

**Rebuilding and Empowering Psyche After Trauma:  
A Survivor's Journey Toward Healing, Self-Expression, and Artistic Creation**

**by  
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**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements**

**for the degree of**

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## **Abstract**

Rebuilding and Empowering Psyche After Trauma:  
A Survivor's Journey Toward Healing, Self-Expression, and Artistic Creation

by Jordan K. Laband

Through the use of artistic-creative methodology and alchemical hermeneutic exploration, this production thesis examines the creation of images and the process of dialoguing with them as a therapeutic tool, helping to heal and empower female trauma survivors. By acknowledging and interacting with images from the unconscious, one may begin to reintegrate split or dissociated parts of the Self, ultimately leading to the reunification of psyche. Drawing upon the theories of Jung, depth psychology, and expressive arts therapy, the author presents her personal journey toward healing, self-expression, and empowerment, which involves active imagination and dialogues with created images. The production, two original paintings, illustrates the process of accessing the unconscious through interaction with images as a way of making meaning and healing from trauma, splitting, and dissociation. Using these ideas, mental health clinicians can gain an additional modality for the successful treatment of trauma survivors.

## **Acknowledgments**

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I want to acknowledge that this monumental piece of writing came to completion because I had all of you and your faithful reassurance on my side. Thank you for believing in me. My deepest gratitude to everyone for their many contributions.

### **Dedication**

This production thesis is dedicated to all of us, all the survivors of trauma. May you find peace, love, courage, hope, strength, support, and understanding. May this thesis also serve as a reminder that there is so much work left to be done in the fight against domestic violence, sexual assault, rape, and abuse. I hope to inspire and motivate those who feel that they have to remain silent. I encourage you to stay safe, share your story, keep chasing the light, and above all else—never give up. Remember, you have a voice and you are more powerful than you can even begin to imagine.

## Table of Contents

Chapter I	Introduction.....	1
	Methodology .....	3
	Research Problem and Question .....	3
	Methodological Approach .....	4
	Procedures.....	6
	Gathering Data .....	6
	Analyzing Data .....	6
	Limitations .....	7
	Ethical Concerns .....	7
	Organization of the Study .....	8
Chapter II	Literature Review.....	9
	Overview.....	9
	Art Therapy and Expressive Arts Therapy .....	9
	Expressive Arts Therapy and the Depth Perspective .....	11
	Trauma, Dissociation, and Splitting.....	13
	Approaches to Treating Trauma .....	15
	Interacting with Images: Using a Depth Psychological Approach to Treat Trauma .....	16
	Active Imagination.....	16
	Archetypal Images and the Collective Unconscious .....	17
	Healing Images and Female Empowerment .....	18
	Creating Space for Working with Images.....	19
	Summary .....	19
Chapter III	Findings and Clinical Applications.....	21
	My Production .....	21
	My Image Dialogues.....	23
	<i>Maleficent – Revealing The Divine Goddess Within Us All</i> .....	23
	<i>Death and Rebirth – Trauma Awakening Psyche, Bringing The Pieces     Whole</i> .....	27
	Findings.....	31
	Clinical Applications .....	32
Chapter IV	Summary and Conclusions .....	34
Appendix	Production Images .....	38
References.....		41



### List of Illustrations

- Figure 1      *Maleficent – Revealing The Divine Goddess Within Us All*.....24  
Acrylic painting with markers and pencil by the author, J. Laband, completed in  
2015. Photograph by author.
- Figure 2      *Death & Rebirth – Trauma Awakening Psyche, Bringing The Pieces  
Whole*.....29  
Acrylic painting with markers and pencil by the author, J. Laband, completed in  
2015. Photograph by author.

## **Chapter I Introduction**

The paradox of trauma is that it has both the power to destroy and the power to transform and resurrect.

Levine, P., 2010, p. 37

Approximately 70% of adults living in the United States have experienced some kind of traumatic event at least once in their lives (PTSD Alliance, 2001). Similarly, almost 17% of men and 13% of women will experience more than three traumatic events within their lifetimes (2001). With trauma being so widespread, it is interesting to note that there are few alternative therapies, other than traditional “talk therapies,” that are readily available to help in the healing process. Through artistic expression and a creative outlet, women specifically, can find healing and empowerment with the help of powerful female imagery.

This production thesis seeks to offer an alternative method of healing from trauma. By exploring a depth psychological approach toward interacting with images, an individual may be able to integrate his or her split or dissociated parts into a whole, cohesive psyche on the path to healing and ultimately, individuation. The journey of creating and interacting with images has helped to facilitate my own healing from past traumas and provided a way for my own individuation as well. The ideas, concepts, and findings within this thesis offer clinicians a different perspective on healing trauma. Furthermore, this thesis presents alternative ways of including powerful female imagery within the therapeutic setting.

In my experience, where existing resources and counseling tools for survivors of trauma do not address the issues sufficiently, artistic-creative methods for self-expression, healing, and empowerment are a highly effective option. Strong female imagery may be able to help a female trauma survivor link her own experience to something greater. This thesis explores how an artistic process produces this connection, in which the individual and the collective may both be simultaneously influenced. The creative perspective toward healing may help address the myriad needs of this population that may otherwise go unrecognized. At the core of this inquiry is the question: How can an artistic process, influenced by strong female imagery, be utilized as a form of self-expression, healing, and empowerment for female survivors of trauma? To explore trauma and various ways of healing, I utilize artistic-creative and alchemical hermeneutic methodologies.

Ethically, I want to acknowledge that trauma is a sensitive and controversial topic. Reading this material could potentially trigger survivors of trauma and induce vicarious retraumatization. I recognize the challenges associated with writing about this subject, and I am aware that I, too, may experience the potential risks involved. I have taken the appropriate steps to provide myself with proper self-care throughout this process. Additionally, I urge the reader to be cautious when diving into this work and to maintain safe and healthy boundaries around this material.

In Chapter II of this thesis, a review of relevant literature explores art therapy and expressive arts therapy in addition to assorted applications of active imagination. Other depth psychological terms are defined as well. The concepts of trauma, dissociation, and splitting are examined. Furthermore, specific treatment modalities of trauma are

highlighted. Healing and empowerment with the use of powerful female imagery, particularly the title character from the film *Maleficent* (Hahn et al., 2014) is also explored.

Chapter III synthesizes the ideas presented in the literature review, as well as the dialogues with my created images. I examine my own work with healing from past traumas as well. This discourse also includes depth psychological concepts and approaches that relate to the clinical findings from my research. The production piece of this thesis, two works of art, is also presented.

Chapter IV provides a brief summary of the thesis and reveals conclusions from this body of work as well. In addition, Chapter IV reviews my findings and their implications. Furthermore, suggestions for further research and areas of study are also discussed.

## **Methodology**

**Research problem and question.** Currently, society is lacking in effective resources and counseling tools that are offered to survivors of trauma. This specific population is not provided with enough alternative or creative methods for self-expression, healing, and empowerment. Through an artistic process in which strong female figures are referenced, a female trauma survivor may be able to link her own experience to something greater. This connection may not only influence the individual, but may also affect the collective as a whole. The creative process toward healing may assist with responding to the numerous needs of this population that may otherwise be overlooked. At the crux of this inquiry is the question: How can an artistic process,

influenced by strong female imagery, be utilized as a form of self-expression, healing, and empowerment for female survivors of trauma?

**Methodological approach.** To explore trauma and ways of healing, I utilize artistic-creative and alchemical hermeneutic methodologies. The artistic-creative approach and the alchemical hermeneutic methodology both allow the individual to interact and engage creatively with the unconscious. In addition, one may ruminate on his or her own reflective thoughts, personal revelations, and emotional connections. With these approaches, I dive into my own story and journey of healing. Through alchemical hermeneutic research, I can track my involvement with unconscious material and bring awareness to the transformative nature of this process as well. Dialogues and comparative studies of different sources are also of significance. The creative process affects the development of my work in this thesis as well.

According to the Pacifica Graduate Institute *Counseling Psychology Thesis Handbook for 2013-14 Matriculates* (2014), the artistic-creative methodology involves engagement in the creative process “combined with thorough understanding of the theoretical contexts of the work and its implications. Immersion in the material studied and the arising of material from the unconscious are both legitimate aspects of artistic-creative qualitative research” (p. 53). Through my research and personal experience with trauma survivors, I have seen how valuable the process of artistic expression and immersion in the resultant material from the unconscious can be for healing to take place. I also recognize how the artistic-creative methodology gives freedom to the researcher and provides its own sense of empowerment as well. It is with this thought that psyche may be active and present. For this thesis, I have employed the selective use of female

imagery, including two art works of my own, to illustrate how this process can help women heal from trauma. By selectively utilizing female imagery, I am aware that I am limiting myself to a certain population.

Additionally, I employ the alchemical hermeneutic approach to research, best described by Jungian psychotherapist Robert Romanyshyn (2007) as “the act of understanding and interpreting symbolic texts of whatever source or kind” (p. 219). This way of inquiry engages with the psyche, allowing influences to reach the researcher and the work itself. “The wounded researcher is a complex witness who, by attending not only to the conscious but also to the unconscious subjective factors in his or her research, seeks to transform a wound into a work” (p. 111). With this in mind, it is interesting to note that the topic of trauma was thrust upon me naturally, “rather than the reverse, as in traditional hermeneutics,” where an individual chooses the area of study (Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2014, p. 51). I find that this approach is all-encompassing, thus I am able to reference a variety of sources such as film, literature, and myth throughout my inquiry.

Similarly, alchemical hermeneutic research involves “the search for meaning in and between different contexts” (Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2014, p. 51). The dialogues with my created images serve as another resource within this approach. These discourses serve as a way to hear psyche’s voice coming forth, or “the soul of the work” (p. 51). Furthermore, the “researcher is transformed as the research progresses, and therefore the work is considered alchemical in nature” (p. 51). My story and journey toward healing is intertwined with the work and material presented for this thesis. Still, because of the intimacy associated with this kind of research, the findings can be overly subjective and

focused on only one individual's experience. Therefore, the findings may not be broadly applicable. However, I hope that my experiences provide ample knowledge and understanding for clinicians who wish to use this approach when working with trauma.

The artistic-creative and alchemical hermeneutic research methodologies contain similar inherent limitations. Results may be limited by the author's perspective, personal bias, lack of experience, and/or subjectivity. However, it is my feeling that the greater potential gains in understanding unconscious material and personal empowerment balance these limitations. In addition, because a significant portion of this research is based on personal experience and artistic creation, it may be difficult for others to relate to it or see this piece as holding the same merit or value as other findings. Despite those concerns, I anticipate this research to have relevance in sociocultural-historical contexts because this topic encompasses practical applications of depth psychological material within the clinical environment, and also serves as a valuable learning opportunity for the future in academia.

### **Procedures**

**Gathering data.** Throughout my research, I employ many forms of collecting data. These span from online search engines, journal articles, published theses, research studies, popular culture, film, art, and myth. I have sought all types of materials to help on my quest of seeking different ways of healing for trauma survivors. The gathering of data has come with its own challenges, yet I remain patient and open for any reference pieces that come my way.

**Analyzing data.** Analyzing the data has been a process within itself. There is a great deal of research on the topics of art therapy, healing, and trauma. Yet for me, I

utilize an alchemical hermeneutic approach to sift through this data. I have collected articles and images, feeling and sensing how I relate to them both individually and as a universal being. I search for hints about how these pieces may potentially add to the transformative nature of this process. Additionally, I have viewed data through a Jungian lens, piecing together the concepts of archetypes, splitting, disassociation, and active imagination as well.

**Limitations.** Within this study, I have set certain limitations in terms of the scope of my research and what I will include in this thesis. I acknowledge the trauma and pain that survivors feel every day and within certain settings. I, too, feel that pain. However, beyond this acknowledgment I do not continue to reference that suffering throughout this work. Rather, I focus on the healing process and methods of self-expression and empowerment.

### **Ethical Concerns**

I recognize the sensitive and controversial nature of trauma. Reading about this topic could potentially trigger survivors of trauma and induce vicarious retraumatization, defined as experiencing the repetition of a traumatic event through contact with someone who is experiencing trauma (Kammerer & Mazelis, 2006). I acknowledge the challenges related to writing about trauma, and I am aware that I, too, could possibly experience the potential risks involved. I have taken measures that allow for adequate self-care during this process. I also encourage readers to remain mindful and aware when entering into this work. Please be sure to adopt appropriate and safe boundaries regarding this material and the possible reactions to it as well.



## **Organization of the Study**

The literature review in the following chapter explores art therapy and expressive arts therapy. Various utilizations of active imagination are examined in addition to other depth psychological terms defined. Trauma, disassociation, and splitting are explored as well. In addition, certain treatment modalities of trauma are highlighted. Healing and empowerment with the use of powerful female imagery, specifically the character Maleficent, from the film of the same name, is also briefly examined.

In Chapter III, I dialogue with my two created images and explore my own work with healing from past traumas. This discussion includes depth psychological concepts and approaches. This chapter also discusses the clinical findings that arise from my research. Chapter IV concludes this thesis with a summary of the previous chapters, a discussion of my findings and their implications, and suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter II Literature Review**

Suffering is traumatic and awful and we get angry and we shake our fists at the heavens and we vent and rage and weep. But in the process we discover a new tomorrow, one we never would have imagined otherwise.

Bell, R., 2011, para. 23

### **Overview**

This thesis topic encompasses a plethora of different areas of study that are linked together to address the following research question: How can an artistic process, influenced by strong female imagery, be utilized as a form of self-expression, healing, and empowerment for female survivors of trauma? The fields that lay the foundation for the research in Chapter III include art therapy, depth psychology, trauma, empowerment through female imagery, and theories of healing.

### **Art Therapy and Expressive Arts Therapy**

The American Art Therapy Association (2014) defined art therapy with clients as using:

art media, the creative process, and the resulting artwork to explore their feelings, reconcile emotional conflicts, foster self-awareness, manage behavior and addictions, develop social skills, improve reality orientation, reduce anxiety, and increase self-esteem. (“About art therapy,” para. 1)

The International Expressive Arts Therapy Association (IEATA) (2008-2012) described their method of art therapy as:

combin[ing] the visual arts, movement, drama, music, writing and other creative processes to foster deep personal growth and community development. IEATA encourages an evolving multimodal approach within psychology, organizational development, community arts and education. By integrating the arts processes and allowing one to flow into another, we gain access to our inner resources for healing, clarity, illumination and creativity. (“What Are the Expressive Arts?,” para. 1)

Both of these explanations of art therapy explain the creative process and reflection as part of the therapeutic journey toward healing. In addition, both sources argued that this type of art therapy involves symbolism and interpretation that provides deeper meaning for the individual. Expressive arts therapist Shaun McNiff (2004) saw this approach to expressive arts therapies as being *intermodal*, meaning that the therapist’s role is to guide the client’s imagination through the artistic creation (p. 140). The simultaneous processes of creating art and therapeutic transformation result in ultimate healing (p. 140).

Art therapist and research psychologist Cathy Malchiodi (2005) noted that:

expressive therapies encourage not only self-exploration, but also use self-expression through one or more modalities as a central part of the therapeutic process. . . . Self-expression through a painting, movement, or poem can recapitulate past experiences and even be cathartic. (p. 9)

Additionally, the therapist and client work together. The creative experience is a container that holds “feelings and perceptions that may deepen into greater self-understanding or may be transformed, resulting in emotional reparation, resolution of conflicts, and a sense of well-being” (p. 9). The therapist’s role here is not to interpret, but rather to facilitate the client on the journey of discovering personal meaning and understanding (p. 9). Additionally, this creative outlet allows for the “productive use of imagination, helping the individual discover and develop corrective solutions leading to

change, resolution, and reparation” (p. 11). Furthermore, counseling professor Samuel Gladding (1992) stated that artistic creation in counseling may aid in speeding up the process of self-exploration for clients, and that expressive modalities also provide the space for people to experience themselves in unique and different ways (p. 6).

### **Expressive Arts Therapy and the Depth Perspective**

Art therapist Bruce Moon (2004) saw the creative process of making art as spiritual and sacred, an act that both revealed and conceived the soul. Through this art making, one may come across images, myths, and dreams that lead the individual into more understanding or deeper meanings. It is at this point in the art therapy process that the individual gives his or her own interpretation of or association with the image. Similarly, Malchiodi (2005) noted how expressive arts expand upon traditional therapeutic techniques, allowing for more self-expression, active participation, imagination, and mind–body connections (pp. 8-9). In terms of those who have experienced trauma, “The process of art making is a way to gain symbolic control over terrifying circumstances and to establish an inner sense of security and safety in the wake of a catastrophic event” (Malchiodi, 2007, p. 139).

American psychologist and Jungian analyst James Hillman (1991) pointed out that

therapy works through the paradox of admitting that all figures and feelings of the psyche are wholly *mine*, while at the same time recognizing that these figures and feelings are free of my control and identity, not *mine* at all. (p. 47)

The images that present themselves are simultaneously a part of the individual and not.

Hillman continued to explain that the “images and metaphors present themselves always as living psychic subjects with which I am obliged to be in relation” (p. 48). It is through

this connection, this interaction between image and individual, that healing takes place. Hillman also noted how the path to self-discovery is through art: “Know Thyself is revelatory, nonlinear, discontinuous; it is like a painting, a lyric poem; biography thoroughly gone into the imaginative act. . . . Each image is its own beginning, its own end, healed by and in itself” (p. 59). Psyche lies within the images, “so the gift of an image is that it affords a place to watch your soul” (p. 75).

For those affected by trauma, Hillman (1983) stated that “a trauma is not what happened but the way we see what happened” (p. 47). A client may explore his or her trauma through the images, archetypes, myths, and dreams that come forth. The *archetypes* are mythic beings, characters that are universal to mankind (Jung, 1936/1981, p. 42). These symbols represent the fundamental patterns of life. We experience the power of archetypes while undergoing change or transformation. They provide us with various thoughts and emotions as well. An archetype is an “unconscious, pre-existent form that seems to be part of the inherited structure of the psyche and can therefore manifest itself spontaneously anywhere, at anytime” (Jung, 1983, p. 415).

With assistance from a therapist, Hillman (1991) pointed out that an expressive arts approach utilizing imagery helps the individual create new meaning, out of which healing can arise, which is the ultimate goal. Each part of the person is integrated during this process. Drawing, painting, sand play, dancing, singing, and writing during therapy are just some of the ways that clients can address what they are feeling or sensing in a more symbolic manner than traditional talk therapy offers (Jung, 1945/1969, p. 202). This process of psychological integration or differentiation is known as *individuation*, where the development of the individual is seen as “being distinct from the general, collective

psychology” (Jung, 1921/1971, p. 448). Theorist and Jungian analyst June Singer (1994) wrote about how the unconscious incorporates part of “the human potential which needs to be actualized in order for individuals to move toward individuation” (p. 79). Once the different unconscious components are realized in the present sense, then transformation and individuation may take place. The therapist in this case, would be the facilitator or the catalyst.

### **Trauma, Dissociation, and Splitting**

There is a great deal of research surrounding the topic of trauma; similarly, the body of literature associated with this subject is robust, and it encompasses multiple perspectives and theoretical orientations as well. However, in the context of this thesis, trauma will be primarily viewed from a depth psychological perspective.

Trauma is defined as:

A direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one’s physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about an unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate. (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 463)

Trauma can occur in many ways, shapes, and forms. It may happen at any given moment in peoples’ lives. Trauma does not discriminate against age, religion, education level, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, culture, gender, or any other defining piece of information. It also affects each person differently.

According to assistant clinical professor in psychology Daniel Brown, professor of law Alan Schefflin, and psychologist D. Corydon Hammond (1997), two individuals may experience the same traumatic event, yet they may have completely different reactions and symptoms associated with the incident. Psychiatrist and trauma researcher Judith

Herman (1997) argued that “traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning” (p. 33). Clinical psychologist Emmett Early (1993) proposed seven different classifications of trauma: neonatal trauma, loss trauma, accident trauma, sexual trauma, interpersonal violence, natural trauma, and combat trauma (pp. 8-11). Early explained that when an individual experiences any of these traumas it affects the mind, body, and spirit.

As a result of trauma, clinical psychologist and Jungian psychoanalyst Donald Kalsched (1996) suggested that *fragmentation* or *splitting* can occur, where an individual may shut down, resulting in a state of numbness and anamnestic withdrawal. This acts as a defense mechanism, protecting the mind from what it may not be able to handle. While this takes place, “parts of the psyche detach themselves from consciousness” (Jung, 1937/1968, p. 121). During this process, the individual may also lose control over certain elements of consciousness, such as cognitive awareness, affect, sensation, and imagery; these psychic components are unable to integrate with one another (Kalsched, 1996, p. 13). Furthermore, the “experience itself becomes discontinuous. Mental imagery may be split from affect, or both affect and image may be dissociated from conscious knowledge” (p. 13). The individual may not be able to fully understand or digest what has just occurred. Communication can become difficult as well.

Trauma often results in dissociation, “a psychological mechanism in which the mind splits off certain aspects of a traumatic event from conscious awareness,” which “can affect the patient’s memory, sense of reality, and sense of identity” (“Dissociation,” 2008, para. 1). Individuals may feel numb, confused, or disconnected following a traumatic event. They may feel detached or fragmented. Through dissociation, the

traumatized individual unconsciously creates a sense of protection and safety for the Self; dissociation is a way to escape the pain of the trauma through shutting off or shutting down. *Splitting*, which happens when an individual unconsciously creates a divide between mind and body following a traumatic incident, may also occur (Kalsched, 1996). The psyche tries to shield the Self by splitting it off from the ego. This experience then cuts off the senses. The outcome is defensive energy that is protective yet crippling (Kalsched, 1996). The results can be painful, disorienting, and frustrating, leaving the survivor with unbearable suffering.

### **Approaches to Treating Trauma**

There are many different approaches to working with trauma survivors. Currently, researchers have found a number of effective evidence-based therapies and interventions. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to name and describe every available treatment modality; however, this section touches on some of the more well-known approaches to treating trauma. Herman's (1997) three stage recovery model of establishing safety, remembering and mourning, and reconnecting is a prominent theory in the field of trauma treatment.

More cognitive behavioral approaches address improving anxiety symptoms that result from trauma, and exploring and reframing how trauma has affected the survivor's identity and worldview (van der Kolk, van der Hart, & Burbridge, 1993). This type of approach also touches on exposure therapy (Foa & Meadows, 1997) and seeking safety (Najavits, 1999). These modalities work to reduce anxiety symptoms and reframe the effects of trauma on the survivor's identity and overall perspective.

Other approaches involve bodywork such as Somatic Experiencing (Levine,



2008), the Hakomi method (Kurtz, 1991), and SomatoEmotional Release (Upledger, 2002). These methods focus on feelings and responses within the body. Additionally, there are other alternative interventions that involve mindfulness, meditation, movement, and energy practices.

### **Interacting With Images: Using a Depth Psychological Approach to Treat Trauma**

**Active imagination.** There are many different ways of engaging with the images of the unconscious. These archetypal symbols call out to be understood, their messages lost in translation. Through active imagination, one may access this dialogue. Swiss analyst and psychiatrist Carl Jung (1961/1989) found that images seem to be concealed within emotions (p. 177). To engage with this realm, one must use *active imagination*, in which one turns inward, suspends judgment, and allows for whatever arises from the unconscious. This involves greeting an image, welcoming it, hosting it, befriending it, and thoroughly dialoguing with it as well in order to actively imagine it with the help of “word play” (Hillman, 1991, p. 25). This brings the image to life and creates a two-way interaction. It is a way of “talking with the image and letting it talk. We watch its behavior—how the image behaves within itself. And we watch its ecology” (p. 25).

Furthermore, active imagination processes how the images that come forth convey messages that are interconnected to fields within the individual’s life (Hillman, 1991, p. 25). In a clinical setting, this way of turning inward is held with profound understanding and love (p. 25). Jung (1945/1969) also observed that interacting with these images in some artistic way, as well as in dialogue, is helpful and healing for the client (p. 202). Hillman (1991) supported this thought as well. He claimed that images are alive and are meant to be worked with and played with. The images themselves are

constantly in motion, changing and shifting while also incorporating new meanings and messages as well. They stir the unconscious. By personifying an image, one can be separated from it. A relationship can develop here, one that feels safe and nonthreatening. This internal detachment leaves room for unification and healing (p. 47).

Jungian analyst Robert Johnson (1986) also found the use of imagery in art therapy to be an effective mode for healing. Through the process of summoning images into the therapeutic work, the ego can communicate with the unconscious, creating a strong dialogue that allows for more exploration into the inner world (pp. 140-142).

Jungian analyst Marie-Louise von Franz (1993) also noted that the use of active imagination in therapy was extremely valuable. She asserted that this process helps bring about conscious awareness, and thus results in more personal growth and development (p. 146). McNiff (2004) further championed this approach with clients, stating that by “personifying images, gestures, and other artistic expressions, [it] enables them to act as ‘agencies’ of transformation rather than simply ‘illustrations’ of the psyches of their makers” (p. 85).

**Archetypal images and the collective unconscious.** Prominent Jungian analyst Daryl Sharp (1991) recognized that through connecting to something greater, *the collective unconscious*, an individual is now in “communion with the world at large” (p. 37). Jung (1936/1981) stated how the psyche incorporates processes that are both conscious and unconscious, and within that space, people hold the personal and collective as well. According to Jung, the personal unconscious maintains the individual’s own biographical experiences and influences, while the collective unconscious stores archetypes, the principal motifs that affect our lives. The act of relating one’s own

personal experiences to a force that is larger than one's self externalizes the trauma—it helps personify certain aspects of the unconscious (Johnson, 1991, p. 4). This helps the individual to feel connected while placing their “personal experience within a larger context of the imagination of humankind” (Allen, 1995, p. 87). The personified images then live in both the personal and the collective—they are linked.

Through exploration and analysis, an individual may be able to understand how this image plays a vital role in the recovery process. It is important to become aware of and involved with one's archetypal images, thereby engaging in dialogues and interactions between the conscious and unconscious mind (Downing, 1991). Images and myths allow us to “see who we are and what we might become” (Downing, 2007, p. 2). The psyche develops itself and grows with assistance from images because they “provide a knowledge that we can interiorize rather than 'apply'” (p. 2). Accessing these images can occur through creative outlets within the therapeutic container. Similarly, Jungian analyst Edward Edinger (1972) posited that it is essential to reconnect with strong images in order to become whole; individuals must make a connection with the Self and heal the state of alienation (p. 100). Furthermore, the arts and images are archetypal in nature (Bravesmith, 2001). Through this lens, one may see the potential for healing and meaning-making throughout the artistic-creative process of therapy.

**Healing images and female empowerment.** To heal from trauma, a woman may need to ground herself and resocialize into a female-based culture and reinitiate through female development (Meador, 1992 p. 146). Writer and lecturer Patricia Reis (1995) also aligned with this thought and believed healing occurs within the emotional/spiritual body and the physical body. Jungian analyst and teacher Sylvia Brinton Perera (1981) noted

that women may feel unseen in the world because there are no images alive that reflect their wholeness and variety (p. 12). Thus, women are disconnected from their femininity and when trauma occurs it can limit the development of a positive self-concept, and oppression can be internalized (Meador, 1992; Perera, 1981; Reis, 1995). In therapy, a powerful female image or the symbol of the Goddess can help women integrate with their psyches, contributing to a redefinition of the self as a powerfully-affirmed entity rather than a victim (Jacobson, 1989). This allows the space for transformation, identity empowerment, and healing. Chapter III explores how the main character from the film *Maleficent* (Hahn et. al, 2014) may be used as a healing image for women recovering from trauma.

**Creating space for working with images.** All of these various methods of interacting with the living images must occur in a creative and nonjudgmental space (McNiff, 2004). The images and the creative expression of them are not to be criticized or analyzed, but rather engaged with in a playful and curious way. The images help heal; “they revitalize, guide, and enlarge lives” (p. 86). Through the artistic process, which can be accessed using images, healing truly does occur and may help facilitate unification from splits that were caused by traumatic events (p. 86).

### **Summary**

In this chapter, art therapy and expressive arts therapies were explained and described. Certain modalities of expressive arts were examined at greater length because they embody the depth psychological perspective. Specific techniques and approaches to using active imagination and imagery work were highlighted. Trauma, dissociation, and splitting were explored. Some current methods in the treatment of trauma were briefly

surveyed as well. Additionally, there was an examination of empowerment and healing with the use of powerful female imagery for female survivors of trauma.

The chapter that follows portrays my journey toward healing from the effects of personal trauma that resulted in dissociation, splitting, and the fragmentation of my inner world. Expressive arts techniques and interventions are utilized in this next chapter to explore my own growth and development. Depth psychological theories and concepts are applied to these art expressions and engaged active imagination dialogues are documented as well. Chapter III concludes with a discussion of my findings and their clinical applications.

### **Chapter III**

#### **Findings and Clinical Applications**

You may not control all the events that happen to you,  
but you can decide not to be reduced by them.

Angelou, M., 2008, p. xii

This chapter depicts the production pieces that I created as part of this thesis, stemming from my research that manifested powerful female imagery and my subsequent dialogues with those images. My container for this research includes Pacifica Graduate Institute and my own personal apartment, where I integrated various depth psychological concepts that I am cultivating as a student in this field. I applied expressive art techniques to track my own process with these images as they revealed themselves. I then employed methods of active imagination to create dialogues with the images. Through these dialogues, I discovered pathways of self-expression, healing, and empowerment that helped me cope with my experiences of past traumatic events. I found this exercise to be a valuable means for reducing the symptoms associated with trauma, including dissociation, splitting, and feelings of helplessness.

#### **My Production**

Expressive art therapy promotes healing and interpretation through our own experiences and how we later process those events in a creative way. For one to be able to experience true self-expression, empowerment, and recovery from trauma, there must be a safe container where one can enter into the world of the unconscious, both the personal and the collective. This realm holds a deeper connection to the Self and the

psyche, where healing can take place. For me, this connection occurred both while at Pacifica Graduate Institute and within the confines of my apartment. In both realms, I feel safe, heard, and understood, and both of these places hold a great deal of heavy, in-depth material that is activating to my soul. During the times when I felt most prompted, I would sit with the feelings in my body. This energy was so strong that I felt moved to create; this was sometimes the only way for me to feel whole, rather than fragmented and dissociated. In these moments, I could feel my imagination running wild, picking up thoughts and images, similar to a fisherman taking hold of his net as the eager catch swims quickly inside.

As I continued to experience these flashes of inspiration and rumination, I began to make notes of what was occurring. Over time, these bits of my unconscious started infiltrating my dreams and impacting my waking life as well, launching a collection of thoughts and images that seemed to bring together all my fragmented parts. In turn, I felt called to create works of art that encapsulated them all. Sometimes language is not enough to describe what is unfolding within us. Art can be more effective where words fail to explain. Similarly, according to therapist and author Susan Makin (1994), creative expression can foster communication and recovery from trauma, when more traditional, verbal psychotherapy is not as successful.

Two remarkable and imaginative mixed-media paintings emerged as a result of my contemplations. I utilized acrylic paints, markers, and pencils. These images capture my feelings and are an expression of my internal world. The powerful and ethereal imagery represents the archetypes that visited me during these times. Psychologist and art therapy instructor Natalie Rogers (1993) suggested that being creative serves as a life-

force energy that surges through each individual like a mighty stream: “Dam it up and we become psychically ill, blocked, and physically stressed. The expressive arts offer a way to keep the river flowing” (p. 187). With the connection unfolding, and interacting with the resulting manifestations, one can reach a new level of understanding and relationship with the Self. The following pages depict excerpts of dialogues with some of the images in my paintings, along with the presentation of my two pieces.

### **My Image Dialogues**

*Maleficent – Revealing The Divine Goddess Within Us All.* The figure of this fierce and enchanting magical woman was the first image to reveal itself to me from the process of my own discovery toward healing and empowerment from past sexual assaults and is titled, “Maleficent – Revealing The Divine Goddess Within Us All” (Figure 1). As a budding depth psychotherapist, I have been learning to hold and witness others as they journey into the unknown, a place of darkness, and a place that sometimes stores great emotional hurt, pain, sorrow, and torment. For myself, I have truly engaged with the vulnerability that this task requires, one that is often uncomfortable and difficult to sit with. However, I know that I must enter into this unfamiliar territory; I must be ready to cross the threshold, either with myself or with a client. The descent into the underworld is not a simple undertaking. Yet with a guide, one may find treasures and steppingstones along the way that do ease this passing. For me, this guide was Maleficent (Hahn et al., 2014).

I begin the process by befriending the image and remaining curious. I pose simple questions: “Who are you? What messages do you bring to me?” The image responds, “*I am Maleficent. I am the ruler of my lands, a powerful and captivating goddess. I*



*represent us all, all who have been wronged, who have been raped and pillaged of their innocence to the world.*” I visualize myself in session with a client embodying this image. I allow myself to imagine the full presence of Maleficent’s being and feelings. I welcome the intensity of her rage, the vastness of her pain and hurt. I sit with her passion. Utilizing Hillman’s (1975) teachings, I “personify” this image, asking questions and engaging with it so as to unleash its transformative abilities (p. 85). I begin again: “Maleficent, I feel your suffering. I hear your anger and sadness burning red. I see the brokenness and fragility within. I honor these parts of you. I am witness to your story.” I surrender to this darkness and let it fill my being, just as I would with a client in therapy. The image replies, *“But there is more than meets the eye here. You must not be mistaken. There is no delicate or frail creature here. The story is still being told. Let it come forth.”*



*Figure 1. Maleficent – Revealing The Divine Goddess Within Us All. Acrylic painting with markers and pencil by the author, J. Laband, completed in 2015. Photograph by author.*

Working with trauma is an area where some therapists may feel stuck or afraid. This sphere is a difficult beast to tackle. I take a breath and allow myself to sink deeper into this imaginary space. I descend into the unconscious with more curiosity and an eagerness to learn what this image is providing. I remain open and say, "Maleficent, I give myself to you fully. I am at your mercy for you to say and do as you please. Enlighten me. Send me your wisdom from all that you have endured." She responds, "*Don't you see, my child? We are all one. All of us. I am you, me, each and every one of us. We are all together, united. We represent each other. We do not merely cling to life for survival. We thrive.*" Her answer gives me hope and I begin to trust the image and the lesson it is bringing.

Maleficent continues, "*See, first, you must break. You must enter into the place where all hope is lost, where you feel darkness and despair. Where the guilt and shame eclipse the sun, and you are powerless. But you must remember, this too is not the end.*" I feel comforted now, a sense that a dark cloud has lifted, that a menacing storm is beginning to pass. I feel lighter, freer, like a silver fox that has narrowly escaped the grips of the hunter's snare. I feel a shift in energy overwhelming my body. A transformation is brewing. I am still uneasy and slightly afraid, however I feel the love and support from the collective: my family, my friends, my partner, my loved ones, my therapist, my supervisor, and my cohort.

I assert myself and pose one final question to the image. I cling to the hope that is growing inside me and seek the last answers from my image. "Maleficent," I say, "So now what? How has your story changed?" She smiles and with a playful tone replies, "*That is not for me to divulge. You must go into the world and discover for yourself. For*

*although we are one, we are still all different and unique. We have different songs to sing, different patterns to weave. The myth does not write itself too clearly.*” Her response leaves me baffled and confused. I am not as confident as I felt before. She goes on, *“But fear not. I know what you seek. I cannot give that to you because you must find it for yourself. But I can impart my fraction of the tale. It does not end here. It is just the beginning. There is hope for the future. There is love and goodness still in the world. There is a power, a fierceness, a bravery within us all. And courage is taking that first step. You must never give up. Because we are women, we are the givers of life, the abundance of nature, the Divine Goddess that holds all flora and fauna to her breast and carries it in her womb. Never forget that.”* I am left speechless, at a loss for words. Tears begin forming in my eyes. The image has graced me with a wealth of knowledge and insight, which I cherish dearly. My body feels relief and I smile, knowing that through everything, I will do more than just survive.

Maleficent’s image is additionally powerful not only because of my personal experience with her symbolism, but also due to her own story. The film *Maleficent* (Hahn et al., 2014) is

a commentary on current male and female relationships. It’s a commentary on rape culture. And much more, it’s a story that allows a woman to recover. It gives her agency. It gives her power. It allows her to reclaim the story. And this is something that can’t be ignored. (Krischer, 2014, para. 14)

Through this strong female imagery and the character of Maleficent, a female survivor of trauma may claim the power of the dark feminine. The archetype of the Great Goddess or the Divine Feminine, here represented by Maleficent, is cast off, banished from society, and made to seem devilish or impure.

Maleficent's story tells of a "powerful, magical woman" (Wilson, 2014, para. 13). "Her name reflects the complexity of identity, suggesting we all have some maleficence in us, but also some beauty and goodness" (para. 16). Within the film (Hahn et al., 2014), Maleficent loses her wings, causing her extreme mental and physical pain. This parallels the suffering of real-world trauma survivors. Her story is one of hope and survival, a significant tale that displays a woman's reclaiming of her own power and identity after trauma.

The journey into the depths of the unconscious, and the deepest and darkest corners of ourselves, is no slight task. It is a grand undertaking that must be cultivated with sensitivity and care. As clinicians of the depth perspective, we must be able to enter into these shadow realms with both our clients and ourselves. We must be willing to be vulnerable and feel the suffering that our clients are experiencing. As psychotherapists we hold this tension and must provide the safe container for the unraveling and the healing of the psyche. We tend to the client's soul and that of the world. As I sat with the messages conveyed by Maleficent's image I was struck by the profoundness and meaning I took away.

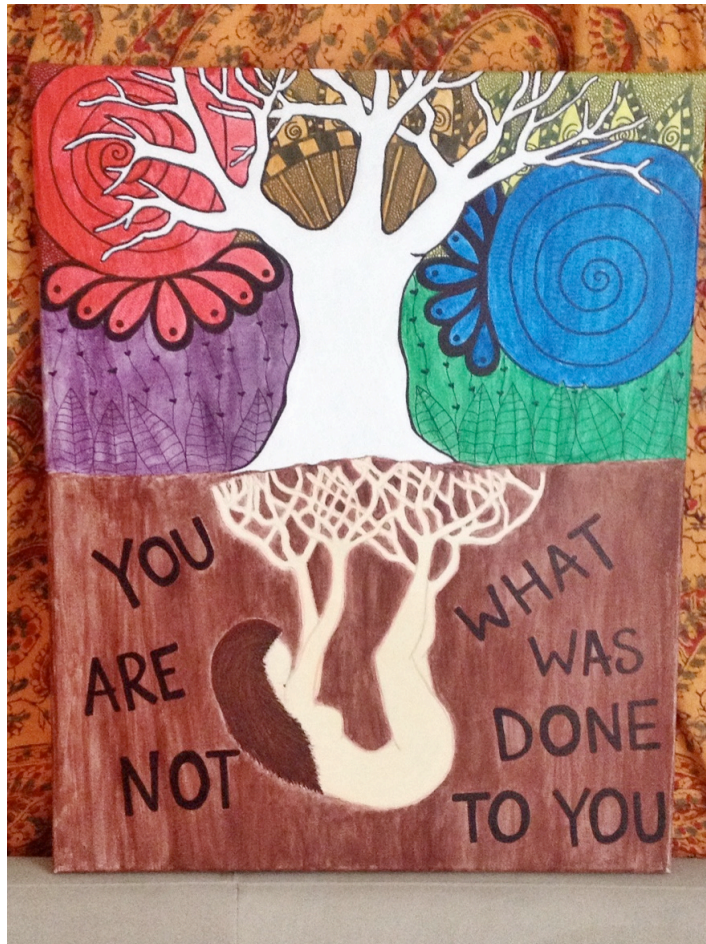
***Death and Rebirth – Trauma Awakening Psyche, Bringing The Pieces Whole.***

As I sat one day, revisiting my own stories of the past, I was astonished to unearth a primordial image that sprang forth from within me (see Figure 2). Its complexity caught me off guard, as the image incorporated both simplicity and gravity in its meaning. It was a glimpse of transformation, alchemy occurring in a natural yet fantastical state. Again, I quieted my mind so that I could submerge myself in the imaginary. I began my dialogue, "Who is visiting me?" (Aizenstat, 2003, para. 18). The image replied, "*It is I, the one left*

*behind but not forgotten. I am the one buried deep inside—bare, naked, vulnerable. My roots spring forth to the Earth from my shell. They are reaching upward for freedom. I am the one who still remembers what it was like then, but now something magnificent grows.*” I felt a knot inside me, a sickening feeling. There was both light and dark with this image, but I was unsettled. This image made me think of working with a client to reclaim the light, to be able to shift perspectives so that resilience and perseverance are admired and given recognition. This image speaks to the ongoing battle within my own soul to acknowledge the light at times. There are moments when the pain feels too great, that its power tries to hold me back and trap me.

I continued dialoguing with the image, “What is the message you wish to bring to me? Why are you here?” It responded, *“I wish to instill a comfort onto you. To impart that these events did not just happen at random. Let go of the need to fully understand. The conclusion may not be satisfying. Just know that this was meant as a means of transformation. Your growth and change were inevitable. You must sit with the mystery of not knowing all. Instead, remember the beauty and the wisdom that you now hold. Your journey awaits you, and the future looks bright. It is promising for you, for the others, for all of us. You need not feel abandoned. Your past will set the stage to allow others to mend and rebuild as you yourself are doing each day. A part of you may feel like it is dying, becoming one with the Earth. But listen to that part of you that still holds on, that is fighting. Let that consume you. Let it fill your being and burst from your soul. Let the colors and rays of light shine throughout the world. Let this transformation guide you. You are now as the butterfly, having sprung from the chrysalis. You are ready to spread those wings and fly out into the world. Your metamorphosis has prepared you for*

*all that is yet to come. Honor this rebirth. Honor this gift.*” I sat with what the image conveyed. Again, I was in awe at the depth of spirit that I had received.



*Figure 2. Death & Rebirth – Trauma Awakening Psyche, Bringing The Pieces Whole.* Acrylic painting with markers and pencil by the author, J. Laband, completed in 2015. Photograph by author.

The image responded to me once more, *“You are more than what happened. This will not define you. You are not bad, or broken, or impure. You are whole and you are divine. You are strong and you are powerful. You will live through this. You will overcome. You will be resurrected into light and love. You will persevere. Change comes with each sunrise and sunset. You are creating your own destiny from here. You are the*

*creator of your story.*” I now sit with a feeling of comfort and a sense of knowing that the future is at my fingertips.

I view this image as a journey of descending and ascending, where one must surrender to the darkness in order to be reborn into the light. Similarly, I see this as myth recreating itself. Ancient Egyptian culture tells the story of the sun, how it must die, travel through the underworld, and renew itself again so as to complete the passage of birth, life, death, and rebirth as is the natural order of the world (“Surrender of the Sun,” n.d.). The parallels are apparent here, as one who experiences significant trauma often feels as though a part of them dies. The healing comes from self-expression and empowerment through art and creativity, which then allows the individual to be reborn. This transformation is a process. As a therapist, I must help guide and assist clients as they begin this journey. I must work within the limits of the conscious and unconscious. I must be patient and compassionate, meeting my clients where they are at, while holding unconditional positive regard and empathy as they start off on this difficult undertaking (Rogers, 1980).

The images that emerged from my psyche are just small excerpts from the inner workings of my unconscious. They speak to the nature of the collective and serve as signs that intrigue, mystify, and comfort. I know that my interactions with these images are not over. I must sit with them on different occasions and also bring them into my work with clients in therapy as well. Trauma and violence are all too common in this world. By witnessing the wounds of others and listening to their stories, piece-by-piece we can heal. We can learn to speak through the images, through the archetypes, through myth. This research and exploration into active imagination has only touched the surface of my

awareness. I am just starting out on this road of discovery that highlights the intelligence that symbols carry. Overall, I am grateful for the images that visited me, and how they helped me on my own path of healing, self-expression, and empowerment.

### **Findings**

Each painting in this production thesis was a form of self-expression and empowerment with the use of strong female imagery. This process allowed me to gain access into parts of my psyche that were more closed off when I started on this interactive journey. Additionally, this process was both healing and alchemical in nature. Each dialogue provided me with greater insight into my unconscious and the hidden shadow parts that reside in that space. The visiting images guided me along this path and made it feel safer and more approachable. Through this production, I have allowed myself to release the deeply held guilt and shame from the personal trauma of rape, sexual assault, abuse, and domestic violence that has haunted me for years.

By engaging with the imaginary, I have developed my own psyche and helped heal some of the pain. In turn, I feel confident that I can recreate this type of setting for work with clients in the therapeutic container. I feel that this process has been my own crossing of the threshold, a rite of passage that has shown me the way toward becoming a stronger depth healer. Change starts from within, and on a larger scale, this change is starting with me. It is with that hope that I transfer this work onto my clients, and ultimately the world. Self-expression and creative-artistic production are valuable tools and resources for therapy. Through organic inquiry and examination into the unconscious, the act of creation has aided in my own personal growth and development.



## **Clinical Applications**

For this type of work, I have noted that remaining in a calm, quiet, and safe space provides the context for images and visitors to emerge. I also see it important to remain fully present-centered in a meditative state. As future therapists, we must take on many roles with our clients, including the physician-healer, the philosopher-scientist, and the priest-hierophant (Edinger, 1997, p. 11), in addition to the facilitator, the mediator, and the midwife (Sullivan, 1989, p. 81). These roles all assist us in connecting with our client, in creating an alliance with common goals in mind.

Through conversations with the images that show themselves, and bearing witness to others as they bring forth images, humanity can begin to embrace the knowledge and wisdom that the archetypes share; this practice may also help with understanding shadow material. Then the process of individuation may start to blossom. As survivors of trauma, our wounds give us the opportunity for healing and relationship. The relationship grows as the therapist and client align and participate together, analyzing and conversing with the expressed images, finding meaning, and empowering. Expressive art allows for this type of interaction to occur in a safe space for those who have been severely wounded and traumatized.

By applying therapeutic interventions that utilize expressive art, creation, active imagination dialogues, and powerful female imagery, I feel that my clients and I are on a journey of discovery. Together we travel through the unconscious on a formidable quest. The appropriate amount of time and space is crucial for those who have experienced extreme abuse or neglect. Healing, recovery, an integration of the Self, and eventual individuation can occur with self-expression and empowerment. Active imagination and

conversing with these strong female symbols are parts of this process that allow for healing from trauma to take place. Additionally, I recognize that there is so much more that could be said in terms of how this work is applicable clinically. Personally, I will continue to dive into my own material so that I can develop and expand upon these ideas and experiences with the hope that in turn I may successfully apply these techniques therapeutically with clients.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Finally the time came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

Anais Nin, as cited in Millman, 2000, p. 4

Following this research and my own investment with this material, I see that there is much more work to be done. Trauma continues to be a serious real life issue that can have an impact on many lives. Oftentimes, the effects of trauma emerge within the therapeutic container. Personally, I feel that I must continue dialoguing with the images that surface from my psyche. Each experience helped me to release some of the deeply held shame associated with my past traumas. This in-depth work informs my counseling with clients in therapy, and it furthers my own insight, personal growth, and development as a budding depth psychotherapist. I continue to tend to the images that come forth, giving time and space for their voices and stories to arise. The unconscious does not cease to cultivate new messages and meanings for me to decipher or interpret. It is with this thought that I continue to uphold that through artistic self-expression and a creative outlet, women survivors of trauma can find healing and empowerment with the help of powerful female imagery.

The findings from this research contribute to the field of counseling and depth psychology in that they serve as a reminder that traditional ways of healing are not always the only option or best course of treatment for all. Alternative therapies, such as using artistic-creative expression and active imagination, can be even more effective in

some cases. Psychotherapists may find this clinically relevant for clients who they may deem to be difficult to work with or challenging. Additionally, this way of self-expression may be an influential outlet for women and other survivors of rape, trauma, sexual assault, abuse, or domestic violence. By recreating the conception of images that visit our clients and conversing with those living images, we may help them connect and integrate what they are experiencing to something greater. This is extremely useful and beneficial in the end; healing can take place. With the utilization of both depth psychology and art therapy, a client may feel more freedom of self-expression. Therefore, they may be able to open up and voice concerns more freely in the clinical setting. With the use of imagery and visuals, a client may be able to discuss graphic material in a way that still provides them with the feelings of safety and support.

In Chapter I of this thesis, I laid out the basic foundation and structure of my research, which also included the purpose behind this work and depth psychology as a framework. Similarly, the artistic-creative and alchemical hermeneutic methodologies were introduced. Chapter II focused on the literature that provided a foundation for my research in the following chapter. These fields included art therapy, trauma, depth psychology, ways of healing, and different approaches to imagery work. In Chapter III, I briefly reviewed my personal story of healing from past traumatic experiences. I presented my two art pieces and the different dialogues with my unconscious images. Additionally, I discussed how depth psychology and expressive arts therapy are tools that clinicians can use to help survivors of trauma. I established how these methods can be applied practically and productively.

Through my studies and exploration, I see that more research is needed on the treatment of trauma, including greater examination into trauma treatment for children, survivors of mass trauma, and survivors of rape and sexual assault. In addition, more research needs to be conducted concerning the unconscious and people's interactions with their own psyches, in particular, the way untreated trauma is held in individuals, such as how it affects our behavior and manifests in our lives. There is so much that goes on beneath the surface that we are unaware of or blind to, and that can drive our motivations in misunderstood ways. With this type of exploration the world can begin to know and understand the unconscious realm; I feel that this is essential for humanity. More healing could take place on a global scale, which would have its own implications and impacts as well.

Trauma is such a complex issue. Therefore, I feel that there should be more research overall into all aspects of trauma and its effects, in addition to different modalities and ways of healing that can help counteract the possible negative outcomes that could occur. Furthermore, in-depth research could be performed in the area of using active imagination and expressive arts techniques with diverse populations where cultural trauma has occurred or is currently present. I feel that this research could provide much-needed hope and healing to different communities and could bring about a deeper sense of connection, understanding, and belonging on Earth. More research could look into traditional healing methods and therapeutic practices as well. As professionals in the mental health field, it is our duty to inquire into these lesser-known areas. We must provide the space for meaning-making and transformation. We must hold the alchemical

vessel, as we are capable of embracing both the light and the dark. Through greater understanding and connection, we may bring about healing in the world.

## **Appendix Production Images**

This section catalogues the list of figures for the two paintings I created as works of art, self-expression, healing, and empowerment for this production thesis. These paintings were created with acrylic, markers, and pencil. The author produced and photographed all images which are copyrighted by the author as well.

### List of Figures

- Figure A1.    *Maleficent – Revealing The Divine Goddess Within Us All*.....39  
                Acrylic painting with markers and pencil by the author, J. Laband, completed in  
                2015. Photograph by author.
- Figure A2.    *Death & Rebirth – Trauma Awakening Psyche, Bringing The Pieces  
                Whole*.....40  
                Acrylic painting with markers and pencil by the author, J. Laband, completed in  
                2015. Photograph by author.



*Figure A1.* Maleficent – Revealing The Divine Goddess Within Us All. Acrylic painting with markers and pencil by the author, J. Laband, completed in 2015. Photograph by author.





*Figure A2.* Death & Rebirth – Trauma Awakening Psyche, Bringing The Pieces Whole. Acrylic painting with markers and pencil by the author, J. Laband, completed in 2015. Photograph by author.

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