

Integration and working through in art therapy

Motty McMurray, ATR^{a,*}, Ofra Schwartz–Mirman, ATR^b

^a*Eithanim Mental Health Center, affiliated with the Hebrew University and Hadasah Medical School, Doar-Na Zfon Yehuda, Israel*

^b*Children and Adolescent Clinic, Abarbanel Psychiatric Hospital, Bat-Yam, Israel*

Introduction

The idea that the artistic creative process has inherent therapeutic qualities is taken almost for granted by most people in contact with the field of artistic expression. However, in discussions between art therapists and colleagues from other therapeutic disciplines, the question almost invariably arises as to the nature of the curative process that takes place when the patient creates a work of art. Buried within this question is the issue of working through unresolved emotional contents in art therapy.

In this article, we shall address the nature of the healing process in art therapy. First, we shall present a brief survey of the psychodynamic literature on the issue of working through unresolved archaic contents and the fundamental theoretical points regarding the transformation of primary impulses and fantasies into works of art. We shall then outline our theoretical approach regarding the issue of working through in art therapy, an approach that bridges these two disciplines, which we shall illustrate through two case studies. We conclude by clarifying our approach in the light of the case presentations.

In artistic expression, the core of the creative process is the translation of the unconscious primitive impulses and fantasies into tangible forms in the present, using art materials. The transformation of the intrapsychic ideations to external representations gives rise to a visual product that retains within it primitive themes identical to those originally directed towards the primary internalized self and object rep-

resentations. The source of inspiration is in repressed primary impulses and fantasies that were directed towards significant figures in early life (McMurray & Schwartz–Mirman, 1998; McMurray et al., 2000; Molloy, 1997; Robbins, 1987).

In the creation of art, the rigid need to repeat recurrent creative patterns reduces the flexibility of emotional experience and prevents the growth of expression using art materials. This rigidity reduces the possibilities for varied artistic expression and impedes the flexible transition from the crude source of inspiration to the ‘controlled’ act of creation (Kramer, 1979; McMurray & Schwartz–Mirman, 1998; Robbins, 1987). The unconscious compulsion to repeat rigid patterns of expression precludes recognition of the repressed primitive impulses and fantasies (Freud, 1914; Fenichel, 1941). Thus, in art therapy, the rigid need to repeat inflexible patterns of creation replaces the process of linking the repressed primary impulses and fantasies that are the basis for inspiration to the associated emotions and consequently prevents the expansion of creative expression using art materials. The repetition compulsion supplants the varied and flexible transformations of the primary internalized self and object representations into tangible forms using art materials.

According to Freud (1923), the primary impulses and fantasies, which obtained verbal representations in early childhood, can be brought back into consciousness in maturity. The preverbal impulses and fantasies, which originate either in external or internal stimuli, are repressed into the unconscious and cannot be recalled directly in later life. The pictorial imaging of repressed primitive impulses and fantasies precedes verbal representation. These pictorial conceptions stand near the unconscious. Affective

* *E-mail address:* mottymc@internet-zahav.net (M. McMurray).

states are experienced directly, and there is no distinction between unconscious and conscious. The emotions associated with repressed primitive impulses and fantasies can pass directly from the unconscious to the conscious. It follows that emotional states associated either with archaic preverbal impulses and fantasies or those associated with later developmental stages can gain direct verbal representation in maturity.

We hold that in art therapy, the source of inspiration for the creative artistic act is in primitive impulses and fantasies repressed close to the unconscious. The intrapsychic pictorial images motivating the visual creative act are founded on the nonverbal representations of primary object relations. Visual ideation of early internalized self and object representations are closer to the unconscious than verbal representations. Therefore, in art therapy, the compulsion to repeat rigid creative patterns supplants the linking of the pictorial images close to the unconscious to the associated affective states arising directly from the unconscious.

We believe that in art therapy, ongoing, consistent, and flexible creative expression leads to the working through of the repressed primitive impulses and fantasies. The connections repeatedly made between the repressed internalized object relations and the associated affective states enables the ego to gain gradual control over the primary impulses and fantasies, which previously have been warded off (Eche-goyen, 1999; Freud, 1914; Fenichel, 1941). Working through can be regarded as the gradual encounter with the ego via the rediscovery of previously repressed archaic impulses and fantasies through various paths. The aim of this controlled confrontation is to integrate primitive contents in the ego that have been repressed (Freud, 1914; Fenichel, 1941). In art therapy, the process of interconnecting the various tangible products of the present to the emotions that surface during the creative activity enables early object relations to be experienced. The multiple transformations of previously warded off primitive contents into a variety of tangible visual forms in the present enables a vivid exploration of the primary object relations. The varied and repeated examination of early object relations, by means of flexible ongoing creative activity using art materials, enables the ego to gain gradual control over the previously repressed primitive impulses and fantasies. Flexible ongoing and consistent artistic activity brings about the said integration in the ego of the warded off and isolated archaic contents. In art therapy, the interconnection between the repeated translation of internalized early object representations that stand close to the unconscious as pictorial images and the associated emotions that themselves surface directly from

the unconscious, enables the integration in the ego of the repressed primitive impulses and fantasies almost directly in the unconscious. In other words, the repeated connection between the pictorial forms stored close to the unconscious and the associated affective states, the source of which is in the unconscious, brings about the integration of early intrapsychic experiences near to the unconscious. Thus, in art therapy, the working through of previously warded off primitive impulses and fantasies takes place close to the unconscious.

Kernberg (1980, 1997) holds that the integration of primitive impulses and fantasies in the ego does not constitute the actual process of working through, but precedes it. The integration in the ego of the early internalized self and object representations is a prerequisite for the working through of previously warded off archaic contents. This integration enables the transformation of primitive defense operations into mature defenses and the recognition of whole early object relations. The transformation of partial and split self and object representations into whole objects and their integration in the ego enables a more realistic perception of early childhood experiences. According to Kernberg (1980, 1997), the repeated interconnection at a more mature organizational level between the primary object relations and the variety of associated emotions is what constitutes the process of working through. Working through only takes place once repeated recognition of whole-object relations has been enabled.

Our impression is that in art therapy, a disturbance in the ability to integrate early split and part self and object representations appears as a defect in the consolidation of the visual product into a unified entity. The final visual product is characterized by a controlled combination of a variety of separate creative components, which lack a common style. When the disturbance in the capacity for integration is especially severe, the separate components are placed in an isolated and disconnected manner and are unrelated one from the other. The final visual product is characterized by a chaotic and disjointed composition. In creative products where the impairment is less severe, the component parts are interrelated, but the composition lacks an overall unifying theme.

For patients who have a disturbance in the integration of early object relations in the ego, art therapy can serve as a transitional space in which the patients can externalize their primitive split impulses and fantasies, originally directed towards the internalized object representations (Cavallo & Robbins, 1980; McMurray et al., 2000). The transformation of disjointed and chaotic intrapsychic perceptions into tangible visual forms enables the examination of the same primitive fantasies and impulses that are the

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات