

WCPCG-2010

Sublimation, as a technique for treatment

Sayid Dabbagh Ghazvini^{a*}, Milad Khajehpour^a, Mohammad Rahmani^a, Elham Memari^a

Department of Psychology, Rudehen Azad University

^aMember of Young Researcher Club, Tehran, 1773854661, Iran

Received January 8, 2010; revised February 6, 2010; accepted March 13, 2010

Abstract

The goal of conducting this research was to use from sublimation defense mechanism for controlling and managing aggression impulses in persons by themselves. Research method in this study was case study and the person under study was a 50 year old woman that was not able to control her aggression impulses. In order to evaluate aggression of participants in this research, after performing treatment processes, it is used from Buss and Perry aggression questionnaire.

Results of this research show that: 1-participant's aggression impulses were meaningfully decreased. 2-Not only participant is able to control her aggression impulses by painting but also she will be able to discharge her unsuitable mental modes. 3-Aggression impulses are move toward suitable and acceptable activities that are sublimated.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Keywords: sublimation; catharsis; painting; Aggression impulse; defense mechanism

1. Introduction

By having look to works and paintings that are remained from caveman during Paleolithic period and analyzing them, gradually process of evolution and mental growth process of human is cleared and also how to deal with mental challenges and tricks for achieving to mental relaxation is shown in these pictures Most of psychologists believe that not any analysis like pictures and paintings, may completely interpret differences of thoughts and mental characteristics of people. Of course it is obvious that fulfilling this affair necessitates required expertise.

Generally all artistic works including painting are full of message, allegory and refer. Since artistic imaginations including dreaming will reveal all desires, morale and inner contents of human inside of his unconscious existence. Human by assistance of imaginations of his mind, expresses his challenges, problems, concerns, shortages, fears, anxieties and his final goals and wishes and will find solution for revealing, satisfying and dealing with them.

When mental problems of human are expressed and drawn it will result in alleviating emotional pains and inner pressures and in unconscious mode these fears or challenges by being revealed in paintings and sculpture and even

* Saeid Dabbagh Ghazvini: Tel.: +98-21-778-89129 ; Mobile: +98-912-303-5466 ; Fax: +98-21-772-91006
E-mail address: hopesparkle@yahoo.com

make-up face will satisfy their desires and wishes. Therefore for example in paintings of primitive man, we see that these people are hunting, confronting with natural disasters and constructing shelter.

Painting main elements of nature including moon, sun, thunder, flood and storm may associate some part of desires and fears of human.

From view point of Phillip Williams doing creative activities by using materials and methods of visual arts is called as art therapy (williams, 1988).

Art therapy covers great spectrum of therapy functions that consists of visual arts including painting, collage, planning and sculpture. At one side this spectrum of art is used as tool for non-verbal communication, since artistic works besides association and interpretation may assist to understanding and solving problems. At the other side of this spectrum, treatment occurs as a result of artistic process.

Art therapy is based on theories of Freud, Jung and other scientists and is under influence of psychoanalysis. In concept of unconscious as Freud has mentioned, people mention their memories and thoughts via symbols that finally be used as basis for theory of art therapy.

1.1. General

Painting therapy is not educating painting; rather it is providing opportunities to persons that by using colors and lines to freely express their feelings, emotions, needs and their knowledge (Rubin, 1999; Landgarten, 1981).

Painting and other arts are like a bridge among inner world and outer realities and picture like a mediator will reflect conscious, unconscious aspects of past, present and future of person.

1.2. Usage of art therapy and painting therapy

Painting therapy was suggested and used by Stern. He was founder of first painting workshop for children in Paris at the end of Second World War that still today is working.

Stern mentioned that painting is a tool of psychotherapy for educating not adaptable, unstable and mentally retarded children. Sometimes painting is more suitable than speaking for children aged lower than 10 years. Especially when they want to talk with an adult, they try to express their meaning both correctly and understandable but as a result of shortage of domain of words and low familiarity with information of speaking language they are not able to transfer their concept; thus the best way to do this is by painting.

In the year 1935 Luis.D.C was used from free painting for adult neurotic. Free painting means optional performance by person himself that there is not any force and obligation for drawing (Ferrari, 1996).

Painting are seen as a reflection of a child's inner world (Dileo, 1983; Golomb, 2003) as drawings are assumed to give indications about children's character and state, we can gather some evidence about a child's emotional state and problems and make conclusive facts (Koppitz, 1984; Golomb, 2003).

Young children do not easily speak about the traumatic occurrence, recent experience has been that many young children basically give graphic accounts of their experiences and were also able to reveal how distressful re-experiencing this imagery affected them (Yule, 2001).

Kramer was both artist and teacher that for the first time deal with emotional disorder of children by painting therapy. He believed that the goal of art therapy is creating opportunity for selection and changing behaviors. Doing this will create opportunities for repeated experience of conflicts and then tries to solve, analyze, complete or to respond them (Kramer, 1958).

The first pioneer in art therapy in U.S.A was Margaret Naumburg that after working with children at Walden School found out those children reflect and project their emotions in their paintings. Free association of art by children introduces symbolic type of speech. He believes that self-stimulated expression of art may be used as basics of psychotherapy (Naumburg, 1950).

After him we can refer to Victor Lowenfeld that for the first time deal with blind and handicapped children and by using painting attempted to rehabilitate handicapped children (Lowenfeld, 1957).

The use of painting successfully allows unconscious motivations to present themselves in safe ways for client processing (Miller & Veltkamp, 1989).

Consequently, belief in unconscious motivations is vital to the administering and interpreting of drawings (Miller & Veltkamp, 1989).

The finding of such distinctions indicates that drawing have the potential to provide helpful information in assessing the functioning of people (Goodenough, 1926). Specifically, projective drawing techniques allow for the evaluation of relationships and interactions in the people's life (Koppitz, 1968).

The use of projective drawing techniques is supported by results from various studies. One such study a drawing technique with title of human figure drawings reported that when sexually abused children were evaluated, each child focused on genitalia in his or her drawings Also clients that have aggression motivation, show signs of anger and aggression in their paintings (Sturner & Rothbaum, 1980).

In recent years we have encountered earthquakes in Turkey especially after the 17th of August and 12th of November. Recent research about disasters indicated that children have been seriously affected by natural disasters especially when they occur unexpectedly. Children who have had different emotional problems have difficulty in expressing themselves. Through play and drawing traumatised or emotionally disturbed children can reflect their anger, fear, desperation (Veltman & Browne, 2002; Gray Deering, 2000), and they can do this in a secure and relieving aspect (Malchiodi, 2001).

Results of a previous research about children's paintings after the Marmara disaster showed that drawings of children included dark colours like black and brown and were depicting the disaster scene including graves of beloved parents or siblings (Celebi-Öncü & Karaaslan, 2002).

Art therapy is used by its tool with the goal of growing identity and feeling of success in children. Art therapy is useful for children having emotional and behavioral disorders therefore art therapy gives some clues for understanding and solving problems of children and by creating feeling better life as a result of creative activities; it will improve relations, adjustment skills and personal adaptation of children with their world.

Simon believes that art therapy or artistic psychotherapy necessitates for having attention to mental needs of patients, including need of freedom, expressing and relaxation and does not attention to details of artistic skills (Simon, 1997).

Levic has suggested that drawing painting may be used for discerning pathological conditions and from these elementary discern factors, gradually large number of disciplined methods will be created that nowadays are called as Painting Test (Levic, 1983).

Painting besides being useful in discerning mental disorders of adults, is suitable for discerning and curing problems of aggression and restless children. Painting makes able these children to reveal their inner abilities and creativities. Lowefeld has mentioned that process of constructing, drawing and painting is a complicated process in which child uses from different components of his experiences for constructing a meaningful total. In this process child gives us something more than a statue. Rather child reveals some part of himself, how he thinks and how he feels (Williams & Wood, 1977).

According to harmful effect of aggression on growth process of children, aggression during childhood is among adjustment problems that have been greatly studied during last decades (Parker & Asher, 1987).

Persons having adjustment problems may solve their problems by making mental pictures and implementing it; that doing this by assistant of competence art therapist will be promptly achieved.

Clinical function of art therapy covers following groups: children and adults that are hospitalized, psychoneurotic persons that are volunteered for going under psychotherapy, prisoners, mental retardations , learning disorder , couples having problem, families and persons suffering from physical diseases like chronic diseases of kidney, cancer, hemophilia, asthma, diabetes and nerve problems.

Art therapy meetings are held in small and big groups or with presence of families. There are diverse methods and techniques in art therapy. In art therapy using from art is regarded as mediator for achieving to treatment goals.

1.3. How to act art therapy and painting therapy

In painting therapy patient encourages to draw painting at presence of therapist and thus therapist encourages or guides patient in performing artistic work. Sometimes it is requested from person to draw whatever he wants and other times therapist asks from patients to draw special things. For example patients are being told to draw the picture of their families.

Art therapists believe that this kind of therapy is useful for all patients and is not just for persons having artistic talent. Most types of art therapy are based on this logic that expressing thoughts and emotions in drawing may result catharsis that it has kind of treatment effect. Most types of art therapy are parallel with psychodynamic. Logical basics, goals and performing any kind of special art therapy are specified by theory of psychodynamic. Anyway there are 4 joint goals among most types of art therapy that include:

1-Catharsis 2-Insight- Integration 3-Communication 4-Mastery

Catharsis is among psychoanalysis theories of Freud that believes contrast and expressing repression feelings is curable. **Insight - integration** is one of the important consequences of dealing to art. Dalley: “art therapy is a path for expressing confused and improperly understood feeling via guiding them toward clarity and discipline” (Dalley, 1984). **Communication** means communication among person and therapist. It is mentioned that under condition in which person is not able to talk about his feeling and experiences, having pictorial communication may have special privilege. **Masters** deals with this issue that persons via reproducing difficult conditions in their paintings, may achieve to type of mastery over their problems. Person by reproducing difficult conditions may control his feeling and emotions (Glyn, Angela, & Silk, 1990).

Art therapy for all patients and persons referring is a kind of nonverbal communication that achieves to benefit via creating distance between thoughts and problematic feelings; also it helps psychotic patients to separate dream from reality. Researches have shown that when persons participate in activities that enjoy them, their physiologic factors including blood pressure, heart beat and aspiration will be slower. Thus by using activities and artistic communications it is possible to created actions in physiology and biology of person which these actions may improve ability of person for confronting against diseases and influence in immune system.

By using art therapy it is able to increase social skills of people. In fact art therapy like medical grounds deals with prevention and improving mental health of people and at the first stage it attempts to prevent patients via empowering human and in next stage it attempts to cure and decrease diseases.

1.4. Catharsis

Sublimation starts when Id of person has strong attraction for discharging its impulses but Superego prevents from it. This contradiction occurs when that Superego is fully grown in person otherwise impulses of Id will be easily satisfied. In fact struggle between Id and Superego result in anxiety and one of the actions of Ego for decreasing anxiety is using from sublimation defense mechanism. Factors that continue from using this mechanism by Ego, is it's reinforce effect in decreasing anxiety that is as a result of catharsis and its certification on behalf of society. Sublimation is revealed in activities including painting, writing, gardening, musician and poetry and dancing. People of ancient Greece believed that stimulating emotions is one of the best ways for personal comfort and improving behavior. From historical point of view, catharsis is based on emotions hydraulic model that it prevents from direct expressing unacceptable emotions including anger, guilt and anxiety. Prevention from these kinds of emotions has caused that emotions will be discharged so that indirectly puts persons under pressure, for example anger from physical point of view will be expressed as headache. If emotions will be directly freed in psychotherapy, the source of their energy will be discharged and person will be freed from source of symptoms

(Prochaska & Norcross, 2007). Whereas sublimation is among grown defense mechanism and this mechanism may suitably discharge sexual and aggression impulses; the goal of conducting this research was to use from sublimation defense mechanism for controlling and managing aggression impulses in persons by themselves.

2. Method

2.1. Design, participant and procedure

The research method in this study was case study. The person under study was a 50 years old woman that was not able to control her aggression impulses. This issue was proved via interview with her and her family. Also results of 29 question inventory showed the same results for aggression of Buss and Perry.

In this research that it is used from sublimation paintings, it is requested from person that under suitable condition and by using tools of painting to discharge his aggression impulses. After termination of work, the result is certified and encouraged by therapist. Also in order to encouraging the painting of patient on behalf of society, patient will go under training professional the techniques of painting.

Tools that are offered to participant include painting canvas with dimensions of 30*40cm, 6 main colors (oil colors) and paintbrush with different sizes.

At first participant resists for starting work, since she believes that she is going to draw a beautiful painting like a professional painter but after being justified in relation to methods of work, her resistance will be decreased and she could paint pattern tray duration 3 session tender.

It is requested from participant that there is no need to draw special shape or special pattern, rather she shall draw the thing that at present time is in her mind and during painting she can develop and insist on that part which she think it is familiar for her. This method is used for 1 year by participant in order to control her aggression impulses.

The style that is used is nearly similar to cubism style. Pablo Ruiz Picasso the founder of this style. This style of painting that is mainly similar to children paintings who knew nothing from painting, colors are simply and optionally drawn on canvas and the result is ambiguous and unclear painting.

2.2. Measure

In order to evaluate aggression of participants in this research, after performing treatment processes, it is used from Buss and Perry aggression inventory. This test was designed by Buss and Perry in the year 1992. The English form of this inventory is consisting of 29 questions. In this inventory, 4 factors evaluate verbal aggression (5 questions), physical aggression (9 questions), anger (7 questions) and hostility (8 questions). The choices of this inventory are designed so that status of person on each question is specified within a 5 degree scale, from 1 (does not completely explains me) to 5 (completely explains me).

Results of psychometric analysis indicate that this inventory has large internal consistency (0.89). Also correlation of sub-scales of this inventory that was between 0.25 to 0.45 indicates suitable validity of this tool (Buss & Perry, 1992).

3. Results

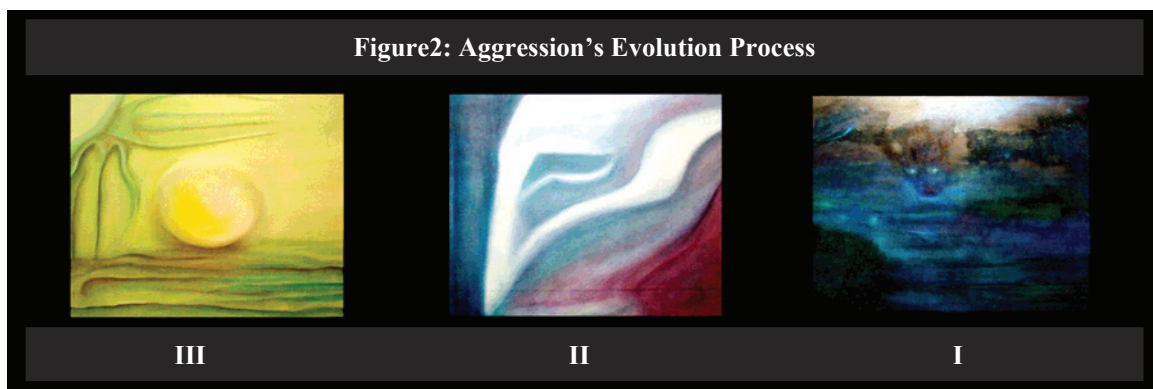
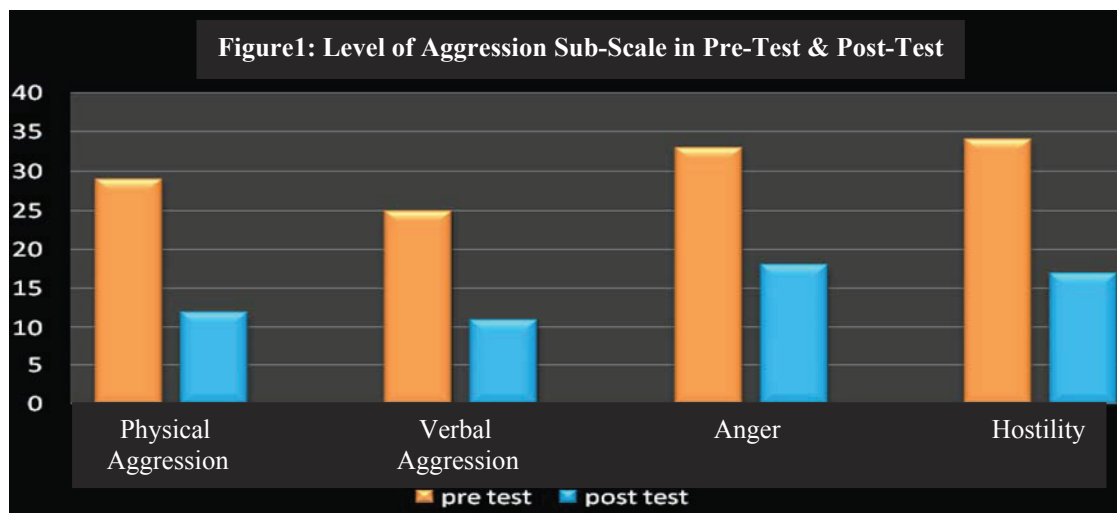
Results of this research show that:

1- Participant's aggression impulses that were measured by 29 question inventory of Buss & Perry aggression inventory were meaningfully decreased and this issue is reported by person itself and his associates.

2- Not only participant is able to control her aggression impulses by painting but also she will be able to discharge her unsuitable mental modes.

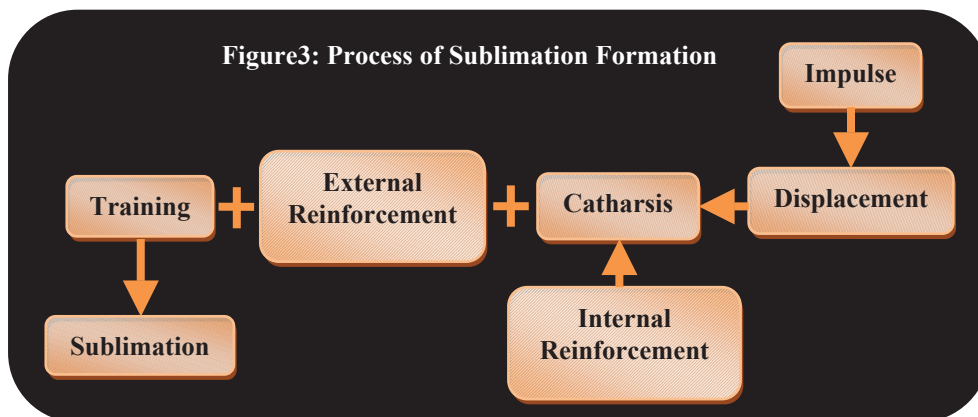
3- Aggression impulses are move toward suitable and acceptable activities that are sublimated.

This graph (figure1) indicates received grades by participants at sub-scales of Buss & Perry aggression inventory that include: physical aggression (PA), verbal aggression (VA), anger (A) and hostility (H). As it is clear in graph grades of all sub-scales after passing time periods is considerable decreased.



These shapes indicate process of evolution that show the aggression of person is decreased at each stage and finally it can be said that effect of painting has decreased aggression.

4. Discussion



At first this method was changed by Displacement Defense Mechanism from impulses to ordinary goal and may result in catharsis. Since catharsis result in decreasing unsuitable impulses, it is also result internal reinforcement of person.

On the other hand encouragement of therapist may result in external reinforcement and increasing interest of person for continuous usage from this method. Then at each session professional training is provided to person. Practice will improve paintings of such persons so that person not only on behalf of therapist but also on behalf of other persons will be accepted. This process continues up to level that person acquire required skills in painting and finally person will be able spontaneously draw painting without referring to therapist and will be encouraged by society.

This style may be factor for controlling unsuitable emotions and feelings, so that after passing educational course person will be able to self-regulation without referring to therapist. Not only this style may be used for aggression impulse sublimation but also it may be used for controlling sexual impulses.

Projective measures, particularly this technique, have the potential to use positively as therapeutic process when working with aggressor clientele. Great responsibility, however, must be taken in the training of clinicians to interpret such works. The administration of drawing grants people the freedom to communicate issues they may otherwise be unable to express. Using the technique as therapeutic treatment can be beneficial to both client and clinician.

References

- Buss, A. H., & Perry, M. (1992). The aggression questionnaire. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63, 452-459.
- Celebi-Öncü, E., & Karaaslan, T. (2002). Examining the drawings of traumatized children who experienced 17 August and 12 November Disasters. *Poster presented at Symposium of early childhood education in the 21st Century, Hacettepe University, 6-7 June*. Ankara.
- Dalley, T. (1984). *Art as therapy*. London: Tavistock publications.
- Dileo, J. H. (1983). *Interpreting children's drawings*. London: Brunner-Routledge.
- Ferrari, A. O. (1996). *Children's drawing and what they means*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Glyn, V., Angela, M., & Silk, J. (1990). *An introduction psychology of children's drawings*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Golomb, C. (2003). *Child's Creation of a Pictorial World*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Goodenough, F. (1926). *Measurement of intelligence by drawings*. New York: Harcourt Brace and World.
- Gray Deering, C. (2000). A cognitive developmental approach to understanding how children cope with disasters. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 13 (1), 7-16.
- Koppitz, E. M. (1984). *Psychological evaluation of human figure drawings by middle school pupils* (2 ed.). New York: Allyn and Bacon.
- Koppitz, E. (1968). *Psychological evaluation of children's human figure drawings*. New York: Grune & Stratton.
- Kramer, E. (1958). *Art therapy in a children community*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
- Landgarten, H. B. (1981). *Clinical art therapy*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Levic, M. F. (1983). *They couldn't talk and so they draw*. Illinois: Charles. C. Thomas.
- Lowenfeld, V. (1957). *Creative and mental growth* (3 ed.). New York: Macmillan.
- Malchiodi, C. A. (2001). *Trauma and Loss: Research and interventions article using drawing as intervention with traumatized children*. Retrieved November 21, 2005, from tlcinstitute: www.tlcinstitute.org/drawingintervention.html
- Miller, T. W., & Veltkamp, L. J. (1989). Assessment of child sexual abuse: Clinical use of fables. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, 20 (2), 123-133.
- Naumburg, M. (1950). *Schizophrenic art*. New York: Grune & Stratton.
- Parker, J., & Asher, S. R. (1987). Peer relations and later personal adjustment: are low-accepted children at risk? *Psychological Bulletin*, 102 (3), 357-389.
- Prochaska, J. O., & Norcross, J. C. (2007). *Systems of psychotherapy: A transtheoretical analysis*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Rubin, J. A. (1999). *Art therapy: An introduction*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Simon, R. M. (1997). *Symbolic images in art therapy*. London: Routledge.
- Sturner, R., & Rothbaum, F. (1980). The effects of stress on children's human figure drawings. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 36 (1), 324-331.
- Veitman, M. W., & Browne, K. D. (2002). The Assessment of drawings from children who have been maltreated: A systematic review. *child abuse review*, 11, 19-37.
- Williams, F. (1988). *Exceptional children culture*. Baltimore, MD: University Park Press.
- Williams, G. H., & Wood, M. M. (1977). *Development art therapy*. Baltimore, MD: University Park Press.
- Yule, W. (2001). Post-traumatic stress disorder in children and adolescents. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 13, 194-200. Retrieved June, 29, 2002, from unicef: www.unicef.org/turkey.