

The unique therapeutic effect of different art materials on psychological aspects among children 7-9 years old

By: Tamar Pessso Aviv, MA, the Graduate School of Creative Art Therapies, University of Haifa.

Supervised by: Prof. Joseph Guttman & Dr. Dafna Regev

The processes that are involved in art therapy occur within a therapeutic space, which forms within the dynamic triangle that includes the therapist, the patient and the art materials (Gotliv, 1999). The present study focuses on the function of the art materials within this triangle and aims to determine whether different art materials have differential effects within the framework of art therapy among normative population - children 7-9 years old.

The materials tested in this study were selected using the distinction recognized in the field of art therapy between regressive and controlled materials. The art materials chosen to represent the two opposing types were pencils and gouache paints. In addition, a material that represents the middle of the spectrum was chosen, namely, oil chalk. The guiding assumption was that different types of art materials have distinct characteristics (Betensky, 1995) and therefore their effects on psychological variants related to patients' wellbeing will vary.

The research focused on four psychological variants: aggression, self-esteem, anxiety and self-control. Because the effect of a particular art material changes as the user learns and gains experience working with it (Hass, 1998), participants' evaluation of the experimental intervention was tested.

The research included 41 participants, 9 boys and 32 girls. The participants were divided into three groups: the "pencil group", the "oil chalk group" and the "gouache paints group". The interventions in all of the groups included 10 sessions, in which participants experienced the material corresponding to their particular group. Participants completed questionnaires to examine their levels of aggression, self-esteem, anxiety and self-control before and after the intervention. To examine the participants' evaluation of the therapeutic session, Session Evaluation Questionnaire (SEQ) was administered at the end of each session.

The research findings revealed significant differences of change between pre- and post- intervention scores on aggression. In levels of self-esteem, anxiety and self-control, no differences between pre- and post- intervention were found. It also revealed differences of minor significance in terms of changes between pre-and post intervention level on aggression level between the groups (the gouache paint group showed bigger decrease than the oil chalk group in the level of aggression), and self-control levels between the groups (the pencils group showed a decrease which was different from the gouache group that showed an increase in the level of self-control). In levels of self-esteem and anxiety, no differences were found between the groups. SEQs revealed only one difference between the groups: their evaluations of the creative experience: While the gouache group showed a decrease as the meeting progressed, the other group showed an increased in their evaluations.

In conclusion, this research is unique in its attempt to test the differential effects of art materials on aggression, self-esteem, anxiety and self-control. The research partially supports the notion that the use of different art materials in art therapy has diverse effects, thus highlighting the importance of incorporating a variety of materials in the art therapy process. The research

lights the way for other additional experiments that might contribute to the art therapy field in general and to the inquiry about art materials' function in therapy, in specific.

Keywords: Art-materials, Gouache-paints, Oil-chalk, Pencils, Aggression, Self-esteem, Anxiety, Self-control and Session-evaluation.

Corresponding author: Tamar Pessó Aviv, Email: tamarpesso@gmail.com