



Art-making and Psychological Growth

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Abstract: Psychotherapy has incorporated the use of art in psychological interventions or art therapy to attain psychic changes and therapeutic healing. Outside of psychotherapy, art is also used as a means to explore the psyche of an individual for the purposes of self-discovery, psychological growth, and well-being. Carl Jung (1963, 1972) engaged in art-making through his mandala paintings and sculpture as part of his own process of psychic development (Jung, 1963, 1972). With an emphasis on the contribution of the humanities to mental health, the objective of this paper is to describe the experiences of normal adults in art-making and its psychological outcomes. Jung's analytic psychology is used as a framework to understand how psychological inner work can be undertaken by normal adults to delve into both unconscious and conscious materials in order to derive self-knowledge and psychological growth. Using a qualitative research approach, three adult participants undertook psychological inner work, reflections and art-making in the context of a graduate course. Informed consent was obtained from the participants. Case analysis was done to analyze the data. Case examples show the participants' process of art-making, insights, and psychological outcomes. Art-making in a psychological context is capable of producing psychological growth to normal adults. The findings of this study have implications for the vital role of the humanities in training individuals to foster mental health.

Key Words: Art-making; psychological growth; Jungian psychology

1. INTRODUCTION

Various forms of art such as painting, poetry, movement, music and drama have been utilized for psychological healing with individuals who have mental illness or psychological problems. For instance, Rosen (1993) presented case studies of patients whose creative work in painting, pottery, and dance, in conjunction with psychotherapy, allowed them to deal with their struggles with depression and find meaning. Psychotherapy has incorporated the use of art in psychological interventions, and it's generally referred to as art therapy. Art, with an emphasis on the visual arts, is used as a medium and a portal to enter and delve

into the psychological, mental, and emotional processes, not to mention unconscious materials, of an individual in order to achieve therapeutic goals (Rubin, 2001), or favorable personality changes (Ulman, 2001). Expanding on art therapy, some psychologists use the term "expressive therapy" or "expressive arts therapy" defined as:

an integrative multi-modal therapy with emphasis on the healing aspects of the creative process. Movement, drawing, painting, sculpting, music, writing, sound, and improvisation are used in a supportive, client-centered setting to experience and express feelings. All art that comes



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from an emotional depth provides a process of self-discovery and insight. We express inner feelings by creating outer forms (Rogers, 2001, p. 163).

Although this paper did not utilize art in the context of psychotherapy as the participants were normal adults, this study acknowledges the expressive and healing aspects of art. Outside the context of psychotherapy, art may also be used as a means to explore the psyche of an individual for the purposes of self-awareness, self-discovery, psychological growth, and well-being. To delineate the non-psychotherapy context of this study from art therapy or expressive arts therapy, I will refer to this therapeutic use of art as “art-making” whereby individuals find expression of their thoughts, feelings, insights and reflections through the expressive arts. Dr. Lourdes Carandang (2014), a prominent Filipino psychologist, utilized expressive arts in her psychotherapy work with her patients, both with children and adults. She asserts that self-expression is one of the basic psychological needs (Carandang, Aguilar, & de Guzman-de Asis, 2014) that provide an avenue for the deep layers of feelings and emotions to be communicated, transmuted, and understood. Furthermore, her clinical practice has shown that for adults, “play,” some of which is expressed through various art forms, is a vital aspect of adult psychological health (Carandang, 2009).

Following the tradition in psychology of using art for personal growth outside the context of psychotherapy, this paper shows how normal adults can facilitate their own process of psychological growth through the experience of art-making. Hence, this paper emphasizes the value of the humanities that can be incorporated in the discipline of psychology (e.g., Jung, 1966); particularly, on how the humanities through the arts can contribute to the mental health of individuals. There is a burgeoning interest and concern about mental health given the rising incidence of mental illness among Filipinos as well as the recently passed Philippine Mental Health Act (Republic Act 11036). The law defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes one’s own abilities and potentials, copes adequately with the normal stresses of life, displays resilience in the face of extreme life events, works productively and

fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to the community” (R.A. 11036, p. 5). In this light, the humanities may be accorded relevance in the promotion of mental health when the arts—with their capacity to facilitate insight into human nature and psychological healing—are tapped as a resource to foster psychological growth and well-being among normal adults.

1.1 Jung’s Analytic Theory

Jung’s analytic psychology is used as a framework in this paper to understand how psychological inner work can be undertaken by normal adults to delve into both unconscious and conscious materials in order to derive self-knowledge about deeper aspects of the psyche. This psychological undertaking may lead to Self-realization or what Jung (1968) termed as “individuation,” which involves an expansion and accommodation of all different aspects of the psyche; in short, this self-integration is a process of becoming whole.

Key aspects of Jung’s ideas in relation to art-making that I focus on in this paper are the following: the importance of the image, the psychological inner work of integrating opposites in the psyche; and the concept of archetypes that find expression in the individual. Jung engaged in images that arose from his unconscious and invented a technique called “active imagination” to dialogue with those images (Jaffe, 1979). Working with images allowed him to explore dualities involving conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche (e.g., the archetypal shadow) as a path towards wholeness of the individual or individuation. Art-making based on these images facilitated the work towards the union of opposites that are part of the human experience of duality. Aside from using imagery and art-making in psychotherapy with his patients, Jung himself engaged in creative self-expression through his drawings, mandala paintings and sculptures as part of his own self-analysis (Jung, 1963, 1972). His art-making explorations contributed to his personal growth and self-integration, as well as to his theory (Jung, 1963, 1968; Edwards, 2001). For Jung, “Everything living dreams of individuation, for everything strives towards its own wholeness” (Jaffe, 1979, p. 78).

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of this research is to describe the experiences of normal adults in art-making (that is, creative self-expression) in the process of personal growth, and the outcomes of engaging in psychological inner work and art-making. In this paper, art-making is a creative process of expressing the adult's psychological inner work and reflection through engaging in art. Although extant literature emphasizes the use of art in the context of art therapy with clinical patients or normal patients with psychological problems, this paper claims that normal adults who undertake psychological inner work and reflection will be able to engage in art-making and derive positive outcomes that will impact on their psychological growth.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative research approach to describe the art-making experiences of normal adults. The participants of this study were three adults (2 males, 1 female) with mean age of 33 years old; two of them are single and one is married. All of them work in the educational setting as an educator, guidance counselor and educator/psychologist. The participants are graduate students enrolled in a class that included psychological exercises to facilitate psychological inner work and self-reflection. They were encouraged to engage in any art form as a way to express their insights from the psychological inner work. Informed consent was obtained from the participants. Their art-making output and reflections were obtained; they were also asked to answer brief structured questions as a follow up. Case analysis was done to analyze the data consisting of self-reflections, interview data and artwork.

4. FINDINGS

The findings of the study are presented in three case samples, using pseudonyms. Each case presents their art-making experience as follows: art-making process, artwork and its analysis, their insights and psychological outcomes.

4.1 Simon

Simon, male, 32 years old, is married with two children, and works as an educator and psychologist. His art-making produced a two-paneled painting (See Figure 1) that reflects his insight about himself.



Figure 1. Simon's two-paneled painting.

Art-making process. Prior to creating his painting, he had not done any painting. He described his process: "I was excited. I bought all the materials after my work... I had a vision but certainly I have no idea how it will turn out. I spontaneously drew the background to the main images of the art... I intuitively did it." It took him about 5 hours to finish his painting but he was engrossed in the process that he "did not feel the passing of time." When he completed it, he just "felt satisfied...I know for myself that I have done something beautiful..."

In the past, prior to Simon's inner work and reflections, he preferred to focus on what is positive, good and easy in his life and, in turn, he downplayed failures and mistakes. "There are a lot of positive things that are presently happening in my life. More than that, this is only how I wanted life to be. I want life to be purely happy and beautiful." In Jungian terms, this is his persona

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(social aspect of the psyche) that is sunny and positive that refuses to see the dark or negative side of life. Although it is generally helpful to adopt a positive view of life to navigate life's challenges, a myopic and insistent focus on only the good and positive side of things—the persona of Simon—will create an imbalance in the psyche; thus, the shadow side (that is, the unacceptable aspect of the psyche) may surface as a compensatory function. Harmony within the self cannot be attained if there is a psychic imbalance.

Artwork. He painted two panels that are meant to be connected like a diptych. The right side of his painting, which shows half a tree and the sun, represents his persona as described earlier. The left side of his painting shows the dark side, with half a tree and the moon. When the panels are put together, the painting shows a whole tree and both sun and moon. The tree is a symbol of his process of growth and individuation. The images of a tree, the sun and moon symbolize the process of integrating opposite aspects of himself that arose through his psychological inner work and art-making.

Insight. His psychological inner work led him to gain insights about himself that allowed him to acknowledge both the bright/acceptable aspect and the dark/unacceptable aspect of himself. Simon realized that for him to grow and mature as a person, he needed to acknowledge that “life involves pain and suffering”—his own and others. “I have come to realize that life is beautiful, ... but human suffering is what enriches the experience. Human suffering stimulates and enhances the appreciation of the beautiful and the divine.” As expressed in the images of his artwork, his main insight is: “I have come to value acceptance. I realized that both positive and negative aspects of my life are essential. It is only by integrating them that I can appreciate my life in general as well as ...attain prudence, which I can share (with) my family.”

Psychological outcomes. Because of his psychological inner work and art-making, Simon glimpsed the emergence of different aspects of himself that affect his relationships and his life. He acknowledged an awareness of his desire to balance his emotional expression. “Sometimes, I have to express my emotions even if others may think of it as sign of weakness.” He discovers a new way of

thinking about love and loving. “Love is essential in all relationships...loving myself, my wife, and my family.” This helps him to handle conflicts in relating with people by knowing when and how to appropriately engage in conflicts. These insights allow him to approach his day-to-day living thus: “There is beauty in simplicity and there is meaning in the ordinary.”

4.2 Vilma

Vilma, 32 years old, is a single woman, who works as a guidance counselor. Her art-making produced a black-and-white ink drawing that reflects her insights and inner psychological processes. (See Figure 2)

Art-making process. Vilma used to draw a lot but she had not done any drawing prior to creating this artwork. While she was engaged in the art-making process that produce the above, “I was enjoying (the process) and I was in a very relaxed state.” When she completed her drawing, “(i)t was very fulfilling because I haven’t completed an artwork for quite a long time. I used to draw a lot but because of the many tasks I need to accomplish I can’t find time to draw again...completing this artwork was very satisfying.”



Figure 2. Vilma's drawing.



Vilma describes herself as a light-hearted and fun person. She acknowledged that this is her persona that allows her to have a carefree approach in life. Nonetheless, this might have prevented her from exploring other aspects of herself that contrast with this lightness in her personality.

Artwork. Her artwork shows an outline of a tree devoid of color, surrounded by various shapes in black ink. For Vilma, “(t)he tree symbolizes my conscious self and everything around it (are) the things I need to discover to put color into my tree.” The tree symbolically represents the Jungian archetype for the Self. Her drawing suggests that she is interested to discover various aspects of her psyche but her attention is still focused on the external, which may guide her in working on her interiority but may also create distractions that will prevent her from getting to know her unconscious aspects. In Jungian terms, she is more focused on her persona at this point in her adult life. The black and white contrast of her ink drawing points to her need to control the intermingling of conscious and unconscious aspects of her psyche; the somnambulism, which is, in a sense, the unconscious impinging on waking reality, suggests a break in her attempt to control the dynamic inter-flow of aspects of herself. But upon waking up, she is back to her conscious control; she feels psychologically unprepared to delve into the other, less pleasant or desirable aspects of her personality. Nevertheless, she is aware of her process: “I still have restrictions in exploring my psyche and I am aware of these walls but as to the specific reason why I have these walls, that I am not yet ready to explore fully.”

Insight. Her psychological inner work led her to realize that “being too carefree also opens the risk of being too laid back...being too light, I tend to disregard parts of my life that will require me to be lonely.” From a Jungian perspective, this creates an imbalance as shown by her refusal to deal with the unconscious aspects of her psyche, particularly the shadow or negative aspects. She herself speculates if her somnambulistic tendency is connected to her hesitation to explore her unconscious. Nonetheless, engaging in art-making offers a psychologically safe venue to explore her psyche. Art-making made her realize the need to rekindle her passion for creating art. “I can still do my passion. I just need to find time...Creating

artworks gives me more focus. I need to revive that part of myself I loved so much.”

Psychological outcomes. Her psychological inner work and art-making led her to manage with her emotions better and to experience positive affect (“It helped me control my emotions. To be mindful and just to be still.”), and handle her work better (“it also gave me more focus in terms of handling my priorities at work.”). With regard to art-making, she states: “I regained confidence in creating more artworks.” This sentiment extends to a positive approach to her life: “I realized that life is all about finding time and sometimes, about keeping still and be grateful for everything.”

4.3 Lorenzo

Lorenzo, male, 36 years old, is a priest. He wrote spoken word poetry in his art-making, which he entitled as “*Ang Kwento ng AKO sa LIKOD ng TAYO.*” An excerpt of his poem in Filipino is presented below.

Saan nga ba ako magsisimula?

Paano nga ba?

Kung ang simula at wakas ay iisa?

Kung ang dulo ng walang hanggan ay abot kamay mo na.

Kung ang abot kamay na ay mawawala pa?

Na matatapos na ang IKAW at AKO ay iisa

Na ang tanging nakikilala ay hindi na ang IKAW at AKO kundi TAYO.

TAYO sa kabila ng IKAW at AKO.

Mananatili ang kwento ng IKAW at AKO

Dahil sa bawat hibla ang pagkatao ko

Kasama ka sa paghubuo nito;

Sa kwento ng kahapon at pangarap ko

Laging naroon ang pangalan mo

Naging bahagi ka ng kahapon, ngayon at bukas ko.

Sana dulo nakaabang ka at magsasabing

Heto na TAYO kasama na natin ang dahilan ng lahat, ang Lumikha.

Sa ayaw ko at sa gusto

Patuloy ang ikot at inog ng daigdig

Sa paghubuo ng AKO.

Kaya saan ako magsisimula?



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*Sa bawat kahapon at ngayon.
Sa bawat IKAW, AKO at TAYO.
Sa mga pangarap at pangako.
Sa pag-asa, paglago at pagbabago.
Sa simula ng bawat simula hangang sa dulo ng
bawat dulo.
Doon muli tayo magtatagpo at ipagpapatuloy ang
kwento ng TAYO.*

Art-making process. Lorenzo appreciates different art forms but does not usually engage in visual art-making. He found a way to express the insights of his psychological inner work through the metaphoric use of words that can connote multiple levels of meaning. While engaging in art-making, he recalled, “I (felt) relaxed and enjoying...it. ...My mind flow(ed) naturally.” When he completed his poem, he also read it as a spoken word poetry. He felt a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction from his art-making, and was able to appreciate the beauty of it. “I felt satisfied and enjoy(ed) the art produced.”

Lorenzo describes himself as an introvert, caring and responsible person. These qualities allow him to introspect and reflect about life and theology, to care for others in his religious community and his own family and carry out his duties as a vocation director and work as a graduate student. While this persona enables him to be effective in his social world, he admits that his introversion sometimes makes him view himself as less empowered in making contributions to his community. Furthermore, as kindness and caring are associated with the priestly demeanor, he tends to view himself in this light instead of allowing for other less pleasant aspects of himself that may occasionally surface.

Artwork. His artwork is a spoken word poetry in Filipino and three pages long in its entirety. It expresses his reflections about his life from both causal (that is, past) and teleological (that is, future, purposeful) views and uses the idea of story or kwento to connect the self or *ako* (conscious aspects) with the other or *ikaw* (unconscious aspects) in order to become a whole or *tayo* (the individuated Self). At first glance, his poem seems to be talking about the story of two lovers (*ako* at *ikaw*) whose journey—the joys and struggles—of two distinct entities ends up becoming a united single entity. However, given the context of the Jungian

psychological inner work and reflection undertaken by Lorenzo, the meaning of the poem can be seen as his own journey of individuation. Like an archetypal hero, he struggled with different aspects of himself, both conscious and unconscious, in his process of individuation, of becoming his Self, as an integrated whole (*tayo*).

Insight. His psychological inner work allowed him to acknowledge shadow aspects; he became conscious of his projection of undesirable aspects of himself onto others, such as sometimes being harsh towards others. This harshness contrasts with his persona of being kind and caring so there’s a tendency to disown this unacceptable aspect of himself. “Seeing and acknowledging it as part of me, what I disliked most from that person are the same thing that I disliked within myself that I denied... the dark sides of me yet still part of me.” Jungian theory states that disowned or unacknowledged aspects of the psyche—the shadow—gets projected onto another person with a similar quality or behavior; in turn, the shadow continues to be repressed in the unconscious and yet exerts an influence in the person’s waking life. Lorenzo was able to recall how he sometimes became unkind in relating to people around him. However, becoming conscious of his shadow allowed him “to venture more on the other side of me and have a healthy relation with (it) and to use (it) positively as the need arises.”

Psychological outcomes. Insights from Lorenzo’s psychological inner work and art-making added layers of maturity in his approach to life, his relationship with himself and others. “I view life as a balance and not just a matter of understanding...I became more open and integral in looking at life, relationships, circumstances and people around me.” In his journey of individuation, he attained this: “I became wise...understanding, accepting myself and others. This leads me to the realization of the rebirth of (the) new me in understanding and living the gift of life.”

5. DISCUSSION

The three cases presented above experienced positive affect (excitement, relaxation, satisfaction and fulfillment) while engaging in art-making that produced visual arts and poetry. Their insights



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from psychological inner work and art-making focused on awareness of their dualities (conscious and unconscious aspects) and the process of reconciling the opposites (persona and shadow) through acceptance, balance and integration. The outcome of these insights is a renewed self-understanding, personal growth and maturity, and a better way of relating to oneself and others.

The art-making of the adult participants in this study was not done in the context of art therapy, yet their prior psychological inner work provided a fertile ground for insights that were deepened and expressed through art-making. In this sense, art-making for normal adults without the presence of an art therapist is related to what Ulman (2001) refers to as “art as therapy.” The art-making experiences shown in this paper find resonance with her description of the function of the arts in personality development:

The common thread uniting these many views is recognition of the inherently integrative character of the arts, that is their power to unite opposing forces within the personality and to help reconcile the needs of the individual with the demands of the outside world.... True mastery of life’s tasks depends upon a disciplined freedom, whose model may be found in the artistic process. (Ulman, 1977, p. 14 in Ulman, 2001)

Given the Jungian goal of individuation as an approach used in the participants’ psychological inner work, Ulman’s description of the integrative function of the arts with regard to opposites (conscious and unconscious) in the personality shows how art-making is a therapeutic companion to the psychological inner work of the adults. Although the participants engaged in art-making after their inner work and reflection, the participants metaphorically gave birth to their insights through an art form that brought their internal process into an exterior space, thereby continuing the process of psychological growth that started with their inner work. With this art-making process, the “creative unconscious” (Rubin, 2001) of the adults were tapped and given expression.

The findings of this study have implications on the inclusion of the arts in adult mental health programs. This implies creating an educational program for adults that will focus on the interface of humanities and human development to train their sensibilities toward beauty, and to engage in art-making with the goal of fostering or enhancing their mental health. Ulman’s definition of art shows how the power of art impacts on mental health:

Its motive power comes from within the personality; it is a way of bringing order out of chaos...chaotic feelings and impulses within, the bewildering mass of impressions from without. It is a means to discover both the self and the world, and to establish a relation between the two. In the complete creative process, inner and outer realities are fused into a new entity....” (1961, p. 20 in Ulman, 2001).

Further implications of this study point towards the integration of art-making in daily life, hewing closely to McNiff’s (1992) idea of “art as medicine.” For many psychologists, the developmental tasks of adults are centered on work and relationships. For McNiff (2004), “healing often occurs through the process of integrating diverse spheres and finding a common purpose and deeper meaning to everything we do. Artistic creations emerge from the details of our lives and from how we perceive those details” (p.283). To fulfill our developmental tasks and find meaning in life, art-making and its psychological benefits can be integrated into the adult world of meaningful work and satisfying relationship with others.

6. CONCLUSION

To conclude, normal adults outside of psychotherapy can benefit from engaging in psychological inner work and art-making to attain psychological growth and maturity. Art-making has the capacity to express and expand insights about oneself and one’s relationships with others.



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