

* Svatojánská kolej – Higher Vocational Pedagogical School

** University of South Bohemia. Faculty of Theology

MARIE GABRIELA LHOTOVÁ*, KAROLÍNA DIALLO**

ORCID: 0000-0002-4193-3611, marie.lhotova@volny.cz

ORCID: 0000-0002-3634-2278, karolina.diallo@gmail.cz

*Mindfulness to Expression of Emotions in Art Creation
in Art Therapy*

Wrażliwość na ekspresję emocji w sztukach plastycznych w arteterapii

HOW TO QUOTE THIS PAPER: Lhotová, M.G., Diallo, K. (2020). Mindfulness to Expression of Emotions in Art Creation in Art Therapy. *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska. Sectio J, Paedagogia-Psychologia*, 33(3).

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to reflect the expression of emotions in art in contexts that allow a better understanding of the process of creation, as a way of identifying human emotions. The theoretical basis is the psychotherapeutic approach of interventional art therapy using projective techniques. The framework of this type of psychotherapeutic care is based on analytical interpretation and conceptual concretization of art. The research aims to answer if it is possible or not to estimate (interpret) artistically expressed emotions by therapists and other viewers.

Keywords: expression; creation; art therapy; emotion; emotional experience

INTRODUCTION

Man is both a rational and emotional being. What is important to us, is always connected with emotions. We assume that art “floats” on our emotional wave (Horanský, 2014, p. 24) and thus serves to express emotions of different intensity and urgency. Consequently, it can contribute to their mastery. Therefore, emotions may not always be demonstrated in an obvious, evident way. In this context, Jan Slavík (2013a, 2013b) emphasizes the cultural aspects of emotional expression (cultures differ in valuing emotions). We express our emotions in a way that is appropriate to our culture (Nakonečný, 2012). In contemporary aesthetics and art

theory, the term “expression” is understood as a special type of art creation and symbolization (Stuchlíková, Mazehoová, 2017). In education and psychotherapy, the expression of emotions is intended to reflect the personality traits, current mental state, and the cultural expressions of emotions mentioned above. It becomes the subject of a therapeutic progress.

Considering that emotional experience (differing only in intensity) is a part of every moment in our lives, art creation is a way for expressing emotions, therefore, it can be used in art therapy. Unconscious emotions expressed in the piece of art can, in art therapy, move gradually towards the conscious level to full awareness. The basic determining idea of the reflection of emotions in creation in art therapy can be seen in the following: how the outcome looks like, how it has been performed, how diverse the colours are, and what the proportions of the elements/objects are on the painting. Another determining aspect is the content of the picture, the portrayed story. Emotions may be found in any topic presented by the author. Discovering and naming these emotions and confronting them with reality during the interaction between the client and the therapist, is the main task of art therapy. We can use emotions in art therapy in a different way as well – when we choose them as the main subject of creation. For example, the client/patient is asked to paint his specific emotion (joy, sadness, surprise, etc.) and to perceive through the work of art of how intense/positive/negative his experience is with this emotion.

EXPRESSION OF EMOTIONS

Expression communicates something that can be hidden beyond the straightforward meaning, usually sufficient to interpret a word or a sentence (Lhotová, Perout, 2018, p. 23). Expression is formation of a content into a form that is obvious and distinct. Expression related to the concrete emotional experience is a sign of the relationship of a person to some contents, events, values, etc. Slavík (2013a, p. 184) says that “expression is not considered as a causal consequence of the expression, but it is rather a way of »cultural« coping with the process”. If creation is involved in this context, then expressed emotions may be perceived, named and become the subject of self-reflection or research. Iva Stuchlíková (2007) acknowledges the fact that emotions mediate the creation. This can be used to discover and realize them. A conscious expression of emotion is part of human communication, when one person wants to communicate/share his emotions with his partner. For example, if he wants to show his depressive mood and sadness, he will probably paint a gray picture, a black gaping wound, or a dark scribble as a message: “Look, how I feel”. Therapeutically, this conscious expression is a part of announcing one’s own feelings, which can bring a temporary relief. There is a different situation known in art therapy: when emotions expressed in the picture

are not readable at first glance, the author does not plan to communicate something emotional. The artistic expression is immediate, yet emotions are expressed spontaneously during the process of creation. The creation is a prerequisite for expressing emotions; emotions can be searched in the picture afterwards. The question that remains is: What is the best way to look for them when the author is not conscious of this expression? What if the spectator's interpretations are influenced by their own emotional impulses, and may or may not correspond with the author's emotions? This leads, in many cases, to double interpretation of emotional expressions, which requires patience and dutiful work, in search of common elements and harmony, in perceiving and explaining the form of expressed emotions. The situation where emotional content is communicated allows both the author and the viewer to realize how positively or negatively he likes or dislikes the interpretation of his current state of mind. Expression allows to grasp a content of subjective experience, and express it in a way that is understandable to other people. Therefore, the content of expression can be generalized, and interpreted or understood, within a metaphorical shift between two content schemes.

BASIC RESEARCH

Questions

The question of the legitimacy and validity of the interpretation of emotions in artifacts is often raised in art therapy. We were interested if or how it is possible for therapists and other viewers to estimate (interpret) the content of images and emotions associated with those images, and to what extent researchers can hit the content of images and emotions that the author identifies himself.

METHOD

We collected 53 pictures (in most abstract ones) of one patient (author), who named the pictures, described the emotions related to them, and how he felt during the creation. The author was working spontaneously without aiming for the artistic value of the picture, and without the conscious ambition to convey emotions. We presented these images to 20 respondents. Their task consists of naming the image according to its content, and identifying the emotions they think are related to it. The number of emotions obtained from inquiry was classified into 10 basic categories: 1 – joy; 2 – fear, anxiety, pain; 3 – chaos; 4 – sadness; 5 – aggression; 6 – disgust; 7 – revival, dynamism, courage, anticipation, interest (leading to change); 8 – calm; 9 – excitement, agitation, tension, astonishment, passion; 10 – dislike, coldness, insecurity, helplessness, hopelessness.

The author's pictures are also described by these categories. These categories

were created based on results of a pre-study of the variability of emotional processes, what happens when emotions occur while observing images, determined by a selection from Table 1. Emotions are lined up on the axis “fear–anger–grief–love” in the middle of the scheme.

Basic emotions according to different experts

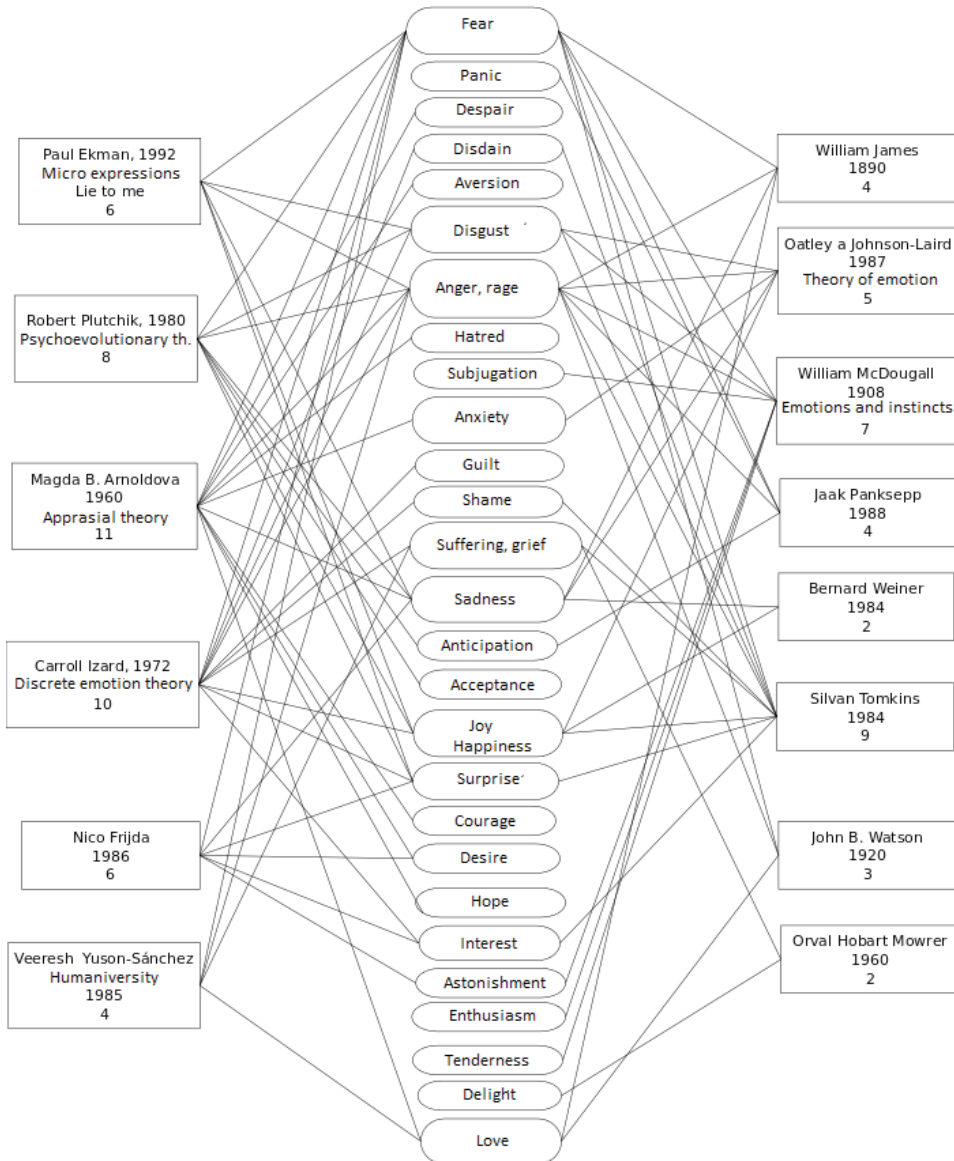


Figure 1. Basic emotion according to different experts
 Source: (www.emocnifitnes.cz [access: 12.04.2020]).

Half of the respondent group was consisted of psychologists, art therapists, educators and the other half included people from non-humane service professions. Their responses were logged. Numbers in the table represent the type of emotion subordinated to one out of ten categories based on its content.

1. We were looking for a correspondence between respondents in identifying emotions on each of the 53 pictures. We have created a table that shows the frequency (indication of one out of ten categories the emotion was attributed to) of each answer for each picture (number of each picture is shown on one line), the author's evaluation, and the percentage of correspondnence. The lines in the table are sorted from highest to lowest. There were 20 respondents in total, which corresponds to the sum of votes in each line.

Table 1. Consistency in the designation of the emotions of the author and the evaluator (1–10) for individual images (1–53)

Category of emotion												
Figure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Author	Correspondence
14	1	8	0	1	0	0	4	1	4	1	2	0.4
25	5	0	1	8	0	0	0	4	1	1	4	0.4
26	8	4	3	0	0	1	3	0	1	0	1	0.4
42	7	4	0	1	0	1	1	5	1	0	1	0.35
39	6	4	0	2	0	0	1	4	1	2	1	0.3
50	3	6	1	0	1	2	1	0	6	0	2	0.3
51	2	4	2	1	6	1	2	0	2	0	5	0.3
3	4	4	1	0	0	1	5	1	3	1	7	0.25
20	0	8	1	0	0	0	3	2	1	5	10	0.25
53	7	4	5	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	3	0.25
23	4	4	1	2	0	1	1	5	0	2	1	0.2
24	3	3	6	1	2	0	4	0	1	0	7	0.2
29	9	4	0	1	0	0	3	0	1	2	2	0.2
33	4	4	1	3	0	2	3	2	0	1	2	0.2
34	4	2	1	2	0	1	2	4	3	1	1	0.2
37	1	4	0	3	0	3	4	3	0	2	7	0.2
45	1	8	0	3	4	1	1	0	1	1	5	0.2
47	4	3	2	3	1	0	5	1	0	1	1	0.2
49	4	4	4	4	0	1	2	0	0	1	3	0.2
2	2	9	0	1	0	2	2	1	3	0	9	0.15
10	3	3	3	2	0	0	2	2	2	3	2	0.15
11	3	2	2	0	1	2	3	2	3	2	7	0.15
31	0	7	2	1	3	3	3	1	0	0	5	0.15

40	1	3	2	2	0	4	1	2	3	2	2	0.15
44	7	4	3	0	0	1	2	1	2	0	3	0.15
46	8	3	2	1	0	0	1	3	0	2	8	0.15
1	4	4	2	3	0	2	1	2	1	1	3	0.1
6	3	8	0	1	3	0	3	0	2	0	9	0.1
8	1	10	0	2	2	1	0	0	3	1	5	0.1
12	0	9	0	6	0	2	2	0	0	1	7	0.1
13	0	2	3	3	0	1	2	5	2	2	7	0.1
19	2	5	1	0	0	3	3	2	1	3	8	0.1
38	0	5	1	5	2	2	1	2	0	2	5	0.1
43	2	6	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	0	5	0.1
52	0	9	1	5	2	2	0	0	0	1	5	0.1
4	0	1	4	3	1	4	1	3	2	1	2	0.05
5	5	3	5	0	1	0	3	1	1	1	5	0.05
7	6	3	0	1	0	2	1	1	5	1	7	0.05
16	9	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	9	0.05
17	3	8	1	0	0	2	1	3	1	1	9	0.05
18	1	8	0	1	2	0	1	0	1	6	4	0.05
21	3	2	1	4	1	2	4	1	1	1	10	0.05
22	3	1	1	5	0	1	1	2	1	5	2	0.05
27	5	0	1	2	7	1	0	1	1	2	8	0.05
30	4	1	6	1	0	1	1	2	3	1	4	0.05
32	5	5	0	2	1	0	2	3	1	1	9	0.05
35	4	3	2	0	0	4	2	2	1	2	9	0.05
41	7	1	1	3	0	2	1	3	1	1	3	0.05
48	0	10	2	1	3	1	0	1	1	1	9	0.05
9	6	4	2	2	0	1	1	1	3	0	5	0
15	8	4	2	0	0	1	0	1	3	1	7	0
28	5	3	0	1	2	0	3	1	4	1	3	0
36	7	2	1	2	0	3	0	2	2	1	5	0
#	194	231	83	98	48	67	98	88	83	70		

Source: Authors' own study.

What we find interesting is that:

- the absolute majority (11 or more persons) never agreed on one emotion,
- half of respondents (i.e. 10 persons) agreed in two cases, in Fig. 8 and in Fig. 48, both marked the emotion of fear and anxiety (2). None of these two cases coincides with the author's intention,

- slightly less than half (i.e. 9 people) agreed on the emotion of fear and anxiety (2) in Fig. 2 and 52, and the emotion of joy (1) in Fig. 12 and 29. Again, the most common answer does not match with the emotion marked by the author. Interestingly, in case of Fig. 29 (bear by the water), there was a correspondence in terms of the emotion of fear and anxiety (2), but at the same time the greatest consensus on the emotion of joy (1). We would expect that if the emotions of 1-Joy and 2-Fear and anxiety are basically contradictory, people would not have confused them,
 - correspondence of 7 or 8 people appears most often on emotion fear and anxiety (2) and emotion of joy (1) which is related to the fact that people generally choose these emotions most often, as shown below,
 - joy and fear are the emotions that people most often agree on.
2. Order of emotions by frequency. We can see how many times an individual emotion was chosen in the last line of Table 1. The most common choice was the emotion of fear and anxiety (231). The other occurrences were joy (194), sadness (98), revival, dynamism, (98), calm (88), chaos (83), excitement, agitation (83), insecurity, helplessness (70), and disgust (67). The smallest number of respondents was for perceived aggression (48).
 3. We tested statistically whether respondents' answers are evenly distributed among categories of emotions, which would indicate whether they selected emotions randomly. We tested each figure separately. We could reject the random sampling hypothesis for half of the respondents. Images where the test showed that respondents had made the random decisions, was where the distribution of answers was most close to even. The image did not evoke any clear emotion and the viewers were not emotionally affected (Fig. 1, 10, 11, 21, 34, 40). On the other hand, images where the distribution of responses was most different from even, are the images that evoked one or more clear emotions from these pictures: 2, 6, 8, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 20, 25, 26, 29, 48, 52, 53.
 4. Correspondence in identification of emotions with the author of images. The answer to this question is shown in Table 2. Respondents achieved the highest correspondence (40%) with the author on paintings 14, 25, 26; 35% match in case of painting 42; and a 30% correspondence in case of paintings 39, 50, 51. No respondent agreed with the author in case of four paintings (9, 15, 28, 36). In 27 cases, the match was equal or lower than 10%, which, given that respondents made a choice out of 10 options, indicates a that the decision was completely random. correspondence was higher than 10% for 26 images. The average correspondence was 14.4%. Who agreed with the author the most? Of the total number of images, most matches were in Fig. 26, 21.

Table 2 shows the number of matches with the author. The total number of im-

ages is 53. The first line indicates the person, the second line indicates the number of matches with the author, and the third line shows the correspondence percentage. Four persons interpreted images similarly to author; they had a match in more than a fifth of cases. Two of them were art therapists, one was a musician and one – a technician.

Table 2. Number of matches with the author

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
#	8	4	10	9	8	11	5	8	9	14	4	8	11	3	4	7	11	6	4	9
%	15	8	19	17	15	21	9	15	17	26	8	15	21	6	8	13	21	11	8	17

Source: Authors' own study.

Here is the basic question, mostly for art therapists who are concerned about the legitimacy of interpreting images according to evoked feelings: Is it possible to rely that other people can perceive emotions projected in paintings the way like the author does? And how much can one rely on those other people? **A:** If people could not read emotions at all, the average match (in our case with ten options) would be 10%. The average match with the author is 14.4 % in our experiment.

Assuming a normal distribution, the average correspondence threshold for proving the validity of a presumption that people can read emotions would be 12%. Due to violation of the normal distribution this value will be higher. So, we can say that at the 95% confidence level, people can identify emotions better than randomly. If we want to limit this probability from above, we can choose 17%, which corresponds to the upper limit of the 95% confidence interval. If we want to quantify the reliability of interpretation of emotions projected in art work, we get a range of approximately from 12 to 17%. Thus, we have shown that emotions are expressed in art piece and influence selection, but not to the extent that we can truly determine the author's emotions.

DISCUSSION

The search for emotions and the framework of their interpretation

Emotions are subjective experiences, respectively, contents of consciousness that express personal interest and engagement in our relationship with the world. They transfer information, they help self-reflection, and they induce possibilities to improve our self-understanding and growth. Expressing oneself emotionally then hits the level that is essential for efficient therapy. It is important for therapeutic achievements that clients accept their undistorted emotional experience and the way it is expressed (Stuchlíková, Mazehoová, 2017).

How to understand emotions and affective processes in art creation in art

therapy? What is the relationship between spontaneous expression, manifestation of expressed emotion, and representation of emotion? The expression of emotions in art creation in art therapy is related to vulnerability. It is therefore clear that sharing, where an individual chooses the means of expression to communicate (manifest) their emotions congruently (with the way he experiences them), is less frequent in therapeutic practice. Radkin Honzák (2017, p. 84) states that the vast majority, perhaps 98%, of psychic activity is carried out unconsciously, and conscious control is very often mistaken about its interpretations.

In paintings we often encounter a condition when the client:

- tries to suppress internally unacceptable emotions, tries to hide them and not talk about it as a result of ego-defense mechanisms. In art therapy, we can pick out the suppressions in a change in artistic expression, when some of the delicate elements in the pictures are being “framed” or omitted. This is closely connected with client’s clouding emotions to himself,
- tries to change, distort internally unacceptable disturbing emotions and tries to pretend something for others. Images are stylized,
- demonstrates his emotions in the most complex form possible. The images are expressed chaotically, contain incompatible elements, have a large number of elements that are illogically intertwined, and the perspective is reversed,
- does not find the communicative form. He expresses himself, but others cannot understand, because the pictures are: not colored, and created without dynamics, pressure, and stereotypically,
- does not find communicative form and refuses to express himself in art work,
- wants to speak according to his own scenario, but he deviates from the given topics of the art work.

CONCLUSIONS

The range of possible views of emotional expression suggests that the goal in art therapy is to actively seek out which forms of expression are authentic from the client’s and therapist’s point of view. Communication is not only a question of finding a fitting code, perhaps a metaphor, but also a question of the recipient’s readiness to “decipher” it, including its creativity and the ability to discover. All of the conditions above may also be applied to the therapists as they perceived their emotions (affective processes) their self. These aspects influence therapists’ interpretations and might easily be wrongly attributed to the client. James A. Russel (2003, 2009) talks about the so-called “core affect”, which forms the basic background of our emotional experiences. We are in our predominant mood the most of the time, which we do not have to realize or interpret until we turn our attention to it.

REFERENCES

- Honzák, R. (2017). *Psychosomatická prvouka*. Praha: Vyšehrad.
- Horanský, M. (2014). Emoce a umění. In: R. Rokyta, C. Hoeschl (eds.), *Emoce v medicíně II a III. Emoce v životním cyklu člověka. Úzkost, stres a životní styl* (pp. 23–29). Praha: nakladatelství Mladá fronta a.s.
- Lhotová, M., Perout, E. (2018). *Arteterapie v souvislostech*. Praha: Portál.
- Nakonečný, M. (2012). *Emoce*. Praha: Nakladatelství Stanislav Juhaňák-Triton.
- Russel, J.A. (2003). Core affect and the psychological construction of emotion. *Psychological Review*, 110(1), 145–172.
- Russel, J.A. (2009). Emotion, core affect, and psychological construction. *Cognition and Emotion*, 23(7), 1259–1283.
- Slavík, J. (2013a). Tvorba jako způsob poznávání ve výtvarné výchově. *Kultura, umění a výchova*, 1(1).
- Slavík, J. (2013b). Expresie. In: J. Slavík, V. Chrz, S. Štěch (eds.), *Tvorba jako způsob poznávání* (pp. 175–188). Praha: Karolinum.
- Stuchlíková, I. (2007). *Základy psychologie emocí*. Praha: Portál.
- Stuchlíková, I., Mazehoová, I. (2017). Expresie emocí. *Kultura, umění a výchova*, 5. Retrieved from: http://www.kuv.upol.cz/index.php?seo_url=aktualni-cislo&casopis=12&clanek=155 (access: 12.04.2020).

STRESZCZENIE

Opisane badanie dotyczy ekspresji emocji w sztukach plastycznych w aspektach pozwalających na lepsze zrozumienie procesu twórczego jako sposobu poznawania emocji człowieka. Bazę teoretyczną stanowi podejście psychoterapeutyczne arteterapii projekcyjno-interwencyjnej. Ramy ideowe tego sposobu opieki psychoterapeutycznej bazują na interpretacji analitycznej i konkretyzacji pojęciowej dzieł plastycznych. Badanie pilotażowe zmierza do poszukiwania odpowiedzi, w jakim stopniu mogą być odgadywane (interpretowane) emocje wyrażone przez autora zestawu obrazków przez terapeutów i innych odbiorców.

Słowa kluczowe: ekspresja; twórczość; arteterapia; ekspresja artystyczna; emocje

