Using Smartphone as a Therapeutic Stimulus in Art Therapy

Abstract

The current cross-global generation has incorporated digital technology as part of their mainstream culture (Malchiodi, 2018; Kowal, Kuzio, & Wawrzak-Chodaczek, 2016; Robinson, Cotten, & Schulz, 2015). Digital devices have become the ubiquitous mode of communication across the globe, with almost every culture’s most utilized tool that has supplanted person to person communication (Robinson, et al., 2015). As a means of entertainment, research, and often a means of personal interaction, the smartphone has become the most essential tool for daily life. With these ever-expanding web-connected, pocket-sized portable computing and communication devices have become a "new media" phenomenon, a central aspect of global media and visual culture (Creeber & Martin, 2008). The smartphone can also possess its own aesthetic and self-expressive power, which can be harnessed for therapeutic purposes (Malchiodi, 2018; Torous & Powell, 2015). This presentation explores its therapeutic uses, from the universal “selfie” to actual drawing, the smartphone will be considered as new territory to explore in the clinical sphere.

The methodology utilized is based upon Lowenfeld’s (1957) original concept of using “simulations.” In this case, the presenter has utilized the ubiquitous smartphone as a stimulus. Henley (2017) has identified several goals in utilizing stimulations, which assist in crossing developmental, social and cultural divides. He also writes that a stimulus is conceived as a familiar device that can provide open-ended structure, excite the senses, increase focus and derive inspiration. Like Lowenfeld (1957), Henley (2017) considered a well-crafted stimulus as a critical means of facilitating the client’s access to their imagination. By delving deeper into the artist’s expressions including one’s unconscious that overcome stereotypical effects upon creative expression and thus dampen therapeutic outcomes.
The population under review are Korean students whom this presenter visited and worked with for a non-consecutive six months as part of the presenter’s doctoral studies. The smartphone was identified as a potent stimulus that might overcome internalization and defensiveness of these adolescent Koreans (Xu, Farver, & Shin, 2014; Yoo, 2012). As part of this journey, it was expected the stimulus could assist the Korean adolescents in reaching a degree of sublimation during art therapy sessions through externalizing and communicating of one’s inner world.

To dip into unconscious forces and transform these impulses into expressive and communicative images through the smartphone became the main locus of the presenter’s research with a group of typical Korean students. Despite their typicality, many were identified as displaying disturbed behaviors that bespoke of inner conflicts of differing degrees of severity.

Their one unifying commonality was their attachment to the smartphone. Hence, the presenter began where the client most comfortably resided. After devising a protocol which invited the adolescents to freely utilize their smartphone expression, response art drawing was then encouraged. Outcomes were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively by integrating statistical evidence and Kramerian psychodynamic approaches. The presenter intends to explore the current controversies over cross-paradigm efficacy. The case utilized illustrates these dynamics with the adolescent’s struggles to translate digital imagery into a medium that integrated internal conflict with transformative communication with an eye on aesthetic authenticity, in keeping with the creative art therapist’s mission.

References


