

Art therapy as a complementary therapy in the treatment of depression: a case study

La arte terapia como terapia complementaria en el tratamiento de la depresión: estudio de un caso

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Abstract

This article refers to the case of a 27 year old female diagnosed with depression, whose treatment included Jungian Therapy with Transpersonal Art Therapy as a complement. The Art Therapy consisted of working with mandalas, visualization practices, energy therapy, and attending the Creativity and the Brain course. During the mandala sessions, the archetype of the Great Mother represented by the African goddess figure of Iemanjá was used as a focal point. Soothing music was played in the background during every therapy session. Physical hugging upon the client's arrival and departure was also considered part of the therapy. Because this young woman experienced significant recovery in a short period of time, Art Therapy may be an important consideration in the treatment plan of patients suffering from depression.

Key words

Complementary Therapy, Mandala, Art Therapy, Archetypes

Resumen

Este artículo relata el caso de M.S., mujer de 27 años, médico residente diagnosticada por depresión, cuyo tratamiento consistió en terapia jungiana y arte terapia transpersonal como terapia complementaria. La arte terapia de M.S. consistió en trabajos con mandalas, prácticas de visualización y terapia energética, a la vez que asistiendo al curso "Cerebro y Creatividad". Durante las sesiones con mandalas, se usó como punto focal un arquetipo expresivo de la Gran Madre, representado por la figura de la diosa Iemanjá. Durante todas las sesiones sonó una música relajante de fondo. Un abrazo de bienvenida y otro de despedida formaba parte de la terapia. A la luz de la significativa recuperación que esta joven mujer obtuvo en un breve periodo de tiempo, consideramos la Arte Terapia como una posibilidad en el tratamiento de pacientes depresivos.

Palabras Clave

Terapia complementaria, Mandala, Arte Terapia, Arquetipos

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“It is much more important to know what sort of a patient has a disease than what sort of a disease a patient has.”

William Osler

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, depression has become a real epidemic, reaching people from all sorts of social classes, ranging from developing countries to the most developed nations around the world - mainly in metropolitan areas.

According to recent studies conducted by the World Health Organization, 10% of men and 25% of women are suffering or will suffer from depression at some point in their lives. In the year 2000, depression was recognized to be the fourth main cause of disability around the world, foreseeing it to be the second by 2020 (THASE, 2005).

In Brazil the same ratings are found in medical offices, at working environments, at family homes, including an estimate that 75% of these people will neglect to seek medical help, putting their symptoms off for a period of about 5 years until they will obtain a diagnosis.

According to INSS (Brazil's National Social Security Institute) there were 74,418 idle employees victims of depression in the year of 2007.

In Salvador, as well as in any other Brazilian state capitals, the number of people suffering from depression is also shocking, causing health professionals to be alarmed, more so therapists who dedicate their work to treating psycho-affective disorders.

COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

Complementary and alternative therapies have been occupying a more relevant rank in demonstrating effectiveness in addressing several problems that impede or hinder a person from living a healthier style of life.

Complementary therapies are therapeutic practices aiming at the reduction of symptomatology allowing patients to have a better quality of life. They do not integrate the conventional allopathic medical practice and are usually associated with academic treatments (NCCAM, 2006).

Alternative Therapies are used as a substitute for conventional treatment, although in reality, many are also used in conjunction to some type of allopathic treatment.

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) classifies the Complementary and Alternative Medicine therapies in five categories or spheres:

1. Alternative Medical Systems – Homeopathy and Naturopathy, Acupuncture, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and Ayurveda (from India).
2. Focus on Mind and Body – Meditation, Prayer, Mental Suggestive Healing, and therapies that use creative solutions, such as: Art, Music and Dance. Some of these have already been formalized: Patients' Supporting Groups and Cognitive and Behavioral Therapy.
3. Biological Therapies –The use of substances found in Nature like herbs, food and vitamins.
4. Manipulation Methods – based on the body – Chiropractic, Osteopathic, and Massage.
5. Therapies based on energy: Biofield therapies - these try to affect the energy fields that surround and penetrate the human body, such as Chi gong, Reiki, Therapeutic Touch, Tai Chi Chuan.
6. Bio-electromagnetic therapies - the unconventional use of electromagnetic fields, such as: impulse fields, magnetic fields or alternating or direct current (RESTREPO, 2006).

ARCHETYPES

Carl G. Jung denominated *archetype* as images found in the collective unconscious, full of contents and behavioral ways that are identical in every human being, forming therefore, a common psychic substrate of the psychic supranatural nature which is found in every person (JUNG, 2002).

In Bahia, psychiatrist Dr. Rubim de Pinho, has completed a detailed research in the effect of religion in the psyche and relevant archetypes, using the example of 'Mãe D'água' (Mother of the Waters) myth and regional variants within Brazil. (CONCEIÇÃO *et al*, 2002).

Jung suggests the use of artistic work as means for the depressed patient to reveal the affective issues that are in the unconscious, making the integration with the conscious in the pursuit of balance. (JUNG, 1984).

ART AS THERAPY

Around 1910, Sigmund Freud published several papers on the analysis of artists and their art, considering the fact that the unconscious appears through images that act as a catharsis, escaping from censorship of the conscious while facilitating the access to the most secret issues of the Being. (CARVALHO, 1995).

The late Dr. Nise da Silveira, a well know Brazilian psychiatrist, played an important role in the validation of art as a therapeutic method, concerning the application of Jungian psychology and the development of people's creative function while treating psychiatric inmates in Rio de Janeiro, (Brazil). (SILVEIRA, 1992).

Art Therapy, a new kind of complementary therapy, gained credibility with the creation of the AATA – American Art Therapy Association in the United States, in 1969. Art Therapy Associations settled in various Brazilian states, deepening the studies in this field. As time progressed, Art Therapy became integrated into medical practice, as evidenced during the 1st and 2nd Congress of Medicine and Arts in Salvador (Bahia, Brazil) in 2004 and 2006, respectively.

My team and I have been in the process of developing an independent research in this area in the city of Salvador, since 1992. Upon the formation of the first Art Therapy course through the creation of the *Creativity and The Brain* course, we began to notice a significant reduction in psycho-affective disorders symptomatology in depressed patients. This work entailed treating depression by using non-invasive resources through a relevant playful and affective approach, while recovering the patients' taste for life through art (CARNEIRO, 2004).

MANDALA

Mandala means "circle" in Sanskrit. It is used as an instrument during magic rituals and it has been included in the design of sacred architecture expressed in a group of temples to facilitate meditation, self-knowledge, and one's relation to the outside world.

Carl G. Jung studied the subject in depth, noticing his patients' progress in the direction of a centered energy in the most intimate part of the psyche, achieving the development and structure of personality. Together with other scientists, Jung applied this drawing technique to treat patients through, stimulating the growth process of the Being in search of individuation.

While painting or creating a mandala through the process of using diverse materials, the patient organizes himself/herself externally and internally, focusing their attention to the center of his/her own being - the Self.

MUSIC

Music has influenced human beings since the beginning of our existence. Its proper use favors the reduction of brain pace providing a relative silence, balancing the use of the brain hemispheres while facilitating self-knowledge.

The act of listening to music while mental images are evoked can lead to a state of synchronization of music, feelings and images, breathing and pulsation. When this link happens, it increases the healing effect on the whole body and mind (BUSH, 1999: 38).

THE HUG

Hugs are spontaneous gestures of affection which have followed us since the most remote time. They also occur between animals.

Recently, neuroscientist Francis McGlone (2008), from the University of Liverpool, presented research results on the loving touch at the British Association Science Festival to the Advancement of Science in Liverpool. It confirmed its therapeutic effect in treatments for depression and assistance in the development of children. (BBC Brasil, 2008).

Research conducted by Harry Frederick Harlow with *rhesus* monkeys shows that they prefer to huddle together starving in a frame covered with a soft cloth imitating a mother figure than feeding from a bottle of milk attached to a hard wire without cloth (CARDOSO, 2008).

ENERGY THERAPY

Talking about this therapy in the Western world, for those who know the Eastern medical traditions, such as Chinese Medicine and Ayurveda Medicine, is like describing a landscape to someone looking through a window while the person who is listening is at the opposite window.

In the book *Fora da Casinha*, the Brazilian neurologist Dr. Paulo Rogério Bittencourt discusses the experiences of madness and genius through time, recognizing that we have no 'perception of the diversity of mental realities that exist in 2/3 of the planet, which are now more mixed than ever.' Bittencourt says that if Leonardo Da Vinci had been born in Nigeria, 'Munch in Belo Horizonte, Einstein in Hanoi and Newton in Mumbai, maybe they might have deteriorated in a psychiatric illness, given the lack of institutions and people with enough power to allow their ideas and contributions to be not only heard, but registered, passed on, and recognized.' (BITTENCOURT, 2009).

Energy Therapy is related to the Field of Human Energy. Quantum Physics is now bringing into light explanations that Eastern Medicine had already given in relation to what we call quantum vital body.

Dr. Amit Goswami states:

Modern medicine makes more sense if we add the concept of quantum vital body. This allows us to make a connection between Western and Eastern medicine. Western medicine is strictly based on materialism: life is chemistry, disease is chemistry which went wrong; something that must be fixed with chemical substances external to the system. In opposition, Eastern medicine knows that the vital body has the originals (the morphogenetic fields) that are represented by the physical body. The Eastern concept recognizes disease as an imperfect chemistry in the physical representations of the vital body organs, without any doubt, however, it concedes that its imperfections can originate in the vital body.

(GOSWAMI, 2006: 210)

TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

In the second half of the 19th century, psychology was recognized as a science, promoting the study of humans' behavior, psychic life, and consciousness. Since then, psychology has had several phases also called forces, in which Transpersonal Psychology is considered the 'fourth force', as recognized by the psychologists Abraham Maslow, Stanislav Grof, Viktor Frankl, James Fadiman, and Anthony Sutich by the end of the 60's, officially recognized in 1968 (SALDANHA, 1999).

Prior to then, eminent humanists had already recognized a therapeutic approach that was viewed as purely material. It consisted in searching for new ways to treat patients who presented an unusual form of

reality, an approach that was unacceptable to those who were connected to the idea of man as a mere thinking machine.

Carl G. Jung's Analytical Psychology opened gaps to meet transpersonal reality. Transpersonal Psychology aims to integrate the following functions in humans - thinking, feelings, intuition, and sensation; while working the several states of consciousness: wakefulness, sleep, and dream within the various experiences within Science, Religion, Philosophy, Art, and Spiritual tradition that are directed to the whole essence of the Being, going beyond the personal, the visible, and the apparent.

CREATIVITY AND BRAIN COURSE

This is a course including relaxation and self-knowledge activities while using art in a Zen meditation state.

This form of meditation is to be performed along with the various tasks of one's everyday life, while being present in every single action, living the present moment, trying to be aware of reality, without illusions or attachment.

Zen gives great importance to art, to aesthetics, to calligraphy, to gardening, to the tea ceremony, to flower arrangements (ikebana), to silence and the void; facilitating the power of concentration, the increase in visual perception, improving attention, memory, and intuition. This along with all that one learns in how to observe closely and carefully one's internal day-to-day movements so that one knows more about one's self; hence becoming a better being, more affectionate and happier, while improving the quality of one's life and aiming to achieve plenitude of consciousness. (CARNEIRO, 2004).

During this course, while listening to music for relaxation, the patient is engaged in special drawing exercises that stimulate the whole encephalon while in complete silence

My team and I have tirelessly sought partners who are interested in conducting experiments in the field of medicine while using the new technologies of MRI (magnetic resonance imaging), in order to test the results of this therapeutic work, as it has been confirmed by a group of students.

The methodology used in this course can be found in the book of the same title *Criatividade e Cérebro (Creativity and the Brain)*. (CARNEIRO, 2004).

CLINICAL CASE REPORT

My team and I report one of the cases treated through Art Therapy; the patient has achieved significant improvement in seven visits, including two attendances in the *Creativity and the Brain* course.

THERAPEUTIC MEETINGS

1ST MEETING – June 2nd, 2005: Maria (fictitious name) was sent to me by her psychologist and physician to work with art therapy while using the mandala technique. She wanted to attend the *Creativity and the Brain* course, conducted in a small group, as well as undergo individual care twice a week.

When the time came for Maria's treatment, I noticed a much devitalized young woman with a disorganized energy field. She had been taking antidepressants and seemed doped.

Maria expressed that she was indeed feeling depressed, and that her mentor from the Medicine Residence had given her a one-month deadline in order to get better, otherwise he would have to cancel her course altogether. However, Maria expressed that she really wanted to continue studying.

I asked Maria if she wanted to have her energy field harmonized right away (energy chelation) (BRENNAN,1992), in order to balance the vital centers. She agreed enthusiastically. When we finished the procedure this day, Maria left feeling much stronger.

In order to feel and notice this Energy Field, I use Extra Sensory Perception, which I have practiced over several years, given that 'Alternative Medicine takes into consideration not only the physical body, but also its close connection to its psychological and vital energy systems. Consequently with the connection that exists between each of these individual systems, such as the physical, the vital, and the mental energy systems of the environment, as well as of the universe, including their own or common pace'. (WEIL, 2000).

At the same time, it is also possible to check the status of this Energy Field through instruments such as the AMI – a machine created by Dr. Hiroshi Motoyama ‘to measure the functional status of the meridians and corresponding internal organs’ (MOTOYAMA, 2003); Kirlian photography; the utilization of electromyogram electrodes used by Dr. Valerie Hunt from the University of California in Los Angeles (GERBER, 2004), and the crystal pendulum as described by Barbara Ann Brennan (BRENNAN, 1992). I believe that on-going psychosomatic research using multidisciplinary teams, together with further future technological advances, will show changes of the subtle body influencing the dense physical body- this will show up on brain scans.

Dr. Richard Gerber says:

Combining formation systems of magnetic resonance imaging, computed tomography, and Kirlian photography may allow us to go beyond the current resonance technologies and penetrate even deeper into the subtle energy structure of human beings.

And further:

When the flow of vital energy to a certain organ is deficient or unbalanced, patterns of cellular disruption appear. The capacity to measure electromagnetic disturbances in meridian systems (with AMI) and find imbalance in the ch'i energy flow, permits not only the detection of a pathogenesis presence in a certain part of the body, but also predict future organic disorders. (GERBER, 2004, p.168)

2nd MEETING – June 2nd, 2005: That same day, in the afternoon, Maria attended the *Creativity and The Brain* course. As customary during the first class, I asked Maria for a free drawing while guiding her to use any material that she felt like in order to complete the given assignment.

In the upper right quadrant she designed a boat with three sails that looked like spears aimed at the sun.

While going over Maria's drawing, I noticed the possibility of three suicide attempts expressed within her composition as if trying to attack her father.

We started the therapeutic treatment the following week.

An Art Therapy drawing comprehension is based on studies that are associated with the sensibility in assimilating the whole, according to advice provided by authors like Jungian Analyst Dr. Gregg Furth (FURTH, 2004): first pay attention to the initial impression caused by the drawing, then search each element within it, and then go over the synthesis of the searching result reflecting both what you felt about the drawing and what the patient says about it.

3rd MEETING – June 7th, 2005: Maria begins by sharing that she wanted to be a surgeon like her father, but that she couldn't bear the surgical studies. She had been attending Medical Residence and wanted to be a Pediatrician.

As Maria fell into a state of serious depression, she obtained a medical leave of absence from the Medical Residence program in order to rebalance her health. She underwent psychiatric treatment that included taking psychiatric medications that doped her, making Maria feel ‘like a caged lion’.

I asked Maria if she had been treating “the lion” and she responded by stating that she had been undergoing Jungian psychotherapy, attending yoga classes, and taking painting classes.

Maria and I talked about the drawing that she had created in the course and she brought up that the drawing was the same kind of drawing that she has been producing since she was a child. I asked her to talk about the sea that was expressed in her composition and Maria told me that she has tried committing suicide twice: once entering the sea and another doing a hunger strike. I asked her: how about the third time? And she replied: I haven't tried a third time. There was another time when I almost drowned but it was ‘accidentally’...

I asked Maria to tell me about her father. She said that he had died not too long ago, fifteen days after a cancer diagnosis that shocked her very much.

Maria didn't get along with her mother; hence, she lived with her grandmother, while spending some days in another relative's house too.

I suggested that she created a mandala. She imagined it with fruits that she liked best, started with a lilac flower in the center, followed by strawberries, grapes and watermelon around the flower. Everything was created in a small version. As time was up, she finished the drawing afterwards.

I suggested the possibility of working with different types of material, like beads, vitrilhos (small pieces of mirror or glass), etc and realized that there was a nutritional aspect within her being that she wanted to share.

Working with collage results in a good effect for those who are depressed. Small parts that are freely arranged on a surface which can be made of cardboard, of fabric, of wood or of any other firm material, will also organize the psyche, bringing balance and well-being.

Suggested materials were appropriate for a connection with the sacred, as expressed in the design where the purple flower was at the center.

4th MEETING – June 09, 2005: Maria arrived feeling lighter. She changed her psychiatrist and the new doctor reduced the dosage of her psychiatric medication.

Excited she brought a round canvas, many “vitrilhos”, beads, shells, bronze powder and paint to make a mandala on canvas. She wanted to honor Iemanjá.

Iemanjá is an Orixá (god) from African Tradition and represents the female element, the maternal, sensitivity, the emotions. Within everyone there is a quest for the universal archetype of the Great Mother, present in the collective unconscious of humanity.

We can say that the deities of Cadomblé and Umbanda inhabit the symbolic psyche of most Brazilians, in the same way as the Hellenic gods populate the symbolic dynamics of ancient Greece.

The knowledge of the content and symbolic meaning contained in the worship of Orixá provides understanding keys for the psychological processes, whether individual or collective’. (ZACHARIAS, 1998)

We began the session by choosing the materials- collage on the round canvas- and Maria was excited to have the chance to create a mandala honoring Iemanjá.

The mandala with these materials, in a context like this, is considered a Sacred Mandala in which the honored being is someone from the African Tradition. The contact with the Sacred part of Being has a great healing power.

The spiritual well-being is a dimension of health in the body, including psychic and social dimensions (World Health Organization,1998). Considering the mystical and meditative experiences as measurable and quantifiable processes based on medical literature and practice, World Health Organization through the Quality of Life group, included in its generic instrument for evaluating quality of life the Religiosity, Spirituality and Personal Beliefs domains with 100 items. (PERES, 2007)

5th MEETING – June 9th, 2005 Maria came in the afternoon to *Creativity and Brain* course. We worked with Attention, Concentration, and Meditation Exercises.

6th MEETING – June 15th, 2005: We set a 2 hour individual care for this session: Maria arrived late and began by working on the canvas collage.

Continuing with what she had done in the previous visit, she begins by gluing the chosen pieces, allowing some free space amongst them. Maria places the beads closer together, as if pressing on each other, creating a distorted pattern, which differs from the beads’ idealized nature. When she began the

assignment, the person distributed the pieces at the center as if they were rays of sunshine; however, the collar could not maintain the same shape. She puts shells around the canvas edge; four of them are bigger in size, framing the corners.

I looked at Maria's work, which at first transmitted a sense of torment, distress, and despair. I felt her frustration at not being able to place the pieces in harmony within the equidistant spaces as if in an attempt to form a beautiful and balanced center...

As I looked at the mandala Maria had created so uniquely, I thought to myself: My Gosh, how can I see beauty in this work? How can I rescue her healthy part of the Self? How can I bring Maria back to what she used to be?

Then I noticed that the awry center of Maria's composition resembled a captured movement of a crooked skirt, similar to that of someone while dancing! Its expansion and contraction appeared to have been registered in the collage and I was delighted with this view.

A few minutes prior to closing our session, I asked Maria: What do you think of your mandala? She replied: 'It's not beautiful, it's not centered, and the pieces look sort of squeezed together... I'm sorry!...'

I told her: It's neither out of center nor ugly. Look at it again: Doesn't it resemble a skirt in movement as if of someone who's been dancing?

Maria's eyes shine!

She says: 'You are right! ... I remember when I was a child and we had a party at school and I danced representing Iemanjá! It was such a beautiful party! It was a presentation of Orixás. My friend danced in the center of the stage wearing a crooked white skirt that was decorated with fishes, while other girls and I held its tips and danced, full of happiness!... That skirt was so beautiful! I'm going to do the mandala this way'

I said to Maria: Since you are creating Iemanjá's skirt as if you were dancing... invite her to have a meditation and visualization moment with you.

During Maria's meditation, I suggested that she take the happiness of that dance with Iemanja' and feel the Orixás protection, represented by the shells that were surrounding the canvas.

Maria told me that she was back at her mother's house.

Roberto Crema and other humanist authors state that one has to search what is healthy within a human being, to rescue the light that is inside each and every one of us, and to see the beauty in spite of everything. Crema states: Put your attention on what is not ill inside you. (CREMA, 1995: 143)



The Center of Maria's mandala

7th MEETING – June 21st, 2005: Two hours of individual care, Maria arrived feeling happy, (she didn't seem the same person), and she came with ideas to finish her mandala.

Maria went downstairs to purchase the missing material. She bought a doll with long hair just like Iemanjá's, dressed in a blue and lilac dress (like the flower she drew in the first mandala). She separated the doll's body parts, adding them specifically to the finished collage. The doll's head was put just above the center, where the puffy skirt was represented, the arms that were dressed in a shining cloth are placed

on each side within the skirt, as if holding a fish net (made out of a hairnet) adorned with shining beads. Maria sprinkled white bronze powder on the net and stuck a few small fish made of silver paper. She also cut sea stars that were placed near Iemanjá's feet.



Maria's Mandala

Maria was very happy, feeling that her mandala expressed exactly what she had intended to do in the first place.

She said that she was anxious to go back to work. She confessed: I'll never do what I did again - to drink to the point of starting a depression crisis...

To finish our session, I led her meditating, looking at her mandala. It became an instrument of balance, protection, and strength to overcome life's challenges while working as a rapport - a therapeutic alliance.

Maria hugged me happily, and left on a trip on the countryside to spend the holiday of Saint John's - S. João is a religious folkloric holiday typically celebrated in the northeast part of Brazil - where Maria will reengage in continuing her Medical Residence.

In all the therapeutic meetings that have been held to help Maria's case, we embraced each other, as previously mentioned, as according to documented research studies, besides relieving pain, depression, and anxiety, hugs make people feel better, producing a positive physiological change in both people sharing the hug - the one who is giving it and the one who is receiving it.

The Art Therapy work that Maria has completed will bring back to her mind the health and beauty that once existed within her. It will provide her with the spiritual protection, strength, and hope necessary for her to achieve her ideals, giving her a new meaning of life.

Months after that, during an Art Therapy Symposium, a lady embraced me and said: *You don't know me, but I want to thank you for what you did for my daughter. She is pretty well, she is studying, and she is attending a painting course.* The lady was Maria's mother.

Three years later, in 2008, I remembered this case during a presentation I gave at the Transpersonal Psychology Congress held by ALUBRAT, in Évora, Portugal. I had not taken any pictures of Maria's work. I talked to Maria by telephone and she answered me in a happy voice. I asked her if she would authorize me to present her case, and if possible, she provide me with some photos of the Mandala in honor of Iemanjá, if she still had it.

Maria promptly gave me authorization to present it, and asked her sister who lives in Salvador, where the mandala was located, to take photos of it and forward them to me by e-mail. Her sister then added a note stating how happy Maria felt to have been able to give her contribution to my presentation.

CONCLUSION

This therapeutic work lasted less than a month; however its effect was profound and liberating for the respective patient.

Other patients suffering from depression that I have been working with have stayed with me for a longer time - about one and a half years. Some patients do not interrupt their allopathic medical treatment

or stop taking prescribed medication; however, in some cases, medications are gradually diminished or stopped all together.

It is valuable to note that this kind of care is one way that helps the patient who is suffering from depression to achieve cure. It is similar to several roads leading to one specific city. This therapeutic approach can be viewed as a short cut to accelerate arriving safely at one's destiny.

Our report is meant to invite health professionals in considering other possibilities of treatment, so that together we can study the best alternatives in providing our planet population with a better quality of life, since we are part of it.

In face of this result, we consider Art Therapy, a possibility in improving one's life, considering that it deserves careful insight of its effect upon people that have been diagnosed with depression.

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