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**Art Therapy with Children and Adolescents Experiencing Obesity:
Embracing an Object Relations Approach**

Capstone thesis

Lesley University

May 5th, 2021

Rohan Roberts Goldman

Art Therapy

Tamar Hadar, PhD

Abstract

This thesis looked at how art therapy can help identify problems in attachment between children and adolescents living with obese bodies and their parents. In this literature review, I examined the dynamics of child-parent/caretaker relationships and the way object relations and attachment play a significant role in the child's mental health development. Incorporating art therapy into the treatment for this population has shown some signs of improving the dynamic between children and their caretaker. Through this research, I concluded that children need a consistent caregiver to be attuned to their needs. If they lack attuned and consistent care, the child may replace parental love with an unhealthy relationship with food.

Keywords: art therapy, obesity, children, adolescents, attachment, object relations.

Art Therapy with Children and Adolescents Experiencing Obesity: Embracing an Object Relations Approach

Introduction

This thesis will examine the use of art therapy with children and adolescents experiencing obesity and eating disorders. In particular, it will focus on the different ways art therapy can support dyadic work with this population: restoring and strengthening parent-child relations and patterns of attachment that might have influenced the emergence of the child's symptoms.

According to Anderson and Butcher (2006), over the past three decades, obesity has become a worldwide pandemic, with the United States holding the world's highest rate of obesity, with the rate of 42.4 percent which is an increase of 26 percent since 2008 (Trust for America's Health, 2021). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines childhood obesity, as, "BMI at or above the 95th percentile for children and teens of the same age and sex" (CDC, June 29, 2020). This thesis will be looking at children from birth through adolescence, age of 18. Several articles have shown the successful use of art therapy with individuals suffering from obesity (Naumburg & Caldwell, 1959; Rabin, 2003; Hinz, 2006; Wallace, 2015; Anderson, 2015; Bechtel, Wood & Teoli, 2020; Bucharová, Malá, Kantor, & Svobodová, 2020). Anzules, et al. (2007) suggested that art therapy could enhance feelings of self-control and aid in the treatment process through elevating creativity and freedom of self-expression without fear of judgement for children who live with an obese body.

Bergmeier et al. (2020) suggested that childhood obesity could be caused by a variety of reasons, from genetic factors to non-genetic ones, emphasizing the family and the community as influencing the development of obesity amongst children. Sanahuja and Belot (2013) supported this in saying that children with obesity use food as a maternal substitute. This complies with

Bergmeier et al. (2020) which emphasized the role family dynamics plays in the development of obesity among children.

The current study will adopt a psychodynamic approach to understand the origins and manifestation of eating disorders. Slochower (1987) suggested that obesity, emerges as a response to the child's anxiety relating to unresolved conflicts which lay in the unconscious, and thus, food is used to relieve such distress. In a more recent psychodynamic study by Sanahuja and Belot (2013), they coined the metaphoric term of "protective envelope," meaning that obese individuals use their body as a defense mechanism to shield them from dealing with psychological turmoil they undergo. In their study, they suggested that obese adolescents created coping mechanism to refrain from discussing their feelings as they might hold a distorted body perception. Sanahuja and Belot (2013) also found that there are correlations between obese children and the child-mother relationship. Kirsch and Buchholz (2020) referred to the work of John Bowlby, the founder of attachment theory and Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychodynamic theory and psychoanalysis, to explain the importance of the mother-infant tie within the first year of infancy. This paper will investigate mother-infant attachment as well as imbalanced object relations as a potential basis for triggering obesity and/or binge eating disorder as a coping mechanism. Although the role of fathers as an important figure in the child's upbringing, has been well acknowledged in the past decade (Kirsch & Buchholz, 2020), this thesis will mainly focus on the special tie amongst children and their mothers. However, at some places throughout my thesis I will use the term caretaker to allow a wider range of individuals to be able to relate to my paper's topic.

This paper will focus on the use of art therapy to heal and support symptoms of obesity in a child-parent context. Art therapy can be used as a language when words are absent (Silver,

2001). When using artistic mediums, clients give meaning and interpret their life experiences, while engaging in development of self-understanding, and personal growth (Silver, 2001; Wallace, 2015). The creative process allows for internal search, while alternating the art mediums used, according to the client's needs. The literature shows that art therapy can be used with children and adolescents who live with an obese body to potentially increase self-esteem and engage in self-exploration using the arts. (Silver, 2001; Wallace, 2015).

In the current study, I will demonstrate art therapy methods that can be implemented in working with obese children and adolescents that have negative self-image and/or body dysmorphia. This work was inspired by a previous client of mine, suffering from obesity and her work using therapeutic artistic tools as a form of self-expression. This paper will aim to contribute to the art therapy field by expanding the psychodynamic focus when working in a dyadic frame with children dealing with obesity. By consulting in supervisions, reading the literature and engaging with art making, I hope this paper to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the literature and to identify new methods in supporting such clients.

The following literature review will begin by defining childhood obesity and eating disorder, specifically looking at young children through adolescence (etiology, symptoms, and prevalence in the general population). Secondly, this paper will look at the influences of living with an obese body on behavior and personality. Consequently, I will discuss treatment methods and approaches working with this population, in particular, looking through the lenses of psychodynamic, object relations and attachment theories. Finally, I will describe the gap in the literature as it currently stands and extend recommendations for further research. In my study I wish to increase the awareness of art therapists to this poignant mental health issue, its possible origins and treatment methods.

Throughout my thesis, I will mainly use the term *mother* as opposed to *caretaker*. This thesis is inspired from Freudian psychoanalytic theory and is valid and applicable today with the understanding that not all contemporary families have a traditional “biological mother”. In their 2020 article, Van Rosmalen et al., explained that infants seek a bond between themselves, and a unique and attentive caretaker, usually, the mother. This is not to say that only biological mothers can have the role of a maternal figure, but rather, care takers that are more attuned, caring, and sensitive towards their child’s needs, takes on that role. Van Rosmalen et al. (2016) explained that for infants to grow and develop into a healthy individual, they must experience at least one consistent, sensitive, and nurturing caregiver that will be attuned to their needs, otherwise, the infant can develop a psychopathology deviant behavior pattern.

As stated previously, this thesis topic was inspired by a client of mine who shared with me her struggles with food since her toddlerhood years as well as conflicts she experienced with her mother. During my work with her, I wrote about challenges she faced, leading me to develop this thesis. This experience drew me to mainly focus on the relationships of the mother with her child through the lens of attachment and object relations theories. While children can and may develop an attachment with various significant adults in their lives, and while some family models do not share the traditional mother child basis, my thesis will focus on a specific caretaker relationship between mothers and children. One of my thesis aims is to support the development of positive dyadic relationships between parents/caretakers and their children through art therapy.

Literature Review

Obesity

Over the past three decades, obesity has become a worldwide pandemic, with USA holding the world's highest rate of obesity (Anderson & Butcher, 2006). Anderson and Butcher (2006) demonstrated how in several different countries experiencing high rates of obesity, its course is a growing pandemic. A more recent study by Bergmeier et al. (2020) had similarly concluded that childhood obesity continues to grow in the US and has become a public health problem. With the understanding that obesity has become a global concern, this paper will examine children and adolescents living with obese bodies while exploring treatment methods for that population.

Anderson and Butcher (2006) examined the external and environmental influences on the children's food consumption and the amount of energy they spend throughout the day. Their study suggested different ways in measuring obesity amongst children and adults. However, for both children and adults, the weight is measured by Body Mass Index or BMI. In adults', BMI measures as "weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared (kg/m^2)" (Anderson & Butcher, p.20, 2006). This is different compared to the definition of childhood obesity existing with a BMI at or above the 95th percentile related to other individuals of the same age and sex (CDC, June 29, 2020). According to Anderson and Butcher (2006), childhood obesity has increased worldwide and stems from a lack of balance between energy intake (food) and energy expansion (physical activity). In addition, Anderson, and Butcher (2006) suggested a link between obese children and high rates of obese adults.

Bergmeier et al. (2020) added a new framework for looking at the etiology of childhood obesity, suggesting that ecological system concepts can be utilized to study such a phenomenon. Bergmeier et al. (2020) explained that this framework theory places emphasis on the relationship between the parents as possibly influencing the child to develop an obese body at an early young

age. Bergmeier et al. (2020) looked at cultural norms of parent-child eating habits, suggesting that parents who have excessive control over their children, create an environment that might lead to the children's development of unhealthy eating patterns, such as encouraging children to eat when they are not hungry. This, in turn, becomes the child's response to stress, as also suggested above by Slochower (1987).

In 2013, Ryzin and Nowicka examined the link between parent and children's relationships, questioning whether positive parent-adolescent relationships supported effective coping skills amongst the adolescents. The authors examined the relationship between positive parental influences, such as parent monitoring, involvement, and communication, on adolescents' ability to cope with stressful situations, develop healthy lifestyles, having a healthy body image, and creating healthy relationships with food. The authors found that positive relationships among parents and their children were associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms.

In a randomized control trial Van Ryzin and Nowicka (2013), reviewed 1,000 pairs of parents' and youths' (ages 12- 15) quality of relationships, using the Family Check Up (FCU), Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), and an Intent To Treat (ITT) instruments. The researchers hypothesized that a positive relationship during the adolescent period will have a positive impact on the child's weight by age 17, as well as on the development of healthy lifestyle behaviors, eating attitude and depressive symptoms. The results emphasized the need to improve the family dynamic system, as it significantly influences children's rate of obesity as well as the need to create a positive environment for the parent- child relationship to heal. Van Ryzin and Nowicka (2013) attempted to develop family-based interventions to help reduce obesity in young ages and aimed to enhance parents' ability to oversee their children's habits around food consumption as

well as exercise routines for physical health. Van Ryzin and Nowicka (2013) suggested a substantial link between eating maladaptive behavior in children and the lack of positive child and parent relationships which might lead to obesity.

Van Ryzin and Nowicka (2013) emphasized the connection between family dynamics and healthy relationships with food. Their research aimed to test the impact of a specific intervention, FCU, on parent- child relationships, questioning whether a positive relationship would indirectly influence obesity later in life. In this study, 998 adolescents and their families, from diverse ethnic backgrounds, took part in the intervention. FCU included meetings with parents, school administration, and the therapists, where interviews, assessments, and feedback sessions occurred to enhance the level of acceptance and understanding within their relationships. This helped minimize anxiety symptoms in adolescents, lowering their need to overeat as a coping mechanism.

Van Ryzin and Nowicka (2013) emphasized the correlation between imbalanced parent-child relationships and the likelihood of obesity development. This supports the idea that when designing therapeutic interventions for children experiencing obesity, the parent- child relationship should be integrated into the intervention modality. This study relates to my thesis topic as it focused on the aspect of parenting approaches around trust, monitoring and communication, and their influence on the child's propensity to develop an obese body at a young age.

Symptomology and Common Methods of Treating Obesity in Children and Adolescents

Some of the more common methods of treating obesity and/or eating disorders, in the past several decades include, but are not limited to, psychological treatments such as interpersonal treatment; cognitive behavior therapy (CBT); family system approach (FSA); and

pharmaceutical treatments (Frisch et al., 2006). In addition, Frisch et al. (2006) introduced a multi-disciplinarian treatment approach alongside the aforementioned treatment methods.

In their research of parent-child relationships and dynamics, Van Ryzin and Nowicka (2013) emphasized various symptoms that children can develop as a result of parent-child conflictual relations: “negative mood, depressed symptoms, excessive dieting, binge eating, purging, and obsession with food or body image, somatization, obsessive-compulsive ideation, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation, and psychoticism,” (p.109-110).

Individuals with an obese body might experience various comorbid complication symptoms which can take a toll on their daily living, such as anxiety, depression, sleep apnea, diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, amongst other physical symptoms. In their study, Al-Nbaheen (2020) explained the etiology of obesity to possibly stem from genetic inclinations, familial difficulties, depression, lack of sleep and stress. During 2020, Al-Nbaheen studied a variety of ways to lose weight and found that for obese populations losing weight can be achieved by routine physical activities, modification to their daily diet, and bariatric surgery. In this thesis I will investigate the link between the occurrence of obesity in children and adolescents with issues in attachment and quality of object relations.

Definition of Object Relations

Object relations can be defined as the internalization of early relationships with significant others and influenced the mental life during the person's formative years. These early internalized relationships, structure and define the person's interpersonal life, experience of self and others and modes of relating, thinking, and feeling about the self and other (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983). Object relations theory developed in psychoanalytic thinking beginning with

Freud (1920) and later with Melanie Klein (1946) whose followers established the British Object Relations school of thought (Grinberg & Mitchel, 1983). Thus, various theoretical orientations within psychoanalytic thinking have differing definitions of the term object relations. However, in this paper the term object relations, will be used in its broadest meaning referring to the internalized relationships that are active in the child's life.

Object Relations Theory in Treatment of Obesity

Through interviews and psychological assessments of obese children and adolescents, Sanahuja and Belot (2013) concluded that the development of childhood obesity might lay on the foundation of imbalanced object relations between infant and their mother. The authors explained that children eating excessively might do so as emotional self-protection and defensiveness and suggested that infants who experienced imbalanced maternal objects relation, may develop excessive anxiety in the first few weeks of life. They further explained that adolescents living with obesity could experience a tendency of constant eating as this might alleviate oral fixation and/or oral activity needs. Such a need, Sanahuja and Belot (2013) warn, could transition to substance addiction later in life. Sanahuja and Belot (2013) hypothesized that this need of oral fixation and/or oral activity might be grounded in a delicate state that is rooted much deeper in the child's soul, in his early days where the infant experienced a conflict between two opposing tendencies in their early relationship with their mother: the inclination towards dependency on one hand and the need for autonomy on the other. Sanahuja and Belot (2013) suggested that children with obesity might use food as a maternal substitute, making it difficult for the child to break away and develop autonomy from the mother and/or from the food. Sanahuja and Belot (2013) continued to explain that while pathologies such as obesity are influenced by many factors, the primary influencer is maternal object relations. They

hypothesized that when such fragile object relations is disrupted, it can link to a disordered relationship with food.

Grounded in Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Sanahuja and Belot (2013) described that during the first few months of the baby's lives, the infant's natural state is distress as they are powerless and face external and internal tensions such as hunger, cold, heat, and discomfort (Sanahuja & Belot, 2013). Leaning on Freudian psychodynamic theory, the authors further suggest that the mother, the primary object, is the figure responsible to protect the baby during infancy. While the infant grows and develops their visual and auditory skills, it also begins to develop sensory ability and might begin to differentiate between heat and cold, which potentially symbolizes the change from heat to cold during birth (Sanahuja & Belot, 2013). During their life inside the womb, the baby should feel most protected, however, when coming out to the world, the baby then learns to cope with their natural internal and external instinctual needs (Sanahuja & Belot, 2013). During this time, the baby needs their mother, or caregiver, to regulate and make sense of their experiences, as the baby cannot overcome such tensions on their own. The researchers continued to theorize that when the baby is not receiving the support they need from their mother during infancy, they could develop further distress which might negatively affect their instincts. At this stage of life, Sanahuja and Belot (2013) argued, the baby's ego is still immature, and their defense mechanisms only begin to develop. Therefore, a strong connected bond with the mother as their protective figure is crucial at this point of development.

After a ten-year research study in a weight loss institution for children and adolescents, Sanahuja and Belot (2013) came to understand that a precious first bond for the child is created with their mother and that the lack of such a bond could influence the child to develop obesity

from a young age. Sanahuja and Belot's (2013) claim was that obesity in children might stem from substantial separation anxiety that the child experienced during infancy.

La Barrie et al. (2021) showed that difficult maternal interactions with their offspring and issues with attachment can result in the child developing binge eating disorder (BED). The authors pointed out that these difficulties might also lead to substance use disorder and potential anxiety. These same patterns of substance use were also suggested in Sanahuja and Belot's (2013) study. More so, La Barrie et al. (2021) explained that mothers who experienced difficulties with self-regulation and experienced high impulsivity might struggle to support their children's upbringing. This could manifest as maladaptive eating habits in the children, such as binge eating. In conclusion, both studies highlight the significance of a regulated mother and infant bond as their quality of relationship could influence the way the infant grows. The mother's attunement to her baby's natural needs and positive object relations would promote healthy eating habits during infancy that would lead to positive eating habits later in life. Both studies emphasize that when this bond is irregular and mis attuned, the child could develop unhealthy eating habits as a coping mechanism which can then lead to development of obesity.

Attachment

John Bowlby (1988), a British psychoanalyst, and psychiatrist was given the honor to be called the 'father of attachment theory' (as cited by Van Rosmalen et al., 2016). Bowlby developed the attachment theory alongside an American Canadian psychologist Mary Ainsworth (Van Rosmalen et al., 2016). Standing on the grounds of Bowlby and Ainsworth (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) Van Rosmalen et al. (2020) specified that from a biologic perspective, a mother and her infant share a strong affectional tie. The authors demonstrated that for a child to develop healthy socio-emotional skills, they must have a consistent, sensitive, and attuned caregiver

figure in their lives, with whom they can develop a reliable connection and foster a secure attachment. At the lack of a secure attachment, or a healthy separation process from the primary caregiver, Van Rosmalen et al. (2020) suggested, the child would be adversely affected. Van Rosmalen et al. (2020) added that due to a lack of a strong and positive caretaker figure in the child's life, the child can develop deviant and psychopathological behavior patterns.

Such patterns already discussed above in the description by Sanahuja and Belot's (2013) article, where they explained about the child's means of substituting needed maternal love with food. Such behavior can be considered as deviant psychopathological behavior patterns. Moreover, Van Rosmalen et al. (2020) added that the lack of a secure maternal figure in the life of a young child, can influence the child negatively whilst undergoing major character development. In an earlier article, Van Rosmalen et al. (2016), theorized that attachment develops between the caregiver and the baby during the first year of life and the quality of such attachment will determine the child's future attributes. Moreover, the quality of the attachment is apparent in the baby's degree of restless, anxious, and fear-based behaviors (Rieser-Danner & Slaughter, 2019).

Based on Bowlby's attachment theory, Rieser-Danner and Slaughter (2019) described four phases of infant development in relation with their main caretaker, occurring during their first year of life: (1) in the first phase, birth through few weeks of life, the newborn can achieve containment with anyone who will comfort them; (2) in the second phase, eight through twelve weeks, the infant will find a special caregiver with whom they will foster an attachment and bond; (3) during the third phase, the infant will withdraw from strangers, and will desire to bond with the special caretaker, usually, the mother; and (4) In the fourth and last phase, occurring between infancy and preschool age, the child builds a more complex relationship with the special caretaker and begins to develop an understanding towards the caretaker's feelings. Rieser-

Danner and Slaughter (2019) described that infant's secure attachment follows on the foundation of a responsive, consistent, and loving caregiver, usually the mother. In their summery, Rieser-Danner and Slaughter (2019) expand on potential issues that might appear on the occasion that such a process does not take place between the parent and their infant. The authors detailed that infants and young children who experience insecure attachment might respond with ambivalence and angry feelings when they are not being attuned to their needs. Furthermore, Rieser-Danner and Slaughter (2019) described that complications in the attachment process, such as: early abuse /neglect, infant health conditions, developing trauma and/or insecure attachment, when a parent is not attuned and fulfilling the infant's needs, can lead the child to risk factors for negative behavior patterns. The quality of attachment can predict future behavior patterns, stressing further the importance of an infant/young child's need of a secure attachment. Rieser-Danner, and Slaughter (2019), described Ainsworth and Bowlby's work, of a child who successfully completed the four attachment phases. Such a child could form healthy relationships with peers and adults in their lives, could be ready for learning, and can have better skills to form independence.

In sum, Rieser-Danner, and Slaughter (2019), recognized the power of attachment from the point of view of the infant. In many cases, infants associate their mothers with being their sole source of nutrition, therefore when the mother provides food to her infant, it can secure the attachment that is formed.

Art Therapy

Art therapy modality combines traditional forms of talk therapy and engaging in experiential art. Art therapy is seen as an umbrella term where its approach to treatment and healing is done through working with clients in art making (Frisch et al., 2006). According to

Frisch et al. (2006) through such an artistic engagement, the client will adhere and engage in personal growth and positive change. The creative arts are applied to and utilized with clients as a medicinal means. In “A Call for Dialogue”, Levine (1996) poetically explained that the experiences of engaging with the arts, touches one’s soul thus forming a connection between the art and soul.

Art therapy provides a medium for self-expression, self-exploration, and self-discovery. Engaging in art making is offered through a non-threatening medium lens. It encourages clients to develop positive coping skills, develop new awareness and identify their own feelings and behaviors (Frisch et al., 2006). As Frisch et al. (2006) explain, art therapy allows clients who had difficulty exploring and expressing themselves through traditional talk therapy the opportunity to find the ability to lean on the arts for therapeutic purposes (2006).

Art Therapy and Attachment

Bowlby explained that attachment is an *internal working model*, and therefore is an internal mental representation of the way a child views themselves within a relationship with their primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1988). Such a unique structure becomes the template for future relationships the child will form. The art therapy modality can tie to Bowlby’s internal working model of attachment as a representational model (Gussak & Rosal, 2016). In their writing, Gussak and Rosal (2016), explained that working with a client that has a secure attachment with a caregiver, will yield quicker and better results as opposed to a client with a weak attachment foundation. A client with a strong relational attachment will form a better therapeutic alliance with the art therapist, as opposed to a client with insecure attachment. According to the authors, a therapist who noticed their client is presenting with insecure attachment should establish rapport

and help the client to develop a relationship of trust with the therapist, in order to advance clients' ability to exploration through art making.

Gussak and Rosal (2016) talked about the use of the client's art and its interpretation and showed how an insecure attachment can be presented via the client's art. For example, such an art piece may lack an environment, have little use of color, and most of the picture is left blank. According to the authors, in some drawings of clients no bottom of items are drawn, for example, a drawing of a bird nest can be drawn without its bottom. Such an art creating can be interpreted as denials of their problems, avoidance of affect and tendency to dismiss connection, all leading to potential interpretation of a lack of attachment. A therapist will address these issues of attachment by integrating it as a goal in the therapeutic plan. Ultimately, the therapist will be the figure with whom the client will practice a relationship of trust and secure attachment (Gussak & Rosal, 2016).

Art Therapy with Children

Demonstrating benefits of art therapy with children and youth in their decade long study, Cortina and Fazel (2015) incorporated in their research seven schools where their aim was two folds: (1) to ease behavior and emotional difficulties of students (ages 5-16) identified as facing these challenges, and (2) to determine whether art therapy interventions could decrease negative behavior and increase positive mood for the participants. Deploying pre and posttest measurements, the authors found that both teachers and students reported significant improvement in behaviors and moods.

In some cases, children can find it difficult to articulate their feelings verbally, however, through art they can create what they feel: the images they create can aid in evoking a dialogue either verbally or through art (Silver, 2001). In the forward by Malchiodi (in Silver, 2001), she

talked about the benefits of creativity elicited through storytelling and drawing. She explained that for those who experience resistance to traditional talk therapy, the creativity provides means of expression when feeling stuck with words. Art then becomes the language that people of all ages can use. Malchiodi talked about a child exhibiting behavioral symptoms of fear, anxiety, and mistrust. In this case example of a six-year-old dealing with witnessing domestic violence, Malchiodi showed how only through the artistic creation, the girl was able to open up and develop trustful relationships with those around her. Through drawing, the child was able to tell a story of her experience and talk about her trauma and the sadness that she experienced. Malchiodi emphasized that through drawing and story telling the child was able to further develop relationships with a wide range of individuals in her life. In their study mentioned above, Cortina and Fazel (2015) argued that art therapy can help settle struggles and conflicts children might experience with their caregivers and suggested that art therapy can be influential for children as it can enhance the child's verbal abilities, inspire creative thinking, and elevate self-perception. This study will be referenced again in further details later in the thesis.

Art Therapy and Obesity

Frisch et al. (2006) explained that where traditional talk therapy had failed to help clients who live with obesity and other eating disorders, art therapy was able to aid. Art therapy is viewed as a none threatening medium and is used as an alternative to other forms of treatment.

Anzules et al. (2007) postulated that the safe environment within the art therapy setting provides clients with the ability to get to know themselves on deeper levels. Anzules et al. suggested that it is the client's choice how much they want, or are able to, share and explore their inner strength and identity. In their study with individuals living with obesity, the researchers hypothesized that art group therapy processes can encourage growth and potentially increase

self-esteem within the group participants. Anzules et al. (2007) suggested that art therapy could also enhance the feelings of self-control. They theorized that clients living with obesity can utilize the creative component of art making as a source of communication. The authors discovered that communication could exist between the person and their art, within themselves and the art therapist and with others in the group. In the study described below, Frisch, Franko, and Herzog (2006) continued to explain that utilizing arts-based therapy can allow the client to explore the roots of their eating disorder as well as exploring their own early stages of development through the art making.

Frisch et al. (2006) examined 22 eating disorder residential treatment programs across the United States. The researchers constructed a self-report email survey of 30 questions to determine the incorporation of art-based modality in the treatment programs. The authors found that out of the 22 programs that were contacted, 19 offered weekly art therapy sessions, with an average rate of 90.55% of client's participation. The authors emphasized that engaging in therapeutic art facilitates for the clients the opportunity to approach challenging issues such as self-esteem, body image, and depression. Frisch et al. (2006) argued that engaging therapeutically in creative arts can provide a healthy alternative to binge eating. The authors claimed it can help to restore self-esteem and can provide healthy coping skills (Frisch et al., 2006). This relates to Sanahuja and Belot's (2013) claims regarding the relationship between eating habits and negative coping mechanisms.

In their book, Hinz (2006) wrote about the ways in which art therapy was effective in working with individuals with eating disorders and obesity. They explained that clients with eating disorders might make use of defense mechanisms such as not opening up and being cautious with touching upon raw emotions, as a way to avoid the intimacy in psychotherapy.

However, Hinz (2006) argued that working with artistic means, can provide the client with alternative methods of communication. Moreover, Hinz (2006), discussed the possibility for clients to feel empowered in their treatment process, with their art pieces symbolizing different milestones in their way to recovery. According to the authors, in a traditional talk therapy, an obese client may feel the need to be defensive towards the clinician when discussing their eating habits. However, in art therapy, the art images the client creates surface from within and transcend the need for clients to turn to their defense mechanisms, therefore, art could help them to open up more at ease and encounter their underlying problems (Hinz, 2006).

Anzules et al. (2007) conducted a study using a six-week art therapy program incorporating 14 subjects suffering from obesity and eating disorders. Each of the six weekly two-hour sessions was broken down into three parts: assessing self-image, using self when creating art, and explaining their art creation. The study proved the researchers' hypothesis that art therapy can help improve self-esteem as evidenced by the statements of the patients. It also found that participants in the study shared that they were able to access their own personal creativity through the tools provided by art therapy (Anzules et al., 2007). Overall, the art therapy process seemed to help the participants develop a healthier body image self-perception.

Expressive Arts Therapies and Eating Disorders

Several multi-modal approaches using expressive arts therapy discuss the significant benefits of using drama, play therapy etc., in working with eating disordered clients (Bechtel et al., 2020; Lavey-Khan, & Reddick, 2020). Bechtel et al. (2020) detailed the benefits of combining drama therapy together with art therapy. Lavey-Khan and Reddick (2020) integrated play therapy alongside art therapy and discovered that through the usage of both mediums, clients were able to express their sadness and worked to raise their low self-esteem.

Embracing a multi-modal approach with adults, Bechtel et al. (2020), deployed drama therapy as a reflective tool on the art created by the client during the therapeutic intervention. In small groups of six to twelve participants, the participants created tape sculptures using their bodies as the mold. Through this intervention, the researchers tried to find a way to help their clients internalize the concept of boundaries. Such an intervention allowed the participants to gain a sense of empowerment, self-pride, positive body image, and were able to view their large bodies with beauty. The results suggested that the clients can gain a more positive view of their body and increase self-esteem. This study was based on a large population, which included various ethnicities and age groups. In addition, the results confirmed to be effective with overweight, eating disorder, and obese populations. As an art therapist I believe that one can be inspired from this study when focusing on art therapy and talk therapy primarily when working with children suffering from obesity.

In another study integrating art and play, Lavey-Khan, and Reddick (2020) focused on dyadic groups with an aim to improve mother-infant relationships. Seven mother and child dyads were screened and took part in the study over a ten-month period. The arts and play based intervention included fifty-five minutes of child-led art making and play, using different mediums and ten minutes of reflection. Throughout the seven dyads, the facilitator suggested words that described the children's play that helped the mothers to make sense of it. Overall results indicated improvement in the mother-child interactions and an increase in parental confidence within the child-parent relationship. The findings suggested that the quality of the relationships between children and their caretakers can be improved when using art therapy techniques with obese population.

A Gap in the Literature

While I was hoping to find a larger pool of research and studies about art therapy with children and adolescents who live with obesity, I learned that it is a field that needs further research. For example, I was expecting to find more studies that talk about specific art supplies and mediums (e.g., types of paper, writing utensils, art styles). I conducted this literature review in the wish of bringing more awareness to the need of further exploration, as well as to add more to the literature review in the field. Unfortunately, I was unable to find specific case studies. I hope this literature review will inspire art therapists to conduct more detailed case studies regarding integrating a comprehensive view of the use of art therapy techniques in the treatment of clients living with obesity.

In a systematic database review of expressive arts therapy studies, Frisch et al. (2006) found there are no empirical studies in the field of art therapy for individuals with eating disorders. This indicates that there is a large gap in the literature concerning these issues. The authors, working in a residential treatment facility for eating disorders, mentioned that since there is limited research related to obesity, further research is required to better understand the use of expressive arts with this population. Frisch et al. (2006) added that the research in the field of therapy through the arts is difficult to measure and to standardize. However, they suggested that since such therapeutic methods are used in many eating disorders residential treatment facilities around the country, a standardized assessment of the impact of art therapy with this population is of the highest priority.

From reviewing the literature about the use of art therapy with children and adolescents dealing with obesity, I realized there are limited studies concerning obese children and art therapy. Many of the studies in the field of art therapy recommend that more research be conducted in this field. Even so, several authors such as Frisch et al. (2006), Lavey-Khan and

Reddick (2020), and Cortina and Fazel (2015) mention the benefits of applying art therapy in the treatment plan. Some recurring limitations in the research literature that focuses on obese clients include small sample sizes. For example, in Cortina and Fazel's (2015) study, out of 1,000 participants, only 430 were able to complete the year-long intervention, and only 169 students were included in the full data analysis, which significantly reduced the study's validity. Moreover, regarding the aforementioned mentioned limitation, since the teachers were unable to complete the entire questionnaires for all the students, the research lack information on a vast majority of the participants, thus making the results less accurate. Despite this limitation the study provides good insight to the ways art therapy can enhance behavioral and emotional well-being, thus making it a relevant therapeutic intervention with obese children and adolescents. This study demonstrates the need for more thorough and complete research in the field of obesity and art therapy with children as a beneficial treatment method.

Lavey-Khan and Reddick (2020) also suffered from limitations in their study due to clients' lack of consistent participation. The researchers allowed participating parents and their children to attend the study sessions upon their discretion, therefore sessions were not attended on a regular basis. Such a limitation shows potential inconsistency in the intervention, which could affect the overall results. Another limitation is that the participating parents were all single mothers. However, given the minimal limitations, this article enhanced my hypothesis that a positive bond between a mother or a care giver, and the child is important for the child's mental and emotional development.

I was looking to find reports written by art therapists describing the therapeutic process in their work with children and adolescents who live with obesity. Such reports could have provided a deeper insight and understanding about the benefits of art therapy with such clients.

However, in my literature search I was unable to find such case reports. In concluding the various research findings quoted in this thesis, it can be seen that the therapeutic effect art therapy has in treating individual dealing with obesity is especially beneficial for those who find it difficult to articulate their inner experiences. Art therapy brings with it a sense of safety and freedom for the expression of inner experience.

Discussion

Through my inquiry, I learned that obesity is a worldwide epidemic where America is leading the world with this fact (Anderson & Butcher, 2006). I learned that obesity begins at a young age and may lead to obese adulthood. Obesity can result from external and environmental influences stemming from modern day living habits leading to an imbalance between a person's consumption and exertion of energy. For example, children leading more static lifestyles in front of electronic screens rather than being more physically engaged in outdoors activities. Thus, those who live with an obese body consume more calories than what their body releases (Anderson & Butcher, 2006). At one point the DSM categorized obesity as a mental disorder, and in a more recent edition (DSM-V), obesity was removed as a mental disorder replaced by binge eating (American Psychologist Association, 2013). In reading all the presented literature, I understand more the need for further research to determine the best uses of art therapy with this population.

Several studies, amongst them, Sanahuja and Belot (2013) demonstrate the role the dynamics between children and their caregivers have in developing an obese body. The literature suggests that the quality of child-parent relationships is impacted by the style of the parental upbringing. Van Rosmalen et al. (2020) explained that obesity may occur when parents use excessive control over their children, whereas Sanahuja and Belot (2013) as well as Bergmeier et

al. (2020) explained that it is the lack of control over their children that contributes to obesity. Bechtel et al. (2020) emphasized that children and adults who live with an obese body, as a result, have a negative body image and low self-esteem. It is interesting to learn from Ryzin and Nowicka (2013), that children with a positive upbringing will have better abilities to handle various life circumstances and rarely revert to food as an escape outlet. The various studies reviewed throughout my thesis demonstrated that children need a positive relationship with their care giver, a secure attachment style, and benign object relations in order to healthily progress through the developmental stages. According to Rieser-Danner and Slaughter (2019), in the lack of positive attachment and balanced object relations, the child's propensity towards developing an obese body increase.

From this literature review it appeared that attachment and object relations play a crucial role in the development of an infant in the sense that the infant needs a positive and a meaningful relationship with their mother/caregiver to develop a healthy sense of self.

Obese individuals may experience comorbid health conditions which will affect their daily living (Al-Nbaheen, 2020). However, they can opt to receive help for losing weight via working out, modifying food consumption, undergoing bariatric surgery and/or attending mental health therapy, such as art therapy. A few studies mentioned in my thesis, demonstrated that psychotherapy based on psychodynamic theory, can yield beneficial results to such clientele. Moreover, art therapy, as opposed to talk therapy, can be conducted with less need for verbal expression, and thus clients can feel more at ease to express themselves in nonverbal forms.

Mental health support can help individuals with obesity, and specifically, art therapy treatment can yield significant results for those engaged in such a treatment. Therapeutically finding expressive outlets through the arts, might help obese children, adolescents, and adults,

express their feelings and thoughts in a safe space without judgment. My literature review reveals that using an arts-based treatment modality, allows clients to be engaged with their painful feelings in a direct manner, to find resolutions through self-expression and thus to reach self-actualization.

From reviewing the literature, it became clear to me, that a child develops their personality from a combination of nature and nurture. The literature brings forward the notion that parents play a significant role in their child's emotional development, and thus, it is imperative to be aware of their contribution to their child's healthy development. Through dyadic art therapy work of child and their caretaker, parental understanding can emerge that all children need a consistent parental role figure with whom they can experience a secure attachment and a positive bond. This can work towards enhancing the primary relationship they form with their child through the art therapy. Such relationships will benefit the child's emotional growth and will support them in achieving their optimal development. In the forward written by Malchiodi in Silver's (2001) book mentioned previously, Malchiodi demonstrated the therapeutic effect of art therapy with one of the clients in her caseload at a shelter. Malchiodi found that in working with art therapy was a way to get a resistant child to be more open and responsive in her relationships and with her mother, despite dealing with trauma. I believe art therapists should develop a deeper understanding of varied approaches of working with clients dealing with eating disorders and applying different art therapy interventions in their work with them.

I believe in the power of art therapy to allow individuals to express their emotional needs, to be heard and be validated by their art therapist thus bringing emotional development and growth. This thesis has shown how working with arts can be an important intervention within parent-child dyadic relationships. Art therapy work may yield great results for those in need of

mental health support such as children and adolescents living with obesity and who chose to face their struggles.

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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Embracing an Object Relations Approach

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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

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