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A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of Art Therapy Supervisors' integration of Art as Part of Supervision

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand the vivid realities of important technical and relational aspects of visual art that were emphasised during training by art therapy supervisors and educators. Max van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological methodology was incorporated into the study. Summarising their main experiences, art therapy supervisors enabled experiences of reproducibility and immediacy in their supervision, and allowed visual art to be used as a tool to foster inner contact with their supervisees. To enable this experience, art therapy supervisors provided a creative foundation and a receptive environment that promoted creativity for supervisees to use and experience art beyond the role of passive viewers. The results of this research clarified how the participating supervisors interpreted the value of art therapy as a method to nurture the professional growth of trainees. Their contributions suggest experiences and methods that may effectuate future advancements in the field of art therapy supervision.

Keywords: Hermeneutic Phenomenological, Art Therapy, Artistic Experiences of Supervisors, Supervision

1. INTRODUCTION

In art therapy, artworks created by the client can supplement verbal communication through visualization of the client's thoughts. They act as statements that specifically express meaning, intention, and subjectivity [1]. Art therapists are experts who possess the ability to interpret thoughts and emotions expressed through artworks, thus enabling the clients' art to augment verbal discourse [2]. Also trained in art therapy supervision, supervisors instruct and supervise individuals using theories of psychotherapy related to the engagement of artistic creation, the therapeutic environment, and their relationships as applied in art therapy [3, 4]. More specifically, an art therapy supervisor aims to 1) decrease the anxiety of the supervisee; 2) improve the quality of therapeutic service for the client; 3) search for new artistic ideas or techniques; 4) monitor their own biases or hostility; and 5) help the supervisee become self-critical about artworks and to think independently in order for the supervisee to build confidence as an expert in the field [5].

It is particularly worth mentioning that an art therapy supervisor should continue to search for new artistic

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ideas or techniques because there is no equivalent role of a supervisor in other types of psychotherapy. Since art therapists are responsible for knowing the therapeutic effects of the materials and tools they use, as well as their application according to the needs of the client [6], art therapy supervisors who train future art therapists on the therapeutic role of art are required to possess expertise in supervision [2]. Regarding the supervisee's application of art as a therapeutic exercise, an art therapy supervisor examines the supervisee's understanding of artistic materials, the ability to use artistic materials creatively, the ability to guide a client with therapeutic art, and the ability to enjoy the creation of art and resulting artworks.

Here, artistic competency refers to expert knowledge of visual art and its techniques, including artistic materials, processes, and results. Another important responsibility for an art therapy supervisor is to determine the ability of an art therapist to provide and maintain creative work spaces. Since art therapy promotes the client's creative expression through many different types of artistic media, inappropriate conditions in the therapeutic environment may provoke client insecurity and thus limit the ability to perform artistic activities with a free mind. Similarly, ideal art therapy supervision should be performed in an open, aesthetically inspiring, and creative environment, as is the case of the therapeutic environment in practical art therapy. Moreover, the supervisor and supervisee should promote consistent bilateral interaction [7]. With this environment, art therapy supervision helps the supervisee to understand the therapeutic processes through a number of steps, explained by [8] as follows: 1) explanation at the level of consciousness; 2) theoretic intellectualisation to understand cases; 3) physical and emotional responses to the therapeutic relationship; 4) imagination and 'play' created between the supervisor and supervisee; and 5) the acquisition of intuition and insight that change the supervisee's understanding and approaches. Although the aforementioned phenomena are observed through the use of art in art therapy supervision, they can only be understood by those with experience in the field. Therefore, it is difficult to learn the steps of art therapy supervision only through text and other traditional materials, that is, the knowledge construction can feel somewhat superficial for not only those in the general public who are interested in art therapy but also trainees studying to become art therapists [9].

Moreover, although it is necessary to discuss more precise methods to integrate the specific roles of art therapy supervisors into practice, data within the literature remain limited. This has led the researcher of this study to attempt to understand artistic experiences utilised by art therapy supervisors in order to train supervisees to become experts. In order for the supervisor's expertise to be more clearly defined, it is imperative to objectively recognise, explain, and interpret the specific phenomena observed in supervision.

Therefore, this study aimed to investigate art therapy supervisors' artistic experiences during supervision and to reveal the function and meaning of art in art therapy supervision. Through this, it would be possible to examine the characteristics of the application of art that distinguishes art therapy supervisors from other supervisors. Such research would increase the value of art in art therapy supervision and assist in continued attempts to specify more clearly the role of art therapy supervisors. In this context, the study focuses on investigating how art therapy supervisors experience important aspects, most notably the functional and relational aspects of art they emphasise while providing training, as well as how they explain and interpret such experiences.

* This article was written by reanalyzing the artistic elements in art therapy supervision in Park's doctoral dissertation(2020, 2022), *A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study on the Supervision Experiences of Art Therapy Supervisors* [2].

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Study Methods and Steps in Max van Manen's Hermeneutic Phenomenological Method

Max van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology emphasises analysis in research and the textualization of 'lived experiences'. Phenomenology describes ways to seek individual experiences, whereas analysis describes ways to interpret the 'texts' of life [10]. These two aspects question the essence and meaning of a specific 'something' and seek answers for questions in descriptive and analytical forms [11, 12]. The present study's theme concerns art therapy supervisors' artistic experiences during supervision. These experiences cannot be quantified, and they depend only on explicit descriptions from individuals with lived experiences. Among various qualitative research techniques, these special artistic experiences are appropriate for phenomenological research that focus on the essence of experiences. Moreover, the experiences, when supplemented by the researcher's analyses, were expected to increase one's understanding of professional experiences.

Focus on the Essence of Experiences and the Formation of Phenomenological Questions:

Phenomenological research begins with serious questions about 'something'. In other words, it starts from the researcher's intellectual curiosity to study whether that thing is indeed 'something' as it seems. Researchers should maintain their direction by focusing on the essence of experiences from the start of research until its conclusion as these questions will act as the main axis that prevents phenomenological research from veering from the one principle theme. Therefore, in phenomenology, questions should be clear and comprehensible. Above all, the questions should have been lived by the researcher [12]. This study began with the following questions: How does an art therapy supervisor utilize art in art therapy supervision? What is the role of an art therapy supervisor? What meaning or value does the art therapy supervisor offer? The following is the phenomenological question developed from these general questions:

What are art therapy supervisors' artistic experiences in supervision, and what are the meanings and realities of these experiences?

2.2 Empirical Testimony of the Participants Selection of the Study Participants

This study utilised reference sampling. For reference sampling, adequacy and sufficiency should be satisfied before setting the criteria for the selection of study participants. Adequacy assumes that the participants are subjects with sufficient experiences related to the questions, and sufficiency requires data collection to continue until enough data and explanation of the experiences are obtained beyond the level of saturation, at which point no new information can be obtained [13, 14, 15, 16]. Seven participants were selected for this study. When experiences shared by relatively specific groups are explored, it is generally more convenient to investigate similarities and differences between three to six participants, and the amount of information collected is also appropriate for the exploration of the experiences [17, 18].

The participating supervisors can testify their experiences of Korean art therapy because they have experienced it from its introduction in the 1990s until its active qualitative growth in the 2000s. The following criteria for study participants were used to satisfy adequacy and sufficiency requirements: individuals with more than 10 years of experience in art therapy education; individuals with more than 10 years of experience as art therapists; individuals with more than 10 years of experience as art therapy supervisors; and individuals who satisfied all three criteria.

2.3 Data Collection: In-Depth Interviews through Preliminary Interviews

The participants' experiences were collected through individualised in-depth interviews conducted between March and September 2016. Each interview lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours. One or two interviews were

conducted until no new accounts of experiences could be collected. Open questions were used to allow the participants to recall and talk about their experiences, and the accuracy of the accounts of experiences was confirmed during the interviews. From the descriptions of the participants, efforts were made to exclude any exploration of the central meaning and the researcher's own pre-understanding [19]. During transcription, the participants' emotions, such as laughter, sighs, smiles, admiration, and excitement were recorded in detail in order to describe their precise accounts.

2.4 Data Analysis: Systematic Analysis Tool Blue Bird 2.0

For qualitative data analysis, Blue Bird 2.0 was used. Since the program was recently updated from version 1.0 to 2.0, the researcher participated in a workshop held at Yonsei University in June 2016 to test sample data analysis. The researcher concluded that the program could be used to prepare the basis for analysis in this study, and Blue Bird 2.0 was used for all steps of analysis to improve the reliability of the analysis process. Analysis was conducted in the following steps using Blue Bird 2.0 for Qualitative Research: 1) enter transcripts of in-depth interviews; 2) select meaningful accounts from all data; 3) code and create categories; 4) create sub-themes; 5) create themes; 6) perform analytic phenomenological writing; and 7) confirm the analysis results.

3. Results

Essential Themes about Art Therapy Supervisors' Artistic Experiences during Supervision

The following themes were derived from this study and divided into 11 sub-themes: 1) serving specialised roles as art therapy supervisors, people who encounter artworks that can also serve as 'second clients'; and 2) providing guidance to supervisees to enable them to be creative in the use of art. The themes and sub-themes are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories in Each Theme

Theme	Sub-theme
Serving specialised roles as art therapy supervisors, people who encounter artworks that can also serve as 'second clients'	Inviting the 'second clients' into supervision
	Serving as the intermediary of non-verbal 'meeting'
	Scrutinizing the information provided by artworks together with the supervisee
	Serving as the 'third eye'
Providing guidance to supervisees to enable them to be creative in the use of art	Realising reproducibility and immediacy through artworks
	Sharing artistic experiences as a tool for internal contact
	Preparing creative environments

1) Serving Specialised Roles as Art Therapy Supervisors, as People Who Encounter Artworks That Can Also Serve as 'Second Clients'

Art therapy supervisors have special experiences in leading and supervising their supervisees since they are able to indirectly invite the clients into supervision. This is possible because the clients leave behind their alter ego through the artworks they created in the therapy room. This characteristic of art therapy enables art therapy supervisors to encounter artworks, alternately referred to in this study as the 'second clients', during supervision. In supervision, there is conscious verbal communication and subconscious non-verbal

communication, and the clients' artworks compose the latter [20]. Here, the clients' artworks are defined as well-organised subconsciousness [21]. Art therapy supervisors explore the clients' external and internal worlds as well as their imagination and reality through the artworks they presented during supervision. While observing and exploring these aspects, supervisors broaden their understanding of their clients [7].

■ Inviting 'Second Clients' into Supervision

Although art therapy supervisors do not meet the clients directly, they still explore the clients' inner selves through their paintings or other artworks that can serve as the second clients.

More art therapists have started reporting verbal responses in supervision. Sometimes, they seek supervision even without any images or artworks.

More art therapists have started reporting verbal responses in supervision. Sometimes, they seek supervision even without any images or artworks. The participants defined the clients' artworks as second clients. In other words, they perceived the artworks as another persona of the clients and tried to understand the clients better through the artworks. In this way, art therapy supervisors were acting as hosts who politely invited the second clients into their supervision. However, the supervisors were sometimes surprised to find that their supervisees failed to perceive how the clients' artworks held great significance as second clients. The supervisors also reported that supervisees sometimes failed to realise their mistakes even when they did not bring the second clients into supervision. Art therapy supervisors reviewed the overall information about the clients, including the relationship between the supervisee and the client (transference and counter-transference), and through the artworks, that is, second clients offering non-verbal communication. Then, the supervisors explored the therapeutic options to be pursued subsequently [8], thus explaining why it was very important to invite the second clients into supervision.

■ Serving as the Intermediary of a Non-Verbal 'Meeting'

In supervision, visualised images or artworks are used for conversation. Because I can hear the subconscious symbolic language and the client's conscious language related to the artworks, I think I can provide supervisees with a great deal of information.

When I encounter the honesty of artworks, I feel excited because it feels as if my non-verbal 'meeting' with the clients through the artworks was successful.

Psychotherapy is performed through language and depends on an unstated hypothesis that consciousness lies within the mind and should thus be approached through the language of the mind [22]. Human communication is thought to encompass both obvious and latent communication. In obvious communication, thoughts are expressed openly and freely. However, since it may be difficult to freely express thoughts in latent communication, the thoughts tend to be expressed through uncommon ways. One such uncommon way is the use of artworks, and it is possible to investigate the subject's thoughts through this [23]. Here, the art therapist 'meets' the client non-verbally. This indicates that pictures provide 'layers' of empirical data that enable art therapy supervisors to provide more solid supervision.

■ Scrutinizing the Information Provided by Artworks Together with the Supervisee

My supervisee felt that the client uses the same materials, same themes, and same forms. I actually did not notice much change in the painting, but they still contained plenty of stories. Later, the supervisee noticed small changes in the paintings on his/her own. In the beginning, the supervisee seemed unwilling to see the changes.

During art therapy supervision, the participating supervisors became frustrated when their supervisees (trainees) could not realise the client's changes but waited for the trainees to realise the changes themselves. Such empathy and patience is difficult for many supervisors. The attitudes of supervisors can be explained through the therapist's role as described by [24] in providing 'reflection of emotions' or 'confirmation of understanding'. Something similar to triangulation in parenting [25, 26] is also observed in supervision, and the supervisor pays attention to the aspects that the supervisee ignores or is careless about addressing in order to protect the client. However, since supervisees may have various pre-existing emotions toward the client during treatment sessions (including anger, jealousy, and boredom), they may choose to ignore the client's artistic language [2]. If the supervisee makes a concerted effort, they can understand the client's gestures, excitement, and hesitations in their artwork.

■ Serving as the 'Third Eye'

In a broad sense, my role as a supervisor is to serve as the 'third eye' and help the supervisee's exploration of artworks.

In supervision that is perceived as safe, the supervisee tends to see the client's works in a subjective manner [28]. Although factual conditions interpreted as safe may be important in the attitude toward the client's artworks, subject exploration provides more abundant information about the client [28]. In other words, it allows one to realise that the information filtered during communication between two subjective worlds of individuals performed at a specific point may become the most objective piece of information [27].

2) Providing Guidance to Supervisees to Enable Them to be Creative in the Use of Art

[29] suggested the non-verbal approach as a more active medium of communication in supervision and reported that visual approaches utilising images enabled supervisees to express their personal problems better. [30] also led a supervision group where students created their own images to understand the context and processes of art therapy. Supervision through visual media can help supervisors and supervisees understand these dynamics of supervision.

■ Realising Reproducibility and Immediacy through Artworks

When the client creates artworks in the presence of the therapist, the artworks are the results formed during the time shared by the two. As such, when I supervise my supervisees, I

sometimes ask them to copy the artworks during supervision. When they do this in-situ, I get to share their time as well. Through this, the triangular relationship between the client, therapist, and supervisor is reproduced in that moment.

While training to be art therapists, supervisees learn most often and most profoundly through their own artworks [4, 31, 32, 33]. This is the most direct way for supervisees to experience the peculiarity of art therapy supervision [3]. The participating supervisors described the peculiarity of art therapy supervision as experiences of reproducibility and immediacy in art therapy. The reproducibility and immediacy of art became a lived experience at a particular moment within a particular setting.

■ **Sharing Artistic Experiences as a Tool for Internal Contact**

Some trainees have difficulty generating internal contacts. In such cases, I encourage the trainees to create artworks.

Creative supervision in art therapy is also referred to as ‘reactive art’ based on reaction-centred theories. Reactive art is an art therapist’s expression of their response to various phenomena observed during art therapy. This process can be used for therapists’ self-management and is useful for therapists to understand and empathise with the client’s emotions [34]. In creative art therapy supervision, the supervisor aims for internal contact through artworks. Likewise, the participants in this study believed that a human’s internal voices could be heard through art in terms of formative factors, including the typical and atypical, the regular and irregular, and tachisme and dripping.

■ **Preparing Creative Environments**

What artwork or material would be a good starting point to approach a client’s problem? We often discuss that a therapist should experiment with potential uses of art. However, less experienced therapists sometimes tend to constrain themselves from doing this. As a supervisor, I try to encourage the therapists to experiment... (silence).

The participating supervisors reported feeling regretful after witnessing therapists who were not freely experimenting up to their creative potential even though one of the most important competencies for art therapists is precisely that, creativity. The supervisors understood that their role was to enable supervisees to express their creativity, but the silence that followed suggests that this has never been an easy role. One can gain the deepest understanding of the relationship between people and their creative processes by forming their own relationships with creative processes [35]. A major task for therapists is to help individuals find their creative selves and to confirm their characteristics that can bring vitality to all aspects of life. Although all individuals clearly possess their own characteristics to promote and expand creativity, those specifically related to high levels of creativity have not yet been elucidated [36]. Therefore, it is difficult to encourage trainees to display high levels of creative competency.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate art therapy supervisors' artistic experiences during supervision of their supervisees (prospective and inexperienced art therapy trainees). In particular, it sought to find concerns and limitations faced during experiences as supervisors and to investigate the meaning of such experiences in an attempt to explore the realities of artistic experiences during supervision in greater detail. This study utilised an analytic phenomenological method to explicitly investigate the reality of art therapy supervisors' artistic experiences. Therefore, throughout the study, the researcher carefully explored the following basic question of phenomenological research as a whole rather than in parts [37]: How does an individual explain and signify the world they perceive as well as their own life experiences?

The results can be interpreted from two perspectives. First, as professionals who encounter artworks—otherwise known as second clients produced by actual therapy clients—the interviewed art therapy supervisors tried to listen to the voices of the artworks and therefore understand them in greater detail. Moreover, the art therapy supervisors focused on helping supervisees become more creative in their use of art as therapy and to experience reproducibility and immediacy in supervision. The supervisors also tried to use art as a tool to aid supervisees' internal contact with their clients. To transmit these experiences to their supervisees, art therapy supervisors prepared a creative ambience to encourage the supervisees to become users of art themselves rather than remain as mere observers.

Second, the art therapy supervisors found their work special in that they could encounter the clients non-verbally through artworks and the observation of symbols. However, they were also cognizant of the fact that artistic expression could hinder supervisors and supervisees from seeing clients as a whole being rather than only from the perspective of the art. Moreover, the supervisors believed that some symbols could not be interpreted completely and that they sometimes had to patiently wait until the images initiated conversations. As artistic professionals, the supervisors also gained deep trust and respect for the human's capacity for artistic expression.

By collecting the experiences of seven art therapy supervisors who have directly experienced the history of Korean art therapy and then consolidating them into shorter accounts, the researcher felt as helpless as a child who collects seashells on a sandy beach to study the history of oceans. The participants offered an enormous amount of experiences, for which substantial time was required to completely understand the depth and breadth of their accounts. This manuscript will be concluded with the researcher's recollection of input from participants who could not be included in the results section.

The interviewed art therapy supervisors believed that it was an endless road to perform art and understand human symbology. The therapeutic properties of art are sometimes compared with those of alchemy, as it is a magical process that influences the human mind. However, rather than contemplate what art is, the supervisors were professionals trying to gain a further understanding of the meaning and influences of art on the human mind through artistic experiences, and they served as educators seeking methods to transfer this understanding to supervisees through education. Finally, although the participants did not verbally acknowledge that they were contributing to the future of art therapy, their contributions made it clear that they were well aware of what they were working toward. Some also tried to go beyond the scope of the study as participants who were immensely curious about what changes art therapy and the experiences of art therapists and supervisors will effectuate in the future.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the art therapy supervisors paid close attention to creativity in educational and therapeutic relationships with their supervisees and focused on improving their understanding of the artistic activities and artworks of their clients and supervisees. These results contributed to an understanding of how art therapy

supervisors realise the value of art therapy as individuals who foster the professional development of trainees. Since art therapy has artistic and aesthetic characteristics, including the use and interpretation of symbols and images, it is a special skill that requires targeted experiences with artworks during supervision. Therefore, applying supervision models from other areas might hinder a deeper exploration of images in art therapy supervision. This study is significant in that its results lessen the concerns of some in this regard.

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