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# The Role of Art Therapy in Enhancing Emotional Intelligence and Self-Perception

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**Abstract:** The following paper discusses how art therapy contributes to emotional intelligence and self-perception. Emotional intelligence (EQ), which comprises self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills, is essential to psychological health and efficient interpersonal functioning. Similarly, self-perception, such as self-concept, self-esteem, and self-worth, determines how individuals think about themselves and behave in the world. The non-verbal, creative Art therapy processes provide people with a special opportunity to externalize emotions, achieve insights and acquire more adequate coping mechanisms. The paper uses theoretical frameworks, empirical research, and case studies to show how art therapy can be used to create emotional awareness, provide emotional regulation, develop empathy, and aid in identity reconstruction. Its effectiveness in the treatment of anxiety, trauma and low self-esteem is evidenced by real-life applications, which, however, also note its weaknesses with being subjective and difficulties in measurements. In general, the paper highlights the therapeutic value of art therapy as a transformational agent of emotional development, empowerment, and psychological recovery.

**Keywords:** Art Therapy; Emotional Intelligence; Self-Perception; Emotional Regulation; Self-Esteem; Empathy; Identity Reconstruction; Trauma Recovery; Mental Health; Creative Expression

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, art therapy has obtained recognition as a special and effective direction in solving emotional, psychological well-being. This is a therapeutic approach that involves using the creative process of art making to assist a person to express, explore and process thoughts, emotions and experiences. As opposed to conventional types of therapy, which are verbally inclined, art therapy provides an alternative source which clients can use to express their emotions and reflect on themselves. It is this intrinsic ability of art to convey the nuances of the human condition that offers a non-threatening and thus approachable manner in which individuals can begin to deal with and make sense of their emotional landscapes. This process of creation leads to personal understanding and changes, and, therefore, art therapy can be an invaluable resource in improving emotional intelligence (EQ) and the way one feels about oneself [1].

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is the capacity to perceive, comprehend, control and manage emotions and also the capability to empathize with the feelings of others. It embraces five main elements, which include self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Emotional intelligence is extremely vital to mental health and personal growth because it improves decision-making, enhances relationships with others, and promotes emotional balance. Study after study has revealed that high EQ people are in a better position to manage stress, deal with people and display resilience when things go awry. EQ is critical in determining overall psychological well-being, and improvement of the same can lead to increased emotional well-being and an increase in life success [2].

Self-perception, however, is used to mean how people view themselves, their self-concept, self-esteem

and self-worth [3]. It is the inner lens that individuals use to perceive themselves as beings and as capable beings. Having a good view of oneself is very instrumental in psychological health because it determines how individuals relate to the environment, how they cope with problems and how they go about their subjective aims. Individuals who healthily perceive themselves also have higher self-esteem, a better sense of identity and can be more resilient when faced with challenges. Nevertheless, in case people have problems with negative self-perception, they can feel low self-esteem, confusion about their identity, and increased vulnerability to stress and anxiety. Emotional intelligence and self-perception are dynamic and interdependent, so that each one causes a change in the other in a perpetual loop. Art therapy has become one of the powerful tools for promoting development in the two fields. By means of the art-making process, one is enabled to externalize their inner emotional experience, thus coming to better understand their feelings and emotional reactions. It is a creative process that enables clients to experience and work through emotions in a manner that cannot be exhausted through the verbal process of communication. Consequently, people can have an increased emotional awareness and emotional control, as well as empathy. Such shifts in emotional intelligence can also be accompanied by shifts in self-perception as people start treating themselves more favourably, form a more distinct self-identity, and increase their self-esteem in general [4].

Among the main principles of art therapy is that creative expression in art provides a nonverbal processing of emotions. Art is a way of expressing emotions to many people, and particularly to those who might be unable to express themselves using words. By drawing, painting, sculpting, or even journaling, the creative process allows one to safely and without judgment play with their emotions. It is this creating and discovering that brings about emotional understanding and personal realization, both of which are fundamental in emotional intelligence. When people explore their artwork, they can usually address complicated or suppressed feelings, and this aspect can help them to comprehend and manage their emotions better. The process of art making also gives a feeling of achievement and empowerment, which can lead to a more favourable self-image and self-perception [5].

Besides, interpersonal processes within art therapy, particularly group art therapy, can be equally crucial in the development of emotional intelligence and self-perception. The art therapy sessions usually push the clients to share their art and emotional process with others, which helps build a feeling of connectedness and empathy. The mutual experience allows persons to acquire social skills and more emotional insight as they get to listen to the emotional experiences of others, and to share their own emotions in a non-judgmental atmosphere. Through observing and sharing the emotional experiences of others, people can broaden their emotional perceptiveness and enhance the development of their social bonds, which are vital attributes of emotional intelligence. This paper aims to discuss how art therapy can help improve emotional intelligence and self-perception. Through the analysis of available literature, theories, and case examples, this paper will help to illustrate how art therapy may support emotional development and self-understanding. It will also explain the mechanism by which art therapy leads to the development of emotional intelligence, such as the promotion of emotional awareness, regulation and empathy. The paper will, in addition address the effects of art therapy on self-perception, especially in improving self-esteem, self-reflection and in reconstructing identity. The final aim is to demonstrate how art therapy can be an effective instrument to those who want to enhance their level of emotional intelligence and self-perception that resulting in a higher level of personal development and emotional satisfaction, and a healthier sense of self [6,7].

To sum up, art therapy is a special and efficient method to develop emotional intelligence and improve self-perception. By offering people an artistic emotional release and a means of self-discovery, art therapy allows the clients to better understand their feelings, develop the ability to control their emotions, and improve their self-esteem and identity. With the constantly increasing domain, art therapy can be of great help to those who need to advance their emotional state and individual development to lead healthier and more satisfactory lives.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Emotional Intelligence (EQ)**

#### **2.1.1 Definition and Components:**

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is the capacity to recognise, label, control, and use feelings and feelings of other people. Although the idea of EQ had been proposed earlier, it was popularized by Daniel Goleman in his 1995 book titled *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. According to the model created by Goleman, there are five main aspects of what emotional intelligence is:

**Self-awareness:** This refers to the capacity to identify and realise feelings and the influence they have on thoughts and behaviour. Individuals who have high self-awareness are more in touch with their emotional state and how that emotional state affects their decision-making and interactions. Self-awareness enables people to precisely judge their strengths and weaknesses, and it permits people to be genuine in action.

**Self-regulation:** This element is the capacity to moderate or redirect disruptive emotions and impulses and adjust to transforming conditions. It is essential to have self-regulation to deal with emotional responses in a productive manner whenever one is faced with stressful or rather challenging moments. It entails taking your time and thinking intelligently in the face of stress rather than making snap decisions or losing your temper, or getting panicky.

**Motivation:** Emotional intelligence also means being able to use feelings to do what you want to achieve by putting in energy and perseverance. This factor of EQ involves being self-motivated, having goals, being optimistic, and being determined in spite of failures. Inspired people tend to be positive, active and goal-oriented in the long run.

**Empathy:** Empathy can be described as the capacity to put yourself in the position of others to feel their emotions. It is even more than sympathy because it implies the ability to walk in the shoes of another individual and feel their emotions and perceive their viewpoints. Empathy plays an important role in communication, resolving conflicts, and developing strong and supportive relationships.

**Social skills:** This element is the capacity to deal with relationships and create networks. It is also the ability to effectively convey and receive information, handling disagreements, working with other people, as well as persuade and motivating individuals. Active listening, interpretations of social situations, and consideration of the feelings of others are also relevant social skills [8].

### 2.1.2 Significance of EQ:

Emotional intelligence is quite essential when it comes to mental, personal development and interpersonal relations. What high EQ individuals can do is more likely to cope with stress, to control their emotions, and to handle others positively and constructively. On mentioning mental health, highly emotionally intelligent people have recorded low anxiety and depression levels because they are in a position to explore and deal with their emotions. They also possess better coping mechanisms to combat any bad emotional experiences. EQ is also important in interpersonal relationships. People with a high level of emotional intelligence are more forgiving, and this is a factor that ensures relationships are better and healthier. A high level of EQ at the workplace is associated with better teamwork, conflict management and leadership skills because individuals with high EQ are capable of managing their emotions properly in addition to being in a position to identify with others. In addition, Emotional intelligence also plays an immense role in the decision-making process because a high EQ individual can consider not only his/her emotions but also his/her rationality when deciding something and therefore, makes more well-rounded and informed decisions [9].

## 2.2 Self-Perception

### 2.2.1 Definition:

Self-perception describes how individuals think of themselves, their beliefs, attitudes and judgments concerning their capabilities, value and identity. Self-perception relates closely with self-concept, self-esteem and self-worth.

**Self-concept:** This refers to the mental picture or the knowledge an individual has about himself or herself. It comprises conscious and unconscious thoughts of what one believes about his/her attributes, personality, and place in the world. Self-concept defines how people view themselves in the social world and determines their behaviour.

**Self-esteem:** This is described as the emotional judgment of worth. Self-esteem is an indication of the value that an individual has towards themselves. High self-esteem is correlated to positive feelings of self-worth, confidence, and belief in one's abilities. On the other hand, low self-esteem might result in self-doubt, insecurity and failure to realise our strengths.

**Self-worth:** Self-worth refers to the inherent value that an individual applies to themselves irrespective of achievements or what other people think about them. It is more of self-acceptance and being able to love oneself unconditionally, regardless of whether the world does or not [10].

### **2.2.2 Impact on Psychological Well-Being**

Positive self-concept is a basic element of mental health and development. When people have a favourable self-concept, this increases their chances of having confidence and strength when misfortune knocks at their door. Self-worth and high self-esteem also help in making one emotionally stable, so that they are able to handle life changes and disappointments better. Conversely, low self-esteem and poor self-worth define negative self-perception, which is commonly associated with several mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, and lack of motivation. When people negatively perceive themselves, they might fail to establish quality relationships, make choices, and manage life events. Developing a positive sense of the self, instead, is a pillar of emotional resiliency, self-acceptance, and psychological development. By engaging in personal growth and self-introspection, one may redefine their perception of the self and better their mental health and emotional state. Mindfulness, positive affirmations, and therapeutic practices, including art therapy, have been identified to improve self-perception, which allows one to have a more positive view of oneself [11].

## **2.3. Art Therapy Overview**

### **2.3.1. Definition and Goals**

Art therapy is a type of psychotherapy that involves the creation of art as a method to enhance the mental, emotional, and psychological state of a person. The main aim of art therapy does not lie in creating a fine piece of art but rather in using the creative process to induce self-expression, self-understanding and emotional healing. It applies to individuals of any age and circumstances, especially those who might be constrained to articulate themselves orally because of trauma, anxiety, and other emotional issues. The basis of art therapy is that, through the process of creating art, it will allow people to externalize their thoughts and emotions, which will then be easier to comprehend and digest. A trained art therapist usually facilitates the therapeutic process by assisting clients in the process of expressing their feelings and emotions using different forms of creative expression, which may include drawing, painting, sculpture, or collage. The aim is to assist clients in having a better understanding of themselves, to encourage the expression of feelings and emotions and eventually bring healing and personal development.

### **2.3.2 Mechanisms of Art Therapy**

The mechanism of action of art therapy is based on the fact that the creative process involves a person in a special, non-verbal way of emotional disclosure. This procedure may be particularly helpful when dealing with people who struggle to express their feelings with the help of words only. Through using those materials, like paint and clay or even digital media, clients can convey complicated emotions and experiences that they otherwise might not be capable of doing. Self-reflection is also facilitated through the therapeutic application of art. Clients are encouraged to discover the reasons behind their artistic decisions, such as colours, shapes, and symbols, as they generate and work with their artwork. This pursuit assists one in understanding their emotions, revealing suppressed emotions, and addressing unreliable psychological problems. To say more in detail, a person experiencing anxiety can produce chaotic or fragmented artworks that will represent the inner emotional chaos and will result in a conversation with the therapist about the feelings and the causes of the anxiety identified. Also, art-making can promote emotional healing. Art therapy is also a secure means through which clients can work through tough feelings of grief, trauma, or anger in a non-threatening and positive manner. In the long term, this form of creativity may allow people to cope with their emotional reactions better, develop coping mechanisms and experience personal growth. The ability to externalise their feelings and to make something solid often provides clients with a feeling of mastery, control and achievement, which in turn may boost their self-esteem and self-perception. To conclude, art therapy is a special and efficient way of emotional expression, self-understanding, and recovery. Through the creative processes, a person can raise their emotional intelligence and transform their self-perception, resulting in psychological well-being and personal development [12].

## **3. Art Therapy and Emotional Intelligence**

### **3.1 Emotional Awareness through Artistic Expression**

#### **3.1.1 Art as a Medium for Expressing Complex Emotions**

Art making also gives people a special platform to communicate their feelings in a manner that they might not be able to convey through words. Most feelings, particularly those that are complicated or profoundly

ingrained, such as grief, trauma, or shame, might be hard to describe using words only. Art therapy can help overcome this divide, as it enables people to make visual the inner experiences in the form of drawing, painting, sculpture, and even digital media. Indicatively, a person who has suffered a severe grief will not be able to discuss their loss. They do not have to use words to express it, they can make something, a work of art, that will exemplify their sorrow, maybe by using dark colours, or sharp edges, or abstract shapes and forms that will remind them of the emotional whirlpool they are experiencing. This visual form of expression allows them to share some feelings that might be too powerful or complex to explain using words. Art is seen as an emotional discharge and helps the clients to establish order in the inner world in a very real, concrete, non-verbal way. In addition, the very process of art-making can be a kind of emotional release. In the course of the creative process, people commonly experience the fact that their emotions also start flowing more freely. The creative medium provides a non-judgmental way of expressing emotions and feelings, and allows one to tackle and experience those emotions and feelings that one might otherwise be suppressing or avoiding [13].

### **3.1.2 Fostering Self-Awareness through Art**

Self-reflection, promoted by art therapy, is important in bolstering emotional awareness. Once an artwork is made, people tend to think about how they feel about the artwork. These thoughts can assist them in getting insight into how their feelings show and how they respond to different events in their life. The therapist can walk the person through sessions of discussing the meaning of the artwork and its association with his or her emotional status. To illustrate, an individual may produce a disorganised, fractured artwork and, in dialogue with others, the individual can come to the revelation that the artwork is an expression of their feeling of being stressed or out of control in their life. Emotional intelligence particles self-awareness, and art therapy promotes this self-awareness by enabling the client to perceive and interpret their emotions as they happen. Such a reflective practice is beneficial not only to allow people to be more closely acquainted with their emotions but also to learn to distinguish emotional patterns, triggers, and reactions. Having greater self-awareness, people can create a better connection with their emotional mindscape and the effect their emotions have on their actions [14].

## **3.2 Emotional Regulation in Art Therapy**

### **3.2.1 Regulating and Managing Emotions through the Creative Process:**

Creativity through painting, drawing, or sculpture is also a useful way to expend emotional energy. Such exercises need attention, concentration and awareness, which could enable a person to narrow down the emotional colouring and feel a sort of emotional equilibrium. Expressing feelings which are overwhelming sometimes, making art enables clients to shift the flow of emotions into a productive and positive experience, resulting in feelings of relief and relaxation. As an example, when one is angry, creating something will assist in letting out the frustrations in a non-destructive manner. Instead of reacting violently or harbouring their anger, people can invest their emotions into their painting and make a vivid stroke or use a strong colour to project their emotions. This can make people more in control of their feelings and decrease emotional outbursts. With time, as the clients feel the relaxing and balancing impacts of art therapy, they can acquire better coping mechanisms to deal with their emotions during hours when they are not in the therapist's office. Moreover, art therapy enables persons to practice emotional management techniques without fear of failing or doing it wrong in a non-threatening atmosphere. Within a therapeutic environment, clients are able to experiment with various ways of organising emotion, how colours can be used to induce a feeling of calm or how to make patterns that can represent a sense of structure and stability. By trial and error, they can discover which methods appeal to them and which ones are more useful in helping them to manage their emotional reactions [15].

### **3.2.2 Case Studies and Examples of Emotional Regulation:**

A possible case in point about emotional regulation using art therapy is anxiety sufferers. A client with a long-term anxiety problem in a case study was instructed by an art therapist to use an abstract artwork to visualise their fear and worry. The therapist would ask the client to take colours that represented their anxiety, e.g. dark blues and greys and to make shapes or patterns that represented how they felt out of shape. When the client started working on the piece, they started to feel somewhat released and relieved as the physical creation process gave them a brief respite from their anxious thoughts. In a different scenario, a client who had anger problems was asked to produce some form of art that depicted their feelings of frustration and anger. The aggressive brush strokes and bright, fiery colours helped the client to focus their anger into the art and obtain



knowledge on the real reasons behind the anger [16,17].

### **3.3 Enhancing Empathy and Social Skills through Art Therapy**

#### **3.3.1 Promoting Empathy in Group Settings:**

However, art therapy is an effective instrument not only of personal emotional growth, but it is also a good chance to develop empathy, especially when it is done in a group. By exhibiting their artworks to others, people make themselves vulnerable to each other; they allow themselves to be touched and understood. Exchanging the ideas of their works allows participants to realize that others might feel, fight, and emotionally react the same as they do. This common experience creates a feeling of unity and compassion as people get to understand how to view the world through the eyes of another. Group art therapy is a commonly used technique where people tend to draw or paint simultaneously and talk about their feelings and the intentions of their artworks. As an illustration, in a group aimed toward trauma healing, the participants can make their artwork, which will signify their own story of loss, grief, or adversity. In sharing their art with others, they can hear familiar stories and feelings, and this assists them in developing empathy towards each other. Empathy and emotional support are built through realising that other people have had similar experiences. It is also beneficial to those people who feel isolated; this group dynamic makes them understand that they are not alone in their struggles [18].

#### **3.3.2 Fostering Social Skills and Communication:**

Art therapy can tremendously enhance interpersonal communication and collaboration skills, especially when conducted in a group. Such a practice of discussing and interpreting art requires a person to be an active listener, take into account the view of the other person, and be able to explain their feelings and experiences. When individuals cooperate in artistic undertakings or when individuals make efforts to describe their artistic pieces, they practice good communication behaviour, since they get to know how to convey emotions positively. Moreover, collaborative artworks are created by a group, which presupposes teamwork, which involves cooperation, negotiation and compromise. These group activities come in handy to cause the participants to grow to a position of trusting each other and learn how to handle the conflict maturely and compassionately. As they develop joint artistic projects, the participants also develop their own social networks and interpersonal skills they require to maintain positive and healthy relations.

To give an example, a person or a group of people who experience a problem relating and connecting with other people (social isolation) or getting along with each other (interpersonal conflict) can be referred to a group art therapy session where they all work on a mural. Through collaboration, they do not just take up the therapy process of artistic expression, but they also practice the social skills of active listening, collaboration and empathy. The dividends of these experiences are real-world in the sense that the participants are better placed in dealing with the social interactions and they can express themselves in a healthy, constructive manner. Art therapy can be efficiently used in building emotional intelligence by building emotional awareness, promoting emotional regulation and building empathy and social skills. The creative process enables individuals to express very complex feelings that may prove difficult to verbalize, attain some understanding of their feelings and learn to manage their emotions in more healthy ways. Besides, the group art therapy setting can be interpreted as a decent opportunity to train empathy, strengthen the social network, and improve the skills of interpersonal communication. In conclusion, art therapy may efficiently serve as a means of enabling emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and improved psychological condition [19].

## **4. Art Therapy and Self-Perception**

### **4.1 Self-Discovery and Self-Reflection**

#### **4.1.1 The Role of Art in Reflecting Personal Experiences**

Art-making within a therapeutic context allows people a rare moment to be able to examine personal experiences, sense of self, and life challenges. Art therapy provides a person with the opportunity to project their internal thoughts, feelings and conflicts into the physical and sometimes even tactile form, which can be an influential method of self-exploration. Through the creative process of drawing, painting, or sculpting, individuals are invited to dive into their inner world and examine it, addressing the parts of their self that they previously did not have to address or realise. To take a few examples, a person who has lost a lot through personal loss may produce a piece of art which symbolises the sense of emptiness or sorrow. The therapist and

the individual discover the work as they go along; this might unearth other feelings or memories that relate to the loss and that might have been repressed or not identified before. Art gives a non-verbal and secure medium to work through these feelings and helps the person to view their personal story in another way. This process provides them with a more refined insight into their emotional experience, which leads to self-insight. Also, the process of art-making provokes people to stay in the present so that they can practice self-reflection in a non-judgmental way. While clients are trying various mediums and techniques, they can reflect on their response to the artwork as well as how their creative decisions (e.g., colours, shapes, textures) can be seen as an expression of their inner emotional landscape. This practice facilitates a greater intimacy with their thoughts and feelings, which helps them to be more mindful in their process of self-discovery [20].

#### **4.1.2 Art as a Mirror to the Internal World**

Art made in therapy can be seen as a reflection of the inner world and enables people to address and discover aspects of the self that might have been out of sight or unknown. In that way, the artwork is treated rather as a kind of emotional release, which depicts the psychological profile, inner struggles or unprocessed feelings of the person. As an example, an individual battling with self-doubt can produce a work of art that is disjointed or fragmented, and this will represent the broken image that they have of themselves. As they reflect, they may be in a position to discover that such feelings of fragmentation are associated with past events of failure or criticism. By wandering through the artwork and sharing with the therapist on the meaning of the artwork, they begin to understand how these unresolved feelings have contributed towards their self-perception. Art also gives people a chance to discuss their identity and life issues in a visual, tangible form. It also assists clients in identifying trends in their emotional and psychological experiences, which gives them a more comprehensive view of their sense of self. Externalising these feelings into an artistic work can help people to realize the relation between experience and current actions, to achieve more self-acceptance and awareness [21].

### **4.2 Positive Self-View and Self-Esteem**

#### **4.2.1 Boosting Confidence and Fostering a Sense of Accomplishment:**

Accomplishing an art project during therapy can make wonders for the self-esteem and the confidence of a certain individual. To be able to build something out of nothing and to watch it happen, may give one a sense of tangible achievement, which is a part of positive self-affirmation. It is this sense of accomplishment that makes the person believe in his/her capabilities and gives them a higher sense of self-esteem and confidence. To most clients, especially the ones with a poor feeling of inadequacy or low self-esteem, the creation of artwork is a way of self-approval. Every single creation process, be it the experiments with new techniques or a conscious decision in regards to the medium, shows the person that they can create something worthy of attention. The accomplishment felt upon finishing an art project, no matter the technical proficiency or "perfection" of the result, offers a feeling of competence and pride. Considering an example, a person who has been feeling insufficient might paint a picture that shows their inner power, even though they may have held the opinion that they are not creative. Finishing the work, regardless of its simplicity or complexity, can become an indicator that they can create something of real value, and this can be a significant self-esteem tool. Such an achievement can make people get rid of the complex of inadequacy and strengthen the conviction that they can manage to succeed in other aspects of their life [22].

#### **4.2.2 Accepting and Appreciating Unique Qualities**

Besides increasing confidence, art therapy also assists people in noting and acknowledging their special attributes. Through the creative process people are enticed to access and/or adopt a part of themselves which might have been otherwise difficult to access, ignored or underestimated. This procedure promotes self-love, as a person knows how to live with flaws and recognize the beauty of their individuality. As an example, a client who has been dealing with body image concerns can produce an artwork that deals with their physical self or the emotional connection they possess towards their body. During the process of discussing the meaning of the art with the therapist, the client can start noticing the negative beliefs about their body that they have internalized and switch these thoughts with more positive and affirming self-statements. When people practice their artwork as a way of understanding their strengths and attributes, they can have a more affirmative self-perception. Clients also get a chance to defy perfectionistic ideas that subsequently bother their self-esteem through art therapy. It does not matter whether the art is perfect or not in a therapeutic environment; this enables people to accept imperfection and find beauty in the very process. Such an embrace of imperfection results in a healthier

and more positive self-image and pushes people to love themselves instead of chasing after external recognition or impossible standards [23].

### **4.3 Identity Reconstruction and Empowerment**

#### **4.3.1 Reconstructing Self-Identity After Trauma**

Art therapy is specifically helpful to persons who have faced trauma or are suffering an identity crisis. Art therapy may also be a way of helping individuals who have experienced major life problems, including abuse, loss, or personal crisis, to rebuild their self-structure. Creative process accords individuals the platform to work out their feelings, reconcile their experiences, and, in the end, reinvent themselves.

In a case in point, an individual who has been abused might not identify with his or her self, or s/he might have problems describing him or herself beyond his or her trauma. Art therapy would enable them to make something that reflects their experience, and, in the process, they would be able to externalize the pain and start thinking about how this pain has defined them. Gradually, they can use the art process to repossess themselves, through making images or symbols that signify healing, strength or empowerment. Through it, art therapy therefore serves to assist persons in helping their fractured or fragmented identities and reconstruct a healthier and much more integrated version of the self. The art creation process will become a metaphor of the personal change process as the clients will resolve their emotional chaos and create a clearer story of who they are and what they want to be [24].

#### **4.3.2 Empowerment and Personal Narrative**

Art therapy is also empowering as it lets the person own his or her story. The creation of art provides a feeling of power to those who consider themselves marginalized, voiceless, or powerless. Art gives people an opportunity to share their feelings and narrate their stories in a manner that only they can call their own. When the clients examine their past experiences and think over their identity, they feel much more in control of their self-definition. As an illustration, in a case study on a survivor of domestic violence, art therapy enabled the person to develop a visual image of his or her experience as a victim to a survivor. This artwork allowed them to get a sense of ownership of their story and take a position of empowerment instead of victimhood. Such a narrative change was important in ensuring that they re-established their identity and were able to walk tall into the future. The art therapy encourages the perception that a person can create his or her own identities and can determine the flow of personal development. Artistically rediscovering their own story enables clients to take control of their healing, development and redefinition of the self, irrespective of what happened to them or what is expected of them in society. Art therapy is important in helping individuals improve their perceptions of themselves by helping them to discover themselves, improving their self-esteem, and enabling them to rebuild their identities. The creative process allows them to process their personal experiences, address any challenging emotions, and form a more positive and accepting opinion about themselves. Be it the process of assisting an individual to reconstruct the self-identity following a traumatic experience, assisting one to identify his or her exclusive attributes, or simply accepting imperfection, art therapy provides a transformational journey towards enhanced self-awareness and emotional health [25].

## **5. Case Studies and Applications**

### **5.1 Case Studies of Art Therapy in Enhancing Emotional Intelligence**

#### **5.1.1 Case Study 1: Emotional Regulation through Art Therapy in a Teenager with Anxiety**

A case study of a teenager, named Sarah, with severe anxiety, is one of the well-documented examples of how art therapy can help to develop emotional intelligence. Sarah was experientially blind and could hardly elaborate her feelings in words, and tended to have impulsive responses in stressful or pressurized moments, which further isolated and frustrated her. In one of her therapies, Sarah was introduced to drawing to help her reveal her emotional distress, which was at first illustrated in the form of chaotic colours and dark random shapes. With time, as she started to reflect more upon the meanings of her artwork, guided by her therapist, Sarah started to become more in touch with the emotions that were fuelling her anxiety. The therapist provided Sarah with support and suggestions on how to portray more soothing and regulated emotions with the help of colours and other artistic means, i.e. softer blue hues and repetitive patterns to signify control and calmness. This process allowed Sarah to strengthen her capability of self-regulation of her emotions by becoming more aware of her early triggers of anxiety manifestation in her artwork and engaging with creative outlets as a



method of settling her mind before it would react impulsively [26].

### **Critical Analysis**

The case shows the use of art therapy, which helps in emotional regulation since it provides a non-verbal channel of emotional expression. The fact that Sarah got some steps ahead in recognizing and dealing with her emotions with the help of art also promoted emotional intelligence. After Sarah learnt to watch her inner world with the help of her art, she was more likely to be self-aware and acquired the methods of managing her emotional reactions, which is a significant element of emotional intelligence. As proven by this case, art therapy was found to be quite effective in promoting emotional regulation, a quality that improves overall emotional intelligence as individuals get to experience and express their emotions in healthier ways [27].

## **5.1.2 Case Study 2: Empathy Development in Group Art Therapy for Survivors of Domestic Violence**

The plan of the group art therapy sessions with the survivors of domestic violence exists to help the group members increase their degree of emotional intelligence through the improvement of empathy. In one of the sessions, all the participants were asked to come up with a piece of art that would illustrate their experience with trauma. The therapist organized a group discussion, during which each member was required to explain to others about his/her artwork. One of the females, Maria, created abstract work that was her feeling of being in a dead-end relationship with an abuser, and she expressed her feelings with sharp and angular shapes. Another participant, Linda, also referred to anger and isolation, but she was assisted by the dark colour red. As the group was presenting their artworks and hearing the stories of each other, they began to get a sense of understanding and empathy towards each other. Some of the women in the group also talked about how they could observe the same emotions in the art of others, and they did not feel so alone in their emotions. The process of discussion of these visual representations allowed the participants to associate with one another on a deep emotional level and reassure the feelings of other [28].

### **Critical Analysis**

The presented case study proves the effectiveness of art therapy, especially in a group format, to stimulate the development of empathy as one of the essential emotional intelligence. Through the exchange of art and stories, the participants could connect to the emotional experiences of others, and this increased their empathy. The group vulnerability experience made it possible to have a stronger emotional involvement and to support each other. Thanks to this example, it is seen that art therapy can be a big contributor to emotional intelligence in the sense of developing empathy, since people also learn to sense, interpret and emotionally relate to the experiences of others [29].

## **5.2 Case Studies of Art Therapy in Enhancing Self-Perception**

### **5.2.1 Case Study 1: Overcoming Self-Doubt and Building Self-Esteem in a Young Adult with Depression**

In a case example of a young adult, John, who was experiencing cases of depression and low self-esteem, art therapy assisted him in facing his negative self-image. John also experienced the feeling of being worthless, and his life lacked purpose, which made him withdraw from social life and feel like he did not belong to the rest of mankind. In his therapeutic sessions, John was requested to utilize the arts to demonstrate his emotions concerning self-worth. At first, the art of John depicted his innermost feelings of desperation and lack of confidence, darkness and solitude. As time went by, however, his therapist helped him to introduce more vibrant colours as well as elements of hope and strength in his artwork. With the help of a series of visual exercises, including drawing pictures of himself as a hero or making a so-called vision board with positive affirmations and future goals, John started to view himself more positively. The development of John in terms of therapy was characterized by a gradual change in self-perception. He started to realize that the depressing imagery that he had produced through his previous artwork was not exactly reflective of the kind of person he was, but a manifestation of his depressive mind. Engaging in art as a way of reimagining himself helped John begin developing a more realistic and positive self-image, which in turn went a long way toward improving his self-esteem. This image change enabled him to become stronger and optimistic about his future [30].

### **Critical Analysis**

The case study demonstrates the potential of art therapy to assist people in needing to dispel self-doubt and fostering better self-esteem by allowing them to creatively address negative beliefs and reconsider their value as a person. Engaging in the process of producing artwork that was used as a symbol of strength, hope, and empowerment enabled John to confront his disordered self-perceptions and acquire a more realistic sense of self-worth. This procedure underlines the possibility of art therapy to improve self-perception through positive self-affirmation and self-reflection [31].

## **5.2.2 Case Study 2: Rebuilding Self-Identity After Trauma in a Woman Recovering from Childhood Abuse**

In the second example, a woman called Susan, who had a childhood trauma and suffered from identity confusion and low self-esteem, engaged in art therapy as a way of exploring and rebuilding her sense of self. The abuse that Susan experienced in her childhood made her unable to recognize herself as complete or deserving of love. Her therapist had her perform exercises in which she made artwork that defined various parts of herself, such as her childhood and her present emotional state and what she hopes to become in the future. By incorporating symbolic imagery into her artistic work, Susan started to distinguish the patterns of strength and resilience that she had never acknowledged before. In one of her works, as an example, she has pictured a tree, which has strong roots, growing out of a dry, broken soil, as a symbol of her inner strength and vitality to survive the pain that she had gone through. By talking about these images with her therapist, Susan started to incorporate these symbols of resilience into her own story, and she started to understand that she was not just her trauma. The art became a reflection of her inner reality, and it enabled her to come into contact with her past, but also helped her to realise that she was able to develop and to heal. Susan had accomplished a lot in the reconstruction of her self-identity by the time she finished her art therapy sessions. Our patient could admit that she had gone through trauma without letting this fact comprise her whole notion of self. Using art, Susan managed to take back her own story, and as a result, she started to accept herself and earn self-respect [32].

### **Critical Analysis**

This case study shows how effective art therapy is in helping with identity reconstruction and empowerment, especially for those who are traumatised. The externalisation of her feelings and emotions into artistic form provided Susan with the avenue to not only experience and work through the trauma but also realize her strength and resilience. The graphical interpretation of her experience allowed her to rebuild her self-identity in a positive and empowering manner, which will be discussed in terms of how art therapy can be employed to reform self-perception and allow individuals to reinstate their sense of self following trauma. The presented case studies offer vivid examples of the life-changing potential of art therapy as a tool of emotional intelligence development, as well as self-perception [33]. Art therapy equips a person with the means to interpret and communicate their feelings in a non-verbal manner, leading to higher self-awareness, emotional control, and compassion. Creative expression also enables one to address negative self-perceptions and begin the process of reestablishing self-esteem and worth. All these real-life experiences show that art therapy is not only capable of guiding one through the emotional terrain but also enables them to take control of the process of personal development, which is why it can be considered an extremely effective method of improving emotional awareness as well as self-image [34].

## **5.3 A Special Case Study: Sylvia Plath and Emotional Regulation through Poetry**

### **5.3.1 Background: Sylvia Plath's Life and Emotional Struggles**

Sylvia Plath is among the most renowned and inspiring poets of the 20th century, writing in the confessional style with extreme emotional insight. In her poetry, Plath commonly covered the subject of mental illness, depression, trauma, identity, and the pressures of being a woman in a male-dominated society. Her whole life was marred by serious mental health problems, and she ultimately committed suicide at the age of 30 due to depression.

The poems of Plath are very personal and indicate the inner moods of the author. Her creative process is interconnected with her life experience, in particular with the experience of struggling with a mental illness. Poetry then to Plath was an outlet as well as a way to control her emotions. Emotional regulation can be defined as the capacity to control and alter emotional reactions to situations, mainly stressful or difficult ones. This was indeed the case with Plath as poetry served as a safe medium through which she could vent and sublimate her strong emotions that ranged between worthlessness, anxiety, and despair. Although many of the poems can be seen as a reflection of Plath's battles, one can also see that she tried to gain control over her emotions or at least tried to interpret them [35].

### **5.3.2 Emotional Expression and Catharsis**

The poems of Plath, particularly those that are contained in her book *Ariel*, indicate that she went through a personal crisis. It helped her write when she could not articulate or understand certain feelings. Such as in the case of her poem *Lady Lazarus*, which talks about a strong process of self-regeneration: this is seen as an analogy of the life and death struggle that she underwent in her life. The visuals in the poem are quite

dramatic and depict a theme of coming back to life after death and the ability to reinvent oneself, which is reflective of her battles with mental health and suicidal ideations. Writing down such deep emotional pain and conflict released these internalized feelings, in a certain way, offering her catharsis [36].

### **5.3.3 Self-Awareness and Self-Regulation**

There are also instances of self-awareness within the poems by Plath which help towards emotional control. In other poems like *The Bell Jar*, which is a reflection of her autobiographical attempts at dealing with depression and being institutionalised she paints a very graphic picture of her mental conditions. In writing, Plath was able to analyze the quality of her depression and how it was closing in on her in a suffocating, cyclical manner. This self-understanding enabled her to reduce her emotional experiences to words and images and, in so doing, provided her with some control over them. She was able to externalize her feelings and make some distance between herself and her pain, and regulate and understand some of it. In *Ariel*, Plath does struggle with anger and frustration and despair, but by putting her emotions into a metaphorical framework, such as the picture of a horse charging into an unknown future, she does provide her feelings with a plot, and thus they become dynamic and strong instead of all-consuming. This imagery use demonstrates that the process of writing enabled Plath to cope with severe emotional breakdowns by providing them with a shape and sense.

### **5.3.4 Poetry as a Tool for Coping**

As seen in most poems by Plath, poetry was a form of coping with emotional difficulties experienced by the author. Writing not only enabled her to share her sadness, but also to face and work through her ideas about identity, death and mental illness. To take but one example, *Edge* is a poem written just before her death in which Plath deals with the theme of closure and resolution as well as emotional exhaustion. There is a strange quietness in the poem, where she even thinks of death as the means of getting out of the sea of emotions. Writing the poem was in a way a suicide notes, an ultimate act of her internalized pain, yet it also enabled her to face and to put into words the emotions she had probably been grappling with for years [37].

### **5.3.5 Symbolism and Metaphor as Emotional Regulation**

Symbolism and metaphor were some of the devices that Plath regularly used and that functioned as emotional control mechanisms. As an example, the poet Plath in her poem, *Tulips*, employs the symbol of tulips to demonstrate a sense of isolation, and a way out of the oppressive nature of existence. The tulips that intrude into her hospital room and prevent her from keeping her mind in a vacuum-packed mode symbolize this conflict between the necessity to stay peaceful and the invasion of the surrounding world. This metaphor helps her to project her emotional experiences, making them a tangible image that can be analyzed and pondered. The metaphors helped Plath to speak about the difficult emotional experiences indirectly, thus making her inner world more realistic. This form of creative reframing allowed her to deal with her emotions, at the same time as it allowed her to keep some distance from the rawness of these emotions.

### **5.3.6 Critical Analysis of the Outcomes**

The emotional control seen in the poems of Sylvia Plath displays how emotional release and attribution, as well as handling of otherwise complicated emotional situations, can be achieved through writing. Writing enabled Plath to exteriorize her most painful emotional conflicts, establishing a feeling of control, and providing an understanding that direct emotionalism would have been too devastating. The process of converting her ideas and emotions into a poetic form served as a means to come out of the sea of emotions and provided her with a method to organize her feelings. Nevertheless, although poetry was used as a means of managing emotions, it is evident that writing did not entirely solve the problems experienced by Plath. Her emotional distress still took command of her life, and her poetry, which is otherwise full of powerful ideas, shows a depressive state and thoughts of suicide, which eventually resulted in her tragic death. This leads to an important fact, namely that, although poetry may act as a form of therapeutic expression, it is not necessarily a replacement for other types of mental health care, especially where the emotional pain is too severe. Nevertheless, the example of Sylvia Plath shows that poetry may serve as an effective instrument of emotion management, expression, and introspection. Her poems enabled Plath to face, comprehend, and project her feelings in a manner that enabled her to examine her personality and her inner conflicts. When she experienced emotional turmoil, poetry gave her a voice, which acted as a release and a means of managing and releasing hard feelings. The poems of Sylvia Plath are a revealing case study in emotional management by means of creative expression. It helped her to deal

with her emotions and consider her identity, and gave her some control over the severe psychological pain she had to endure. Although it was not a full solution to her emotional problem, poetry was a good channel that enabled her to release her feelings and make them outside of herself, which eventually led to self-understanding and emotional control. By doing so, the work of Plath illustrates a therapeutic quality of poetry as a tool to explore and handle difficult emotional experiences [38].

## **6. Limitations and Challenges**

### **6.1. Subjectivity and Emotional Responses in Art Therapy**

Among the most important obstacles on the way to combining art therapy, emotional intelligence, and self-perception is the subjectivity of the creative process. An important component of art therapy depends upon an interpretation of the artwork and the emotional reactions it creates. The individuality of the emotional world of a person and the expression of this world through art implies that the therapist, working with art, is faced with a complicated, subjective matter of the art and its sense. As an example, similar artistic expressions can be interpreted extremely differently by different people, so emotional growth or emotional regulation can hardly be objectively measured. What one individual finds empowering and cathartic may be too much or confusing to another. This subjectivity may at times be a challenge to therapists in measuring improvement or coming up with clear therapeutic goals for the clients.

### **6.2. Variations in Receptivity to Art as a Therapeutic Process**

The other restriction is the personal differences in responsiveness to the art therapy. Not all people are ready or willing to be creative, and not all of them can find an approach to the process. Art therapy can be unpleasant or frustrating at first, especially to those people who struggle to access or express their emotions. Individuals who possess poor artistic talents or hold pessimistic ideologies concerning their talents might also be less willing to accept art as a form of therapy. Furthermore, some clients might respond better to verbal therapy or cognitive modalities as opposed to the creative ones. The issue is to adjust the art therapy to the needs of the individual and to make the process interesting and efficient for all people, in spite of their original attitude to artistic self-expression [39].

### **6.3. Measuring Progress and Outcomes**

Lastly, the results of art therapy, particularly those related to emotional intelligence and self-perception, are difficult to measure in themselves. Whereas the results of the traditional therapeutic approach can be based on structured assessment or standardized measures, the results of art therapy are fewer and harder to quantify. The gains achieved during art therapy are sometimes reflected in the slight changes of emotional perception, self-worth and external relationships, and they may be hardly quantified without involving the subjective interpretation. To circumvent this difficulty, art therapists tend to rely on a mixture of qualitative feedback, self-report measures, and observational measures to monitor improvement. The subjective nature of the process, however, means that it is regularly challenging to make distinct, universal conclusions regarding the viability of art therapy. Although art therapy is a rather holistic approach, combining emotional intelligence and self-perception, one should understand its limitations. The subjectivity of the artistic process, in general, and emotional reactions, in particular, create certain difficulties concerning the ability to measure improvements and make sure that clients approach the process fully. Nevertheless, even in the face of these difficulties, art therapy can be considered a potent means of emotional development and self-improvement as it gives a person a chance to explore, express, and manage his or her emotions and improve self-perception. Art therapy can be an in-depth, transformational experience that encourages a whole person to develop when it is adjusted according to the needs of the individual [40].

## **7. Conclusions**

Art therapy is an interesting and complex method of improving emotional intelligence and self-image. The creative process allows individuals to tap into and convey emotions that may otherwise be silent, paving the way to emotional awareness, management, and compassion; each of them being fundamental aspects of emotional intelligence. The provided case studies depict the way art therapy can help people overcome anxiety, develop empathy, and have healthier relationships with others. Similarly, art therapy provides a deeply intuitive point of self-exploration and self-reflection, whereby one can challenge and rebuild their personal story, particularly following trauma or other negative experiences. Through creative expression, clients tend to develop positive self-esteem, enhanced self-perception and an empowered sense of identity. Such a healing power of art enables

people not only to digest complicated emotions but also to build resilience, acceptance, and growth. Though there are still issues related to subjectivity, the receptivity of the clients, and the impossibility to measure the results easily, the therapeutic value of art therapy can be observed in all kinds of populations and emotional issues. Further studies ought to focus on its further implementation in diverse contexts and with diverse populations, making it even more incorporated into the general mental health practice. Art therapy is, therefore, an extraordinary instrument that can be proposed to assist in emotional recovery and therapeutic growth and can play a significant role in overall well-being.

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