

# Characteristics of Artistic Expression in Drawings by Maladjusted Adolescent Students

**Mona Rasol Salman<sup>a</sup>**, <sup>a</sup>Senior Educational Specialist at the Ministry of Education, Al-Rusafa Baghdad, Iraq, Email: [Muna.mast@yahoo.com](mailto:Muna.mast@yahoo.com)

This study aims to examine the lack of social adjustment among intermediate-level male and females through drawings. Descriptive and analytical approaches have been used to collect and examine data from a sample of maladjusted adolescents. Results indicate that maladjusted persons can be detected through drawings as forms of self-expression due to certain characterisations of such drawings. These characteristics include drawing frames, large buildings, sad faces, dark colours and distorted shapes. Lack of people drawn is also an important indicator, as well as students' tendencies to draw in a small corner of the page. Lastly, students' drawing behaviours signify fear, hesitation and lack of self-confidence, as evidenced by frequent use of erasers. The study will review relevant literature and analyse findings from the sampled students to substantiate these claims.

**Key words:** *Artistic expression, drawing, adolescent, maladjusted.*

## **Introduction**

### ***Research question***

What are the characteristics of artistic expression, specifically drawing, among intermediate-aged maladjusted students?

### ***Significance of the research***

This study examines the lack of social adjustment among males and females of intermediate age through their artistic expression, specifically through artwork and drawings. Research and analysis of this important issue will contribute to the treatment and preparation of such individuals, so that social adjustments can be positively developed for the future. The study



aims to provide indicators of these maladjustments in students and coping mechanisms to better deal with such problems.

## **Literature review**

### ***Artistic expression***

The origin of the word “expression”, as stated in the philosophical lexicon, is to “express something with a sign, a word or a picture... It is attributed to the artistic movement in France and Germany in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, where the expressionists [favoured] freedom and expression of full content, which shied away from the reins of previous concepts” (Babett, et al., 2019). A correlation therefore exists between the form of expression, such as symbolism, personality and psychology, and the thinking surrounding expression (Basiony). Artistic expression can be defined as a communication between the individual and the world, or the language of those who cannot otherwise express a desired (Goldie and John, 2018). Musa and Osman concur that artistic expression “attempts to deliver part of self-experience to the outer world, which requires special symbols that change depending on the individual’s emotions” (Micah and Sashi, 2018). This type of expression displays a combination of drama, showing true feelings and the actual experience of feeling (Megan, 1993). Collingwood discusses artistic expression as being linked to emotion in two ways: by reflecting an individual’s emotional state, and by expressing an individual’s feelings specifically surrounding the created form of expression (Wiltsher, 2018). The common elements of drawing represent movement, colour, space, lines, shape and texture.

### ***Stages of the development of artistic expression among adolescents***

Herbet’s early writings between 1854 and 1859 discuss drawing as an important educational element, though it wasn’t until the early 1900s that studies on such drawings began to appear in the literature. Psychologists and educators agree that the act of drawing can function as an appropriate mediator for personal expression and as a means of human communication. Drawings as personal and artistic expression have generated positive advancements in the education field, particularly within special education sectors and for children who cannot speak. Henning discusses the importance of artistic expression in relation to psychological development: “From birth to the end of adolescence, the individual passes through well-known stages of mental and psychological development where his or her sensory perceptions differ from one individual to another; the artistic expression develops by the development of the individual physically and mentally” (Henning, 2018). Khamees similarly states that one of the first characteristics of art is self-expression, and that the engaged individual is much less concerned with portraying facts than he is about sensing his emotions surrounding such facts.

The theory of psychoanalysis suggests that artistic expression relies on the subconscious and is the expression of an individual's repression. This repression stems from the subconscious mind and can be due in part to the complexities of sexual instincts (Fonagy, 2018). Artistic expression can therefore be considered as an important psychological element of development and, in terms of adolescence, can be regarded as the stage of artistic renewal. This involves artwork that closely depicts professional methods, showing specific elements and attention to colour, form and line (Henning, 2018). Drawings created by young people depict a fair amount of these elements and adhere to perspective proportions, objective use of colour and implementing specific colours to portray certain emotions (Sandford and Emma, 2019). A team of Canadian researchers in the field of adolescent drawing have divided the characteristics by age group of adolescence, namely early adolescence, middle adolescence and late adolescence. In early adolescence, the individual attempts to portray photographic realism such as portraits or real images. These individuals also produce a tendency to draw naked bodies and faces (Sandford and Emma, 2019). Middle adolescence begins to focus more on design and abstraction in subjects, portraying subjects of a social nature and displaying attention to detail with the accentuation of colour tones (Roegen, 2016). In late adolescence, however, the teenager's tendency towards abstraction seems to dissipate (Terje, and Kristine, 2018). The late adolescent's drawing is characterised by highly sensitive perception and emotion and speed shown in the realisation of drawn details. These expressions highlight characteristics of the individual artist's personality through physical appearance, mood and emotional symbols.

### ***Projective theory***

Based on the analysis of psychoanalytic theory, projective theory is widely considered as one of the most important theories surrounding human drawings. The word "projection" first appeared in psychology writings in 1894, in which Freud considered it as an unconscious defence process. Freud claimed projection to be a result of an invasion of human motives and desires that cause pain to the individual, to others or to the outside world, and can consequently reduce stress surrounding these invasions (Goldie, 2017). In the field of psychology, projection is interpreted as a means of relieving internal stress and is especially present in adolescents (Gadi and Ask, 2017). Projection is a powerful feeling to which the individual refers without being aware of his or her motives in doing so, categorising it as a subconscious experience (Luyuan and Yong, 2018; Chen, et al., 2014). Projection is also effective in personality studies and is associated with the Freudian method of free cooperation through dreams, as dreams can occur to fulfil a person's needs or desires. Specialist psychologists suggest that drawings are a projective method in dealing with an individual's emotions (Hanzely and Peter, 2019). Various psychological problems like aggression, delinquency and criminality can even be detected through testing projection. As

an individual's projection concept is subject to continuous interaction and exchange between the individual and his or her physical and social environments, the individual's personality is therefore resultant of environment (Cummins, 1999). It can therefore be deduced that unconscious processes could be detected through measuring and analysing aspects of behaviour, an idea based on previous literature in the psychology of projection.

### ***Social adoptive theories***

Social adoptive theories include Freud's theory of psychoanalysis; behavioural theory, in which Saqr Ran emphasises the practice of societal learning, and the theory of Abraham Maslow, in which social needs are confirmed as the psychological components that determine behaviour. Another vital theory in this category is functional structural theory, which supports experimental science and logic. Functional structural theory indicates that the construction of any living organism is a relatively stable arrangement of the relationships between an object's different cells. This theory considers that all society is constructive and posits that this construction can be dissected into parts and components for effective analysis. Talcott Parsons elaborates on this theory, stating that "there is no construction without social functions, no social functions without construction, and there is a high degree of complementarity between them" (Hanzely and Peter, 2019).

Within the scope of this research, the concept of "structure theory" posits an important distinction by philosophers and theorists such as Vladimir, Claude, Levi Strauss, Grimas, Jean Cohn, and others. Structure is an essential part of the content as a whole, and must therefore be analysed accordingly (Peter 1987). Probe describes structure as "the relationship of the elements to each other and the relation of these elements to the whole", while Cronper claims that structure is required to form the whole. Meanwhile, Strauss differentiates between structure, shape and material, stating that material differs from shape and that construction is the content of this form, while shape is its actual outward appearance. Jean Cohen emphasises that material is a mental or ontological element, while form can be viewed as a language and style (Haizhi, et al., 2018).

The Latin origin of the word "structure" is "Stuerc", which means the construction or method of establishing solidarity between parts of a whole or putting parts into one building. Edith Kirzweil defines the word "structure" as a pattern of neoliberal relations. Ozias purports that this pattern is not the idea of Levi Strauss or Michel Foucault but is rather the discourse that connects ethnology and linguistics to medicine, history and archaeology. This pattern, or structure, indicates that the knowledge it involves does not develop through accumulated experience, but rather by the development of frameworks or templates. These templates include all manifestations of the structural subject and can shift and change into different forms. More importantly, structuralism emphasises the significance of internal relations and



the format of knowledge, literature and language. Theorists of structuralism claim that the source of meaning is not the experience of the writer or reader but is instead comprised of processes and oppositions that make up the language. This means that it is the system that governs and determines meaning rather than the individual (Raman Sloan). These systems and rules are resultant of the structural relationship with one another, or the relationship between the parts. A structure can therefore be classified as a group of relationships that follow a specific system and which cannot be isolated from the cognitive material or the reception pattern. The reference is the basic structure on which various structural concepts and their components are based, which is the bond between the significance and the connotation. This relationship with meaning is characterised as either random or arbitrary (Rueili).

The organic theory coined by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) describes a living organism in terms of parts, function and the integration of those parts and functions in animals and social objects. The latter consists of a group of institutions or social systems wherein one system breaks down into different roles and functions (Brilakis and Lucio, 2008). Talcott Parsons discusses that structural theory serves three purposes: 1) carrying out the necessary functions of the social system like adaptive capacity, achievement of objectives and unity and interdependence between the parts; 2) functional requirements of the system, or the distribution of social roles through a common language, and 3) dissolution of a community to its functional elements. It can therefore be concluded that all social systems comprise of goals and aspirations and should form a balance with their integrated parts, which is hereby known as structuralism.

## **Methodology**

**Limitations of the study:** Drawings of students who are not socially adapted for the academic year 2010/2011.

**Approach of the study:** Descriptive analytical approach.

**Study sample:** Intermediate stage 2 students of the third Al-Rusafa education in Baghdad for the academic year 2010/2011.

**Scale of social adjustment:** After reviewing the research, information was collected through a public questionnaire provided to a number of intermediate stage students. This data was organised into 21 paragraphs which were presented to a group of experts to gain further insight into the analysis. Some paragraphs have been deleted or amended in light of these expert opinions. The scale was initially applied to intermediate stage students as a primary application and was re-applied after three weeks to verify stability.

**Statistical methods:** The study employed the scientific statistical bag in which the frequency and equation of the weighted mean and percentage weight of each characteristic was determined. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used in these calculations.

## Results

**Table 1:** Weighted mean and percentage weight of maladjusted adolescent students' drawing characteristics

| Areas and characteristics | Repeated frequently | Fairly repetitive | Not repeated | Weighted average | Centric weight |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------|------------------|----------------|
| <b>Subject vocabulary</b> |                     |                   |              |                  |                |
| People                    | 7                   | 6                 | 2            | 2,333            | 77,778         |
| Buildings and attachments | 9                   | 4                 | 2            | 2,467            | 82,222         |
| Trees and plants          | 10                  | 1                 | 4            | 2,400            | 80,000         |
| Animals                   | 4                   | 3                 | 8            | 1,733            | 57,778         |
| Water areas               | 5                   | 4                 | 6            | 1,933            | 64,444         |
| <b>Persons drawn</b>      |                     |                   |              |                  |                |
| Same sex                  | 12                  | 0                 | 3            | 2,600            | 86,667         |
| Small size                | 11                  | 1                 | 3            | 2,533            | 84,444         |
| Adequate details          | 5                   | 3                 | 7            | 1,867            | 62,222         |
| Smiley face               | 0                   | 0                 | 15           | 1,000            | 33,333         |
| Angry face                | 2                   | 0                 | 13           | 1,267            | 42,222         |
| Normal face               | 0                   | 3                 | 12           | 1,200            | 40,000         |
| Sad face                  | 10                  | 3                 | 2            | 2,533            | 84,444         |
| <b>Subject drawn</b>      |                     |                   |              |                  |                |
| Realistic                 | 0                   | 0                 | 15           | 1,000            | 33,333         |
| Realistic by disposal     | 15                  | 0                 | 0            | 3,000            | 100,000        |
| Imaginary                 | 0                   | 0                 | 15           | 1,000            | 33,333         |
| <b>Movement</b>           |                     |                   |              |                  |                |
| Inhabitant                | 13                  | 1                 | 1            | 2,800            | 93,333         |
| Mobile                    | 0                   | 1                 | 14           | 1,067            | 35,556         |
| <b>Painting technique</b> |                     |                   |              |                  |                |
| Uses engineering tools    | 1                   | 2                 | 12           | 1,267            | 42,222         |
| Uses erasers              | 14                  | 0                 | 1            | 2,867            | 95,556         |
| Hesitation in drawing     | 13                  | 0                 | 2            | 2,733            | 91,111         |
| Bordering the page        | 13                  | 2                 | 0            | 2,867            | 95,556         |

|   |    |   |    |       |        |
|---|----|---|----|-------|--------|
| Central in drawing                            | 2  | 1 | 12 | 1,333 | 44,444 |
| Drawing in one corner                         | 14 | 1 | 0  | 2,933 | 97,778 |
| Nature of lines                               |    |   |    |       |        |
| Curly lines                                   | 13 | 1 | 1  | 2,800 | 93,333 |
| Wavy lines                                    | 0  | 1 | 14 | 1,067 | 35,556 |
| Colour tone of the line                       |    |   |    |       |        |
| Bold  | 1  | 0 | 14 | 1,133 | 37,778 |
| Regular                                       | 0  | 0 | 15 | 1,000 | 33,333 |
| Light   | 14 | 0 | 1  | 2,867 | 95,556 |
| Colours                                       |    |   |    |       |        |
| Red   | 12 | 0 | 3  | 2,600 | 86,667 |
| Yellow  | 13 | 0 | 2  | 2,733 | 91,111 |
| White   | 1  | 2 | 12 | 1,267 | 42,222 |
| Blue  | 2  | 1 | 12 | 1,333 | 44,444 |
| Green   | 0  | 0 | 15 | 1,000 | 33,333 |
| Brown   | 1  | 1 | 13 | 1,200 | 40,000 |
| Black   | 14 | 0 | 1  | 2,867 | 95,556 |
| Indigo  | 1  | 1 | 13 | 1,200 | 40,000 |
| orange  | 13 | 1 | 1  | 2,800 | 93,333 |
| Purple  | 1  | 1 | 13 | 1,200 | 40,000 |
| Other manifestations are drawn                |    |   |    |       |        |
| Draw the sun from the right side of the paper | 12 | 2 | 1  | 2,733 | 91,111 |
| Preparing people                              |    |   |    |       |        |
| 1-2 people                                    | 10 | 2 | 3  | 2,467 | 82,222 |
| 3 or more people                              | 1  | 0 | 14 | 1,333 | 37,778 |
| Perspective                                   | 0  | 0 | 15 | 1,000 | 33,333 |

As depicted in Table 1 above, students' tendencies to draw buildings and building attachments have a high centric weight. This result may be one characteristic that highlights environmental influence on students and consequently on their expressions. Results also show that individuals tend to draw persons of the same sex, a characteristic with a high centric weight of 86,667. Drawings of sad faces also recoded a high centric weight of 84,444, which may indicate that maladjusted individuals regard themselves with negative feelings or perceive themselves as inferior to others. Results also show a 100% centric weight percentage of realistic shapes drawn, which change disposition according to viewpoint or individual style. The characteristic of bordering the page by a frame received a high centric weight of

95,556 and drawing in one corner of the page recorded a very high weight of 97,778. This tendency could perhaps be attributed to lack of self-confidence, devaluation of social value or fear of the surrounding environment. Students' drawing methods were also marked by frequent hesitation and even fear of drawing, with many noted using the eraser frequently. This characteristic supports the idea that many students perceived negative emotions towards themselves and their drawings. Regarding the nature of drawn lines, a high ratio, high frequency and high centric weight of 93,333 for the zigzag lines may further indicate fear and hesitation among maladjusted students. In terms of colour usage, black, orange, yellow and red received high centric weights which is indicative of students' preferences for dark and warm colours. Drawing the sun on the right side of the page received a centric weight of 91,111. Drawing 1-2 people only shows a centric weight of 82,222, while drawings of 3 or more people has a lower weight of 37,778. This last result indicates that students were less inclined to draw groups of people, preferring to limit the number of persons depicted in their drawings.

## **Conclusion**

Results of this study indicate that maladjusted individuals can be detected through analysis of distinct characteristics in their drawings. Among these characteristics is the tendency for individuals to be detached from others, from their immediate surroundings and from society. This is evidenced in students' drawings of frames, representative of the restrictions surrounding their world, and through the large percentage of buildings and building attachments included in drawings. The majority of drawings included only 1-2 persons, with some drawings being absent of people altogether. This indicates students' lack of sociability and possible fear of interacting with others in the real world. Drawing in one small corner of the paper also indicates low self-esteem, dissatisfaction with the self and underestimation of personal ability. These findings are substantiated by the high percentage of sad faces drawn by students. Attempts to escape reality are represented in students' tendencies to change the appearance and disposition of otherwise realistic objects in their drawings. Colour usage indicates students' negative internal emotions, with the dominant colour scheme comprising of dark colours like black and indigo and warm colours like red and orange. Perhaps most notable were students' behaviours while drawing, including frequent use of the eraser. This action demonstrates a lack of courage and self-belief as characterised by repeatedly erasing perceived mistakes. Fear and hesitation are therefore two prominent characteristics of maladjusted adolescent students, as evidenced by the various elements within their drawings. From this comprehensive study, it can be concluded that maladjusted persons can be detected through drawings as modes of artistic and self-expression.



## REFERENCES

- Aragón, O. R. and John, A. B. (2018). “So happy i could shout!” and “so happy i could cry!” Dimorphous expressions represent and communicate motivational aspects of positive emotions. *Cognition and Emotion*, 32(2): 286-302.
- Bartling, B. (2019). Altered gene expression pattern indicates the differential regulation of the immune response system as an important factor in cardiac aging. *Experimental Gerontology*, 117: 13-20.
- Boler, M. (1997). Disciplined emotions: Philosophies of educated feelings. *Educational Theory*, 47(2): 203.
- Brilakis, I. K. and Lucio, S. (2008). Shape-based retrieval of construction site photographs. *Journal of Computing in Civil Engineering*, 22(1): 14-20.
- Chen, L. and Yong, D. (2018). A new failure mode and effects analysis model using Dempster–Shafer evidence theory and grey relational projection method. *Engineering Applications of Artificial Intelligence*, 76: 13-20.
- Cummins, S. J. and Murray, R. (1999). An SPH projection method. *Journal of Computational Physics*, 152(2): 584-607.
- Dutta, A., Filip, H. and Peter, R. (2019). A nonconvex projection method for robust pca. *Proceedings of the AAAI Conference on Artificial Intelligence*, 33.
- Fonagy, P. (2018). *Attachment theory and psychoanalysis*. Routledge.
- Goldie, J. G. S. (2016). Connectivism: A knowledge learning theory for the digital age?. *Medical Teacher*, 38(10): 1064-1069.
- Henning, D. (2018). Psychological development and meaningful faith: when faith works. *Pursuit of Truth. A Journal of Christian Scholarship*, accessed 7.
- Hong, H. (2018). Superwetting polypropylene aerogel supported form-stable phase change materials with extremely high organics loading and enhanced thermal conductivity. *Solar Energy Materials and Solar Cells*, 174: 307-313.
- Liu, H.-C. (2014). Failure mode and effects analysis using D numbers and grey relational projection method. *Expert Systems with Applications*, 41(10): 4670-4679.
- Murphy, M. and Sashi, C. M. (2018). Communication, interactivity, and satisfaction in B2 relationships. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 68: 1-12.



- Ogden, T. and Kristine, A. H. (2018). *Adolescent mental health: Prevention and intervention*. Routledge.
- Quarmby, T., Rachel, S. and Emma, E. (2019). 'I actually used to like PE, but not now': understanding care-experienced young people's (dis) engagement with physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 24(7): 714-726.
- Roeger, G.B. (2016). Experience, Time, and Opportunity: An Exploratory Case Study Regarding The Artistic Journeys of Middle School Adolescents and their Perceptions of the Influence of Environmental Factors on The Development of their Visual Art Talent in Rural Montana Communities.
- Wiltsher, N. (2018). Feeling, emotion and imagination: in defence of Collingwood's expression theory of art. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 26(4): 759-781.
- Zerach, G. and Ask, E. (2017). Polyvictimization and psychological distress in early adolescence: a mediation model of defense mechanisms and coping styles. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*: 0886260517716944.