

# ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

## **Art as social spaces to be: Exploring therapeutic benefits of art therapy with newly immigrated children facing social isolation and loneliness**

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### **Abstract**

Immigrant children tend to be at higher risk for dissatisfactory peer relationships, often experiencing loneliness and isolation emanating from the frustrations related to struggles with negative socialization. Art Therapy counseling sessions were designed to address these children's peer interactions and build a reciprocal therapeutic relationship for deep artistic engagements. The brief art therapy interventions with three Korean children from immigrant families outlined in this article, explored issues related to their acculturative social challenges and meaningful interpersonal interactions. The therapeutic value of their deep artistic engagements sustained through reciprocal therapeutic interactions, helped these young people to cope with social isolation and loneliness, and ultimately to form healthy peer relationships for the future.

### **Keywords**

Immigrant children, social isolation, loneliness, art therapy, reciprocal therapeutic interaction

## **Introduction**

Immigration and acculturation are complex processes of change, and involve a variety of challenges that might increase the risk of developing mental health consequences (Berry 2002). The migration experience necessitates loss of, or changes in, immigrants' familiar surroundings and with significant individuals in their lives (Garcia-Coll and Magnuson 2005; Suarez-Orozco 2005). As peer relationships play a critical role in children's everyday lives, being cutoff from familiar friendships from their native country may lead to social isolation and stress (Berry, Phinney, Sam and Vedder 2006; Diversi and Mecham 2005; Jo 1999; Moon 2008). Children of immigrants represent the fastest-growing section of the US youth population, and it is predicted that by 2050 one in three children will be the child of an immigrant (Callahan and Muller 2013). A new and unfamiliar environment may threaten one's sense of safety, while feelings of anxiety, fear, and social maladjustment are reported among immigrant children (Lee 2013). A recent study showed that immigrant youth are often exposed to the risk of unsatisfactory peer relationships and bullying (Qin, Way and Rana 2008). Negative peer experiences have a significant effect on children's psychological and social well-being (Greene, Way and Pahl 2006), related to depressive symptoms and social anxiety, as well as externalizing problems (Perren and Alsaker 2009; Strohmeier and Spiel 2003). Despite its pervasiveness and importance, limited research to date has examined peer context challenges among immigrant children and the effects on their mental health. This article focuses on three Korean immigrant children's peer-related challenges addressed during art therapy sessions. Additionally, therapist-client interactions during art therapy are explored for the impact of deepening artistic engagement and buffering the some of the effects of social adversity and vulnerability.

## **Acculturative stress related to peer-related challenges**

For children and youths in school, relationships play an important role in sustaining motivation and engagement (Suarez-Orozco and Carhill 2008). Negative or unsatisfactory peer relationships are a major challenge for immigrant children and influence their psychological well-being (Greene et al 2006; Suarez-Orozco 2005). The lack of 'cultural skills' such as language

proficiency, navigating different communication styles, and social cues can be an important factor that may contribute to higher social risk among immigrant children (Strohmeier and Spiel 2003:112). Peer conflicts sometimes arise due to misinterpretation of unfamiliar social cues on part of both the newcomer and their peers from the majority culture. A study of Chinese immigrants in an elementary school showed that peer behaviours, misunderstood as rejection, triggered either aggressive responses or hurt feelings and sadness (Kirova-Petrova and Wu 2002). As one of the main skills immigrants to the US acquire is the ability to speak English, language barriers can result in social isolation and loneliness (Garcia-Coll and Magnuson 2005). Newly immigrated children reported lack of English proficiency as one of the main reasons for peer difficulties and bullying (Qin et al 2008; Von Grünigen, Kochenfelder-Ladd, Perren and Alsaker 2012). Many immigrant children experience ridicule from their peers for having an accent (Garcia-Coll and Magnuson 2005). This can lead to an over-reliance on support from peers from similar cultural backgrounds (Ngo 2004). Difficulty developing supportive friendships is another reason for rejection by peers (Hodges, Malone and Perry 1997). Struggles with 'not fitting in' are often internalized into the young person's sense of self and of control, which can foster feelings of helplessness, frustration, and depression over time (Greene et al 2006). Osterman (2001) also found that being socially excluded and ignored leads to intense feelings of anxiety, depression, sadness, and loneliness. Kirova (2001) indicated that social isolation and loneliness are common experiences among immigrant children, finding that frequent moving from one location to another contributes to feelings of alienation and a poor sense of belonging. With each move, a child needs to negotiate relationships with a new peer group and is vulnerable to peer problems. Distress and negative emotional experiences emanating from immigrant children's dissatisfaction with various aspects of social relationships can create loneliness (Kirova 2001; Strohmeier and Spiel 2003; Xinyin and Chi-Hang 2010). To date, large studies of immigrant children's developmental and psychological adaptation have been conducted (Greene et al, 2006; Suarez-Orozco and Carhill 2008). However, peer adversities and the emotional and social effects on the day-to-day lives of these children have not yet been adequately examined.

### **Social support from mental health practitioners as a potential resource**

A number of studies have reported that immigrant families have deep-seated concerns about the perceived dangers of a new environment, and at the same time, well-functioning social support is closely linked to healthier adjustment to the new environment (Suarez-Orozco 2005). Positive social networks of caring relationships are critical for immigrant children in order to foster the ability to communicate and access available resources. Studies on therapeutic relationships have reported that the optimal interplay between therapist and client influences the client's sense of empowerment and deepens the capacity for new learning (Walker and Rosen 2004). Kirova (2001) reported that adults' genuine interest in a child as a person and authentic empathy are crucial to help alleviate loneliness in young immigrant children. A high-quality adult-child relationship facilitates children's positive social experiences and, eventually, reduces social exclusion (Galanaki and Vassilopoulou 2007). A study of Latino youth reported that feeling 'respected' by adults through positive adult-youth relationships increased feelings of empowerment in coping with isolation in day-to-day experience (Diversi and Mecham 2005: 37). This is specially so for Korean immigrants who have lost the social and emotional support system provided by kin assistance prior to immigration. Here social support from mental health practitioners is a fundamental resource that enhances personal security and mental comfort (Moon 2008). In a study on Korean and Chinese immigrants, Zhou and Kim (2006) similarly found that social resources reflecting the country of origin, such as culturally sensitive services, contribute to immigrant youths' sense of belonging in US culture.

### **Art therapy intervention: creating space for meaningful social interactions**

In the past decade, art therapy studies have addressed the social and emotional needs of immigrant children. A number of studies have supported the notion that art interventions have an effective therapeutic role in immigrants' lives, addressing the complicated experiences of immigration and acculturation (Lee 2013; Linesch, Aceves, Quezada, Trochez and Zuniga

2012; Linesch, Ojeda, Fuster, Moreno and Solis 2014). Art is a powerful medium that allows not only for individual self-expression but also facilitates meaningful social engagements and interchanges (Kirova 2001). Parisian's (2015) study with a Filipino immigrant adolescent supports the notion that therapist and client can develop a connection through joint art-making and nonjudgmental, non-interpretive responses to the client's imagery. These interactions involved reciprocity and connection, paving the way for a therapeutic relationship and leading her client to develop his own art expression with autonomy. Creative expression activities are an effective way of working with immigrant children, allowing them to work through losses and reestablish social ties broken by immigration and acculturation (Rousseau, Lacroix, Bagilishya, and Heusch 2003).

While engaged in a creative activity, there are moments when simply being together creates the foundation from which the joy of engaging with an activity emerges (St. John 2006). First-person accounts of adult experiences in relationships sustained during the creative process showed elevated degrees of creative performance and engagement (Custodero 2005b). Evidence exists that children draw upon social resources in the environment to broaden and deepen their experiences through being with others in positive relationship (Custodero 2005b). A child's *awareness of adults* is defined as:

'any observable interactions that involve prolonged gaze, head turning, or physical movements towards another person. Attempts to engage another person physically or verbally are especially noteworthy' (Custodero 2005a:196).

Young children use the adults in their environment to actualize the emotional qualities of a given task, such as gaining security and approval of participation (Custodero 2005a). Another important role of the art therapist in this regard is the provision of accurate and authentic feedback. An observational study discussed the critical role of adults who confirm or affirm children's interest and skills in facilitating their deeper engagement (St. John 2006). A child's acknowledgement of a therapist's feedback allows the child the opportunity to retain a sense of autonomy as they develop creative skills (St. John 2006).

Awareness of adult feedback based on reciprocal interactions is significant in building the child's deep engagement and subsequent positive experiences.

### **Case vignettes of three immigrant children**

These aspects of children's deep artistic engagements have greatly influenced my work with immigrant children. Additionally, these engagements often emerge and are sustained through reciprocal interactions established between therapist and client. Some examples from my art therapy practice may illustrate these ideas. Recently, I facilitated sessions with immigrant Korean children at a community-based organisation. That organisation offers art therapy services to immigrant children and families from South Korea to address their acculturation and transition processes in the New York metropolitan area. Young clients are referred by school guidance counselors after demonstrating socially withdrawn or aggressive behaviour at school. Assent and consent forms for the study were obtained following approval from the Columbia University's ethics review board. To protect confidentiality, the three young immigrant children were assigned the American pseudonyms of Andrew (9 years), Roy (7 years), and Steve (11 years). The children attended at least five or six sessions in which they were encouraged to use art materials to explore their everyday experiences. The sessions below are reported in the form of case descriptions of one session with each child. These descriptions represent some examples of evidence of how each participant ascribed meaning to his art therapy experiences. Art therapy session notes and my journal entries were analysed for themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). Each data entry was carefully read and manually colour-coded for repetition of words, phrases, ways of thinking, and events, and served as the basis for the construction of the nascent themes (Bogdan and Biklen 2003). Data relevant to each code were further analysed in order to review and form final themes (Tuckett 2005).

### **Art therapy session : descriptions of each participant**

#### **Andrew**

Andrew was a nine-year-old boy whose family immigrated to the US due to the difficulties and stigma his family experienced in Korea resulting from his

father's mental illness. Andrew shared that he spent most of his time alone at home because of his mother's long work hours and father's unavailability. These family issues left Andrew without sufficient physical and emotional supervision from his parents. According to his mother, Andrew did not have close friends and was involved in frequent fighting with peers at school due to his lack of English proficiency and impulsive talking. This was the major concern that led to a referral to the art therapy counseling program. His artistic talent and interest had also been recognized by his mother who reported that he spent most of his free time alone drawing action figures or superheroes, such as Power Rangers characters (Figure 1).



Figure 1: A Power ranger



Figure 2: A Man in a Black Suit

In his second art therapy session, Andrew drew a man in a black suit (Figure 2) with coloured pencils and shared the story of his long-lasting fear and anxiety of being bullied or assaulted. Andrew began drawing the head, but encountered a difficulty in fitting the head and whole body onto one page. In response to his frustration, I offered another piece of paper to Andrew.

Immediately after he and I made eye contact, Andrew combined the two pieces of paper with tape to make a bigger piece of paper on which he could fit the whole figure. Upon completing the drawing, Andrew shared that he was scared of the man because he is a gangster. He then changed the role of the man to a teacher. The shift of the man's character had a significant impact on transforming Andrew's feeling into being safe. He mentioned, "I thought he is[was] a gangster, but actually he is a teacher at college like you...it was strange and surprising."

reported he had been very nervous at the beginning of the session, and shared his fear of being alone and of being bullied by gangsters. Andrew stated that his drawing was based on his own experience of once, when waiting for his mother he saw a giant man in a black suit who he thought was a gangster. However, when his mother returned he observed her talking to the giant man. Andrew realized the man was not in fact a bad guy. He reported his relief and intense enjoyment of the unexpected outcome of remembering that the giant man was not a gangster, but a teacher who helped his students. He also shared his enjoyment of the art therapy time because he was able to complete his drawing rather than being alone at home. Andrew's positive emotions toward the end of the session were evident in my session notes, which clearly contrasted with his fear and insecurity at the beginning of the session.

### **Roy**

Roy was a seven-year-old boy whose family immigrated to the US to look for better financial and educational opportunities. Roy spoke mostly in English, but his language skills were not proficient, so he attended the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) class at school. According to his mother, Roy was referred to the art therapy counseling program by a school guidance counselor due to aggressive and violent peer interactions. His mother also reported that he had experienced frequent placements in time-out at school due to poor anger management and physical fights with peers. Roy shared that he had moved frequently due to unsafe neighbours, and that he lost his friends whenever he changed schools. His artistic enthusiasm and talent had however, been recognized by his parents. Roy's mother brought a

paper sculpture that he had recently built at home, “NASCAR game track” (Figure 3). Roy mentioned, “I do that [art] everyday...I am so happy because I finished this [NASCAR game track] and played with it.”

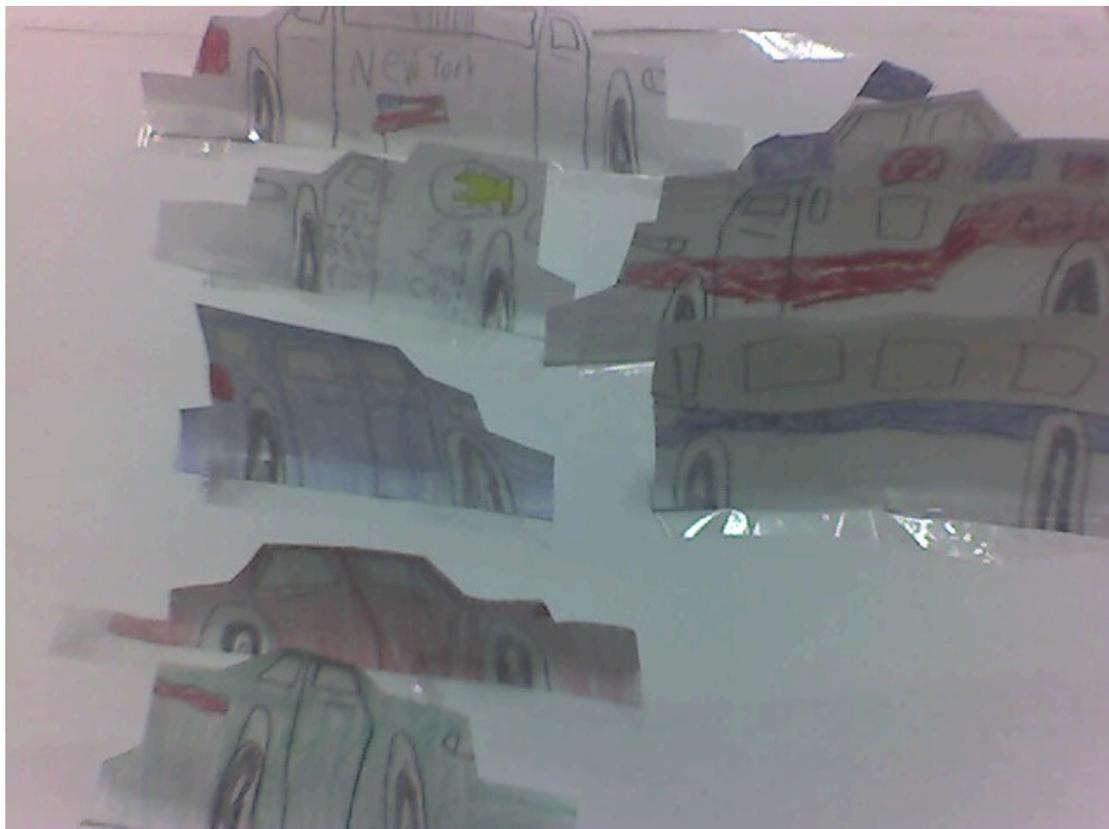


Figure 3: NASCAR game track

At the beginning of the session, Roy initiated building a city with streets and tall buildings out of paper. He was self-directed, saying “Okay. Now, I’ll show you how to make a paper city” and “I know how to do it [make a paper city].” Roy was excited about the idea to build a city; however, he quickly became frustrated about how to start. When asked what he enjoyed the most when he visited Manhattan, Roy was able to recall many tall buildings that he saw in the city. He then began to create one of these buildings. At times he looked for my affirmation and approval, saying, “I could just cut the paper here, right?” “Is this tall [enough], right?” and “Do you know how to make the wall [of the building]? I’ll show you.”

When he completed the building, it had transformed into the Empire State Building in Manhattan (Figure 4). His story began with his fear about a bad

guy in the building. He said, “I was scared [because] there was a bad guy downstairs. He got a weapon like guns. He’s trying to kill us [me and my father] so we called the cop and he got busted.” Roy’s story ended with a feeling of safety after the “bad guy” was sent to jail with the help of a superhero who saved the city from bad villains.



Figure 4: Empire State Building

After the session was finished, Roy shared that he really enjoyed the bad guy being sent to jail with the help of the superhero. He also shared his frustration with being unable to find toys that he likes at any toy stores, but at the same time revealed his excitement at being able to make his own toys. He commented, “I’m feeling better...feel really fun because I made my own toys that I like.” Roy also revealed information about his difficult time maintaining close friendships. He shared, “My friend doesn’t want to come to my house anymore. He thinks my house is too little [small]...Mike [his friend] came to my house once when he was my friend... [I was] annoyed [because] he laughed at me and made fun of me.” Roy also reported that he found making art easy,

which contrasted with the difficulty he experienced getting along with his friends. He said, “making [art is] more fun than [friends], like playing a video game.” Right before Roy was leaving the session, he shared his enthusiasm and strong motivation for art therapy sessions: “When do [am] I gonna come back here?...I wish I could come back [to art therapy] tomorrow when school is finished.”

### **Steve**

Steve, an 11-year-old boy, was not fluent in English and attended an ESOL class at school. His school report card commented on his difficulties in retaining English vocabulary. His mother reported that his schoolteacher was concerned about his difficulty getting along with peers, as he was both bullied and socially withdrawn. It was also reported from his after-school teacher that he played by himself and talked only to teachers, rather than initiating social interaction with his peer group. More importantly, his social isolation had worsened since another Korean-speaking child, who had been close to Steve, left the school. He spoke Korean fluently and he preferred to use Korean during art therapy sessions, as I was fluent in both Korean and English. According to Steve, he spent most of his free time alone and made art when bored at home. He commented, “When I’m alone and I just draw.”



Figure 5: Volcano

In the previous art therapy sessions, Steve initiated making a volcano (Figure 5) with clay of Model Magic. As with the previous session, he mixed all the Model magic colours. The purple colour which resulted from mixing, made it difficult for Steve to decide what to make. His frustration was verbally expressed, “I cannot think of anything [to make] from this colour...I would like to do something different...What else do you have?” His frustration was resolved when I presented him with non-traditional art materials, namely, a bunch of bottle corks. Steve began building a tower with bottle corks (Figure 6).



Figure 6: A Tower

When the tower was finished, he said, “This is a weird-looking tower. I didn’t know what I was going to make, but all of a sudden, it [the tower] reminds me of a Christmas tree. Yeah. It’s more fun.” He began to share his experience of celebrating the previous year’s Christmas holidays with his family. He then used the purple Model Magic to cover the tower and painted it with green acrylic paint. Steve reported his fulfillment from successfully transforming the

tree from a tower (Figure 7). He commented, “Yeah, I’m so happy because I made something out of imagination.” Steve also reported his enjoyment because he had never built a tree before and had the opportunity to try to make something new and different. Steve articulated his earlier frustration and how he had been able to resolve these difficulties. He said, “when I was thinking of what I wanted to make...it was difficult...but you [I] helped me by giving me corks.”



Figure 7: A Christmas Tree

### **Discussion and clinical implications**

Five major themes emerged through these art therapy sessions (Table 1). These themes were: difficult peer relationships and fear of bullying, loneliness and a lack of sense of safety, clients’ awareness of therapist’s undivided attention, reciprocal interactions between client and therapist, and therapist feedback that facilitated their deep artistic engagement. The therapeutic outcomes of deep artistic engagement were also evident in their artwork and narratives (Table 2).

<b>Acculturative Social Challenge Themes</b>		
	<b>Difficult Peer relations</b>	<b>Loneliness/lack of sense of safety</b>
<b>Andrew</b>	<p>No close friends</p> <p>Frequent fighting with peers</p> <p>Lack of English proficiency and impulsive talking</p>	<p>Spend most of time alone at home</p> <p>Lack of physical and emotional supervision from his parents. Long lasting fear and anxiety of being bullied</p>
<b>Roy</b>	<p>Aggressive and violent peer interactions.</p> <p>Lack of English proficiency</p> <p>“My friend doesn’t want to come to my house any more”</p> <p>“He [my friend] laughed at me and made fun of me.”</p>	<p>“I was scared [because] there was a bad guy downstairs.”</p> <p>Spend most of his time alone at home making art or playing video games.</p> <p>Lost close friends due to frequent moves</p>
<b>Steve</b>	<p>Difficulties in retaining English vocabulary</p> <p>Difficulty in getting along with peers; both bullied and socially withdrawn.</p> <p>Plays either by himself and talks to teachers only</p> <p>Limited social interactions with his peer group</p>	<p>More socially withdrawn after his close Korean friend left.</p> <p>Spend most of free time alone</p> <p>Bored at home.</p>

Table 1 Immigrant Children’s Acculturative Social Challenges

<b>Art Therapy Themes: Deep Artistic Engagement</b>			
	<b>Awareness of Adults</b>	<b>Reciprocal Interactions</b>	<b>Therapeutic Outcome</b>
<b>Andrew</b>	<p>Made eye contacts with the therapist</p> <p>Engaging the therapist to telling a story: Transforming fear into being safe</p>	<p>Frustration about not fitting the whole figure and therapist's offering another piece of a paper to combine.</p> <p>Intense enjoyment of the unexpected outcome</p>	<p>Drawing action figures when alone at home.</p> <p>Socializing with the therapist.</p>
<b>Roy</b>	<p>"I'll show you how to make a paper city"</p> <p>"Is this tall [enough], right?,"</p> <p>Looked for the therapist's affirmation and approval.</p> <p>Engaging the therapist to telling a story: Transforming fear into relief and safety.</p>	<p>Frustration about what to make and therapist's feedback to recall one of tall buildings he saw in the city.</p> <p>"Making [art] more fun"</p> <p>" I wish I could come back [here] tomorrow."</p>	<p>Build paper sculpture when alone at home.</p> <p>Art: make his own toys to play with.</p> <p>"Art making easy, unlike his friends."</p>
<b>Steve</b>	<p>Engaging the therapist to telling a story: the previous year's Christmas holidays and developing his idea of making a tree.</p>	<p>Having a difficult time in deciding what to make and therapist offered a cork bottle stoppers.</p> <p>" Yeah, I'm so happy because I made something out of imagination."</p> <p>Fulfillment of successfully completing the tree</p>	<p>" When I'm alone and I just draw."</p> <p>Prefer to speak in Korean with the therapist.</p> <p>Socializing with the therapist</p>

Table 2 Immigrant Children's Deep Artistic Engagement

### ***Difficult peer relationships and fear of being bullied***

All three children faced difficult relationships with peers (Greene et al 2006; Qin et al 2008; Suarez-Orozco 2005). Roy and Steve, who were enrolled in the ESOL class at school, had difficult relationships due to lack of English language skills (Strohmeier and Spiel 2003; Von Grünigen et al 2012). Andrew's lack of English proficiency and impulsive talking and Roy's poor anger management resulted in having no close friends (Hodges et al 1997; Kirova-Petrova and Wu 2002; Perren and Alsaker 2009). These children's social risk of 'not fitting in' was identified through art therapy sessions, including Andrew's deep fear of being bullied, Roy's negative experience of being ridiculed by his friend, and Steve's past bullying experience (Garcia-Coll and Magnuson 2005; Greene et al 2006).

### ***Loneliness and a lack of sense of safety***

These difficult peer relationships affected the children's social and emotional adjustment causing distress, including loneliness, sadness, and intense feelings of anxiety (Kirova 2001; Strohmeier and Spiel 2003; Xinyin and Chi-Hang 2010). Andrew spent most of his time alone due to his father's mental illness and his mother's long hours at work, without sufficient physical and emotional supervision from his parents. Roy also spent most of his time alone at home making art or playing video games. His experience of frequent moves from one location to another after immigration contributed to losing close friends, which made him feel vulnerable, socially isolated, and lonely (Kirova 2001). Steve's socially withdrawn behaviour had become worse since a close Korean-speaking classmate left the school (Ngo 2004). In addition, these young immigrants also experienced deep-seated concerns about the perceived dangers of a new environment (Suarez-Orozco 2005). Andrew's drawing of a man in a black suit revealed his long-lasting fear and anxiety of being attacked by a gangster. As with Roy's situation, his intense anxiety and fear of an unsafe neighbourhood manifested in his story of a bad guy who was sent to jail (Osterman 2001). As such, these young immigrants' social and emotional adversities affected their day-to-day lives.

***Awareness of the therapist: being with others***

In contrast to their social isolation and loneliness in daily life, these young Korean immigrants experienced reciprocal social interactions with the therapist, which facilitated engaged art-making. Awareness of the therapist was demonstrated through engaging the therapist physically or verbally (Custodero 2005a). The therapist presence or 'being with' clients is essential and critical for deep artistic engagement and a flow experience (Custodero 2005b). Social isolation and loneliness are common experiences among immigrant children (Kirova 2001), and the one-on-one therapy setting enabled them to devote their full attention to art-making. This was tremendously important in broadening and deepening their meaningful creative experiences (Custodero 2005b). Andrew articulated that he was aware of the therapist's presence and availability for listening to his story. It is important to note that his story of intense fear of the man in a black suit ended with a sense of safety. He was able to begin feeling safe by engaging with the therapist to actualize the emotional qualities of artistic experiences (Custodero 2005a; Diversi and Mecham 2005). These young clients were also aware of the therapist's presence and engaged me with non-verbal interactions. Andrew gained tremendous emotional security when I supported his decisions by nodding my head or making eye contact (St. John 2006). Roy's awareness of me was apparent in his verbal attempt to engage me saying, "Okay. Now, I'll show you [the therapist] how to make a paper city." These interactions had a strong influence on shaping Roy's perception of his artistic competence toward the given task and further sense of achievement (Custodero 2005a).

***Deep artistic engagement emerged from reciprocal social interaction***

Steve was aware of the therapist and attempted to engage me when he had a difficult time deciding what to make. He said, "I cannot think of anything [to make] from this colour...I would like to do something different...What else do you have?" The therapist's immediate feedback of offering "cork bottle stoppers" facilitated his new artistic interest and skills to build a tower. Steve showed a sense of autonomy to transform the tower into a Christmas tree, something special and personally meaningful, out of daily use of the cork bottle stoppers (St. John 2006). This reciprocal interaction not only helped him

extend his artistic engagement but also experience intense enjoyment generated from discovering something unexpected (Custodero 2005a). Steve mentioned, “Yeah, I’m so happy because I made something out of imagination.” By offering a piece of paper to Andrew, I could demonstrate a reciprocal interaction resulting in solving his artistic frustration and ultimately extending his drawing activity to a deeper level (Custodero 2005a).

### ***Therapeutic outcome of art therapy interventions***

All three young immigrants had opportunities to escape loneliness by socializing with the therapist during art therapy sessions. All had had difficult peer relationships, and social interaction with the therapist was significant for their artistic engagement and enjoyment. As I come from the same cultural background, I was able to provide the children with culturally sensitive services (Zhou and Kim 2006) such as the session with Steve conducted in Korean. These children spent most of their free time alone at home, and through art were able to escape to a more psychologically enjoyable state (Custodero 2005a). Roy mentioned, “making [art is] more fun than [friends]...I wish I could come back [to art therapy] tomorrow when school is finished.” It is important to note that Roy’s motivation for art therapy sessions was not only about building a paper sculpture, but also playing with it demonstrating art-making as a form of friendship.

There are inherent limitations to any research, including cautions regarding generalizability when using a small number of cases and a single ethnic group. These findings may be cautiously applied to similar situations (Merriam, 2009). Despite these limitations, qualitative inquiry pursues in-depth understandings of each case experience (Merriam, 2009) and may be transferable to similar contexts. As such, the findings provide insight into three children with acculturative social challenges, as well as contribute to our knowledge of the therapeutic implications of reciprocal social interactions that may arise in art therapy. This in turn can help children cope with the effects of difficult peer relationships.

## **Conclusion**

This article offered an understanding of how three immigrant children experienced acculturative social challenges of dissatisfactory peer relationships and social isolation in their everyday lives. The study also illustrates how the art therapist-child relationship played a role in facilitating these children's deep engagement in art therapy counseling. The Korean immigrant children in this article struggled with feelings of loneliness, fear, and anxiety, and they struggled with peer relationships due to a lack of cultural skills. However, these case examples also offer evidence of these children's intense enjoyment, fun, and self-motivating behaviours while having a deeply engaged experience in art therapy. More importantly, the reciprocal interactions between art therapist and child contributed to deeper artistic engagements. The children's awareness of the therapist's presence and the therapist's immediate feedback contributed to expanding their artistic activity, thereby validating their decisions and affirming their competence. The mutuality established between art therapist and child played a critical role in these immigrant children's feelings of safety as well as positive social interactions. Art-making was an opportunity to escape from loneliness and boredom to a pleasurable, ultimately positive, and personally meaningful social experience.

## **Biography**

SeungYeon Lee, is an Assistant Professor of Art Therapy and Counseling Program at Post Campus, Long Island University, Brookville, New York. Her research has involved the study of at-risk immigrant children and the role played by the visual arts in their efforts to form new identities; she has published and presented papers on the topic in national and international journals and at conferences.

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