



Case study

A Strong Woman Raise a Self-Willedteen - A case study on the utilization of art for inner expression by a determined adolescent

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Abstract

This case study consists of a combination of multiple intelligences for example; higher intrapersonal skills, creative development, self-concept with self-identity, determination, and passion in achieving desired goals of an early adult named Ms. Ayesha Awan. She is a student and working textile design professional and lives with her three siblings and a mother who is a single parent. According to many theorists and psychologists, a child has to face much trouble in any developmental stage of life who has been brought up by a single parent. However, after observing and interviewing Ayesha, it has been found that though having a stressful and negative childhood, she gained strength from her mother and set goals for herself, and work tremendously to achieve them. This case study can be used as a counseling paradigm for adolescents who face similar social and personal issues.

Keywords: Art as therapy, multiple intelligences, self-identity, cognitive development, emotional intelligence.

Introduction

This is a descriptive type of case study where the person is observed over time and the information is compared to the pre-existing theories presented by the worldwide recognized psychologists and authors to evaluate the observation which will help in counseling and provide a paradigm of self-control and determination. The behavior and enthusiasm in the personality of Ayesha forced me to observe her and decipher the patterns and reasons behind her constant determination. She is introverted yet ambitious and confident enough to handle a complex intrapersonal relationship, as well as accommodating her family, educational and professional issues with her creative intelligence.

Literature review: A triarchic theory of intelligence: The American Psychologist, Robert Sternberg presented *A Triarchic Theory of Intelligence*, he said that; artists and musicians are the first people who come to mind when talking about creative intelligence. He also claimed: "If you're the type to quickly pick up new skills and can devise solutions to abstract open-ended to questions on the fly, it's quite likely you possess creative intelligence"¹. Moreover; he theorized, "Creative intelligence is a combination of creativity, innovation, intuition, perception, and intellectual curiosity." Sternberg, 2018¹ Further, he said, "Learning is one of the only ways we can truly test ourselves. And the better we know our own minds, the more successful we can be"¹.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT): Cognitive Behavioral Therapy "is a treatment to help people to learn how to identify and change destructive or disturbing thought patterns that have a negative influence on behavior and emotions"². It has strategies for identifying negative thoughts, practicing new skills, setting a goal, and problem-solving.

Multiple intelligence: The Harvard Gardner's 9 Theories of multiple intelligence, one of them is "Smart Self" he said; "Intrapersonal intelligence is the capacity to understand oneself, to have an effective working model of oneself-including one's desires, fears, and capacities—and to use such information effectively in regulating one's own life"³. Furthermore, "This type of intelligence can help a person to understand which life goals are important and how to achieve them"³.

Another famous theory is "Picture Smart", he said; "Spatial intelligence features the potential to recognize and manipulate the patterns of wide space, as well as the patterns of more confined areas, such as those of importance to sculptors, surgeons, chess players, graphic artists, or architects"³.

Cognitive development: Jean Piaget's theory was illustrated "From Christine Brain and Priscilla Mukherji, authors of *Understanding Child Psychology*: "In the formal operational stage, actual (concrete) objects are no longer required and mental operations can be undertaken 'in the head' using abstract terms"⁴.

The zone of proximal development: *According to Vygotsky, a Soviet Psychologist; the zone of proximal development is* "[The] distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers"⁵.

Emotional intelligence: The study suggested: "These individuals are aware of their own feelings and those of others. They are open to positive and negative aspects of internal experience, and are able to label them, and when appropriate, communicate them. Such awareness often lead to effective regulation of affect within themselves and others, and so contribute to well-being"⁶.

Methodology

The methodology used for this case study is retrospective because the subject is my student. For the last 3 years, I have been observing her from the first day when she entered my class till the present day, and hence, it is a subjective observation along with the experiential events with her. Based on my observation, I anticipated a result that a child (artist) with a combination of multiple intelligences is exceptionally determined, self-controlled, and passionate about achieving higher goals in life. To find the facts on my observation and assumptions to be correct, I have collected data to support my argument. Multiple methods have been used to collect data namely, direct observation, one-to-one interview with the subject, collected artwork from her childhood, and most importantly from the middle till late adolescent period. The artworks from adolescent time highly reflect her subjective thoughts and emotional relationship with her immediate family. The maturity in artistic development and change in psychological patterns are intelligibly present in her artwork.

Family background information: The subject of my case is Ms. Ayesha Awan, a 21 years old, undergraduate student in the Textile Design Department at the government art university at Rawalpindi, Pakistan. She is the third child among four siblings and solely brought up by a single-mother parent. Her mother belongs to a middle-class family from Wah Cantt, district Taxila, in Punjab Pakistan and the roots of her father go back to the most populous city of Punjab, Pakistan; which is Faisalabad. When Ayesha was four years old, her father left his family due to his extramarital affairs.

Interpersonal relationship with the family: The physical and mentally abusive relationship of the parents badly affected the children. The eldest child was seven years old who witnessed all the violence conducted by his father towards his mother and became a victim as well. This affected his health and resulted in epilepsy. The rest of the children also suffered from a sense of fear very early on in life. However, she has low interpersonal intelligence while dealing with unknown and

known people, but this case is not true when it comes to her family. As narrated by Ayesha;

"When my father frequently beat my mother and elder brother, I with other two brothers used to hide at the back of the door. These incidents made my soul empty...used to stay alone in the room for hours...I don't trust anybody except my mother and myself."

Adjustment to emotional problems: The research illustrated the process of cognitive appraisal of Lazarus in 1993. They narrated:

The growth of cognitive development of the gifted or talented child estimates the emotional problems and finds the solution which copes up in reducing subjective and objective stress. Additionally, the individual's behavior is fully intended to focus on presenting ideal solutions to environmental problems⁷.

Ayesha faced the hardship with full strength and courage under the supportive environment of her mother. She began to explore her artistic abilities from a young age when encountered with loneliness and uneasy emotional stress. The most important aspect to be recognized here is the defense mechanism she used to cater to her emotional and environmental issues. As she said:

"I have been subject of isolation, anxiety, and loneliness from early childhood, my mother is my friend, role model, and supporter, everything of my life... I don't pity her for what she has gone through but love her wholeheartedly. I don't have many friends because I don't trust people but blindly trust my mother only. I started sketching from a very small age, I used drawing, painting as a medium of my inner expression and loneliness".

Combination of multiple intelligences: Ayesha has the following diversified combination of intelligence, through which she can deal with challenging situations comes across in her life. i. From her childhood till early adulthood, she is sensitive to guidance in dynamic interaction with her mother. Furthermore, she has inherited creative artistic skills and expressions from her mother as well. ii. Ayesha's personality has a similarity between Piaget's abstract thinking in formal operational theory and creative intelligence by Sternberg; is that the child finds hypothetical creative solutions to problems and doesn't rely on previous experiences but long-term planning as an important indicator at early adolescence. iii. Additionally, she has high intrapersonal skills to identify her thoughts and channelize them with purposeful patterns in personal and professional life. However, personality with emotional intelligence she communicates her internal feelings through her other skills like spatial and other artistic expressions. As discussed in a study about how an early adult handled their emotions which improves individual and organizational performance⁸.

Ayesha's artworks from childhood: Children having traumatic childhood tend to have difficulty in making healthy friendships, peer to peer challenges, hence, managing social networks increased sensitivity, irritability, and hypervigilance caused by child's behavioral changes⁹.

Art has been utilized as a source of expressing intrusive or unwanted thoughts of distressing flashbacks and memories of traumatic incidents and situations. Ayesha is not new in using her artistic skill for avoidance and distracting herself. Her reply upon asking what role art has played in her life? She said,



Figure-1: My Love for my Mother, She is my Hero.

"I had an emptiness in my life, my mother is a working woman and initially we used to stay with my maternal grandmother, maternal aunts, and uncles...I was a very shy and reticent person...I stayed in the corner of my room for hours and hours...I was 8 years old when I started drawing to distract myself, I drew what fascinated me the most at that time".

Ayesha being anti-social and testing behavior for acceptance in society, worked on the characters that fascinate her the most during her late childhood. A control over colors implications, unified line quality, and a sense of affirmation is seen in her drawing (Figures-2 and 3). She narrated: *"I started reimagining myself as happy, sad and beautiful with characters I drew, I inherited the talent of art from my mother".*



Figure-2: My Obsession for "Tweety".



Figure-3: I as Cinderella.

The regular pencils and colored pencils were the only material available to her for developing her art pieces. Sharp dark lines depict the anger and aggression inside her. According to Burton, J. M., *children experience different feelings even at a very young age, and to understand the use of their lines in drawings, one has to understand their changing ideas, feelings, and behaviors*¹⁰ (Figure-4, 5).



Figure-4: The Superhero in Action.



Figure-5: One day in the forest.

How a child grows in the environment and the change in experience and feelings can also be represented in their artistic skills, the more they desire, the more they perceive, imagine, and form ideas on paper. Some other mature representations of Ayesha's drawings were a curiosity for Disney characters, (Figure-6 and 7), imagining journey about traveling, (Figure-8 and 9), contour lines with intricacy and pattern making can be best visualized in her drawing for the army and Allah Almighty (Figure-10 and 11), a detail in facial expression is observed in her drawing called "Happy Faces" (Figure-12).

Photographic likeness and interpretation in the correctness of the figures are more reflected in Grade 5 to 6 children, the child spent an ample amount of time exploring new ideas on spatial representation¹¹.



Figure-6: My doll.



Figure-7: Strength.



Figure-12: Happy Faces.



Figure-8: Travelling with friends.



Figure- 9: Lake view.



Figure-10: Love for Pakistan Army.



Figure- 11: ALLAH and Me.

Ayesha's artworks during adolescence: When young adolescents have negative or positive emotions, no one can guarantee how it lasts and when it changes; from seconds to minutes or day to day...A shaky sense of identity is reflected in adolescent illustrations...a process of transition from concrete to formal operational development¹⁰.

The following are the narrations and artworks by Ayesha produced in her early till late teenage period, which are referring to the fact that how changing in art style from simple to abstract or conceptual illustrations produced in an exciting and creative dramatic way.

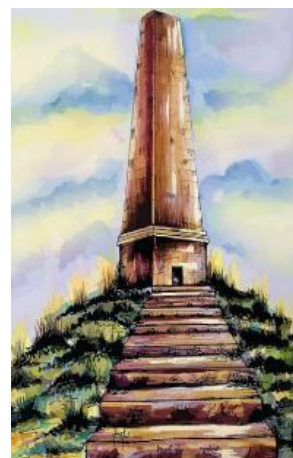


Figure-13: If you want it, work for it.

It's just a monument, but the idea behind is the same like meaning and understanding of future generations (Figure-13).



Figure-14: Kun Fayakun.

Creation of Adam...inspired from Renaissance style, created background with elements of planets of the universe, Allah has created it and we, humans have named it (Figure-14).



Figure-15: A woman is a full circle, within her a power to create, nurture and transform.

I created a visual on how I see my mother (Figure-15)



Figure-16: Hush.

A negative part is always present in every soul, what matters is how you deal with it (Figure-16).



Figure-17: Rules serve no purposes.

I represented a part of myself here, as I am not bothered what's happening outside, but I accept things what I admire and value (Figure-17).



Figure-18: Death-the last sleep? No. it is the final awakening.

I am not scared of death; I visualize the death of my mother, and my brothers. We are five family members, I drew five skulls, I

pray or you can say; I wish that we all die together so no one is left behind to suffer" (Figure-18).



Figure-19: Make every drop of water counts.

Importance of water in the success and technological advancement of life (Figure-19).



Figure-20: How can something so bad feel so good?.

It's my most favorite quick sketch, we can easily addict to anything or anything bad but difficult to leave it, I still wonder how a bad thing gives pleasure to people? (Figure-20).



Figure-21: A was created to create.

My style of admiring the creation of Allah (Figure-21).



Figure-22: A wolf will never be a pet.

Wolf is free...we can capture him nor train him to stay with us...I feel wolf is my spirit animal, I relate my spirit with him...like a wolf is Alpha of his team, I am Alpha of myself (Figure-22).

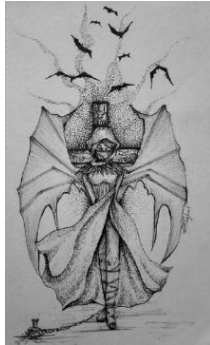


Figure-23: I have my thoughts more tangles than my headphones.

Though I am captured by external sources, I know how to set myself free (Figure-23).



Figure-24: I dream my painting and then I paint my dream.

I love horses; I tried to express the emotions of sorrow and sadness in his eyes (Figure-24).



Figure-25: The Art of simplicity is a puzzle of complexity.

The void inside me is like a puzzle, which can only be solved by me (Figure-25).



Figure-26: Toxic Relationship-stop setting yourself on fire to keep someone else warm.

Besides all positivity and support...I had a toxic relationship with someone...but I am good now (Figure-26).

Findings

i. Art has benefited her when expressing negative and positive thoughts to heal from uneasy and intrusive emotions. ii. She had low interpersonal skills at the academic level, but an improvement is shown when she started a professional life. iii. An improvement in sense of maturity when observing the environment and precise over abstract ideas when expressing in form of art visually and verbally both. iv. A slight transition is observed from being introverted to extroverted. v. A sense of comfort and confidence for maintaining privacy in her personality was highly observed while interviewing.

Conclusion

It has been concluded after a detailed study on Ayesha, though every individual is different, humans have a high potential of strong willpower to handle negative and intrusive emotions if the person himself is ready to accept the fact. Secondly, when a person is given self-confidence and intense support by her immediate authority. She can cross any obstacle in life same as Ayesha's mother given her. Through this pattern, a person can be determined to set priorities and goals for herself and try hard to achieve them. During this process, art has performed a major role in being a true friend to the individual. This case study can be used as a guide for future counseling for the adolescent who has a tragic childhood.

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