

Using Mask Painting To Assess Individual Role Preference In A Society: A Preliminary Research

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Abstract

Mask painting is a form of instrument in art therapy to assess and to be utilized as a therapeutic device. In Jungian psychology, mask reflects human expression that represents individual relations to the environment. Creating a mask is projecting the self into mask form. In children art therapy, the therapist asks children to create masks they want to play for and followed by theatrical play where the children play their roles. In this preliminary research on adolescents, five males and five females participated in mask painting to project how they would prefer to see themselves take social roles in the society. The participants were asked to decorate their masks by using acrylic paints and explained the character of the masks they made. They were interviewed to explain the reasons for choosing the characters and how these characters relate significantly to their social roles. The results indicate that the male participants tended to use more spontaneous brush-strokes and admitted that they preferred to participate socially in a more spontaneous manner; whereas the female participants preferred to be more cautious in taking their social roles, and they painted the masks in more cautious way. Although this research is still in form of preliminary study, it is expected to inspire further research on mask painting in greater population across ethnic and cultures, for interculturality there may be different forms of expressions between genders.

Keywords: mask painting, social roles, adolescence

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence and Identity Formation

In Erikson's psychosocial theory, adolescence is a crucial period. It is a time of transition from childhood to adulthood, occurring from about 12-20 years (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010). Teenagers experience all sorts of changes, whether it's physical, cognitive, or in social aspects. Physical changes, named puberty, in which adolescent develops a primary and secondary sexual characteristics, not to mention *growth spurt* (significant increase in height and weight). In cognitive aspects, the changes include various development in the brain area, such as the prefrontal cortex (the emerging development in that area cause adolescents tend to act impulsively). Other distinct characteristics which might arise, such as egocentrism (the feeling of capable in doing something better than others) and heightened awareness which cause teenagers tendency to feel as if they're being scrutinized (Stangor, 2014).

Another important aspect in adolescence is the alteration in social life. Adolescent must form an individual identity, be it social or occupational identity. Otherwise, they might experience confusion in which role should be taken in the society. So, the essential social agent here is the peers (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010). As stated in Erikson theory, the teenagers' role are to form an identity (the phase is called '*identity versus role confusion*'). Identity formation involves certain process like how one views themselves compared to the significance of others' expectations. When one succeed in creating a coherent identity, it enables the individual to solve a conflict adaptively. Conversely, failing in recognizing one's self leads to what they termed as *role confusion* (Engler, 2009).

In order to develop identity, adolescent can explore all kinds of identity in different social situations. Generally, they display one kind of identity in their home environment and other persona when they gather with their peer groups. Eventually, all those personas will be integrated as one stable self-concept. Peer groups is the important component of adolescence year which allow them to take on different roles, sense acceptance, and belongingness (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). Another part worth mentioning from this whole learning process is the social identity, a part of the self-concept which is gained through one's membership in a group. Social identity is attained by comparing similarities and differences of one's self and others, and by finding meaning of the gender, ethnicity, school, religion, or any other category in which the teenagers identify with (Stangor, 2014).

Mask Painting as Individual Role Preference

Masks have been used for performances, entertainment, disguise, or for protection. This things have exist since ancient times and can also be used in rituals, story-telling, and dramatic role playing. Mask making encourage individual to uncover their personas (Malchiodi, 2010). Mask painting is one of the media used in art therapy as assessment and psychotherapy tool to handle client's problem (Trepall-Wolenzier & Wester, 2002; Janzing, 1998). The aim of using mask as the media is to "distance" the client from the problem their having, hoping they will be more reflective (West, Watts, Trepal, Wester, & Lewis, 2001). Konijn dan Hoorn (2017) also wrote that mask reflects an individual's relation to his/her surrounding. In children's art therapy,

they will be asked to make a mask followed by a theatrical play in accordance to the mask character (Landy, 1985). Landy (1986) wrote four benefits from the use of mask in counselling: (a) to represent dilemmas; (b) to express one's identity in a group; (c) to explore dreams and images; and (d) to express social roles.

Mask making activity is seen as effective in therapy session, one of them which is the use of mask for a client with sexual assault experience in her childhood (Trepall-Wolenzier & Wester, 2002). After attending sessions, the client admitted she felt connected to her emotions and able to get rid of the shame relating to the past experience. Masks have also been integrated in medical world because it supports clients' healing mentally. Through mask making, children whom suffer from chronic disease gain sense of control of environment and conditions that hit them (Driessnack, 2004).

Besides of its application in therapy, mask painting is also used in other context that is not meant to be therapeutic at all. The process involved in mask painting helps educators in developing leadership. They learn to balance process versus product, taking or giving power-responsibilities to students, and study which circumstances are in or out of their control (Jones, 1992). Positive responses emerges from the outbound activity as one of participant felt intimacy in group interaction.

Another interesting aspect from mask is its use in exploring personal identity. Landy (1986) stated mask can be means to reveal one's identity and express social roles. The most recent studies revolving around the theme masks and identity is done by Joseph et al. (2017) and Shapiro et al. (2018). Both utilize mask painting to explore professional identity formation in medical students. From mask painting activity combined with written narrative, researchers are able to detect identity dissonance and help participants in realizing their dissonance thus mask painting also serves as an brief intervention (Joseph et al., 2017). Other researchers is able to summarize a theme from similar research, termed as "reintegration/reclamation of authentic identity" (Shapiro et al., 2018). Both studies received good feedback from their participants because of the chance in attaining new knowledge and self-reflection.

Eventhough both studies is leaned towards professional idnty, it is still inseparable from personal identity. Adolescence is a period where an individual becomes more aware of his/herself and strives to create identity. Peer groups are the key social agent in such times. In addition to personal identity, social identity is also a crucial learning process because some parts of the self-concept is derived by being a member of a certain group (Stangor, 2014). Personal identity is connected to social roles. The peer groups' role in teenage years are to serve as an experiment arena in which adolescents try on many different roles (leader, follower, comedian, and many others). Friendships give chance for adolescent to define situations, sharpened role taking ability, expectations of the roles, and exhibit one's self in accordance to the desired impression (Peterson, 1987; Seltzer, 1982). It is important to explore and define identity or social roles which will be taken by teenagers. In this preelementary research, it is expected mask painting can be utilized as a media to explore how adolescence views theirselves in the roles they are taking.

METHODS

Participant and Research Procedure

The current research uses exploratory approach since no previous studies discussing mask painting and identity role have been found. The participants of the study are five male and five female undergraduate students, enrolling in their second year of college. The age range from 19-20 years and they come from different faculties, such as the communication department, psychology, and engineering faculty. Data collection started in October and ended in November 2018. Participants are given informed consent, then instructed to paint their own mask with acrylic paints. The instruction for the activity is very simple: “Please decorate this mask to your liking” (it is stated in Indonesian language). All participants seemed eager to join the activity so the data collection is free from obstacles and they are very cooperative during the brief interview.

Interview Guidelines

The interviews conducted in the research were rather brief in duration, focusing on the masks’ character and the process behind it. The interviews are done after the mask painting activity to inquire participants’ reflection. The sessions consisted of several questions, such as: “What do you feel upon painting the mask?”; “What images comes to your mind when you are painting the mask?”; or “What character are you portraying in the mask?” Interviews are conducted in Indonesian language. Lastly, participants’ answers are then drawn to conclusion, regarding their role preference in society.

RESULT

Recordings from the interview sessions are transcribed into verbatim. Here below are the participants’ masks followed by summary from each session.

AC (female, 19 years)



Figure 1. AC’s mask.

AC has only realized her ability of visualizing her concept in aesthetic form (in her interview, she made statements like “I just knew that I can paint”) and this realization gave an inspiration of how she has the potential to further develop her creativity in aesthetic way; while she never recognized her hidden talent until she participated in the mask painting activity.

AP (male, 19 years)



Figure 2. AP's mask.

Through mask painting, AP came to a realization of how he enjoys things which people might consider “different”. By means of the activity, he became aware about his inspiration in creating the mask, that is human role (in which he stated he was inspired by an army) or certain characteristic associated with an animal part (“intimidating snout of a shark”). He also realizes thru the painting process he prefers music and theatrical act. He never thought about it and just realized his preference right after he finished painting.

BM (male, 20 years)



Figure 3. BM's mask

From the mask painting, BM showed spontaneity and ‘*present times*’ orientation since he swiftly got inspiration from a horror movie character named “Jigsaw”, which he modified in terms of colors and additional line features. He felt as if there was no insight because the reason behind the chosen character was not well thought out, instead it was just expressed in the form of mask. His result was expected due to the two characters mentioned earlier.

DL (male, 19 years)



Figure 4. DL's mask.

Upon the beginning of painting, DL stated he was inspired by a human boy in a Japanese manga titled “Kobo-Chan”. After participating in the activity, he realized his fondness for realistic matters. Insights are obtained when he attempted to make the color of skin and lips in his mask close to reality as much as possible. Even though technically he felt as if his effort did not produce the colors he wanted, but he gained insight of enjoying realistic things. Even in the interview, he explained that he tried to paint colors and forms according to reality.

DV (male, 19 years)



Figure 5. DV's mask.

Through color selection and painting process, DV enjoyed and was aware of how he presented himself differently in front of different kinds of people. He did not specify what kind of personality and to whom he displayed such traits, but he stated there were particular personality he can show to himself only, close ones, and to people in general. He also obtained a reflection that no matter how he presented his personality to people, there was a part of him which he hid and kept only to himself.

EM (female, 19 years)



Figure 6. EM's mask.

EM, who already loved art activity felt she was given more chance to pour her ability in mask painting activity. By means of personal symbolization and meaning making, she revealed that the contrast theme in her mask described the different kinds of personality she possess. These dominant traits shifted depending on the situation, which are the joyful one, the thinker, and lastly, a more abstract one. The contrast theme in her mask which also reflected her contrast personalities was considered as something that is not necessarily horrible.

JC (female, 19 years)



Figure 7. JC's mask.

Mask painting helped JC to channel her inner artistic desire which she has not been able to release well. From the symbols and explanation, she described how her mind is dominated by gloomy thoughts but she knew behind all those thoughts there were also positive tiny hopes. Facial features in her mask (such as the eye area, lipstick, and beauty spots) reflected femininity and the maturity of a grown woman. Also, she expressed her wish to not reveal emotions too obviously (by omitting one eyebrow and can be seen in the left area of the mask).

PN (female, 19 years)



Figure 8. PN's mask

Mask painting activity helped PN to be aware of her artistic talent and brought out spontaneity which she thought she never have. Both sides of the mask are painted to reflect two opposing personalities in her, which also helped her in recognizing herself better. According to her understanding, there are times where she had to show a 'braver' extrovert side of her and a 'gentler' introvert side of her in front of people.

TV (female, 19 years)



Figure 9. TV's mask.

Based on personal symbolization and selected colors, TV created and presented a 'cheerful' impression in her mask. Bright and various colors (red, yellow, orange, pink, purple, and light green) is personally valued as more outstanding, visually pleasing, and had 'cheerful' meaning. She tried to show joy and happiness just like children whom she considered as being free from pressures in life.

WS (male, 19 years)



Figure 10. WS's mask.

Mask painting encourages WS to do an exploration based on one of his hobby, which was watching horror movies. He combined all sorts of features from several horror films which he thought might present a 'frightening' impression. It seemed as one of his hobbies was successfully transferred to his mask painting.

DISCUSSION

As far as the researchers tracking, studies about mask painting as means to explore individual roles in society have not been found. Earlier studies only explore how mask painting could be utilized as a media to deepen understanding regarding professional identity formation, leadership development, and for therapeutic purpose (Joseph et al., 2017; Shapiro et al., 2018; Jones 1992; Trepall-Wollenzier, 2002). Then it could be said that the current research is the first one to attempt and use mask painting in exploring individual role preference in the society, particularly in adolescents. The finished products of mask painting show different result between male and female adolescents. In male participants, the answers given in interviews are often brief and spontaneous because they referred to current condition. Meanwhile when researchers observed the mask painting process, the males tend to brush spontaneously and did not paint details. The findings are different in female participants because their brush strokes are more carefully done, they took more time to design the mask, and frequently draw wavy lines. Their answers also reflect how

they painted their masks. Whenever interacting socially, the female groups did not show spontaneity and carefully presented themselves in public. An example of these findings would be EM's mask that reflected her three dominant personalities or traits which constantly changed throughout conditions.

Numerous reasons are suspected to underlie the current findings in this research. Meyers-Levy and Loken (2015) reviewed series of findings about how men and women differ in various aspects. The conclusions are men tend to be more self-oriented, while women are other-oriented. In responding to information, women will respond carefully and responsively to negative information. Meanwhile in processing data, men will process information selectively and women do it comprehensively. From researchers' observation in this study, the female adolescents were seen to be more cautious while men often did not plan ahead and showed 'direct' characteristic. Meyers-Levy and Loken (2015) reviews can be used to explain those distinct characteristics in the male and female adolescents, because they found women display more cautiousness or avoidance in behavior. On the contrary, men were found to be more of a risk-taker, assertive, and showed directness.

Diverse findings which can be concluded from the adolescents have been discussed in past literatures. Bakan (1966) wrote about two dimensions, *agentic* and *communal*. Men are categorized in the agentic dimension due to their ruling, assertive, competitive, and dominant traits. Whilst women belong in the communal dimension because they are more friendly, unselfish, caring, and emotionally expressive. Similar theory was brought up by Parsons dan Bales (1955) which stated men were more task-oriented and women were more expressive. Content in the male adolescents' mask displayed 'assertiveness' and '*directness*' characteristic because it is expected they painted what came to their mind right at that time to complete the mask painting activity (the '*task-oriented*' aspect). For instance, DV's inspiration from a Japanese manga character or BM who directly painted a horror movie character when instructed to paint the mask. In female participants, the mask or interviews content showed expression of their emotions. Two examples to portray this finding would be JC's mask which illustrated her gloomy yet hopeful side or TV's mask which emphasized on joy and happiness through colors or symbols. Several findings from female participants are also interesting to discuss about, like how EM and PN both explained how their masks represented the interchanging of personality traits depending on the situations. These could be explained by Wood and Eagly (2012), who pointed out women are sensitive to environmental cues which cause them to modify their behavior in a context-appropriate ways. Though in this study, DV as male participant showed same findings just like EM and PN.

It is worth mentioning that the current research is a preliminary study, so the participant numbers are way too small and therefore cannot be used to generalize to all adolescents. In future studies, researchers hope there will be more additional participants explored to increase the credibility. Also, from this study, it is expected to be continued in exploring different findings that might be found in other populations, ethnicity, and culture due to different individual role expression between genders.

CONCLUSIONS

The following study is conducted to explore different preferences in male and female adolescents regarding their individual role in the society. Result shows that male tend to apply spontaneous brushes and were less oriented to details, which also reflected how they interact in social environment. Answers in the male adolescents' interview sessions reflected spontaneity and present time orientation. Distinct findings are generated from female adolescents, which showed cautiousness, more reflection thinking, and their fondness of applying details in their masks. Brief interviews and observations imply participants' mask painting process also reflected how they interact in social life. For example, female participants tend to paint carefully and give answers that exhibited self expression, followed by cautiousness in acting (like displaying certain personality in certain condition). Surely it is important to note that this research cannot be generalized for all adolescent populations. From this preliminary research, it is expected that other researchers are intrigued to conduct other studies using mask painting as the media, whether to explore similar topics or to study different populations.

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