

# Art Therapy and Psychoanalysis: A Literature Review

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**Abstract:** This study conducted a systematic literature review on the use of art therapy in the psychoanalytic clinic, seeking to understand the existing productions at the intersection of these two fields. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, thirteen articles were analyzed that examined the integration of art therapy in psychoanalysis, highlighting how creative and symbolic expression expands the possibilities of the analytical process by exploring internal conflicts, traumas, and unconscious processes. This approach is particularly valuable in the context of mental illness, where art therapy facilitates the expression of individuals who find it difficult to verbalize their feelings and thoughts. This study hopes to encourage professionals to expand the use of art therapy in the context of the psychoanalytic clinic.

**Key words:** art therapy; psychoanalysis; mental health

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## 1. Introduction

Art therapy is a therapeutic tool that absorbs knowledge from different fields of knowledge, constituting a transdisciplinary practice aimed at rescuing man in his entirety through processes of self-awareness and transformation (Coqueiro, 2010).

Valladares (2005) proposes that art therapy refers to a non-verbal therapeutic process that seeks to help the individual find new meanings, respecting them as a complex and diverse being and encouraging them to externalize their emotions, conflicts and feelings, exploring their subjectivity through various types of activities or materials.

Art inspires people to express themselves, which is beneficial for the mental health of those in psychological distress. In the development of health care, attention to humanization becomes important, so therapy and art merge. "It can be seen, therefore, that activities that use art as a means of expression illustrate constructive action and the production of the new through invention, the display of facts, experiences, acts, information, the recreation of the human being and the universe" (Ferreira, 2013, p. 18).

Over the years, various theoretical currents have explored the importance of art as a therapeutic intervention to assist psychology and psychiatry, in order to rescue the human perspective, promoting the understanding, transformation and structuring of the subject through art (Marra, 2018, n.d.).

Regardless of the specific context in which psychologists work, we understand that they have an ethical commitment to help people recognize themselves as creators, not only as social actors, but also as authors who can participate creatively

in the society of which they are a part. In art therapy, we try to do this at the interface between psychology and art, based on an aesthetic conception of the subject, whose life itself can be transformed into a work of art (Reis, 2014).

Sei (2011) points out that regardless of the approach applied, art therapy helps the individuals to communicate more fluidly with their feelings, which reduces the possibility of them being internalized in a pathological way and becoming objects that promote illness, acting as bridges for dialogue and personal development and subjectivities, thus favoring the process of self-knowledge and a more authentic existence.

This study is a systematic literature review and aims to reflect on the possibilities of art therapy as a tool in the psychoanalytic clinic. Thus, Reis (2014) emphasizes that it is important to reflect on how art can contribute to the psychologist's work, whether in the clinic or in other therapeutic settings, in order to work with (inter)subjectivity in an aesthetic conception of the human.

## **2. Objective**

To carry out a systematic review of the literature on the use of art therapy in the psychoanalytic clinic.

## **3. Method**

This study is a systematic literature review and is organized in order to investigate how art can inspire the subject to express themselves and consequently help with the mental health care of those in psychological distress. We conducted a systematic review of the literature in order to understand the development of health care, attention and humanization of individuals from the fusion of psychoanalysis and art.

Grant and Booth (2009) listed and explained fourteen types of literature reviews, and before we describe the path taken to structure the review carried out in this work, we would like to exemplify four other review possibilities: the rapid review; the critical review; the mapping/systematic map review; and the state-of-the-art review.

The rapid review, according to Grant and Booth (2009), is the research and critical evaluation of existing research related to a political or practical issue, of something that is already known, through systematic review methods.

A critical review aims to demonstrate that the writer has extensively researched the literature and critically assessed its quality. It goes beyond the mere description of identified articles and includes a certain degree of analysis and conceptual innovation. An effective critical review presents, analyses and synthesizes material from a variety of sources. Its product is perhaps most easily identified - usually manifested in a hypothesis or a model, not an answer. The resulting model may be a synthesis of existing models or schools of thought, or it may be a completely new interpretation of existing data (Grant and Booth, 2009).

Mapping reviews allow in-depth systematic literature reviews to be contextualized within the broader literature and gaps in the evidence base to be identified. This type of review has been developed and refined by the Policy and Practice Information and Coordination Centre (PPIC Centre), Institute of Education, London, to map and categorise the existing literature on a particular topic and to identify gaps in the research literature in order to commission additional reviews and/or primary research (Grant and Booth, 2009).

By virtue of its timeliness, a state-of-the-art review can actually report a supposed gap in the evidence that is already being, or has already been addressed, but has not yet been published. A review that offers new perspectives on an issue or highlights areas that need further research (Grant and Booth, 2009).

Gaiotto et al. (2022) organized their research through a rapid review in their article "Addressing the Mental Health Needs of College Students: A Quick Review", aiming to develop strategies to support the adoption of mental health reinforcement policies for college students in the health field, to recommend that university institutions implement these policies and seek to improve the quality of life and mental health of these undergraduate students.

As an example of a critical review, we can cite the study by Schenker and Minayo (2003), entitled: "The Implication of the Family in Drug Abuse: A Critical Review". In this article, the authors investigate the relationship between adolescence, family and drug abuse. They also discuss the importance of reflecting on and inserting the drug addiction symptom into the family and sociocultural context in order to better understand its complexity, since the family is one of the adolescent's primary sources of socialization, along with school and the group of friends. They may or may not be facilitators of drug abuse. As a result, the research showed that in addition to the importance of engaging the family in the treatment of addicts, some studies have already pointed out that extending the engagement to multiple social contexts, such as friends, school, the community and the legal system, also has a direct impact on the treatment of these adolescents who abuse substances.

Oliveira et al (2018), in their article: "RFID in Healthcare: A Systematic Mapping Review", uses a systematic mapping review to list the most relevant journals, countries and keywords with regard to RFID in healthcare. RFID, or Radio Frequency Identification, is a technology for identifying and instantly capturing data with the aim of tracking information throughout the supply chain, thus tracing assets and people. This resource is now also being used in the health sector, not only because it can locate people and equipment in real time, but also because it can access clinical data with precision. This improves the management of assets and patients, as well as the staff involved.

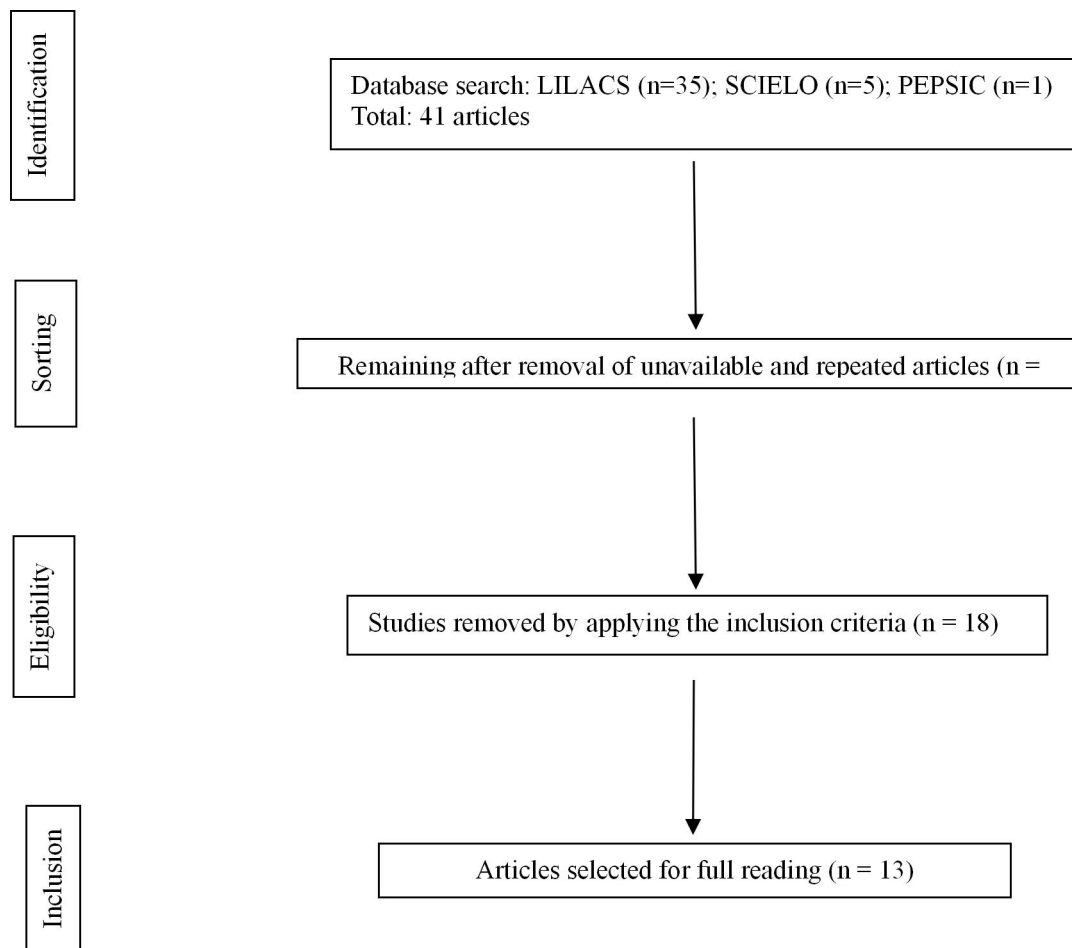
An example of a review of the state of the art can be found in the study "Challenges of Intersectorality in Public Health and Social Assistance Policies: A Review of the State of the Art" by Carmo and Guizardi (2017). The authors discuss the challenges of intersectoral work between public health and social assistance policies, with polysemy, the policy cycle, bureaucracy, social participation and equity guiding the debate using the interpretative analysis method. They also conclude that intersectorality, despite being able to respond to multiple social demands, does not represent the solution to every public management problem. However, they reiterate that its relationship with popular participation can result in greater equity in the policies analyzed.

In order to investigate how art therapy can become a valuable resource for psychoanalytic clinics, we guided our research through a systematic literature review. According to De-la-Torre-Ugarte-Guanilo et al (2011), this is a rigorous approach proposed to: identify studies on a subject in question, applying explicit and systematized search methods; evaluate the quality and validity of these studies, as well as their applicability in the context where the changes will be implemented. In systematic reviews, the "subjects" of the investigation are the primary studies (units of analysis) selected using a systematic and predefined method. Primary studies can be randomized clinical trials, accuracy studies, cohort studies or any other type of study. The choice of study type depends on the question to be answered. Traditionally, a systematic review is a retrospective study (Cordeiro et al, 2007).

To select the material, we used the electronic databases Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO Regional), Periódicos Eletrônicos de Psicologia (PePSIC) and Literatura Latino-Americana e do Caribe em Ciências da Saúde (LILACS) as search tools, with descriptors such as: art therapy, psychoanalysis and mental health. Specifically: 1. art therapy and psychoanalysis; 2. art therapy and mental health.

The inclusion criteria for selecting the articles were: I) Empirical articles; II) Art therapy as a therapeutic device; III) Complete articles available. The exclusion criteria were: I) Theoretical articles; II) Literature review articles.

The articles were selected by reading the titles and abstracts of the works found in the databases, and then the articles that fell within the pre-established parameters were read in full so that the organization and analysis of the data could begin.



Flowchart of the systematic literature review

**Figure 1.** Flowchart of the survey of articles for the systematic literature review on Art Therapy and Psychoanalysis.

#### 4. Results

In this section of the results, we will begin the descriptions of the selected articles. In order to make it easier for readers to understand, we have chosen to present them in table format.

**Table 1.** Characterization and objectives of the selected articles

No.	Author	Year	Title	Objective
1	Lima et al	2013	Art and therapeutic mediation: on a device with adolescents in the school clinic	To build an interdisciplinary clinical device, using art as a therapeutic tool, taking into account the specificities of adolescent problems, especially those related to transference.
2	Jansen et al	2021	Art therapy in the promotion of mental health: an experience report	To report on the experience of using art therapy as a tool for promoting mental health.
3	Freitas et al	2021	Nursing residents and art therapy	To report on the results of art therapy through expressive workshops for resident nurses.
4	Valladare et al	2010	Transforming hospital junk into art therapy sessions in pediatric hospitalization	To carry out the transformation and manipulation of hospital junk in art therapy sessions, with 20 hospitalized children as participants.

No	Author	Year	Title	Objective
5	Caldi et al	2022	Hospital nursing staff's perception of art therapy as a resource for promoting mental health	To understand how art therapy is perceived by hospital nursing staff.
6	Camargo et al	2017	Sewing health: possibilities for integration through making rag dolls in a CAPS for children	To present the activities developed in a psychosocial care center for children (Centro de Atenção Psicossocial - CAPS), in a city in the interior of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, during the summer of 2009.
7	Valladare s et al	2011	Art therapy and the promotion of child development in the context of hospitalization	To evaluate and compare the development of hospitalized children before and after art therapy interventions.
8	Coqueiro et al	2010	Art therapy as a therapeutic device in mental health	To report on the application of art therapy in everyday practice, taking as its object the experience developed in one of the therapeutic groups of the Psychosocial Care Center of the Regional Executive Secretariat III, a municipal body in Fortaleza that works in partnership with the Federal University of Ceará and uses therapeutic devices in the field of Mental Health, as well as promoting awareness and encouraging other professionals in this area and artists to experience experiences of this nature.
9	Valladare s et al	2005	Art therapy in the context of pediatric hospitalization. The development of construction with hospital scrap*	To compare the performance of hospitalized children in three-dimensional making and construction with scrap metal, before and after art therapy intervention.
10	Tavares	2003	The role of art in psychosocial care centers - CAPS	To observe the use of the artistic approach in the care provided at Psychosocial Care Centers (CAPS).
11	Azevedo and Miranda	2011	Therapeutic workshops as a tool for psychosocial rehabilitation: family members' perceptions	To identify family members' perceptions of therapeutic workshops. This was a descriptive, qualitative study carried out in the Psychosocial Care Centers (CAPS) of Natal-RN, between August and September 2007.
12	Depret et al	2020	Health and well-being: art therapy for health professionals working in outpatient care settings	To enable health professionals, in an outpatient care setting, to experience a group art therapy process and to understand the meaning attributed by them to this experience.
13	Franco and Sei	2019	Family secrecy and artistic-expressive resources in family psychotherapy: a theoretical-clinical study	To discuss the use of artistic-expressive resources in psychoanalytic couple and family psychotherapy through a theoretical-clinical study based on the clinical-qualitative method.

**Table 2.** Main results of the articles selected for review

No.	Method	Results
1	Intervention research	The transference, in this type of intervention, allows for negotiation with some forms of transference movement that are often present in the psychoanalytic clinic with adolescents. At the same time, the use of art can be considered a therapeutic mediator capable of respecting these particularities, as well as promoting strategies that are representative of the movement away from primary bonds towards bonds

No.	Method	Results
		of expanded sociability. Through a shared experience of "re-creation", the crossing from the one to the other enables new openings in the act of learning.
2	Experience report	The patients participated effectively in the activity, expressing their feelings, emotions, or recounting some fact from their life and daily life related to their production that meant happiness to them, in order to promote their mental health.
3	A descriptive exploratory study with a qualitative approach, using thematic analysis	The following themes emerged: the hospital environment as a stressful factor; art as a cathartic mechanism in the midst of emotional suffering; looking inwards and finding balance; the use of art as a tool to relax, unwind and acquire new experiences; an expanded concept of health and illness.
4	Exploratory-descriptive with a qualitative approach	Data analysis showed that the manipulation and transformation of hospital scrap facilitated the creative process, as well as the communication and expression of hospitalized children. It was concluded that hospital junk used in art therapy sessions, as well as being easily accessible, contributes to improving the quality of care for sick children.
5	Qualitative descriptive research	Five categories emerged: sharing experiences; awakening to teamwork; providing a moment to relax; learning to listen and speak; and asking for the workshops to continue.
6	Experience report	The making of the puppets not only provided a new rehearsal of the transitional experience, but above all, favored a space without stigmatization, in which the participants were able to recognize themselves as creative subjects capable of acquiring psychological and cultural skills.
7	Descriptive-exploratory research	Their results showed that art therapy interventions were effective in promoting child development.
8	Experience report	The group has been appropriating art languages such as painting, sculpture and production actions for free artistic expression, thus obtaining the adherence and involvement of the subjects involved in the process, bringing about changes in the affective, interpersonal and relational fields.
9	Quantitative approach and quasi-experimental design	Art therapy was effective in terms of the variables used to evaluate the performance of three-dimensional making and construction with hospital scrap for hospitalized children.
10	Exploratory field research	They indicate that art-based activities are used with a view to positive interaction with service users with a view to their psychosocial rehabilitation.
11	Field research	Family members highlighted the positive impact of CAPS on their treatment and life trajectories, improving family harmony. Regarding the therapeutic workshops, they identified flaws and contradictions, denouncing them and pointing out ways to overcome them. They perceive the spaces for participation in CAPS as important ways of accompanying their user family member, as well as mutual growth.
12	Qualitative study	For the professionals, the art therapy workshop was a surprising and rewarding experience, a space for interaction that enabled them to get to know each other better, respect and learn from their colleagues, relax, relieve stress and express their emotions. It was defined as a therapeutic experience, promoting health and well-being, which led to the desire to continue it.
13	Case studies	It was observed that the use of artistic-expressive resources favored the unconscious contents and the development of the therapeutic process.

Note: list of the methods and main results of the scientific articles selected for the project.

## 5. Discussion

Based on the survey carried out in this study, it is possible to understand that the benefits of art therapy can be seen in all the work, regardless of the setting and the audience in which it was applied.

Considering psychoanalysis as a method of investigation and psychotherapy, as classified by Laplanche and Pontalis (1988), attempting to attribute unconscious meaning to everything expressed through imaginative products, dreams, delusions, or failed behaviors, even through the actions and words of the subject, this interpretation is primarily constructed from their free associations. When combined with art therapy, it can further promote the development of connection and empathy, and enhance individual autonomy and self-awareness.

Lima et al (2013) point out that from a psychoanalytic perspective, it is important to consider, in addition to the dimension of the subject and their unconscious desire, everything that is produced around their suffering, and so art therapy can become a tool that facilitates access to this inner world, which through other means, removes the exclusive responsibility of understanding from speech, creating other possibilities for presentation, sharing, and building a qualified and safe listening, since it expands the ways of accessing, investigating, expressing and making people understand.

Thus, under the guidance of an art therapist, art can promote autonomy, creativity, the expression of subjectivity and emotions, the individual's balance with the environment and psychic organization, for example, and can serve as an important self-care tool in the quest not only to express oneself, but also to develop and improve coping skills, resilience and self-knowledge.

Birman (2008) points out that there is a creative trait in the functioning of the psyche that can be seen in oneiric, delusional or symptomatic productions, which sews a relationship between creativity and subjectivity. Lima et al (2013) also reiterate that this process can be favored when associated with analytical practice, since in addition to betting on the subject's creative potential, it provides a clinical device that favors its action. Using the art workshop as a mediated crossing to another place. It also emphasizes that:

In addition to the diversity of artistic expression forms, this certainly means that specific subjective processes, as well as the relationship between materiality and addressing - which works on artists - also limit the parallelism of practice. However, when raising the question of creative behavior, we do not strictly refer to those behaviors that identify artists' works as creative behavior; in our case, it is about the experience of presenting the possibility of artistic creation in a clinical context. (Lima et al., 2013)

In light of the above, Lima et al. (2013) reinforce that, when we think about art therapy applied in contexts aimed at adolescents, it is important to consider that there are two natural and fundamental operations for them: the construction of a place for the other beyond the family; and the transition from private to public addressing. In this way, art provides resources for analyzing their inner world.

In the context of children's hospitalization, Valladares et al. (2005, 2010, 2011) point out that in addition to being a resource for coping with hospitalization and pain, art therapy can also be a tool for stimulating learning, manual skills, forms of expression and contact with children's inner worlds, all of which can be very positive, given that illness and hospitalization lead to cognitive deficits and other suffering. Thus, the authors reinforce that giving new meaning to hospital junk, transforming all this material that could be traumatic into exciting and stimulating objects, can help to alleviate the daily lives of pediatric patients, as well as their psychomotor, cognitive, affective and social development. Using artistic creation as a means of accessing children's inner worlds, giving them a voice and space to communicate, express and elaborate on their experiences of hospitalization.

Valladares et al. (2005) also reiterate that art therapy, as well as working on forms of expression and the construction of subjectivity in children's hospital contexts, promotes well-being and creativity, and playfulness helps to prevent the onset of certain dysfunctions that could directly affect these children's development.

Analyzing children's developmental assessments conducted before and after art therapy interventions, Valladares et al. (2011) observed significant progress both in intrapsychic processes and in the artwork itself, demonstrating gains in behavior, development, and artistic production. In this work, Valladares et al. (2011) analyzed: physical functioning; relationship patterns; mood or general emotional tone; affections; anxieties and fears; and thematic expression, and in all cases the children made gains, from developing greater autonomy to advances in creativity and dynamism, perceived not only in the artistic works but also in their daily personal lives, as they gave tone to their psychic life and broadened their communication, always working on the duality between their inner and outer worlds.

Although the art therapist is a facilitator of the processes, in addition to the benefits of from art therapy proposals in pediatric hospital contexts, it is important to consider and remember that each child is unique, so their engagement and development will fluctuate greatly, because in addition to being unique individuals, they have different worlds and experiences, so they have completely different maturational and personal resources, so it is necessary to respect the individual time and limits of each one (Valladares et al, 2011).

Still on the spectrum of children, but now in the context of the Child and Adolescent Psychosocial Care Centre (CAPSi), Camargo et al. (2017) point out that the art therapy workshop favoured social integration and helped to destigmatize the service. Facilitated by the artistic process, through making rag dolls, the children were able to introduce themselves and get to know the other users, which led to the emergence of various intimate and personal issues that could be worked on in a careful and respectful manner, enabling the service to expand its care and work on mental health in its most diverse aspects, thus bringing more humanity to these children, and removing from them the weight of the stigma of their pathologies.

Considering art therapy as a tool for promoting mental health, Caldi et al. (2022) investigated the benefits perceived by hospital nursing staff from these art workshops, mediated by an art therapist. Among them, in addition to relaxation and stimulating creativity, there was a significant gain in teamwork, since during the activities they were able to talk more about themselves and listen more about each other, thus working on their individual potential, empathy and strengthening the team bond, which meant that the possibility of self-expression generated identification and overcame the pressure inherent in the service.

Still on the subject of mental health care for health professionals in outpatient settings, Depret et al. (2020) reiterate that art therapy can alleviate the psychological suffering to which these professionals are constantly exposed, improving their quality of life and indirectly giving feedback to the population, since it could positively affect the care offered, ensuring greater humanity, dignity and respect for both sides. The study allowed us to give these professionals a voice, to better understand how overburdened they feel, as well as giving them the opportunity to re-signify their experiences and envision new paths and the adoption of new attitudes. These benefits were perceived both through the art therapy workshops and through the exchange with colleagues (Depret et al, 2020).

Freitas et al. (2021) analyzed art therapy applied to nursing residents and, in light of the reports, realized that art related to therapeutic purposes, in addition to promoting expression, facilitates the individual's balance with the environment, which promotes psychic reorganization and the improvement of their ability to be resilient, thus increasing their ability to cope. It thus functions as a care instrument that promotes relaxation, self-expression, the development of creativity, the emergence of subjectivity, empathetic listening and a sense of belonging.



In the most diverse contexts, for the most diverse audiences, the need to implement new mental health care devices is evident, and to this end, Tavares (2003) explains that art therapy offers the possibility of reinvention and the attribution of new meanings, as well as the strengthening of individualities and potentialities in the process of building humanity and citizenship. Thus, the author reiterates that it is clear how much art therapy favors communication with the patient, the promotion of rehabilitation and the resignification of experiences, the attribution of meaning, the expression of emotions and feelings, the construction and strengthening of subjectivity, the promotion of affections and the establishment of a safe space for the creation of new possibilities.

The value of art in rehabilitation lies in the possibility for the patient, as a citizen, to use the healthy aspects of their personality to conquer social spaces. Psychosocial rehabilitation is a process of rebuilding the exercise of citizenship and conquering contractuality in three main scenarios: habitat, social network and work with social value (Tavares, 2003).

Jansen et al. (2021) affirm that the role of art therapy in promoting mental health is directly associated with the rehabilitation of individuals through their demands and interests, thus facilitating the reception, expression of subjectivity, elaboration of creative and productive activities and the dialog itself, since the possibilities of communication and access are being expanded. Reflecting on these opportunities, it is easier to think of humanized care for patients with mental disorders, since their singularities are being considered and taken into account when associated with the specific conditions of their pathologies, thus attributing the necessary importance and attention to the particularities and complexities of each case. (Tavares, 2003).

In line with what the other aforementioned authors have said, Coqueiro et al. (2010) reaffirm that art therapy has allowed users of the mental health network to experience their experiences in a less painful way, since it provides a more respectful contact with the internal world of each individual, resulting in a greater emotional balance, which directly affects the affective, interpersonal and relational fields, increasingly favoring social interaction.

Still thinking about the social reintegration of individuals with mental disorders, Azevedo and Miranda (2011) point out that art therapy can help improve connections, as long as the workshops don't take place in closed work formats, steeped in moral judgments of what is right and wrong, with specific objectives that need to be achieved, since what promotes action, reflection, contact with the inner world of each individual, is the possibility of autonomy, creation, invention and the needs of each user in the context of their subjectivities and particularities arising from their conditions of mental suffering.

In addition to art therapy workshops, Azevedo and Miranda (2011) also propose that the engagement of families in activities is a very important factor in the success of users' social reintegration, and can promote progress or delays in the whole process.

Finally, regardless of the context in which they were applied, the art therapy workshops promoted positive and significant movements, whether in socialization or self-expression. Associated with the analysis process, Franco and Sei (2019) argue that using artistic-expressive resources favors access to other forms of expression beyond words, guided by freer and more spontaneous expressions, facilitating contact with repressed content. In other words, mobilizing visual thinking helps to express the unconscious, which removes the sole responsibility for making oneself known or understood away from words. This can reduce the subject's anxiety, leading them to access their limitations and those of the environment in other ways, and to establish a different relationship with their desires and possibilities, since they will be expanding their repertoire of reflection and self-knowledge.

## 6. Final Considerations

Considering art therapy as a tool of care within the psychoanalytic clinic further expands the possibilities of the analytic process, since its emphasis on creative and symbolic expression complements psychoanalysis by providing non-verbal means for exploring and expressing internal conflicts, traumas, and the dynamics of the unconscious. It thus encourages the recognition of the complexity of each individual's subjective experience.

In the context of mental illness, art therapy can be an important tool for unblocking expression, as mental illness can lead to the silencing of individuals who constantly feel unable to talk about themselves and make themselves understood. In this sense, psychotherapeutic workshops can find ways to unblock these pathways and allow what was previously unable to be said to emerge and find a way to manifest.

It is believed that this literature review can encourage the training of new health professionals and promote the expansion of art therapy in psychoanalytic clinics in order to offer another resource that can guarantee more autonomy and greater possibilities for self-care, helping to develop coping skills, resilience and self-awareness.

Thus, by accessing and associating these two care tools, it is possible to consider that the individual will be able to develop better strategies for appropriating their internal contents, thus expanding their personal repertoires, finding the necessary balance between their internal and external worlds, as well as their psychic organization, becoming increasingly active in their analytical psychotherapeutic process.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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