

WEAVING THE THREADS OF SELF-COMPASSION INTO ART THERAPY PRACTICE

A HEURISTIC ART-BASED INQUIRY

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A Research Paper

in

The Department

of

Creative Arts Therapies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

AUGUST 2021

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This research paper prepared

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Entitled: Weaving the Threads of Self-Compassion into Art Therapy Practice: An Heuristic Art-Based Inquiry

and submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Creative Arts Therapies; Art Therapy Option)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality as approved by the research advisor.

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August, 2021

ABSTRACT

WEAVING THE THREADS OF SELF-COMPASSION INTO ART THERAPY PRACTICE:

AN HEURISTIC ART-BASED INQUIRY

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In this heuristic arts-based research, I applied Moustakas's Six Phases of Heuristic Inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) to investigate how the experience of textile repair and transformation practices can be used to explore and cultivate self-compassion in the artist-researcher life. Self – compassion is a psychological mechanism that allows oneself to effectively regulate and cope with negative emotions, addressing with kindness to their suffering. Cultivation of self-compassion fosters the ability to stay mindful and self-kind in the moment of emotional turbulence, accepting the stress as common human experience (Neff, 2003; Neff & Germer, 2019). In psychotherapy practices, compassion focused intervention aims to help the clients to find and practice the self-compassionate voice, recognise, and create imagery, that fosters compassion in one's life, while accepting and embracing imperfection (Gilbert, 2009). Responding to feelings of discomfort and daily stress as mother, immigrant, and art therapy intern, I have engaged in textile repair and transformation, and through this art practice I welcomed self-compassion in my life. During the restoration sessions, I mindfully examined the damaged garment with an intention to offer compassion, kindness and actively transform those objects into wearable art.

Searching for personal reflection as well as professional insight, I aimed to apprise the benefits of textile repair and transformation as compassion stimulating medium with art therapy clients. Textile repair and transformation is a symbolically rich medium that can connect humans to their past and ancestors. Textile process may provide an expansive tactile and bilateral experience, eliciting creative flow. Moreover, this media is ecologically oriented because it uses upcycled materials, prolonging the life of textile garments. Reuse of textile and reduction of textile waste and consumption is an act of compassion towards our planet and should be integrated in eco minded art therapy practices.

Keywords: Art Therapy, Textile Arts, Fiber Arts, Crafts, Self-Compassion, Mindfulness, Repair, Compassionate Imagery, Self-Regulation

AKNOWLEDGMENTS

I dedicate my research project to my grandmothers *Bluma* and *Mania*, from whom I inherited the love for crafts and textile arts. I am forever grateful to witness them making art and the impact of textile handcraft on their mood and wellbeing. Those became my needle and thread in the process of crafting the research.

Thank you, my love and partner Felix - Antoine, for encouraging me to make art and explore my passion for art therapy. You made for me the best coffee of my life, and I know that with you everything is possible “אני ואתה בשנה את העולם...”

I am thankful to my children Mikaël and Coralia, for being the light in my life, I will do everything to be a better mother for you two... we break and repair together... your compassion is an inspiration for me...

Thank you, my dearest parents, Sasha and Zina, and my older sister Stella who taught me to listen and follow my heart, first and for most and “if you have a headache, take a good shower”

Thank you, to my teacher and research mentor Heather, for helping me to find the right words to express my ideas and especially for dearly believing in me and my project.

Thank you, Bonnie Harnden and all the “awe and gratitude” research group 2019 – 2021, for exploring together how by noticing the beauty we can make our life better, thanks to you I notice the beauty of the broken..

And finally, I am thankful to my friend and fellow art therapy graduate Dani Minuskin, for your enormous help on the project, your attention, ideas, inspiration, and hug... תודה רבה יקרה שלי hug...

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Introduction

In the following paper, I will introduce the research project that illustrates the emotional process of cultivating compassion towards oneself. Through heuristic arts-based research I amplified my understanding of the self-compassion concept from my lived experience and described how one can foster and integrate compassion into their being. As an arts-based practice, I used fiber arts and crafts practices and conducted repair of my clothing articles, intending to generate and sustain self-compassion in my life. Germer and Neff (2019) suggested the following:

Self-compassion emerges from the heart of mindfulness when we meet suffering in our lives. Mindfulness invites us to open to suffering with loving, spacious, awareness. Self-compassion adds “be kind to yourself in the midst of suffering.” Together mindfulness and self-compassion form a state of warm-hearted, connected presence during difficult moments in our life (p. 3).

This research is communicated in my authentic first-generation immigrant voice. Inspired by the Japanese philosophy of *wabi-sabi* (Buetow & Wallis, 2019), I compassionately permitted myself the imperfection of written English as my third language, trusting the reader’s sense of compassion to understand and bear with my ideas, as they are. I am proudly “wearing” and sharing my original voice and trust in the love and kindness between humans. That said, we are all perfectly imperfect, and like repaired clothes, we are beautiful with our stitches and scars exposed to others.

Growing up in a Soviet multigenerational home, I witnessed the textile crafts practice of my grandmother. She wanted to teach me, but I resisted, especially because she would tell me, *every girl should know how*. After our immigration to Israel, she often darned her outdated garments. I recoiled from this activity, finding it ridiculous and embarrassing. We could finally afford new, why is she keeping the *alte zachen* (old things in Yiddish)? Many years later, after she passed away and I immigrated for the second time, to Canada, I also mended a pair of jeans. I was particularly attached to this pair because it was a gift to myself right after the birth of my son, to welcome and be compassionate to the new

“mommy” body. When the jeans started ripping on the knees and weather became colder, I wanted to save it, like my grandmother. I was surprised how soothing and regulating it felt and how my hands intuitively performed the darning. While wearing the mended jeans, I constantly touched the threads on my knees. That tactile experience embedded a lot of calm and kindness. I didn’t feel embarrassed or ashamed for wearing an old outfit, but rather gratified and connected to my grandmother, compassionate to her and my suffering as a woman, immigrant, mother, and craftsperson.

Textile repair and transformation practice has taught me how compassionate self-repair can become a way to cope with emotional discomfort and process negative feelings. Projecting this pain onto the object, I restored and transformed it and through this process I actively repaired and cared for myself. Repaired items carry that special quality that displays a connection to the past, unique beauty, and vulnerability. They are precious as memories of the past and cared for, with love and kindness.

Throughout the text, I will be using several terms referring to the same art practice: textile arts, and fiber arts, and more generally, crafts. The different techniques that I applied in my research can be defined through each one of those terms and I treat all of them all as valuable and important components of art therapy. I refer to these practices in my research as textile/fiber/crafts-based art therapy. Textile-based art therapy is versatile, widely practiced, culturally expressive and suitable for clients whose art therapy goals are to raise self-worth, kindness and acceptance (Leone, 2021; Moon, 2010; Collier, 2011). This research will put more emphasis on to the textile arts and crafts, from the women’s perspective, yet it is important to mention that diverse forms of textile crafts and arts are applied and practiced by individuals of all genders. I was inspired by my past experiences with textile-based reparations and felt compelled to further explore this concept through a heuristic self-inquiry. My past experiences informed my approach to researching the topic. This paper is a portrait of my personal journey into understanding the intricacies of compassionate self-repair.

Literature Review

A heart full of love and compassion is the main source of inner strength, willpower, happiness, and mental tranquility.

– Dalai Lama, *Emotional awareness: Overcoming the obstacles to psychological balance and compassion.*

In this research my intention is to study how the textile repair and transformation can be employed in exploration and cultivation of self-compassion in one's being. The literature review braids together the key components of the research on the concept of self-compassion, and compassion-informed psychotherapy, emphasising the neurobiology of that emotional state and its benefits for one's mental welfare. Additionally, the literature review examines the textile art practices and arts-based therapeutic approaches with clients, together with repair-based artmaking and its integration with the art therapy practice.

Self-Compassion

Bréne Brown (2018) said, "self-compassion is key because when we're able to be gentle with ourselves in the midst of shame, we're more likely to reach out, connect and experience empathy" (p. 136). The concept of self-compassion that is embedded into the research has been primarily drawn from the works of Kristin Neff (2003), Paul Gilbert (2009), and Christopher Germer (2009) – the leading scholars in the field for the past two decades. The word compassion derives from the Latin word *pati* (suffer) and *com* (with), suggesting that compassion is the ability to suffer with someone (Gilbert, 2017). The notion of self-compassion, rooted in Buddhist philosophy and psychology, informs contemporary Western psychotherapy and the conceptualization of mental well-being (Neff, 2003; Gilbert, 2009; 2017; Pardes, 2020).

Neff (2003) refers to self-compassion as awareness of one's suffering and the act of providing kindness to self through profound understanding and acceptance of the pain. An individual who is

integrating self-compassion in their being can acknowledge their suffering, pain, and failure as an integrated part of the human experience without self-judgment (Neff & Germer, 2018). Multiple studies among adults and adolescents supported the positive impact of self-compassion on one's social connections, life satisfaction, mood, and emotional comfort (Neff et al., 2020; Gilbert, 2011; Dana, 2018; Barnard & John, 2011). Compassion is a skill or a state of affect that can be learned and integrated in one's life (Gilbert, 2009, 2017). Brach (2019) emphasized the importance for individuals to be and to stay in the experience of emotional discomfort, allowing oneself to develop curiosity and awareness about themselves while sustaining self-kindness. Self-compassion that has a strong link to emotional well-being (Neff & Lamb, 2009), decreases the level of psychological distress, anxiety, sense of guilt, and shame (Barnard & John, 2011). According to Neff & Lamb (2009),

Higher levels of self-compassion have been associated with greater life satisfaction, social connectedness, self-determination, and self-concept accuracy, as well as greater emotional equanimity when confronting daily life events. Self-compassion has also been associated with less anxiety, depression, rumination, thought suppression, and perfectionism. (p. 2)

A study that was conducted among women with breast cancer identified self-compassion as one of the key elements that impacted their resilience, which manifested in biological, mental, and spiritual balance in a difficult situation (Alizadeh et al., 2018). Another study that explored self-compassion among youth and young adults (Neff & McGehee, 2010) suggested that participants who reported self-compassion identified themselves as more connected, less anxious, and less depressed. Compassion towards oneself promotes not only mental but as also physical health (Alizadeh et al., 2018; Neff & McGehee, 2010).

A study that examined the constitution of the self-concept identified self-compassion as an "ego-focused reactivity" (Neff & Vonk, 2009, p. 23) that contributed significantly to the sense of self-worth, happiness, and well-being in comparison to self-esteem. Differently from self-esteem, which

relies on external outcome and success, self-compassion builds from within and provides more stability and consistency in the level of emotional wellness (Neff & Vonk, 2009).

Self-Compassion and Self-Care for Clinicians

Neff et al. (2020) highlighted the difference between self-compassion and self-care. The authors claimed that self-compassion can be “practiced in the moment of pain” (p. 1545), while self-care requires engagement in activities that are not always accessible for people in moments of stress. Their study has shown that health care professionals who lacked sleep or meditation practice time due to the intensity of their occupation were able to cultivate self-compassion following the compassion-based protocol, which prevented burnout and promoted wellbeing (Neff et al., 2020). According to Leary et al. (2007) self-compassion negatively related to maladaptive emotions regulation, such as rumination and avoidance and positively related to emotion balance strategies such as acceptance and positive thinking. Stress is an embedded experience in one’s living and is unavoidable; resilience is built on the ways individuals cope with stress (Huss & Cwikel, 2015). Resilience is the capacity of human to have a positive reaction and adapt in a stressful situation and “self-compassion can be understood as an important resilience mechanism” (Trompetter, de Kleine, Bohlmeijer, 2017, p. 465), helping individuals to react to stress in adaptive ways and preventing psychopathological and maladaptive reaction to daily life situations.

Components of Self-Compassion

Neff (2003) determined three components of self-compassion: 1) self-kindness – understanding regard towards oneself without judgment, 2) common humanity – acknowledging that the experience is human rather than unique and isolating, and 3) mindfulness – being aware and staying with the painful experience and emotions. According to Rappaport & Kalmanowitz (2014) “mindfulness is a practice of bringing awareness to the present moment with an attitude of acceptance and non-judgment” (p. 24).

The ONEBird model by Williams (2018), integrates mindfulness, self-compassion, and art therapy, “arguing that creative process is inherently suitable as a means of deepening the acquisition of the skills and resources associated with self-compassion” (p. 27). The author claims that the state of mindfulness is a balance that achieved by the objective experience itself and subjective observation of it, those are the two wings of the bird (Williams, 2018, p. 25). Cultivation of mindfulness helps foster self-compassion by reducing rumination, intrusive thoughts, and self-criticism. Individuals who are mindfully aware of themselves learn to accept and cope with negative thoughts rather than ignoring or judging them (Leary et al., 2007; Rappaport & Kalmanowitz, 2014).

The Self-Compassion Scale SCS (Tóth-Király & Neff, 2021) measures self-compassion based on three dimensions: 1) self-kindness – self-judgement, 2) common humanity – self-absorption, and 3) mindfulness – over-identification (p. 2). Mindfulness in relation with over identification suggests that an individual that mindfully accepts their negative feelings can achieve an emotional distance from the negative emotions (Dana, 2018; Brown, 2018). Over identification with the pain and suffering results in emotional engulfment, narrowing one’s view of their situation and potential mental health issues (Barnard & John, 2011; Inwood & Ferrari, 2018). According to Gilbert (2014), the human brain operates on three regulation systems: the drive system that motivates people to achieve goals and acquire goods; threat system that protects and seeks safety; and soothing system that helps to slow down, rest and digest and provide kindness and care. Mentally healthy individuals are capable to alternate between the systems in response to the situation. Cultivation of self-compassion helps individuals regulate between those systems in a way that promotes their mental well-being (Gilbert, 2014).

Compassion-Focused Therapeutic Intervention

Gilbert (2009) suggested that compassion-focused therapy (CFT) is part of the third wave of psychotherapies. The first wave included the psychoanalytic and psychodynamic approaches followed by behavioral therapies and cognitive therapies (CBT). The third wave of psychotherapies highlights skill-

building, and work with consciousness (Inwood & Ferrari, 2018). CFT suggest that people increase their tolerance to suffering and pain, organising their thoughts and behavior in prosocial and emotionally stable fashion (Gilbert, 2014). According to Lurce and Clupton (2021) CFT belongs to the school of positive psychology which fosters positive individual characteristics and hope, exploring the subjective experience of wellness. CFT approach draws on social and developmental psychologies, Buddhist psychology, and neuroscience (Tóth-Király & Neff, 2021; Gilbert, 2009; Williams, 2018). Positive psychology highlights the ways individuals cope with stress and conflict, rather than diagnosing psychopathological traits (Huss & Cwikel, 2015). Gilbert (2017) defines compassion as “a sensitivity to suffering in self and others, with a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it” (p. 73). Self-compassion is a device of positive change in a client’s life and increases the sense of happiness, social connectedness, and motivation (Galili-Weinstock et al., 2019).

From Negative Self-Talk to Positive

Therapeutic intervention that emphasises compassion, has been found effective among clients who suffer from higher levels of self-criticism and shame typically with a history of trauma (Galili-Weinstock et al., 2019; Neff, 2003; Gilbert, 2009). As such clients often use a criticizing tone towards themselves, fostering self-compassion helps them to shift the tone and adopt a more positive and accepting regard towards themselves and towards others (Gilbert, 2009; 2014; 2017; Neff, 2003; Neff & Germer, 2018). The emotional-regulation systems, as described by Gilbert (2014), are related to threat-responses, drive-responses, and the necessity of contentment and soothing for survival. Their balance ensures a healthy brain function and mental health of an individual (as cited in Germer & Siegel, 2012). Emotional suffering and pain appear when the negative inner narrative takes over the emotions, thoughts, and behaviour and the individual over-identifies with this negative experience (Germer & Siegel, 2012). Enhancement of the self-soothing system and compassionate inner voice helps one achieve positive change in life (Inwood & Ferrari, 2018). The focus of CFT prompts the therapeutic

alliance between the client and therapist, helping the client to transform self-criticism into self-kindness, and practicing self-compassion (Gilber, 2009). CFT chair-work intervention had a significant impact on clients with depression, helping them to cultivate self-compassionate voice by situating the self-criticizing and compassionate self-talk in two different chairs (Bell, Montague, Elander & Gilbert, 2020). The intervention helped the clients gain skills and attributes of self-compassion.

Focus of Self-Compassion in Art Therapy

Integration of self-compassion and mindfulness with art therapy allows the client to gain tools and deepen their understanding of self-compassion, finding inner resources for its cultivation (Williams, 2018). Gilbert (2014) states that the image externalization helps the client to acknowledge the pain and integrate it in a compassionate manner, which has a positive impact on the capacity for self-regulation and mental wellness (Williams, 2018; Gilbert, 2009; Lurce & Clupton, 2021).

Compassionate imagery is one of the interventions that helps the client to stimulate the experience of compassionate self, alongside breathing, mindfulness exercises, voice tone, and facial expressions that help regulate the autonomic nervous system (Gilbert, 2009; 2011; 2017). The client creates and explores the image of ideal compassionate self, human or non-human, to clarify one's perception of compassion. Accessing those images is self-southing and helps the client generate compassion in their daily life towards themselves or others. Compassionate imagery "is important because it helps to create 'ideas' in the person's mind about what they might like to aim for" (Gilbert, 2014, p. 29).

Minimol and Bance (2019) conducted an art therapy intervention called, IT'S NOT MY FAULT, with sexually abused teens. The participants were pre-and post-tested on SCS and Trauma-Related Shame Inventory (TRSI). The quantitative and qualitative results showed a significant increase in levels of self-compassion and reduction of trauma-related shame among the participant (Minimol & Bance, 2019). Beaumont (2012) suggested Compassion Oriented Art Therapy program (COAT) with gender-

variant clients, helping the client foster self-acceptance in the transition process. Within CFT model intervention, the therapist provides psychoeducation on the function of the brain in the process of regulation, effects of compassion, and criticism on the mind and body (Germer & Seigal, 2021). Beaumont (2012) proposed that individuals could become compassionate towards themselves and others through a special mindfulness exercise, breathing, and guided imagery. COAT facilitates awareness of uncomfortable emotions through mindfulness, the practice of self-regulation, and practice of self-compassion and integrates guided imagery for art-based therapy (Beaumont, 2012).

The Neuroscience of Self-Compassion

According to Di Bello et al. (2020), compassion is a response to inner sense of safety which reduces the stress reaction and prompts the nervous system regulation. Compassion originates from the mammalian neurosystem of care to their infants (Porges, 2011). Care system activation releases oxytocin, considered to be the “love” hormone, and endorphins, the “feel good” chemicals (Di Bello et al., 2020). The release of oxytocin and endorphins promotes the feeling of safety and reduces stress response (Neff & Germer, 2019). Through self-criticism and shame, we are tapping into the threat-defense system, triggering fight, flight, or freeze response, releasing cortisol and adrenaline in our body (Gilbert, 2009; 2011; 2017). These body responses are helping us to protect against real threat but often it is counterproductive as it is directed towards the self. We are threatened and become a threat to ourselves, producing self-harmful narrative, often resulting in rumination, anxiety, or depression (Dana, 2018). “When we practice self-compassion, we are deactivating the threat-defense system and activating the care system” (Neff & Germer, 2019, p. 32).

Polyvagal Theory and Compassion

Polyvagal theory delineates the neurobiological devices in the core of social interaction and response to stress (Porges, 2017; Dana, 2018; Huss, & Cwikel, 2015). The theory explores how the vagus nerve activity affects the sense of safety and impacts one’s stress response and resilience (Porges, 2017;

Dana, 2018). The autonomic nervous system builds our experience by translating the body sensation and the environment signals into the way we respond and understand the world (Dana, 2018). The polyvagal theory makes a distinction between perception and neuroception (Huss, & Cwikel, 2015). Perception is based on the explicit and objective reality and awareness whereas neuroception is informed by the implicit feelings and triggered by the heart activity, generating our reaction to safety and unsafety even before the brain can process and make sense of the situation (Dana, 2018). The autonomic nervous system reacts to the cues of risk from inside and outside, activating the sympathetic state or dorsal vagal collapse, responding in fight, flight, or freeze (Porges, 2011; Dana, 2018). When the neuroception signals safety, the ventral vagal system achieves balance or parasympathetic mobilisation (Porges, 2011). Emotions are regulated through the interrelation of cognitive and automatic processes, which impacts the traits of emotional expression (Inwood, & Ferrari, 2018).

Polyvagal theory explores how the vagus nerve and its tonal state impact one's emotions, somatic response, behaviour, thoughts, and relationships (Huss, & Cwikel, 2015). "Through a polyvagal lens, we understand that actions are automatic and adaptive, generated by the autonomic nervous system, well below the level of conscious awareness" (Dana, 2018, p. 23). Activation of the vagus nerve helps the body to self-soothe and socially engage (Porges, 2011). Self-compassionate self-talk and touch, releases oxytocin and activates the vagus nerve, which promotes emotional regulation (Neff, 2003; Neff & Germer, 2019). Furthermore, the hormones associated with self-compassion help regulate the heart rate and foster parasympathetic activity and regulates sympathetic activities (Gilbert, 2014). Higher levels of self-compassion help the individual to develop more adaptive response and effective emotional regulation (Dana 2018). People who grew up with neglect and abuse experience a difficulty to accept and comprehend compassion and be compassionate towards oneself and oftentimes towards others. Low scores on the Self-Compassion Scale often appear in high correlation with history of insecure attachment and neglect (Di Bello et al., 2020).

Textile Arts and Crafts

The act of sewing is a process of emotional repair.

– Louise Bourgeois

The word textile is coming from the Latin verb *texere*, meaning to weave, and integrates many fibers: plants-based, animals-based, chemicals and synthetic based materials (Collier, 2011, p. 17). Creation with textiles has been practiced widely by humans for thousands of centuries, employing fibers made of plants, animals, and later synthetics (Collier, 2011). Harrison (2019) states that all humans have a *cloth connection*, as an object that is essential in the human being from the moment of birth to death and throughout human history. Engaging in textile arts and crafts provides a sense of ownership, connecting humans to their history and ancestors, seeing textile crafting as a personal, spiritual, and emotional experience (Collier, 2011).

Hanson (2015) focused in her study on the transgenerational learning of textile craft among First Nation communities in Canada and Chile. She described how women gathered in storytelling circles, where artifacts such as beading and weaving materials, projects in progress, and significant items to the participants, were placed in the middle of the circle. Their narratives presented how the learning of textile art symbolized the story of their tradition, love, healing, resilience, and of sharing. Harrison (2019) noticed that by piercing the fabric first, the maker is violating it but making it whole again, as the needlework continues “just as the surgeon uses stitch to close open wounds to allow them to heal” (p. 418).

Exploring influence of fiber on well-being and mood, Collier (2012) stated that “fiber making successfully changed [the women’s] negative mood, rejuvenated them and allowed them to be absorbed in the activity” (p. 110). The advantage of textile crafts was reported by Talwar (2019) who stated that uniting immigrant women around crafts ignited their creative passion and enhanced their

supportive community where women engaged in cross-cultural dialogue, shared fiber skills, expressed and processed their traumatic memories.

Textile-Based Art Therapy

According to Huss (2015), artmaking allows creative solution for a problem and opens new points of view for client's life. While many examples were found for an impactful, textile-based art therapy, no studies have pointed out the advantage of textile art, in particular textile repair and transformation in relation to cultivation of self-compassion. According to Alber (2014), the use of textiles in art therapy intervention raises the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction by the production of everyday items. The client gains an inner order and enhances the relation to the family traditions. The use of textile arts in art therapy practice with children taught them to cope with difficult family situations and overcome sadness and guilt (Alber, 2014).

Reynolds (2002) investigated the impact of the textile art process among women with unresolved grief, depression, and chronic illness and found that the fiber crafts helped them to cope through bereavement, manage their physical condition, and feel joy and vitality. The author reported that her clients who struggled with chronic illness succeeded to "find a way of locating and communicated a renewed sense of self, a sense of mastery over the stress of the illness, and clarified values and beliefs" (Reynolds, 2002, p. 104).

Cohen (2013) and Segalo (2014) integrated textile narratives in work with women from conflict areas, unveiling their traumatic memories through needlework and providing an opportunity to "re-stitch" their lives. Sewing was found as an effective way of self-regulation while slowing down the body and breath motion (Cohen, 2013; Segalo, 2014). Both studies showed that participants shared their disturbing memories and yet kept calm due to the work with self-soothing material that carries memories and security (Cohen, 2013; Segalo, 2014). The soothing stimulation of the needlework can be

described by Reynolds' (2002) acknowledgement of the repetitive nature of sewing, and how the use of both hands simultaneously created a condition of therapeutic bilateral stimulation.

Baker (2006) described her work through the needlecraft with Bosnian refugees in which the women in the group came together, socialized, shared their memories, honoring their loved ones, their culture and country. Baker (2006) reported that at first the participants experienced memory loss, social isolation, mental and physical disability caused by the war trauma. Engagement with craft and group activities helped the clients to reduce their anxiety, increase concentration, promote self-expression, reduce social isolation, and eventually process their traumatic memories (p. 192).

Garlock (2016) who explored the therapeutic potential of narrative textile work and has shared a personal account of siblings connection through textile, has stated that "fabric has been used, and continues to be used, for expression of identity, social status, secrets, and stories. Many cultures have mastered various weaving, sewing, and fiber techniques that incorporate meaningful symbols that talk about the maker and/or wearer and their origins" (Garlock, 2016, p. 59). Furthermore, Talwar (2019) stated that textile work helped the victims of violence and war to cope with their emotional and physical difficult memories and the accomplishment of the project "became a metaphor of the resilience and strength" (p. 150). As well, Hanania (2018) who works with Syrian refugees, reported that her clients used the traditional embroidery to tell their story, process their trauma and connect to others.

Collier's research (2011) among women who craft has shown that craft making helped women to cope with daily stress by redirecting their attention from intrusive and negative thoughts into the art making. Using culturally appropriate art therapy intervention helped the clients to develop a stronger sense of community in the new country (Hanania, 2018). According to Kapitan (2011), "it is this direct link to the human heart that people who work with traditional arts and handcrafts say is the essence of

their drive to create. It is why we turn fabric scraps into quilts to give comfort and warmth or create scrapbooks that memorialize family life” (p. 94).

The Practice of Repair

Katzenstein-Souza (2016) illustrated how mending practice, which she learned at a young age, played an essential role in her artistic career. She formed a mending circle in the community, stating that “mending seems to touch on something mythic and ancient and yet very universal, practical and of this moment” (Katzenstein-Souza, 2016, p. 463). The artist herself was facing health issues and while recovering she engaged in textile weaving and quilting, accompanied by another artist. At this time, she acknowledged to what extent the slow pace of women creating together is embedded in our nature and can be therapeutic. According to Fontichiaro (2018), Japanese *boro* and Indian *kantha* stitching are examples of slow hand stitch that are used as a practice of fabric repair and enhancement, adding to the fabric a new and charming look. Textile mending is important for sustainable and ecologically ethical being but moreover it is empowering and transformative. In Tanakh and Greek mythology the thread often symbolizes relations, hope, self-reflection, and femininity (Alber, 2014). A broken piece becoming a creative challenge and the repaired object becomes more personal and precious:

Mending creates a visible connection with an object or item of clothing and I like visible mending, as these kinds of marks become a narrative, illustrating how the item has aged.

Looking at old textiles can be like reading them, the marks of stitches or darns like the previous owners’ handwriting, the marks wear a journey through the life of that fabric. (Wellesley-Smith, 2015, p. 138)

The word mend and amend evolved from the French word *amender* meaning cure and revise.

“The idea of repair in our culture is radical, to live our lives where we are slowing down enough to create and mend is part of a social rebellion against mindless consuming and a return to a deeper human connection to each other and the environment” (Katzenstein-Souza, 2016, p. 465).

Similar processes are employed in the Japanese art form *kintsugi*, meaning a “patch with gold” (Wardi-Zonna, 2020). *Kintsugi* celebrates brokenness by repair of old pottery with glue mixed with gold powder, suggesting that the visible scar or hole has a narrative (Meade, 2017). *Kintsugi* practice is based on the idea that broken items can be repaired with love and care, filling the cracks with a strong resin and golden powder, adding to the value of the ceramic piece (Meade, 2017). The brokenness of the item is not hidden but covered with gold.

As a piece of “living philosophy” golden repair suggests redemptive practices through which the damages of history and the tragic mistakes we make with the fragile vessels of both nature and culture might be repaired. Like any genuine process of healing and making whole again, golden repair requires that we first acknowledge and carefully study the exact faults and divisions that damage the shared vessels of our lives. (Meade, 2017, parag. 3)

Kintsugi practice is based on the Japanese philosophy *wabi sabi*, meaning rustic and aging beauty, that celebrates imperfection and simplicity (Buetow & Wallis, 2017). *Kintsugi* is the art practice that makes the item stronger, embracing its scars and symbolising the external and internal repair. Introducing *wabi sabi* within art therapy intervention helps the clients to embrace all the parts of self, narrative, and identity, reduce the need for control and tolerance of self-imperfection (Hurtman & Irwin, 2021). Jones and Girouard (2021) reported that repair workshop participants felt attached to the repaired items, valuing the time and effort they spent on the item transformation as well as the human relations that were related to the item. Repaired items of late relatives are often particularly precious, carrying the texture of the human touch.

Methodology

Art is a microscope which the artist fixes on the secret of his soul, and shows to people these secrets that are common to all.

– Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?*

In the following research I investigated the creative experience of textile-based art practice, in particular the textile repair and transformation inquiring on how such practice can help exploring and cultivating self-compassion. As someone who is interested in the textile art making, I am wondering how such practice can be implemented in art therapy practice with clients, helping the clients generating self – compassion towards oneself. For that enquiry, I gained insight into the process, implementing art-based heuristic research method.

Research Question

How can the experience of textile repair and transformation practices be used to explore and cultivate self-compassion in the artist-researcher? Using an art-based heuristic self-inquiring approach, the current research project aims to explore how an action of repair of clothing article can promote a sense of self-compassion.

Art-Based Ways of Knowing

According to McNiff (1998), arts-based research (ABR) uses artistic expression as a way of investigating the lived experience. In art-based research, art is a way of knowing. Kapitan (2018) states, “the outcomes of ABR are grounded neither in the mathematical language of quantitative research nor in the words of qualitative research but the symbolic language and forms of arts practice” (p. 235). As I am trying to understand the nature of the textile repair, the most valuable exploration can be drawn through the art-making practice primarily and the art expressions that might come out from the experience (McNiff, 1998). According to Leavy (2020), the visual language and imagery do not describe reality as is, but rather explores the created perspective of the artist. For this research project, I chose to apply heuristic art-based inquiry. In this chapter, I will identify both aspects of the selected method and its relevance to the research question. For example, if I see a tree from the window and make a drawing or musical piece of this tree, the art will represent the artist’s perspective of this tree and their relation to reality. In art-based research, we will use this perspective to investigate phenomena and draw

conclusions based on the creation. Arts based research is “a focused, systematic inquiry with the purpose of contributing to a useful body of knowledge” that utilizes “artistic methods for data collation, data analysis, and/or presentation of findings” (Hervey, 2004, p. 183).

Heuristic Self-Inquiry

Heuristic inquiry has been administered in area of clinical psychology, art therapy, education, anthropology, sociology, medicine, counselling, psychotherapy, as well as mathematics and computer science (Kenny, 2012). The experience of the researcher and their process of transformation is the center of the research, acknowledging the researcher’s subjectivity (Brisola & Cury, 2016; Kenny 2012). Moustakas (1990) defined heuristic research as “a process of internal study through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis” (p.2). The word heuristic is related to the Greek word *heuriskein* meaning, to ‘discover’ when the researcher is searching for traits of their own experience (Brisola & Cury, 2016). According to Brisola and Cury (2016) “the purpose of focusing on oneself is not to enclose oneself, but rather to access consciousness searching for the essence of the phenomenon, taking one’s intentionality into account.” (pp 96-97). The word heuristic also related to the word *eureka*, the term that was used by Archimedes when he discovered the phenomena of *buoyancy* by noticing his own body in interaction with water (Moustakas, 1990). The self-investigation requires from the researcher a profound awareness and understanding of the self to be able to observe changes and reactions and draw upon meaningful knowledge (Moustakas, 1990; Kenny, 2012). During the heuristic inquiry process, the researcher’s imagination will engage with the question which will allow them to connect to new areas in themselves and view differently themselves and others (Brisola & Cury, 2016). The main goal of the heuristic research is to pen the knowledge in the parts of self that is *calling* for profound understanding, while the researcher focuses his regard inside themselves, searching for an answer (Sela-Smith, 2002). Schenstead (2012) described the heuristic arts-based research like bicycle riding: you can understand it

in theory, but only in practice you will know what muscles to use and posture to keep, being able to keep the balance and ride (paras. 6). Moustakas (1990) identified a six-step model of heuristic exploration (pp. 10 – 14):

1) *initial engagement* – definition of the theme that the researcher is interested to investigate and is passionate about. In this process, the researcher will unleash their imagination allowing them to be led by intuition and passion

2) *immersion* happens when the researcher “lives with the question” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 11), and everything in his being started to relate to the question; the question is alive in them

3) *incubation* happens when the researcher takes a distance from the question, they are not engaged with it as before, yet the learning is expanding

4) *illumination* happens when there is a breakthrough of the knowledge and is accessible from the conscious level. At this level, the researcher understands better the meanings which allow corrections and adjusting the understanding around the question

5) *explication* appears when the researcher is ready to engage in the process of explication of the details – the themes or phenomena – achieving a better understanding of the key elements of the question

6) *creative synthesis* is the final stage of the heuristic method and it is when the researcher owns the essential knowledge and allows themselves to move beyond the question to its expansion making the connection from the self to the world.

The Creative Process

I have been collecting my personal broken articles of clothing for a couple of years now. I have already conducted some repair in the past and was awaiting for the right time to reengage in the restoration and upgrade my closet. Afterwards, I conducted several textile repairs and transformation sessions over two months, when I felt some emotional discomfort and dysregulation. The item of repair

was selected before the session, based on the emotions and intentions of that day. I described every item's story and the "narrative" of the damage before the repair and took images of the damage. Before, during and after every session, I documented the data in the digital noted journal, video and photography reflecting on the process and noticing the thoughts of self-compassion. I explored and documented the process of cultivation of self-compassion between the session and used that data as well in findings.

Data Collection and Analysis

Within art-based research heuristic inquiry, I collected varied types of data that can help in the investigation of the research question. As an art-based research process is practiced, I will engage in a particular artmaking as proposed by the research question and use the process notes and documentation as raw data for this project. During the creation of the textile repair, I will engage in journaling documentation and writing of the process. Wix (2010) encourages artists to expand their artmaking experience by writing during creation, noticing how the image appearing, the body sensations, memories, and symbols. The project will be documented with video and stills photography to illustrate the creation process. These documents will be included in the data analysis.

For the data analysis, I used some of the techniques for qualitative research data collection with adaptation to heuristic arts-based research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I conducted eleven repair sessions for the period of three months. Every session was documented in the digital journal and images and at the late research stages, Instagram blog. All the data was organised in a digital file by date, including the journal, and images. After organizing the data, I read and looked through all the sessions, and captured the general ideas and impressions, extracting the main themes that stood out in the creation process. The data was coded by subgroups of themes and identified by three types: expected codes, surprising codes, and unusual codes. The codes will be titled based on the language that I used in the writing process.

Ethical Considerations

According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), ethical considerations applied by the researcher in all the stages of the study: before, during the study, and dissemination of the study, as well as data storing. For heuristic art-based research I identify an intervention that, based on the findings of a personal inquiry, can potentially be applicable to art therapy clients. As the only participant, I aimed to present all the relevant data drawn from my individual experience while avoiding disclosing only the positive results or falsifying data. The data relates only to my own experience and doesn't include other people's experiences. Throughout the creative process, I have integrated self-care practices such as proper sleep, rest, nutrition and meditation, to ensure the quality of the collected data and findings.

Validity and Reliability

McNiff (2008) stated "As with science, the validity of art-based knowing and inquiry is ultimately determined by the community of believers who experience firsthand what the arts can do to further human understanding" (p. 38). In qualitative research, the validity of results presents by the authenticity of the research findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and the accuracy in the description of the experience of the researcher (Moustakas, 1990). Through reflexivity, authenticity, sincerity, and research supervision I was able to acknowledge my subjectivity as the researcher and participant at ones and draw conclusions and recommendations for future investigation. Raw data and relevant materials that were produced within the research were documented and presented within the project (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Collection: Process and Analysis

Based on the phases model of heuristic research by Moustakas (1990) I will describe in the following chapter the research process, highlighting the most pertinent moments of the art-based process. The quotes from my journal will be integrated into the text and accompanied by images.

Phase I: Initial Engagement

I was first introduced to the concept of self-compassion while working on an assignment for one of the classes last year. I was familiar with the concept of compassion towards others and its origins in different cultures, but the idea of generating compassion towards oneself was new and obscure. I began exploring further, and multiple studies suggested that the cultivation of self-compassion has a significant therapeutic value and the potential to provide emotional relief among clients who experiences feelings of shame, self-criticism, and guilt (Gilbert, 2007; Neff, 2003). I have implemented the concept in art therapy interventions and witnessed how easily the client related and responded to the idea through art.

The idea to work on self-compassion in my life took place during the global pandemic Covid - 19. I had quite a different agenda for my research project, but the reality of parenting during lockdown forced me to readjust all my life priorities and activities. With the facilitation of homeschooling, healthy screen hygiene, cleaning, and cooking I felt frustrated, overwhelmed, and quite overworked. I constantly felt tired and guilty for not doing and being enough, for gaining weight, for not reading more books, for not hiking more, for not making more amazing projects with my children like everyone else did, or at least I thought they did or baking healthy bread. The voice of self-criticism took control over my being, without any resources to discharge or recharge. Who can afford self-care practices when you are consumed in the family duties? "Let me drink my coffee hot, I will thank you...". I came to realize that I needed to learn how to help myself by exploring and integrating self-compassion in my life.

I have always found textile arts the most soothing and meditative art practice. I selected this medium to use to create a ritual to facilitate the compassion cultivation process. It could as well have been gardening, meditation, or yoga, but at the initial state, I have chosen a form of art that was calling me the most. The idea to transform my old clothing articles was intuitive at first just because of my love

of fashion. In the later phases, I found the link between that type of craft and the ideas of compassion. I started collecting old and damaged garments in a basket, anticipating the delightful art making process.

Phase II: Immersion

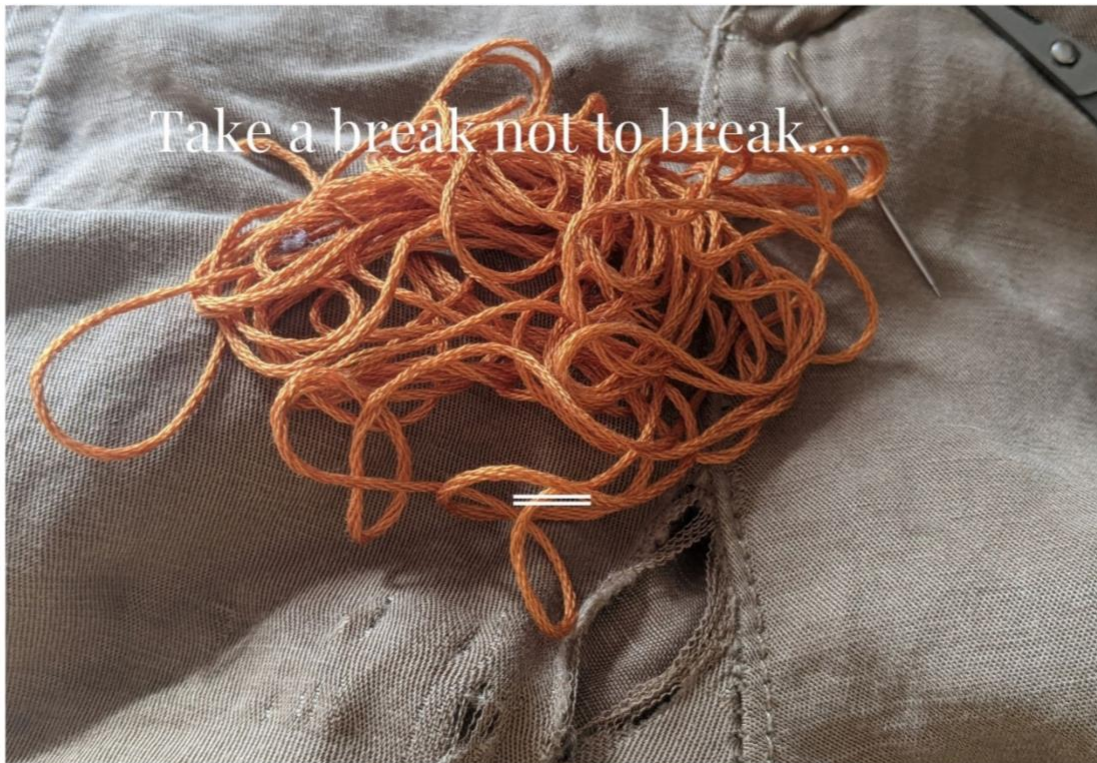
That phase has started when I pulled out the old garments basket and placed it in the center of my atelier. I searched through the closet and added few more items. I have seen it not as basket of broken item but a potential for exciting projects. In the meantime, I kept exploring and thinking about self-compassion, searching for origins of the concept in different languages. Over the period of three months, I have conducted several textile repair and transformation sessions that included mending, darning, patching, weaving, dyeing, and bleaching of clothes and shoes. Those sessions became the rituals of self-compassion. Before, during and after the repair project I reflected on the concept of self-compassion, noticed and journaled thoughts, body sensations and emotions. In the following part I will describe the art-based process and using italic font I will share some of my reflections from my journals.

Responding to some emotional discomfort that was alive in me, I am approaching the repair project. I picked summer pants of a very light fabric. Even though it's still "wintering" outside, I wanted to fix those pants and feel the summer closer. The light cotton pants were worn out and fragile and that's the way I feel today.



I notice my excitement to finally start the repair, I organized all the items on the table and began exploring the hole and what it needed. I made the first stitch and noticed that the fabric is very fragile and with few more stitches of an embroidery needle I might damage the fabric even more. I feel that I need a break already, my second coffee of the day. I don't want to stop now but I feel the need for coffee. I remind myself of the purpose of the project of being kind to myself. *Take a break not to break...* (Figure 2). After the break, I decided to start over again. I will make a double layer and add another fabric underneath. I have a memory of my father's patches on the elbows and knees. I am carrying this memory as I am choosing the fabric as the back of the hole. I chose a fabric that looks

sunny and happy. I place the fabric under the hole, just to give another layer to the worn-out fiber, the hole will remain exposed, the fringes of the broken tissue are beautiful. *I make a circle of protection around the home/hole. I notice my breath, inhale when pocking needle in, exhale when pulling the needle out. Playing with words: hole, whole, wall, hold, home, hall, hallow. Be kind to your body, your home, don't rush.*



I am grateful for the beauty of the scar, it's an embellishment that I want to celebrate, add more colors... Something is challenging in passing the thread through the needle, it requires patience and concentration, the stitching is a reward. Take a big breath, you can do it. Try again.... The stitches create a mandala, and it's growing...I want to make few stitches at a time, to go faster, but the fabric resists, it helps me to understand my patterns, to do more at a time, "wearing myself out." Hold on, one stitch at a time... I am noticing my work becoming smoother, I got used to the fabric and thread and now drawing

decorations on the pants. I try the pants out, I touch the thread on my body, and it feels suiting, I love the feeling of stitches on my fingers. It's not straight, it has a relief that feels like softness under my fingers.



Repairing jeans that I ripped on the belt because *I pushed too hard... Pushed at the wrong place*. It's my mistake and my intention for this creation session is not to be mad at myself for breaking but be grateful for myself for being able to repair and taking the time. I use a pink thread as a reminder not to push too hard, especially on myself. Be *kind to yourself for your mistakes, you don't have all the answers... Now you know more...* I am darning the hole first and then attach the ring of the belt, it looks strong, I try it. I know more about this fabric now, how fragile it is, how thin it is. The more I learn about the fabric, the more I want to wear it, especially with the cool darning piece. *The repair process is an opportunity for growth, resilience, and transformation.*



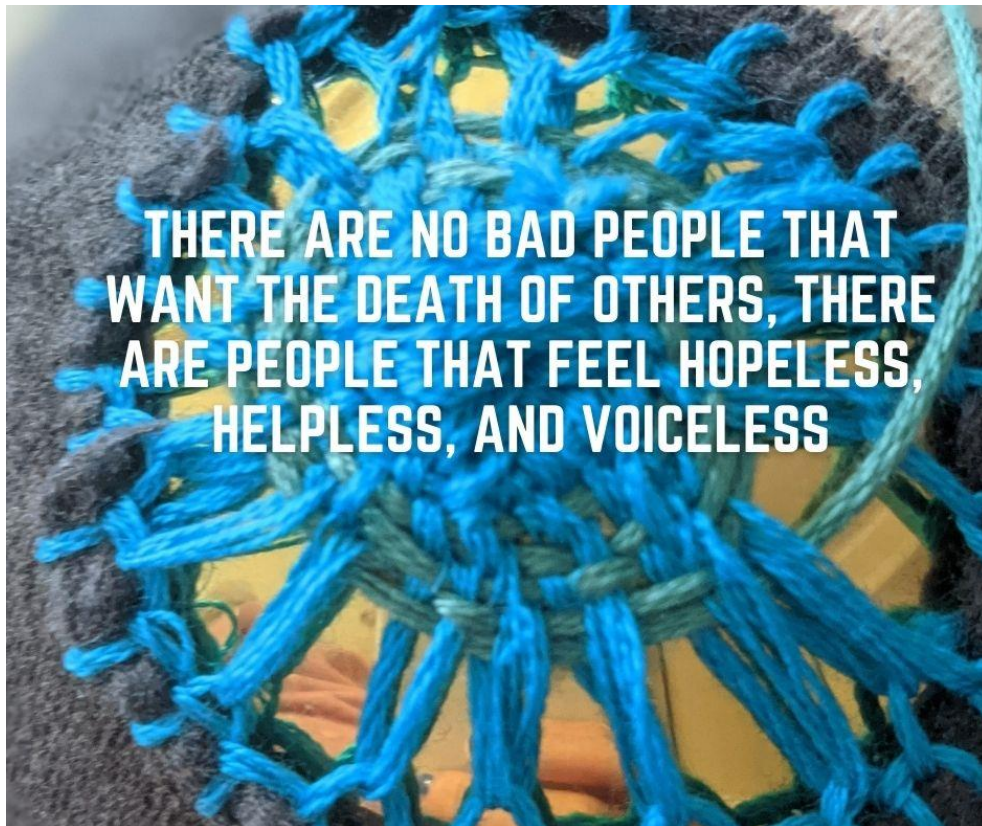
”
•Self - compassion is a superpower that is given to me in the moments of despair.. Superpower to selfheal and self- repair, deconstruct and reconstruct with more self-belief, self-kindness and acceptance.

My intention for this session is to address some self-doubt that was alive in me that day. I chose to work on a pair that I repaired already but didn't hold and ripped again on the stitch that I made. The fabric is pretty old and fragile, but I decided to try again. *I already took care of it, but it broke again...* I choose to add the underneath patch, use another jeans fabric, *the fragile fabric will be empowered and by the patch.* During the work, I notice self-doubt, feel tired, and feel like dropping it. *Why bother, it's too old and needs to be thrown away.* I take a little break and start again. I notice a rainbow reflected on my knee reflected by the glass. I am in awe of this beauty; I go back to my pants and start stitching. The stitch feels smooth and soft. *I start feeling the harmony between my hands, head, and heart. Everybody feels self-doubt sometimes.* I notice that I wear a pair of blue jeans today and it's the same color as my patching fabric, *I have put a piece of myself under "the wounds" on my jeans, the needle can damage the fabric but can also piece it together, piecing the peace. The color of the thread is white like the freshly*



painted road that I took on my bicycle earlier today. I feel connected to that road and the rainbow in my room.

This repair project is about the devastating violence and conflict happening in Israel and Palestine, my home. Bombs were sent on both sides, lives of innocent people have been taken, Israeli and Palestinian supporters have colored the web in call for justice but also hate (Figure 6). The voices are divided against and pro. I want to take the action of weaving to respond to my feelings of fear and despair. I am here but my family is in Israel, I fear for their health and for the growing hate inside and outside of Israel. The internet is full of opinions and I can't ignore or avoid those discussions. I chose to darn a hole on a sock. It's a big hole on the ankle which I placed on a light bulb.



I start making stitched across the hole, to connect between the opposite side, *holding compassion* for all the sides, those who suffer from occupation, those who claim the lands promised by God, those who

just want to live and raise their children peacefully. *There are no bad people that want the death of others, there are people that feel hopeless, helpless, and voiceless.* As I start weaving, I say love and kindness meditation (Neff& Germer, 2019), using the stitch as a metaphor for repair and peace. *I am piecing the peace*, circularly closing the hole with one thread that is passing around and reducing the gaps. Finally, the stitch is arriving in the middle and closing the hole. I used blue and green colors, to represent the planet earth as depicted from the cosmos. Taking distance from the conflict in the land of love, kindness, and peace.



The technique reminds me of basketry, a colorful container for many items. I notice that my hand is making a circular motion *from my heart to your heart*. I am asking myself where I belong, acknowledging the privilege of living in a peaceful country such as Canada. I allow myself to belong both to my country

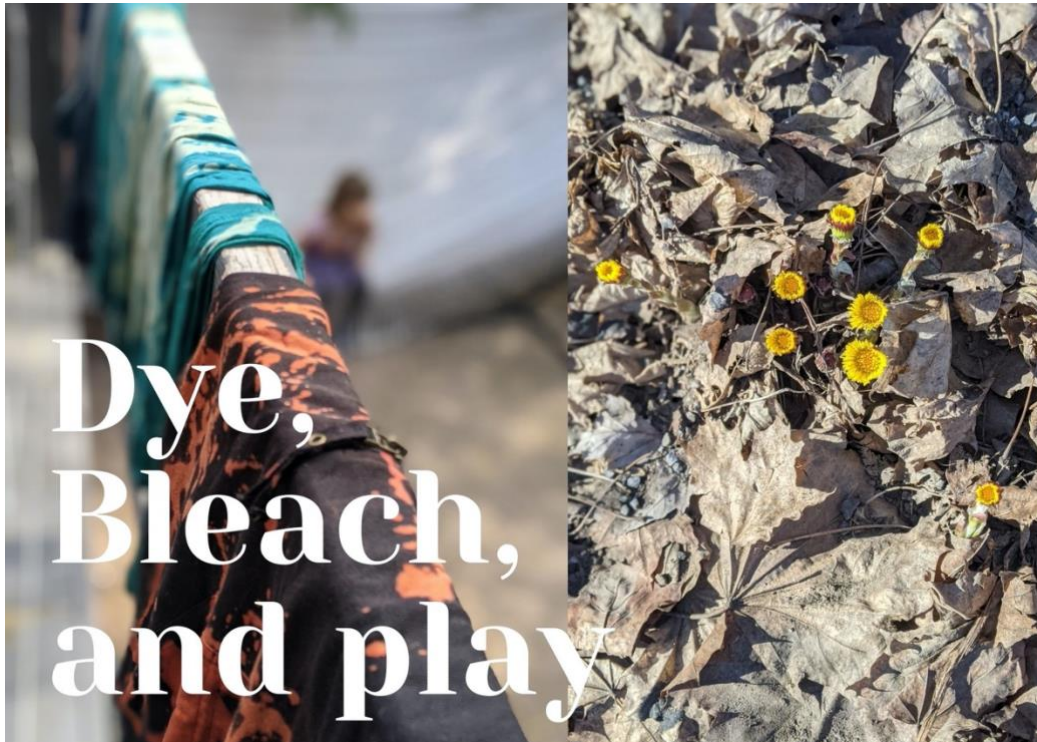
home Israel, to the whole region of the Middle East, and right now to Quebec where I raise my children. The thread has connected the different parts of myself too. I notice the tension in my shoulders and my face.

Working with the stain on pants. Those are lovely pink sweatpants that I used as pajamas. They have stained with my period blood a while ago. The period is the most natural yet very shameful phenomenon. As a young girl, I was thought to never mention it or expose it in public, it's the most private and dirty secret. Coping with shame, especially the one that was embedded in teenhood is my intention in this project. I first thought to make some embroidery on the stain and cover it but then decided to play with natural dyes and bleach. It's a new skill set for me, I have never done it and suddenly it made much sense – the repair by creating more random stains of different dyes. *Stain is a mistake, it's dirt that stays on a piece of fabric, it stays forever as a reminder of an incident or accident, it's an opportunity to play, to change, to embrace the mistake.* Mistakes remind me of my language skills. I grew up speaking Russian, at the age of 13 my family moved to Israel, where I had to learn Hebrew. Since the age of 13 I hold this idea of imperfect verbalization, I risk not expressing myself properly, humiliating myself, not being understood. I had to master five languages by far, none of them perfect but I am learning to be at peace with mistakes, errors, make it my signature, not to be shy, and be kind to myself. My pants represent my mistakes in all the languages and maybe embracing the period stain, is my homage to this young woman, who decided not to be muted, even with language barriers, make it part of my identity. I dyed my sweatpants with red onion skin, they soaked in the onion water, taking in the new color. Lifting heavy pots and handwashing feels like a relief, the pots are hot and work quickly. I notice the difference between the dying and stitching processes and feel that dying is soothing



Stain is a mistake, it's dirt that stays on a piece of fabric, it stays forever as a reminder of an incident or accident, it's an opportunity to play, to change, to embrace the mistake.

me more today. I feel the need to move, to run, to wash. It's a change of seasons and instead of cocooning in stitching, I let my body move. The change of color is a surprise, it's a play. I don't know how the fabric will react and instead of transforming the stain, I am transforming all the rest of the fabric. I am adding more and more clothing items to this process, enjoying the potential of a new colorful collection. After washing the pants, I notice the color change, but the stain is still very visible. I drop some bleach around it, and now it's blended with other stains, still proudly decorating the pants. I notice that the color doesn't spread evenly, and it feels more appealing to the eye. I notice that in nature nothing has even color, even our skin or the color of the flower, trees, and sky. I am exploring all the colors around, focusing in and out, pink is a blend of colors. My pants looking like belonging to nature now. Bleach is flying all over the place, feeling like Jackson Pollock .



Phase III: Incubation

Once I completed several repairs and felt that I collected enough data for the research project, I took a short break from creation. I collected all the repaired projects, washed and ironed, and placed them in the closet, existed about the new repaired collection. I noticed that I tended to “role” the idea of self-compassion in my mind and kept reflecting on it. I kept making art and integrated a lot of flowers and natural materials. I took long walks and collected images and flowers in those walks, admiring nature. I updated my playlist with some new music and enjoyed discovering new types of arts that I never tried before. I allowed myself to rest from everything, the school, the research, and just be in that space of self-kindness and well-deserved relaxation.

Phase IV: Illumination

The illumination process or the “Aha moment” took place in my consciousness when I realized that I have developed a new way of coping with difficult events and negative thoughts. Because I could easily access self-compassion, I noticed that I allow myself to confront those feelings, without judgment of myself or others, owning the tools that will help me to transform those negative thoughts and emotions into learning and self-insight. I acknowledged the defense mechanism patterns, without criticizing but befriending those patterns. More than ever, I am not tending to change myself, but just to accept myself, the way I am with all the parts. Negative thoughts and events, anxiety, and disbalance are part of our life, the repair and transformation help me to emotionally mature and become a better friend to myself. There are moments of self – love and self-kindness in everyday routine, I notice them and hold on to them, just to make it more and more present in life. “It was well done, bravo, look how beautiful it is what you have done...”. Besides the self-judging voice, there are self-gleaming voice and the learn to live in harmony. I do is more with my family and friends, helping them to notice their beauty and success.

Phase V: Explication

The research process allowed me to expend my understanding of the idea of self-compassion and explore its stimulation and cultivation through the art practices. I chose to apply varied technics of textile repair and transformation, first because I found this practice soothing and regulating and second because I found a comfort in creating something useful and practical and continue the way of being of my ancestors. That particular art practice helped me to understand better how to approach repair, be mindful of the materials and technics as well as my own body. The process of transformation is slow and sometimes challenging. Taking this time and effort to overcome those challenges led me to greater understanding of self-compassion as well as repair and transformation of material and emotions.

Phase VI: Creative Synthesis

In this final stage of the heuristic method, I presented the findings and the process through the social media special IG account called @weaving_compassion_into_being. The name is reflecting the essence of art therapy and illustrating the circle that was transformative for me in arts-based research. Gaining the wisdom from hands, led to the heart and soul, something the unconscious and from there to consciousness, the head. The underscores before and after every word suggest circularity, continuation, and imitate endless stitches. I have been posting the images of repair and creation in progress, exploring the theme of self-compassion, mindfulness, and textile-based art therapy. Through the IG blog, I am aiming to share my lived experience in this research process as well as keep exploring the ideas further with other art mediums and ideas that have the potential to enrich the art therapy practice.

Findings

In my research project, I have inquired into the question of how fiber arts can help facilitate and foster the psychological process of cultivating self-compassion. Following the art-based heuristic research and data analysis, I identified several key elements that were woven into the tapestry of the lived experience of cultivation of self-compassion. Following the data processing I identified seven key themes that wove together the lived experience throughout the research. These themes are highlighted in the following paragraphs and identified by their bolded text.

Key Themes

The theme ***repair as healing ritual*** describes how the repair process has become my response to the emotional discomfort that I have experienced facing challenges in my personal and professional life. I developed a ritual that allowed me to connect and stay with those negative feelings allowing the compassion cultivation process. The ritual included preparation of the space and materials and selection

of the project and the repair technique, journaling, and documenting throughout the process. The breaks that I have taken through the process helped me to advance and connect to the process. I responded with care to those calls to take distance and ground through movement, a good cup of coffee, or just observing a tree. Often when I am engaged in textile arts, I am listening to a TV show or a book, which helps me to distract my mind from the daily problems and get lost in the creative space. Those are precious moments of self-care when artmaking is used as therapy. With the intention of fostering self-exploration, I decided not to distract myself during the creation and listen carefully to the noise inside me and in the environment, which helped me to stay present in the moment and take the time to process profoundly the range of emotions and the negative narrative. While the needle craft helped me to regulate and sooth, my mind and body were able to process that discomfort, understand and put it into words.

The flow that is achieved in the process of art making circulates motion from hands to heart to the head, which I describe using the theme **three Hs: Hands, Heart, and Head**. The wisdom of the hands, that I experienced while repairing damaged textiles, were processed and transformed from unconsciousness to consciousness. That experience helped me to understand profoundly the notion of staying with the pain in a nonjudgmental manner, getting more insight into the function of my defenses and patterns and develop that sense of compassion towards myself and others.

Within the project I explored a variety of fiber techniques. I used my intuition to address a problem caused by the damage and explored the meaning of each one of the verbs used for the repair: weaving, darning, stitching, and soaking in the natural dye. Each one of the techniques has its unique visual impact and function. The technique and tools that I chose for repair were unconsciously drawn from my emotional state at that day and helped me gain an insight into my emotional world. The process of understanding the technique, why, and how to apply it is described by the theme **metaphors of my life** because the revealed the meaning behind the words and integrated those words as

metaphors that represented different ways of coping with situations that sometimes needs darning, patching, or dyeing. For example, I remember thinking, *I am soaking in self-compassion*, meaning being in the mode of mindful cultivation of self-kindness, being knowledgeable about my needs, imagining the fabric that is soaking in a natural dye, while going through the process of coloring. In case the fibers are too fragile for darning, backing fabric can be used to cover the hole and hold the fabric together, without creating more tension on the worn-out fibers. Backing for me is a metaphor for support that one can have from others, from family, friends, and community. I reminded myself that *it's okay to ask for help, to have someone as your back, to know who can be trusted*. Reaching out to others is healthy, is compassionate and empowering.

Many of the pieces that I transformed were broken or stained in the groin area or in the chest. For me, a hole between legs, between the breasts, has the connotation of shame and fear, and vulnerability. Covering and repairing garments was therapeutic and comforting, acknowledging the shame but also the ability to cope with it. Shame is a normal experience in human existence, overcoming shame allows the fostering of emotional growth. I can look at myself in the mirror and feel ashamed or delighted, while nothing has visibly changed in my appearance. I use the theme **I am perfectly imperfect** to encompass this experience of witnessing myself through a compassionate lens. Many things will impact the way I see myself, I learned to cultivate the voice that sees the beauty and befriend the voice of criticism and shame. A hole in the fabric is as natural as the human body and deserves compassion. A repaired hole is a beautiful embellishment like our bodies that change through the life cycle. Feelings of shame, anxiety, and emotional dysregulation can be isolating, and oftentimes, as humans, we tend to think that those feelings are unique to us. From my lived experience, I learned that being self-compassionate is to remember that everyone is experiencing distress and each one has their way to react and cope with it. I noticed that while working on my projects, I kept hearing the noise of construction so typical to the Montreal spring. I remember smiling to myself, thinking that we both

are now making some repairs and renovations, me with the needle, them with heavy machines. I could feel much gratitude to those who work so hard to improve our city, and feeling connected to them, I highlight the relationship with the theme **our city is perfectly imperfect**. I sent my gratitude for the construction and repair and noticed my ability to transform that city noise into the ocean waves or travel in mind to other noisy cities. Repair is manifestation of care, curiosity, and kindness. It's hard to repair without those components, it's becoming pointless and tiring. When repairing something I have not only accepted but truly enjoyed and embraced the imperfection, providing the item with this new and unique look. Textile repair and transformation cultivates the state of **agency**, increasing one's self-belief and the sense of accomplishment. It motivates me to keep trying and exploring new tasks or approach challenges with more confidence and satisfaction in creating practical and useful art.

Finally, being more compassionate towards myself helped me to experience and express **compassion towards other**. I noticed that in human relations and interactions, I am trying to understand more how the other is feeling and taking time to analyse their situation before judging. Cultivation of self-compassion makes me first attempt to find some possible reason for that person behaviour and accommodate them with my reaction. I notice that when I am tired or preoccupied, I have less patience and control over my thoughts or actions. I can raise voice on my children and feel ashamed of it later. Self-compassion is coming to help remind me that I am human, and it is ok to be upset. It provides me an opportunity to repair. "I am sorry I was upset earlier; you didn't deserve it; I was too tired and stressed. Hope you can forgive me. Of course, mama, it's normal, I should of been more respectful, I love you". This dialogue illustrates how self-compassion helps me to embrace those moments of dysregulation and use them as a way of co-regulating with my son. I teach him that it's normal and human to be upset and there is an opportunity to repair and reconnect together. He is learning to be compassionate towards others and himself.

Discussion

The experience of textile repair and transformation helped me to evaluate the therapeutic prospects of this art practice as an art-based process that have the potential to generate self-compassion. Utilising textile craft as self-soothing medium, while coping with emotional discomfort of the daily life, strongly supported the previous studies on textile focused art therapy practices that highlighted the regulating nature of fiber crafts (Leone, 2020; Talwar, 2019; Colier, 2011; Baker, 2016). Textile repair and transformation practices contain the kinesthetic, tactile, and symbolic qualities and can provide an expansive experience in the therapeutic process. Furthermore, the current research findings suggested that textile craft, and particularly textile objects repair, and transformation have a great potential to foster self-insight and generate compassion towards the self and others. The act of art making helps the client to externalize their emotions, self, or thoughts, projecting them onto the object. Projecting on the damaged piece of textile helps the client to distance from the negative emotions and at the same time observe those from outside, fostering mindfulness and self-reflection. The art therapy process assumes that thoughts and feelings are informed by our unconscious universe. Reflecting on image or creating one has potential to reveal unconscious parts of self, gaining an insight and psychological healing (Malchiodi, 2003).

The image of damaged and visibly repaired textile can be associated with compassion. Compassion-focused imagery (Gilbert ,2011) embodies movement, feelings, thoughts, and memories. Clients project human-like qualities onto the objects, experiencing safeness, and warmth that stimulate emotional security. Textile is often simulating transitional objects (Lucre and Clapton ,2016), carries early memories and sense of belonging. Artmaking with textile allows one to self-soothe and develop capacity for self-compassion, autonomy, and growth, and feeling of safety. The repair is simulating the process of healing, it's slow, imperfect but makes the item useful and unique.

Visible repair doesn't intent to fix or renew but rather to transform the piece into a new, one-of-a-kind article that carries new meanings and profounds the connection to it. Self-compassionate approach (Neff & Germer, 2019) does not encourage one to change themselves but to change relationships with their defense and anxiety patterns that are activated when they experience threat and dysregulation (Germer & Siegel, 2012). Like textile items, some parts of the self are more fragile and vulnerable, accepting those parts helps individuals to befriend them and through that self-regulate more efficiently in a stressful situation (Dana, 2018). As the research shown, self-compassion practice helps one to distance from suffering and pain by actively staying in the moment and exploring one's emotions, thoughts, and body sensations, and let those peacefully exist and be processed in a non-judgmental way (Neff, 2003). Seeing oneself as whole, with scars, and accepting it is to love the wholeness of oneself as it is and proudly "wear" the repair with vulnerability and raw emotions that foster one's resilience (Brach, 2019). When one is observing their emotional distress with mindfulness and kindness, the inner dialogue "*you are bad or you are non-worthy*" transforms into "*you reacted like that because you felt that way, it's normal, it happens to everyone*". Intrusive rumination transforms into rational thoughts that help unpack and revisit the situation through the eye of a friend and not an enemy (Neff, 2003; Gilbert, 2009; Williams, 2018).

The slow process of textile transformation and repetitive movements facilitate for the client the creative flow. According to Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2014) being "in flow" is being engaged in challenges that are manageable, helping one to achieve positive goals and feedback. In that state individual operates in full capacity and doesn't feel bored neither anxious, experiencing a dynamic balance. The research findings illustrated how artmaking is interweaving and connecting the Three Hs (Heart, Head, and Hands) creating a holistic circle of transformation. The circular and repetitive movement of the hands while stitching or washing fabric cultivates the state of flow. Czamanski-Cohen & Weihs (2016) describe flow as an "intense and focused concentration on what is being done in the

present moment, the loss of reflective self-consciousness and a sense that one is in control, loss or change in sense of time..." (p. 11). Cultivation the state of flow in the creation within art therapy session helps the client to sustain that state in other fields of life. According to Czamanski-Cohen & Weihs, (2016) bodymind model application in art therapy views the body and mind as connected. One's sensory and motoric experiences are embodying the processes of thinking and feeling while we believe that art therapy is beneficial in helping individuals with deficits of many sorts, the bodymind model is designed to emphasize and tap into individual's strengths and restore an embodied sense of self that is not necessarily related to illness or tragic life circumstances (p.64). Engaging with a familiar and accessible form of craft, such as stitching, can reduce the pressure of performance and generates flow in creation (Chilton, 2013).

Cultivating self-compassion also helps foster compassion towards others and has a positive impact on social engagement (Gilbert, 2009; 2011; 2017; Dana, 2018; Neff & Gilbert, 2019). The clients who begin cultivating self-compassion might observe how they become more compassionate to others or the opposite, when clients generate more compassion towards other, it might help them to foster self-compassion. The client can realise and internalise through the repaired artwork that there is no perfection in relationships and conflicts, which symbolised by holes or stans on textile, have an important role in life. Repair with compassion and self-compassion is making the connectedness stronger. "Cracks" in relationships are an opportunity to repair and enhance the family/social bonds.

And finally, through the projection of repair, the client has an opportunity recognise the universality of their experience which tap into the common humanity component of self-compassionate being (Neff, 2003). All textiles are fragile and tend to be worn away or stained, as all the people live difficult moments and struggle to self-regulate. Such acknowledgement can help the clients to reduce their social isolation and feel more connected to others.

Future Research Investigation

Based on the research findings and discussion it would be interesting to explore how such an art therapy intervention could be helpful with art therapy clients. It can be assumed that one of the populations that might benefit of such intervention are clients who experienced trauma. Future investigation can indicate more pertinently, how the act of repair can contribute to the post-trauma healing process and growth?

Additional questions for further investigation could explore how can object repair be used in art therapy practice, including repair of clothing articles as well as other broken items or even spaces? What are the other psychological benefits of the repair? How can repair of items help one to sustain self-compassion in their life, self-efficacy, and agency? I wonder, if the act of repair in the moments of distress can foster the transition from sympathetic to parasympathetic systems, helping the clients to reduce anxiety?

Also, I wondering how such a practice can be applied in group and community settings, with special attention for interpersonal dynamic. For example, could a group of community members that engaged in repair together, help to stimulate community engagement and participation, enhancing the collective compassion ? In 2013, Canadian artist Nadia Myre was awarded for her art project “The scare project”. The artist invited hundreds of Canadian of indigenes and non-indigenes communities to repair their physical and emotional wounds through repair of a hole in a canvas. The project aimed to promote personal healing as well as the trust and reconciliation between the first nations and the settlers.

Given the critical situation of the climate in the past years, fostering compassion towards the earth should be among our goals as art therapists. I am wondering if the repair of broken items can be integrated as part of the practices promoting the awareness to the environment and reduction of consumption. As art therapists, it’s important for us to join the global movement for the environment and act on promotion of upcycling, reuse and repurpose of materials. Timm-Bottos (2011) introduced

the idea of “socially committed art action” (p. 57), community projects that encouraged the community members to reuse and repair textile items in the local thrift store. That project demonstrated how textile reuse and transformation not only reduced the waste and consumption but fostered education and behaviour change within adults and young generations (Timm-Bottos, 2011).

Implications in Art therapy

The nature of arts- based heuristic self-inquiry is to explore the experience of the artist - researcher, consequently the results cannot be generalized for a greater population. Nonetheless, the research findings provide an indication that self-compassion focused textile-repair practices can be applicable and impactful within art therapy practice. Such practice can be utilised within varied art therapy settings: workshops, community art studios, individual, group and family therapy. The clients will be encouraged to bring and use their personal items and offered the tools to repair or repurpose those items. Before the art making the clients will be invited to think of something in their life that they would like to repair and engage in the art making with compassion, kindness, and mindfulness.

Cultivation of self-compassion can be identified and named as one of the therapeutic goals. Explore and create compassion-oriented imagery with textile and other art mediums can help the clients foster compassion in their lives, towards themselves and other. Repaired item symbolises the capacity to cope with struggles, resilience, and ability to repair. Internalising such notions have a significant therapeutic value and can generate healing in one’s life. The slow and often complicated process of repair can provide an opportunity to talk about repair in one’s life and illustrate the complicity of that psychological, internal, or interpersonal process, highlighting the importance to accept and be kind to imperfection.

The research findings have shown that textile art making can provide the clients with a wide range of experiences helping them to achieve their psychological needs and respond to their therapeutic goals. Exploring that medium through the lens of Expressive therapies continuum (ETC) (Hinz, 2019)

different dimensions of textile manipulation can be classified within the four levels of continuum: kinesthetic/sensory; perceptual/affective; cognitive/symbolic; creative. Versatile interactions with fibers such as: stitching, dyeing, knitting, weaving, knotting and more can be offered to the clients, to explore their emotional state and stimulate change in their lives.

Often the textile projects are intense, complicated, and time-consuming, which requires from both the client and the therapist much patience, flexibility, and compassion. According to Leone (2021), “craft practices transform raw materials into objects that serve a purpose, whether aesthetic, functional, or both. Transformation can take place through reworking, revising, reforming, adjusting, altering – all processes that hold symbolic value and thus have unique therapeutic potential” (p. 13). Transforming a broken piece into an art object fosters the sense of agency and accomplishment and enhancing the sense of self-efficacy and self-belief .

Contraindications

In my work I spoke broadly of the benefits of textile-based art therapy. It is my primary art practice and from my personal experience it has great therapeutic values for young, adults and elderly clients. Nevertheless, it can be challenging medium for people with physical impairment or even clients whose memories with textile craft are rather negative, for instance if they carry negative memories of someone significant who crafted. Also, textile and especially repair is time consuming and is more suitable in time-flexible settings such as art studio.

Textile based art practice can be adopted in individual or group therapy setting, considering the physical condition of the client, the conditions of the location (especially the access to light), the intensity of projects and tools. Working with needles, knitting tools or scissors is risky and I wouldn't use it with clients whose motor skills are limited or that activity might endanger them, for instance people with self-harm history. Some clients are not interested or have no patience for crafts, in that case an

alternative can be offered. It is important to assess the relations of the clients with textile arts, materials, and tools.

Art therapist should not assume that crafts or fibers will be appropriate for clients just because it's typical to their culture. Variety of textiles and fibers can always be accompanied by other materials, providing an appropriate alternative for self-expression. However, if clients are interested to explore their traditional arts, art therapist should make an effort to provide additional and culturally appropriate materials to accommodate the clients need. The art materials that we offer are the language that the clients will use to speak to us and themselves, variety, quality, and cultural property of materials will impact the client's emotional vocabulary and its expression.

According to Gilbert (2011), clients who experienced unsecured attachment and trauma in their childhood have difficulty identifying and relating to compassionate memories and images. As art therapist with should assess and follow the clients in their process and offer psychoeducation related to compassion and self-compassion or helping them to identify other needs and therapy goals.

Conclusions

While concluding the process of the research, I feel grateful for such an intimate and sincere method to acquiring knowledge. Integrating the academic literature with my lived arts – based experience, imparted a great insight and reflection onto my way of coping with discomfort as well as cultivating self-compassion. I used to work with textile as a way of relaxing and *shutting down* from the daily stress, a practice that can be framed as *art as therapy*. In my current research I used the fibers practice, as a therapeutic tool that generated mindfulness, self-reflection and helped to find the path towards self-compassion in my being. The repaired items acquired a new meaning, symbolising an emotional repair and acceptance of imperfection in one's life.

The research findings suggest that Integration of textile repair and transformation in art therapy practice with an intention to cultivate self-compassion can encourage clients to explore their negative

experiences with kindness and help them to cultivate compassion towards themselves and others. The textile art making helps to channel the emotional distress and regulate the nervous system, which can assist the client to stay with their emotional distress, explore it and finally respond with self-compassion. Being compassionate towards oneself is to repair the relation to self, to one's narrative, defenses, self-concept, and self – acceptance. Neff (2003) is suggesting talking to self as if you talked to a close friend with kindness and care, Dana (2018) calls it befriending those parts of self that make you feel bad, not enough or shame. Repair cannot change the past, but it helps to integrate it within the wholeness of the human experience. Feeling broken is imbedded in the human experience, it's connecting between us and generating empathy and kindness between people and helps us to be caring and compassionate. Repair is a manifest of care, kindness and love and every human need "to be repaired" from time to time. Self-compassion is the repair that one can offer to self when in despair "it is normal to feel that way my dear, you will be fine, everyone feel that way... "

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the importance of self-compassion cultivation among mental health professionals. As therapists, we provide the container for their feelings, we are keen to offer the best care. At times, we face moments of self-criticism "you are not good enough...". Being compassionate to self as mental health practitioner, is to accept that you will not provide the perfect intervention all the time yet mistake or misunderstanding is an opportunity to repair and enhance the therapeutic alliance. By acknowledging the mistake, we show that we are humans that make errors and repair, which might set a positive example and will show our deep care. Moreover, textile repair can be a wonderful activity for therapists, helping them to process or prepare for a session and self-regulate. The way they approach the textile can help them identify their emotions towards the session and client and guide some professional decisions and intervention.

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