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Understanding Clay and its Media Properties Through the Expressive Therapies Continuum

by Anne Geisz, Bachelor of Fine Arts
in the Field of Ceramics

A Research Project Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in the field of Art Therapy Counseling

Advisory Committee:

Megan Robb, Chair

Dr. Jayashree George

Shelly Goebel-Parker

Joe Page

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
May 2, 2024

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING CLAY AND ITS MEDIA PROPERTIES THROUGH THE EXPRESSIVE THERAPIES CONTINUUM

by

ANNE GEISZ

Chairperson: Megan Robb

For centuries, clay has been used by civilizations to hold food, memories, and records of history. To this day, it is used by engineers, hobbyists, artists, art therapists and many more. This art based, heuristic study explores clay through the researcher's ongoing practice with the material, within the framework of the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) and examines how its unique media properties make it such a versatile material for both ceramic artists and art therapists. Results exhibit these unique media properties and clay's ability to reach all levels of the ETC through collected data of images, journals, critiques, and notes. These results conclude and explore the extent of clay's unique abilities and open future avenues of research on the material.

Keywords: *clay, expressive therapies continuum, media properties*

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I would also like to thank Ceramic Professors from my past and present, for fostering a love for the material of clay and instilling a curiosity to continue working with it. I'd like to thank Joe Page and Mike Stumbras for allowing me to make a second home in the ceramics department. The space, flexibility, and feedback they provided not only allowed me to create the work for this research but helped build my confidence to call myself an artist and continue my own practice using clay.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends for the continued support to pursue what I am interested in. To Mom, Dad, Gramma, Will, Joe, Madelyn, and Charlie for a love of learning and the privilege to do so. To my cohort and friends, particularly Wes, Anna, and Angela, for reminding me that I am not alone and that there is always joy and love in the world, despite difficulties.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Working with clay by nature offers us a primary sensual, physically challenging, kinesthetic experience with a material that records action and emotional primacy and offers experimental learning like no other material.

- Tony Marsh, 2019

Entering the field of art therapy counseling with a background in fine arts quickly changed how I viewed my artistic practice. Amplifying my previous interests, I was enthralled by the unique qualities of materials within a therapeutic context. I started working with clay for the first time when I was a sophomore in college, about four years ago. It was new to me since I had entered school with a concentration in painting and had always been a 2-dimensional artist. At first, I would not say I liked it. The clay felt weird and was challenging to work with, and I struggled in the first couple of ceramics classes. However, I found myself confused by my inability to stop going into the studio and working for hours with a material that I found so frustrating. I now see this confusion as the initial seeds of thought that brought me to this research topic.

As I moved through college, I continued to take ceramic classes alongside my primary painting classes despite my disheartening experiences with the material. I enjoyed realistic, controlled paintings, and continued to struggle with the loose, flowing material of clay. In my junior year, I took figure drawing and painting classes and became very interested in the body as a subject. For the first time, I began to “loosen up” with the way I painted, making more “expressive” (for me) pieces, as seen in Figures 1 and 2. Regretfully, I did not take many pictures of my ceramic work then. Figure 2, however, was created using

oil paint alongside clay pigments and joint compound to create depth a way to and lean into a more 3-dimensional painting. I now recognize this piece as a pivotal turning point in my clay journey.

Figure 1

Sienna



Note: By Geisz, A. 2019. Oil on wood, 36"x24".

Figure 2

Oma



Note: By Geisz, A. 2020. Joint compound and oil on canvas, 48"x36".

In the middle of my junior year, COVID-19 came to the United States, and I was suddenly unable to go into the studio. During this time, I began working with clay more and more at home and realized how much I had learned to appreciate the medium. When senior year came around, I could be in the studio again and knew I wanted to work with clay as

much as possible. I changed my concentration to ceramics and began using techniques such as casting, mold making, and carving to create sculptures of fragmented figures, as seen in Figures 3 and 4. The last piece I made during my undergraduate years was Figure 5, was one of the first pieces I was genuinely proud of. At this point, I changed my focus, wanting to attend graduate school for Art Therapy. I knew I would not have as much time to pursue my ceramic work, and I was okay with that. However, I was surprised to learn how much learning about art therapy would change my perspective on my art making.

Figure 3

Reiteration



Note: By Geisz, A. 2020. Ceramic, found bench, 72"x36"x36".

Figure 4

Untitled Bowl



Note: By Geisz, A. 2020. Ceramic, 4.5"x6"x".

Figure 5

Vase I



Note: By Geisz, A. 2021. Ceramic, 24"x24"x24".

During my first year of graduate school, I took a break from using clay and learned much about art therapy and how materials can be used differently in a therapeutic setting. I soon realized how clay had provided me a way to process without getting stuck in a cognitive loop; however, I had not realized this until I began learning about the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) and media dimension variables (MDV), initially created by Kagin and Lusebrink (1978) and expanded upon by Hinz (2020). Thus began my interest in the ETC and how clay fits within it.

Gap in Research

Historically, art therapy research has focused on the visual components and creating images and objects rather than tactile involvement (Elbrecht & Atcliff, 2014). Over time, however, theories such as the ETC have pushed to consider the physical *experience* of art making alongside the symbols and images that are created. Much of the current art research relating to clay does this by examining the process and experience of working with the material. While this type of research can be found, much remains to be explored. Clay is often described as a regressive material that allows for specific functions in art therapy: these functions connecting to its kinesthetic, sensory, and haptic properties. (Nan et al., 2021).

In a presentation by Lisa Hinz, she discussed common myths regarding the ETC. Some of the misconceptions that stuck out to me were that the ETC matches specific art materials to ETC components or brain functions, that ETC-based treatment introduces the components in sequential order, and that reaching the creative level is the goal of treatment (Hinz, 2023). These myths helped me reflect on how I and many others view art materials, including clay, through the ETC. With further research, I discovered that more existing literature needs to explore how one material can function within *each* level of the ETC.

Further, a minimal amount of literature generally shows what we know about clay in the ETC.

As a student learning to be an art therapist, I've spoken to many peers that say they have a fear around using clay due to an unfamiliarity with the material. Along with this, many of them believe that more experience working with clay would benefit them as future art therapists. Learning more about the material and how it can exist at all levels of the ETC could help art therapists understand clay and apply it to their work with clients. Many people who have yet to use clay find it intimidating and, thus, do not often use it in session. With more research about the material, others could see the benefit of becoming familiar with it and implementing it into their therapeutic practice. Hinz stated that art therapists should "understand and explore risk-taking potential, concrete or abstract potential, and mastery or control potential of various media" (Hinz, 2020, p. 27). Her words highlight the importance of understanding many materials and how, as art therapists, it is our responsibility to learn to understand mediums we are less familiar with, with one possible example being clay.

Research Aim

Through personal experience, discussions with others, and reviewing existing literature, I have discovered that many people find clay incredibly therapeutic. The qualities that make clay unique are never-ending, sometimes making it an intimidating material for art therapists to use. It is a material that has existed for many millions of years has taught us much about the past (Cooper, 2010). It has served humans throughout history and provides us with art-historical, typological, and contextual information about the world (Orton et al, 2013). It can also contain sustenance, stories, memories, touch, and more. Clay is a material that does not (necessarily) require mediators such as tools to work with it. One can form an

intimate relationship with it through touch and the haptic perception which one has learned from birth.

Coming to these realizations immediately fascinated me and caused me to look at clay in an exciting, new way. Through my continuous work as both an artist and future art therapist, I could not help but want to explore further the ways working with clay could bring me insight. I acknowledge that clay is not necessarily more complex or of higher quality than other materials, I am merely interested in exploring the relationship I have observed between myself and this particular material through the lens of the ETC.

I am interested in researching and exploring the unique properties of clay and how it can be utilized in fine art and art therapy through the Expressive Therapies Continuum. I cannot help but notice how my artistic practice and my studies in art therapy inform each other and how the materiality of clay benefits both fields. The work I am making *needs* to be done in clay, and by learning about the material through the lens of the ETC, I am learning so much about myself and my work. The work I have created since this new understanding of the material has given me more insight and curiosities about the relationship between clay and art therapy. As I continue to work, I learn more.

There is more to clay than often meets the eye. Understanding it further in relationship to the ETC could help many art therapists utilize it and other materials successfully in sessions. Additionally, the small amount of existing research focuses on larger-scale, theoretical ideas rather than highlighting individual clay works. A more focused, heuristic study allows a deep dive into the subject and provides data through images and experiences that other art therapists could easily apply to their clients.

Thus, my research aimed to explore my work in clay through the ETC lens and analyze how different parts of the process fit into each level within it. The research question

was as follows: How does clay work evoke each level of the ETC, and what role does MDV play in that process?

Definition of Terms

Throughout this research, terms relating to the Expressive Therapies Continuum, as well as the process of working with ceramics, will be mentioned. Those terms are listed below.

Expressive Therapies Continuum, or the **ETC**, is a framework that classifies how people interact with art media to process information. It also organizes interactions into a developmental sequence of information processing and image formation from “simple to complex” (Hinz, 2020).

The **kinesthetic** component is a sense that informs people through bodily movement, rhythms, and actions.

The **sensory** component refers to processing that involves only sensation and no cognitive overlay (Hinz, 2020). Together, the kinesthetic and sensory components form the bottom-most level of the ETC.

The **perceptual** component is within the second level of the ETC and deals with form making capacities. It works with mental imagery and emphasizes formal elements of visual expression.

The **affective** component also falls within the second level and aids in describing the multidimensional construct of emotional states (Hinz, 2020).

The **cognitive** component processes complex thoughts such as language, numbers, and logical, abstract thoughts.

The **symbolic** component involves processing more intuitive and mythical abstract thoughts (Hinz, 2020). This includes understanding meaning within the context of certain symbols.

Then, there is the **creative** component of the Expressive Therapies Continuum. The creative component stands as the top-most level of the ETC and helps with synthesizing and self-actualizing tendencies of an individual (Kagin & Lusebrink, 1978). It has a therapeutic effect on individuals in art therapy and is often achieved by moving through the other levels of the ETC.

Other key terms relate to **media dimensions variables (MDV)**, which is information about the effects of media properties on the creative process in work (Hinz, 2020). **Media properties** describe art media, the essential tools for art therapy and art making, and their properties or qualities. Art therapists learn to understand media properties and how they can influence art therapy outcomes. Other important terms relating to MDV include task complexity, task structure, and reflective distance.

Task complexity involves the number of “steps” something takes to complete. There can be high-complexity and low-complexity tasks, each leading to different outcomes and levels on the ETC (Hinz, 2020).

Task structure, conversely, involves specific types of responses leading to definite outcomes at task completion. (Hinz, 2020). In other words, there are specific tasks that lead to a specific outcome. An example of this could be the specific folds used in origami that lead to a specific shape.

The term **boundary determined** includes the physical boundaries of a material and how that limits or enhances the expressive potential of that material. For example, if someone

is working with a piece of wood, its expressive potential is determined by the size of that piece of wood (Hinz, 2020).

A **mediator** is another term for a tool.

Reflective distance refers to an individual's ability to think about or reflect on the art making experience (Hinz, 2020).

Further definitions relating to ceramics are listed below.

Ceramic is a term used to describe the material made of **clay**, which is very pliable in its natural state. It changes in structure when exposed to high temperatures and becomes very hard and durable (Mizener, 1965).

Vitrification is the process that happens when clay and glaze are fired, making it hard, dense, and stonelike or glasslike.

To **fire** clay or put it in a **firing** describes exposing clay to extreme temperatures inside a **kiln**, like a very high-temperature oven.

Leather hard is used when the clay is not fully dry but not thoroughly wet. It is at a middle stage on its way to becoming fully dry.

Greenware, or raw clay, is a term used for a piece of clay that has yet to be fired. In this state, it is very fragile and, if immersed in water, would soon become soft again. Once fully dry, it is ready to be fired in a bisque firing (Mizener, 1965).

Bisque clay, or **bisque** ware, has been fired once. It becomes hard and dense and changes color from gray or white to a more buff, pink, or red color, depending on the type of clay. Once it has been bisque, it is ready to be glazed. This firing generally rises between 1830-1940 degrees Fahrenheit (Mizener, 1965).

Glaze is a liquid material made of minerals like clay that becomes a glass-like coating when fired. When applied and fired, it can hold liquids because it is no longer porous

(Mizener, 1965). The firings that cause the glaze to melt often go up to 2200-2284 degrees Fahrenheit.

CHAPTER II REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This research focuses on the ETC in art therapy, how clay has been applied to the ETC, and how deeper understanding and long-term use of clay can be seen through MDV and the ETC, as seen in Figure 6. Research material was found through the words and works of ceramic artists and the following databases: Academic Search Complete, JSTOR, ERIC, PsychINFO, Science Direct, and Google Scholar. Further alternative research terms can be seen in Table 1.

Figure 6

Intersection of Search Terms

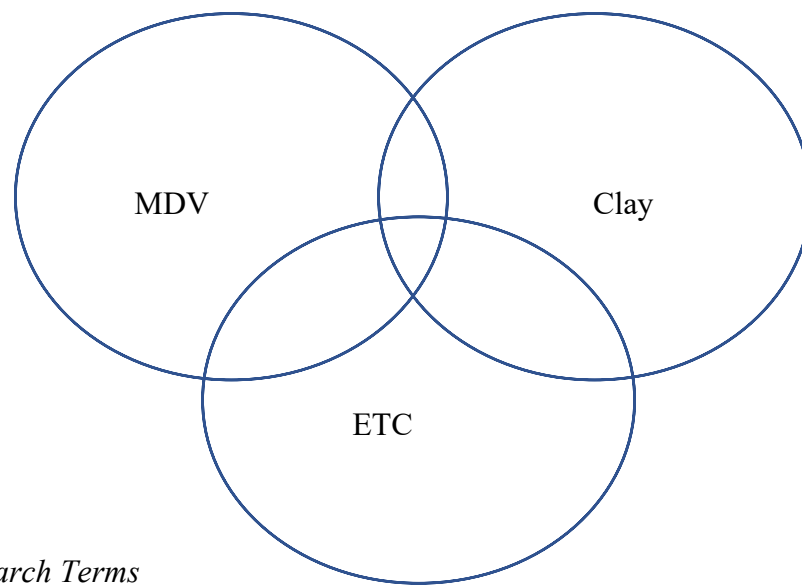


Table 1

Alternative Research Terms

Media Dimensions Variable	Clay	Expressive Therapies Continuum
Media properties	Ceramics	Process
Qualities	Sculpting	Processing
Characteristics	3D materials	Cognition

ETC in Art Therapy

As mentioned in the key terms, the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) is a theoretical framework developed initially by Kagin (now Graves-Alcorn) and Lusebrink in 1978. It was further elaborated on by Lusebrink through the 1990s and into the 2000s and most recently has been expanded on by Lisa Hinz in 1992 and in the latest edition of her book in 2020. It is a theoretical framework that provides techniques and theories about selecting appropriate materials and methods in expressive therapy (Hinz, 2020). It allows therapists to classify how clients interact with art media and activities to process information (Lusebrink, 2016).

Levels of the ETC

The ETC comprises four “levels” of brain development and the right and left brain. These levels consist of the kinesthetic/sensory, perceptual/affective, cognitive/symbolic, and creative levels, as briefly described in the key terms previously. These levels are arranged in increasingly complex processing relating to the human brain. For example, the kinesthetic and sensory level focuses on information processing, via movement and the senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch). These are ways of processing that humans gain early in development and correspond with the lower brain structures such as the brainstem and limbic system. The brainstem is often known as the reptilian brain. It is responsible for instinctual survival reflexes and helps control heart rate and breathing (Elbrecht & Atcliff, 2014). As the brain develops, it can process through the perceptual and affective levels relating to organization and emotions. These components also correspond to the limbic system which holds the main structures for emotion, learning and memory as well as functioning as the mediator for some of the “primal instinctual reflexes” (Elbrecht & Atcliff, 2014). From there, development allows the brain to process through cognitive and symbolic thought, such as

abstract ideas like language and love. This is involved with the recently evolved structures of the cerebral cortex, which organizes sensory, motor, cognitive and conscious experiences (Elbrecht & Atcliff, 2014). These levels can be divided into the brain's left hemisphere (kinesthetic, perceptual, and cognitive) and the right hemisphere (sensory, affective, and symbolic). All three layers of the brain are linked together within an intricate neural network allowing the integration and co-ordination of motor, sensory and cognitive functions (Cozolino, 2006, as citing in Elbrecht & Atcliff, 2014).

The last level is described as the creative level and has the potential to integrate information from both hemispheres of the brain (Lusebrink, 1990). This connects to Daniel Seigel's "integrated brain" which is the term used for the linkage of the differentiated parts. The integration of these brain functions can lead to proper prefrontal functioning, secure attachment, improved mental health, increased mindfulness, and overall internal attunement (Seigel, 2009). The creative level of the ETC can exist at any/all the other levels and allows for combining elements from each of the other levels of the ETC. While reaching the creative level is not the goal of treatment, it can help optimize the influences of each hemisphere of the brain, often resulting in joy and closure (Lusebrink, 1990). Table 2 shows a visual of these levels as described by Hinz (2020).

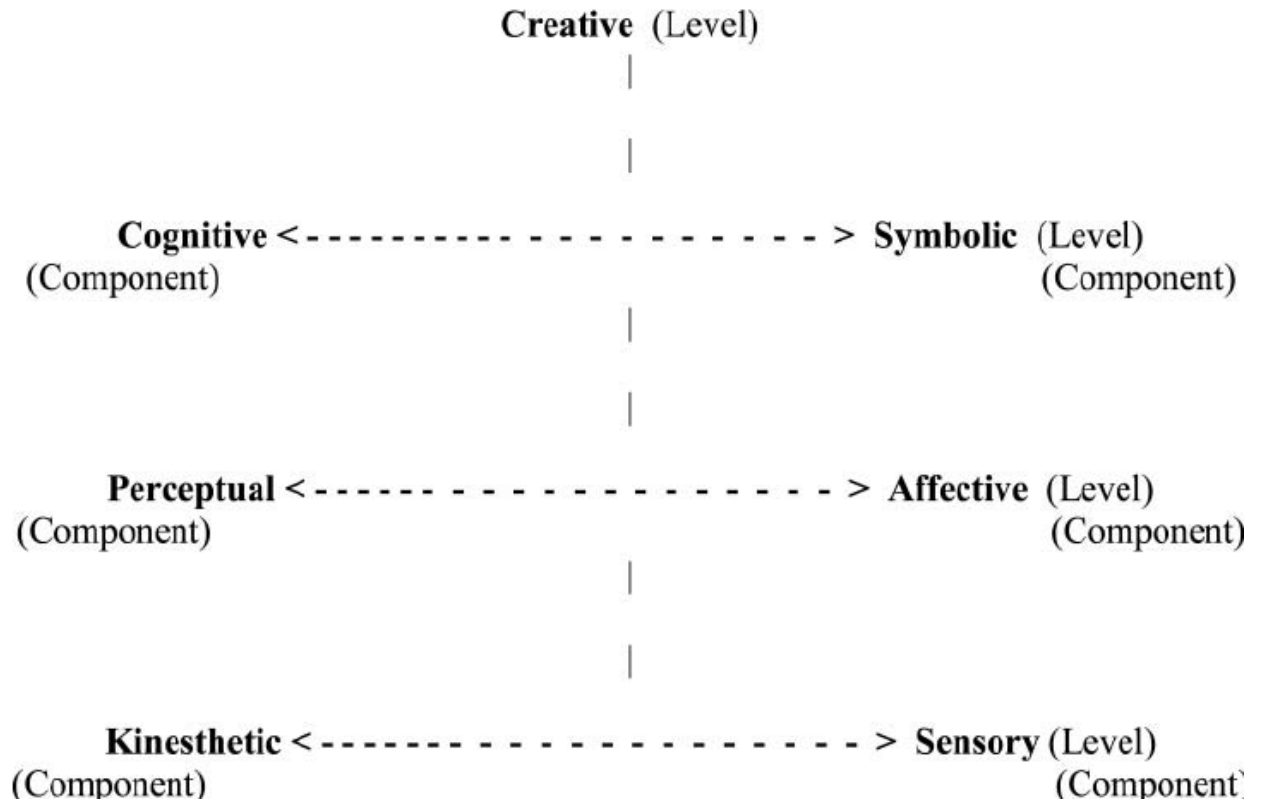
Media Properties and Interactions

Knowing different media properties and interactions is crucial to understanding and using the ETC in art therapy. Hinz (2020) explained how art media are the fundamental tools used in art therapy. Their intentional use distinguishes art therapists from other therapists who use art materials in their sessions. She also explained that our ethical responsibility is to understand materials and how they will affect work with our clients (Hinz, 2020). Each art

medium is unique and has the potential to evoke specific responses in those who work with them. Thus, we must understand those materials to serve best those we work with.

Table 2

Expressive Therapies Continuum



Media Properties and Interactions

Knowing different media properties and interactions is crucial to understanding and using the ETC in art therapy. Hinz (2020) explained how art media are the fundamental tools used in art therapy. Their intentional use distinguishes art therapists from other therapists who use art materials in their sessions. She also explained that our ethical responsibility is to understand materials and how they will affect work with our clients (Hinz, 2020). Each art

medium is unique and has the potential to evoke specific responses in those who work with them. Thus, we must understand those materials to serve best those we work with.

Media Dimensions Variables

Media Dimensions Variables, or MDV, describes information about the effects of media properties on the creative process in work (Hinz, 2020 & Hinz, 2023). Media are categorized on a continuum from restrictive to fluid. Solid media such as wood or pencil are considered restrictive because they require applying pressure (resistance) to be used effectively. Media that are “less solid,” such as paint or wet clay, are considered fluid because they flow quickly and easily during the creative process (Hinz, 2020). It is hypothesized that fluid media encourage experimentation and often evoke an emotional response. At the same time, restrictive media are easier to control, more likely to evoke a cognitive response, and can reduce anxiety (Hinz, 2020). It is also generally considered that fluid materials often allow for processing within the brain’s right hemisphere, while restrictive materials allow processing within the left hemisphere (Hinz, 2020). Beyond the ETC itself, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding the concept of media dimensions variable.

Boundaries, Mediators, and Reflective Distance

Other key aspects of material properties to note are boundaries, mediators, and reflective distance. The term “boundary determined” includes the physical boundaries of a material and how that limits the expressive potential of that material (Hinz, 2020). For example, wood has physical boundaries that cannot become fluid because it is an excellent material. On the contrary, “quantity determined” refers to when a certain amount of medium is controlled and how that can change the amount of expression (Hinz, 2020). For example, when working with an overly energetic child, an art therapist may give them a smaller

amount of paint. This allows for more control over the material and determines how much paper they can cover with that paint, thus adjusting the amount of achievable expression.

A mediator is another term for a tool. Any tool can affect expressive potential by coming in between the maker and the material. When a mediator is involved, achieving affective or sensory experiences and processing can be more challenging. They often allow for cognitive thoughts and higher reflective distance with a piece (Hinz, 2020).

Reflective distance refers to an individual's ability to think about or reflect on the art making experience (Hinz, 2020). Often, the more kinesthetic/sensory something is, the less reflective distance is possible. Conversely, with more cognitive thought comes more room for reflective distance (Hinz, 2020).

Task Complexity and Task Structure

Task complexity refers to the number of steps something takes to complete. There are high-complexity and low-complexity tasks, which can change the outcome and levels one is at on the ETC (Hinz, 2020). For example, drawing the outline of an image and then going back to paint the image is more complex than applying paint directly to a paper with one's hands. Task structure, on the other hand, involves specific types of responses leading to definite outcomes at task completion (Hinz, 2020). For example, creating something using the technique of origami requires multiple steps, done in order, to achieve a specific result.

It is generally known that high-complexity tasks lead to more cognitive processing, while low-complexity tasks often lead to a more emotional or sensory experience (Hinz, 2020).

Culturally Sensitive Art Materials and Novelty

It is important to note that all materials can have cultural significance and familiarity/unfamiliarity. As stated in the *Ethical Principles for Art Therapists* (2013), every

art therapist should do research when working with different materials and populations to ensure they are culturally sensitive to their clients' needs. Cultural differences can influence a client's comfort with various art media and using materials that are culturally meaningful to individuals can accelerate and accentuate the therapeutic process (Hinz, 2020). Having culturally meaningful materials often allow for greater investment and personal expression in the art making process (Hinz, 2020). Further, the novelty of materials can lead to openness and increase divergent thinking and creative performance (Hinz, 2020). It is also noted that it is possible to move a client through the levels of the ETC by changing their most used medium due to the novelty of a new material (Hinz, 2020).

When considering this, it is also crucial to remember that cultural competence ultimately comes from the art therapists personal work and is seen in their stance on how to practice anti-oppressive work. Cultural sensitivity cannot be only tied to whether materials themselves are culturally significant or not. This presents as a gap in the literature about the ETC by Hinz and Lusebrink, yet is far worth mentioning within this research and all future research.

Clay and the ETC

The ETC occasionally mentions clay and applies it in different areas of the theory. However, it is almost always referred to as “wet clay” and thus generally added into the kinesthetic/sensory levels of the ETC due to it generally being more fluid.

Art Therapy Literature

Nan et al. (2021) briefly discussed clay as touching upon multiple levels in the ETC by studying how clay in art therapy can affect emotion regulation. They discussed how clay work helps build mindful awareness of the physical environment through haptic and proprioceptive sensation and how sensations of creating with clay can help to attune with the

psychobiological arousal system. They further explored how clay aids in the facilitating of soothing and expressing complex emotions due to its kinesthetic and sensory qualities. Lastly, they discussed how creating three-dimensional objects in clay increases cognitive abilities and the expression of abstract ideas (Nan et al., 2021).

Further research by Nan (2016) delved into how clay can help cure depression through a bottom-up approach within the ETC. A bottom-up approach is when a client is led from the kinesthetic/sensory level to the perceptual/affective level and then to the cognitive/symbolic level. This study showed more significant improvements in depression symptoms in the group using clay compared with a control group. Analysis of ETC movement showed the flow from the bottom levels of the ETC up to the top levels (Nan, 2016). In other research conducted, he found that clay can produce haptic, solid, proprioceptive, and visual sensations through kinesthetic movement, encouraging emotional expression. This again, explored the bottom-up approach by going from kinesthetic movement to emotion and affective components in the ETC (Nan et al., 2021). Beyond Nan's studies, there is one master's thesis studying clay and the ETC, highlighting its use with adults with varying mental health diagnoses. The data represented all the ETC levels and further showed that the participants enjoyed engagement with the clay material (Medlock, 2017).

Further art therapy literature examined the use of clay in an art therapy setting, however, much of this literature is examined through a variety of theories such as Psychoanalytic, Attachment or Object Relation theories, rather than the ETC. For example, Edith Kramer explores the psychoanalytic concept of sublimation through the observed use of clay by a young boy named Christopher in her book *Art as Therapy with Children*. She describes how Christopher, a blind child, achieved sublimation using clay in art therapy by

turning his aggression and feelings of inadequacy into the impressive clay sculpting of birds and other “powerful” creatures (Kramer, 1971, p. 73-79). A specific example describes his creation of a five-foot blue heron. He had a previous interest in birds wanted to explore the idea in therapy, thus, Kramer assisted by providing smaller sculptures for him to feel before attempting to make his own. Together, they created multiple parts that were then assembled, post-firing into the large bird sculpture (p. 93-97). Through the making of these sculptures in art therapy, Christopher underwent a “transition from defensive belligerence to a more mature and proud masculinity” (p. 77). According to Psychoanalytic theory, sublimation is a process where energy is deflected from its original goal and displaced into achievement. Thus, helping unacceptable desires to become “socially productive” (Kramer, 1971).

Another example of clay research outside the theory of the ETC is Elbrecht and Antcliff’s *Clay Field* studies. In one study (2015), they explored clay in art therapy through Psychoanalytic and Attachment theory and observed how clay could aid in healing development and attachment trauma. Throughout, they explore how the material offers attachment healing through its focus on haptic perception and the use of the hands and touch as a tool of perception. They state that touch is one of the most fundamental human experiences and is the basis of secure attachment (Elbrecht & Antcliff, 2015). In another study (Elbrecht & Antcliff, 2014), they explored “sensorimotor art therapy” through haptic perception using clay as the main medium for the study. In this work, they discussed a case that followed the clay journey of a 35-year-old pregnant woman attending therapy for chronic fatigue syndrome and high levels of anxiety. Over the course of eleven sessions, this woman goes from not being able to touch clay at all, to rolling in and crawling in the clay, to creating representational objects and narratives. She experienced a block in her ability to feel

her emotions during this process, and using clay, was eventually able to get rid of “the old trauma” and “feel again” (p. 26).

David Henley’s work further illustrates how clay in art therapy has been viewed through a variety of theories outside of the ETC. Henley conducted a fair share of research about clay in art therapy, and wrote much about it in his book, *Clayworks in Art Therapy: Plying the Sacred Circle* (Henley, 2002). He also wrote some articles which demonstrated examples of clay work with his own clients. This can be seen in a writing which highlights the use of clay in art therapy through an Object Relations Theory (Henley, 1991). Within this article, Henley applies his ideas to three case accounts of individuals he worked with using clay. One of these accounts shows his work with Rashid, a 28-year-old man who often experienced “psychotic ravings and aggressive behavior”. A recent racial attack of a black youth, who was beaten with bats and struck and killed by a car, understandably upset Rashid. This feeling of upset led to Rashid “becoming hysterical” where he was “shrieking and cursing” while pounding on clay in a group therapy session. Henley worked with him to calm these intense feelings and to express them using the clay. Rashid created a figure using intense squeezing, pulling, and pinching movements. He later described this figure as himself and worked with Henley and the group to sort out the intense feelings this situation brought him. Henley viewed this situation through an Object Relation lens and describe the use of clay as “means for absorbing and channeling intense or overwhelming affect” (Henley, 1991).

As stated, each of these examples in the literature are viewed through a variety of theories, however, they can also be revisited through, or with the ETC. This revisiting of case examples can be found in the discussion chapter of this research.

Clay Artists

Outside the art therapy literature, ceramic artists discuss the ideas discussed in the ETC using a different vocabulary. Artist Del Harrow (2023), whose work is shown in Figure 7, described how working with clay requires both the mind and body in his online artist statement:

This way of working demands a continuous movement between the abstract and the concrete, between information and manual skill. The potency of this combination comes from the resistance it creates. The made thing demands a bodily commitment, providing an insistent reminder that even thinking takes shape through the textures and friction of the mind.

Figure 7

Work by Del Harrow



Note: By Harrow, D. 2019. *A Head is Just a Ball with Eyes* at Haw Contemporary.
https://i0.wp.com/delharrow.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/IMG_8730.jpg?ssl=1

Artists such as Harrow are having these conversations about clay and have been for centuries. Those who work with clay understand the material on a fundamental level and, though they use different vocabulary, are discussing the same material qualities that art therapists are. Thus, multiple artist's work and words will be referenced within this literature review. Understanding, listening to, and collaborating with artists, as well as undertaking personal material exploration, could greatly benefit art therapists and their understanding of materials and the ETC. In turn, this would benefit those they work with, through advanced facilitation of client's material exploration and expression.

Clay and MDV

There needs to be more literature relating clay and MDV in art therapy. While no academic research was found, artists working with clay (ceramicists) often reference similar concepts to MDV without using the same language. Much of this discussion falls between ceramic artists working with more "fluid" clay and those working with more "restrictive" clay. Many artists also discuss how a singular clay piece will go through the transformative firing process, transforming it from a more fluid material to a more restrictive one.

Clay and MDV: Restrictive

Clay is often considered restrictive and was initially categorized by Kagin and Lusebrink (1978) as an example of restrictive media because it is more inherently solid. The idea that clay is more of a solid material comes from the fact that, in its most common state (semi-wet clay), pressure is required to be used effectively; in other words, the material provides resistance to pressure (Hinz, 2020).

Artist Louise Bourgeois, a sculptor who used clay and other restrictive materials in her work, discussed this idea and related it to the resistance of people – a common theme in her work. She stated, "Materials offer a variety of silences, a variety of resistances..."

Sometimes we see that the material's resistance is such, or a person's resistance is such, that it is completely useless to insist.” (Verlag, 1992 p. 122). Figure 8 depicts some of her work. As an artist familiar with these materials, she understands the nature of their resistance and how it can lead to a cognitive response.

Figure 8

Work by Louis Bourgeois



Note: By Bourgeois, L. 1997. Spider (Cell). Museum of Modern Art, New York.
<https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/42/684>

Clay and MDV: Fluidity

Within the ETC, Hinz (2020) suggested clay’s ability to go from a restrictive material to a fluid material when discussing media properties. She explained how clay is generally categorized as a restrictive material, as stated by Kagin and Lusebrink (1978), but it can be considered fluid in its wet form. A fluid material flows easily and quickly during the creative

process, and when provided with enough moisture, clay quickly becomes fluid. In this state, a material can encourage experimentation and evoke an emotional response.

Ceramic artist Tony Marsh discussed the material of clay in depth and how its properties allow for emotional primacy. His quote, which began this paper, states how working with clay offers a sensual, kinesthetic experience that records action emotions and provides learning unlike any other material (Marsh, 2019). In his way, he described how clay becomes fluid and thus allows for a more kinesthetic, emotional experience. Figure 9 depicts one of Marsh's pieces that evokes this kinesthetic experience.

Figure 9

Piece by Tony Marsh



Note: By Marsh, T. 2018. Crucible Series. <https://www.maakemagazine.com/tony-marsh>

Clay and Boundaries

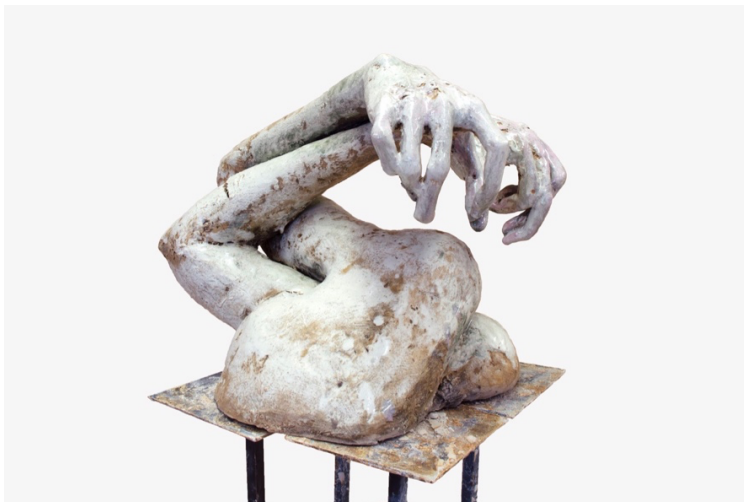
Clay is unique in that it is not necessarily boundary-determined in the same way other materials are. As previously stated, Hinz (2020) pointed out how clay can go from being a fluid material to a restrictive material and back again, unlike a material such as wood that is always restrictive. However, the transition from fluid to restrictive is often slow; thus, the material can be determined simultaneously. The boundaries of clay can change through drying or rehydrating greenware clay or by firing. Contemporary ceramic artist Daniel J Clauson (2023), shown in Figure 10, discussed the transformation through firing and its effects on their work beautifully in their online artist statement:

Clay, in its greenware state, holds imprints and reflects the effects forced upon it.

Once fired, that impressionable material takes into permanence those moments of tactility, violence, and immediacy. Through this transmutation of ephemerality into permanence, these ceramic forms become rendered as monuments, elevating these notions of identity, body, and landscape to a place of remembrance.

Figure 10

Piece by Daniel J. Clauson



Note: By Clauson, D. J. 2022. Can uncertainly find wings through fear/ become a songbird in the night.
<https://danielclauson.com/clay2022>

Clay and Mediators

Clay is often used with various mediators, and the amount and types of tools used can affect the maker's process beyond aesthetics. Artist Olivia Tani described how she precisely measured, drew, carved, and cut clay to achieve highly technical, slab-built forms, as seen in Figure 11. She explained that building with these tools and slabs allows constant reflection of the work and an awareness of form (Tani, 2023). This highlights how mediators allow for more reflective distance and, thus, more awareness of cognitive thoughts and form.

Figure 11

Piece by Olivia Tani



Note: By Tani, O. From <https://www.musingaboutmud.com/2018/11/05/monday-morning-eye-candy-olivia-tani/>

Clay and Reflective Distance

Taking away mediators allows for closer contact with the material itself and, thus, lowers the reflective distance. Generally, working with clay provides low reflective distance due to the material's hands-on, kinesthetic nature.

However, with the use of mediators, that reflective distance can change. In the previous example, Tani (2023) explained how there is more of an allowance for constant reflection when using tools and leather-hard clay slabs. Leather hard clay is dryer and thus more resistive, which, combined with the tools, makes for an experience with greater reflective distance and, thus, allows for more cognitive thoughts and narratives to form.

On the other hand, fewer tools allow for lower reflective distance. Examples of this can be seen in much of the research about clay that focuses on the emotional benefits of using clay as “art as therapy.” Art as therapy revolves around the idea that a material is therapeutic to use, such as the process being calming, satisfying, relaxing or even frustrating (Dalley, 2008). A specific example of this can be seen in a study examining pottery as therapy with older adults in nursing homes. It addresses how throwing on a wheel increased the participants' overall wellness and emotional state (Doric-Henry, 1997). The fluid motion of clay under one's hand on a wheel provides lower reflective distance, thus a shared experience of higher affective cognition and increased general wellness.

Clay and Task Complexity and Task Structure

The clay material can be used with varying task complexity and structure. The complexity and structure can vary greatly depending on what one intends to do with the material. For example, to throw a piece on a wheel, there are many steps one must follow to set oneself up for success, such as wedging the clay, weighing it, preparing the wheel, and more (Leach & Dehnert, 2018). On the opposite end, one could gain insight into art therapy

through the simple act of taking a ball of clay and throwing it against a wall, pinching it, or pounding on it to release frustration, all of which have much lower task complexity and task structure than the prior example.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Arts-based research design uses the art itself as both data and as a method for data analysis. According to Marshall (2010), inquiry in art is realized when art, word, and practice come together through making, reflecting, and writing. This research uses the material of clay and the many ways it can be manipulated to explore how its properties align with the ETC and MDV and how this could be applied to ceramic art and art therapy. I approached this research through a combination of paradigms. I utilized the interpretive or constructivist paradigm and the arts-based or aesthetic intersubjective paradigm (Leavy, 2017). Using the interpretive or constructivist paradigm, this research emphasizes subjective experiences. It considers that we make and remake the social world and assign meaning to activities, situations, symbols, etc. (Leavy, 2017). Additionally, artmaking is used to access that is otherwise out of reach (Leavy, 2017) and to value preverbal ways of knowing, including sensory and kinesthetic knowledge.

Role of the Researcher

The nature of this heuristic research is that I, as the researcher, become the core participant, data collector, and data interpreter. Heuristic research allows for a self-dialogue to take place. Moustakas (1990) stated that dialogue within the self is the beginning of further discovery. This form of research allows for a deep exploration of experiences within the self, opening room for further dialogue and exploration.

Due to my past experiences and education as a ceramic artist, I have a solid foundation to continue ceramic work and use my position as an artist and future art therapist to explore clay in a new way. Over many years of working with the material of clay, I have

already established an internal dialogue with the material and can explore it further within this study.

Phases of Heuristic Research

Moustakas (1990) laid out six phases that take place within heuristic research: “the initial engagement, immersion into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, explication, and a culmination of the research in a creative synthesis” (p. 27). This primary research design allows a researcher to explore, reflect on, and analyze the collected data.

My *initial engagement* with this research began in two ways. One was my initial engagement with clay as a medium, and the other was when I re-entered ceramic courses after starting my degree in art therapy counseling. This took place in the fall semester of 2022 and lasted over that semester. During this time, I realized there was more to the process of working with clay than I had previously been able to understand. I was beginning to find words for the experiences I noticed while using clay and became engaged with trying to understand clay through the lens of the ETC. During this time, I reinvented how I worked with clay, causing something familiar to me to become unfamiliar. This re-orienting of my engagement with the material allowed further curiosity and exploration.

Immersion into the topic began as I continued to work with the material and started to collect data through journals, critiques, and artwork in a master’s level ceramic course, ART 520. This took place over about six months, beginning in the early spring semester of 2023 and ending around the summer of 2023. During this phase, data were collected in journals, critiques, and photographs of the artwork. Thorough recordings of personal dialogue and dialogue with others were documented through journaling, which was hand-written, typed, and in the form of some drawings.

Critiques of the work took place with multiple groups, allowing for feedback and input from varying perspectives. Two critiques were conducted with ceramic professors and graduate students, and two were predominantly conducted with art therapy professors and graduate students. These occurred on March 2nd, March 28th, April 26th, and April 27th, 2023.

Weekly meetings with Joe Page, my ceramics professor, occurred to discuss the progression of the artwork, and bi-weekly to monthly meetings occurred with art therapy professor Megan Robb, the chair of my committee, to discuss the progression of the writing and artwork. Feedback from these meetings was recorded through journaling and note-taking.

Photographs of the artwork were taken throughout the whole process of working and afterward of the final products. These images are included in the data collection as evidence of information on the work that occurred.

Incubation was incorporated into the immersion phase through shorter periods of rest between works of art and critiques, and a more extended incubation period at the end of the spring semester led to a creative synthesis in the summer of 2023. Incubation allows the researcher to rest, reflect, and consider their work differently while stepping back from the making.

Illumination and *explication* occurred throughout the research process, as art-based processes are not always linear and may become somewhat cyclical (Leavy, 2017). After many of these processes occurred, the research culminated during the Fall of 2023 as the data collected were analyzed. Analysis of the data occurred through the organization of the collected data. Information in the journals and critiques was written and read through, allowing for common themes and ideas to be pulled into the research. The images were analyzed and incorporated into the typed-up data to round out the data analysis.

This process led to an extended creative synthesis phase where I, as the researcher, reflected on and discussed my internal dialogue around the topic. Ideally, there will also be a show and gallery reception showing the work to others during the spring 2024 semester.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Plenty of thoughts and cognitive processes were recorded through notetaking, photos of the processes and final artworks, and records of critiques. Through these, I categorized the data into the different levels of the ETC and utilized Moustakas' (1990) heuristic research model to display and organize the data collected throughout the process. While following the framework of heuristic research, I moved through the phases naturally rather than in a strict order. In the following sections, I document these phases and my experience through the data recorded from notes, photos, and critiques.

Initial Engagement

The first initial engagement for this research began when I began to work with clay as a medium. I have always been interested in art and working with my hands; however, it was not until college that I began to work with clay. The more I worked with the material, the more mysterious it became. At this same time, I was actively interested in pursuing a career in art therapy.

I became fascinated by how a simple ceramic vessel could hold: a cup can hold liquid, space, ideas, and the experience and process that created it. Similarly, objects created in an art therapy session become physical objects that can hold onto their maker's thoughts, experiences, and emotions.

The second initial engagement occurred for me when I entered graduate school and learned about material processing. It was not until my first year and a half of graduate school in counseling art therapy that I discovered the ETC and began to fully understand how materials can activate and engage our minds and bodies differently. As I learned about this theory, I applied my knowledge to my previously made ceramic work and discovered many

things about myself and how I was drawn to clay. However, with this discovery, I also found myself asking more questions about the material and the ways my brain and body interacted with it. Moustakas (1990) explained that this phase occurs when a researcher finds something that interests them and has some personal implications (Moustakas, 1990). This initial understanding of the ETC and learning to apply it to clay work laid the foundation for my interest in this subject and, therefore, falls within the first phase of heuristic research, *initial engagement*.

Immersion

I decided to dedicate a semester-long graduate ceramics class to my interest in this subject. At this stage, a researcher should live and breathe their question and do their best to grow in knowledge and understanding of the subject for which they have dedicated their time (Moustakas, 1990).

I began this stage with some confusion. The year and a half before had, in a way, uprooted what I knew about clay and how I used it. I no longer felt that the way I had been making was serving me. Prior to this research, I had been working slowly and methodically, using many tools to tediously carve away at dry, restrictive clay, creating more realistic forms, as seen in Figure 12 and Figure 13. These were created similarly to Figure 5 and took an incredible amount of time. Thus, my ceramic professor encouraged me to work quicker to get my creative juices flowing and allow for more work to be made over a shorter time. With this suggestion, I decided to do a series of 10-minute gestural hands where I would quickly look at my hand, set a timer, and do my best to capture the gesture in 10 minutes. After a few of these, see Figure 14, I wanted to stop, but was again encouraged by my ceramic professor to continue to make them, to get past the point of even thinking about it. This ended with me having 30 hands and 300 minutes of learning to create them spontaneously. I later came to

understand this suggestion as a critical point of research where I switched levels of the ETC through a change in the MDV. By changing the task complexity, task structure and adding boundaries such as lack of mediators my thought processes switched from a more cognitive way of processing to a more sensory and kinesthetic. Figure 15 shows these pieces, and though this exercise never really formed into a “finished piece,” it provided a starting point for my research and informed many of the pieces along the way.

Figure 12

Vase V



Note: By Geisz, A. 2022. Ceramic, found frame, 24”x36”x10.”

Figure 13*Vase VI**Note: By Geisz, A. 2022. Ceramic***Figure 14***First four, 10-minute Hands**Note: By Geisz, A. 2022. Process photo.***Figure 15***26 of 30 Total Hands**Note: By Geisz, A. 2022. Process photo.*

While continuing to move through the immersion phase of research, there are a few considerations to note. The first is that due to having a previous understanding of clay and how to use it, I could engage with the material in a way someone learning to use it might not. I also could direct my time with what I made and when I made because the graduate level class does not have instructed “projects.” Instead, it provides a space for individuals to dive deep into their interests in ceramic work.

Further, it is essential to note that, due to the nature of clay, I could only partially finish one piece before beginning the next because of time constraints. Clay must go through a drying process, an initial bisque firing, and a second glaze firing before finishing, which caused me to stagger my making process. For example, once I finished the first piece, I let it dry while I started the second, third, and fourth pieces. Only later, when many of these pieces were in process or almost finished, could I fire and glaze the ones that had been made previously. Because of this, I have organized the collected data into sections relating to the ETC rather than in chronological order. Thus, the order of the following sections does not correlate with the order in which they were created and does not reflect the significance of the individual findings within them.

Kinesthetic

When I began this research, I was particularly interested in how clay would evoke the kinesthetic level of the ETC because that is what it is often associated with in the literature and practice. For example, many art therapists will use clay only to activate kinesthetic and sensory levels of processing with their clients. A common intervention involving clay is having a client roll, fold, and squish it while talking through a difficult subject to calm their nervous system, much like a stress ball. While clay does touch on each

level of the ETC, there is no denying that many parts of it activate kinesthetic motion. Below are the many processes associated with the kinesthetic material while creating these works.

When I began to create, I needed to get clay and prepare it for use. One way of preparing clay is the process of digging it up. All clay must be dug up at some point, which is a very kinesthetic process of physically removing it from the earth. While I did not dig my own clay for this body of work, the concept was brought up in the second art therapy critique on April 27th, 2023.

I did however, need to prepare my clay through wedging. This is where one rhythmically rolls and presses the clay, much like kneading dough. The process is crucial for getting any air bubbles out of the clay and, thus, preventing it from exploding in the kiln later.

After preparing the material, the initial building process could take place. This generally occurs when the clay is in a semi-wet state with both resistance and fluidity. In this phase of making, getting lost in the kinesthetic feelings is very easy. I chose not to use tools while making it to experience what it was like for my hands and the clay to work together. The initial building process for *all* the clay pieces resulted in a kinesthetic experience.

I needed help staying at the kinesthetic level while working beyond the initial stages of wedging and preparing the clay. I found that I gravitate towards cognitive and symbolic art making – and almost immediately try to create form, meaning, or symbols rather than letting myself sit with the material in a kinesthetic process. I believe that unconsciously, I knew this and was often trying to force myself into the kinesthetic level by getting rid of mediators in my process, which will be discussed more in the media properties section of the results. Throughout this research, it became clear that working at the kinesthetic level without tools

creates low reflective distance. Therefore, thinking about my research while working this way was challenging.

The moment I experienced the clearest kinesthetic making was also the least intentional. After my ceramics class was over, I was excited to make something that was not related to my thesis. So, I went into the studio, listened to an artist talk, and let my hands build without thinking. This resulted in a tall, loose cylindrical form, as seen in the Figure 16 that later formed the finished piece that felt like the final close to my research, which is seen later in the research.

Figure 16

Loose, Coil Built Pot



Note: By Geisz, A. 2023. Process photo.

Sensory

Like the kinesthetic level, the sensory level is often associated with clay in the literature. The two often go hand in hand and can be experienced simultaneously. The sensory level of processing is also very prominent in all art-making materials because we rely on our senses to use and experience them. During my research, the sensory experience was noticeable throughout many processes.

While working with wet clay, all the senses - sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch - were highly notable. For example, visually, I would look at my hands to model the ones I quickly rendered and rely on my eyes to decide when to change the angle in a piece or add another coil. While working in the studio, there is also a constant, subtle scent of clay, which smells of the earth. Sometimes, the smell is pleasant, and sometimes it is not, depending on the state of the clay. It also makes sounds as it is worked with. Sometimes it sounds squishy, and sometimes it makes a splat sound. Sometimes, it can even make a clink or shattering sound in its fired state. One of my favorite sounds is when I am glazing bisque ware and can hear the glaze seeping into the dry, porous clay, much like the snap, crackle, and pop of rice crispy treats. When it comes to taste, it is recommended not to eat clay, but is often unavoidable when working in the studio for long hours. I often went between working and eating throughout the day and ate a little clay from my dirty, clay-covered hands. Lastly, there is touch, which is crucial to working with clay. Many of my early observations included considerations about the feeling of clay. For example, notes taken described the experience using a variety of words such as “cool, warm, slick, dry and sticky”. I also experienced body sensations depending on the clay I was working with. When working with soft clay, I found myself feeling “relaxed, calm, and peaceful”.

Other common words used in my notes to describe the body sensations while working with dryer clay included “tense, agitated, and rigid”. These body sensations and reactions are unique to me, and not everyone would feel the same. However, clay easily brings up a body sensation of some sort for most individuals who work with it. The feeling of it squeezing between my fingers felt soothing and familiar as someone who often works with the material. I also found that I could do many things without even looking. For example, in a previous piece, as seen in Figure 17, the section that was thrown on the wheel was easily created while hardly being looked at. Feeling the clay move between my fingers, I was able to determine where I wanted it to go. The process became less about the cognitive thought process behind making a bowl form, and more about the sensation of doing it.

Figure 17

Untitled Bowl II



Note: By Geisz, A. 2022. Process photo.

Perceptual

Processing through the perceptual level of the ETC often involves thoughts of form, line, shape, and color. Some of this processing occurs at early stages when a piece is beginning, for example, when I created early sketches of a shape for a pot I would consider how the belly of the pot, the foot, and the lip would all interact in their formal qualities. Another moment where perceptual processing occurred was when I neared the end of a pot and added small coils to create balance in the form or when found the location of the hands in ways that accentuated the form. Each of these steps is shown in Figure 18 and Figure 19.

Figure 18

Process Photo of Form



Note: By Geisz, A. 2023.

Figure 19

Process Photo of Form with Hands



Throughout the process, there was also a lot of perceptual processing surrounding the “line quality” of the coils. For example, in a later post, the formal qualities of coils changed midway through making the piece. Figure 20 shows the inside of the beginning of a pot with

a neat-looking coil pattern. Figure 21 shows how large, messy coils were added alongside the original, tighter ones of the same piece. This decision was partially created by the desire for a more kinesthetic coil-building experience; however, it was also informed by the formal qualities that each coil-building technique displayed.

Figure 20

Process Photo of Coiled From



Note: By Geisz, A. 2023. Process image showing the initial qualities of the coil building process. Birds eye view.

Figure 21

Process Photo of Coiled Form with Additions



Note: By Geisz, A. 2023. Process photo showing the change in coil quality. Side view.

Repetition is another aspect of perceptual ways of thinking and processing. It allows for deep study of a form, and by creating a form repeatedly, one can perfect a specific structure. Within my research, I created a series of eight cups with the same form I produced repeatedly. Only then did I add other parts to the cups that created slight variation in the form. Figure 22 shows four of these cups in the greenware state.

Similarly, making the 30, 10-minute hands (see Figure 15) allowed repeating one form (a hand) that slightly varied with each form. By making that form repeatedly, my mind and body became accustomed to making it and thus, as mentioned earlier in the sensory section, could create the form without even looking at it.

Figure 22

Process Photo of Cup Forms



Note: By Geisz, A. 2023. Four of eight cup forms.

Affective

This component of information processing relates to emotion and emotionally driven ways of creating. This showed up in various ways throughout the research I was conducting, from driving the way I moved my body to emotions coming out in thoughts and words while I worked or talked to others about the work. The clay seemed to hold onto or pick up on my emotional states when I worked. This was especially noticeable in the 30 hands pictured in Figure 15. I found that if I was making them while I was stressed and tense, the piece reflected that. The piece also reflected if I was relaxed and going with the flow. Many ceramic artists talk about how “clay remembers,” and this is a perfect example of that. In this case, the hands portray a very literal expression; however, this can even be felt like throwing on the wheel. The material seems to pick up on the maker's emotions and reflect that back on them. I often struggled, fighting the clay when I was already frustrated. Likewise, when I felt

good, I quickly got into the flow of things with my making process. In my observations, I took note of common impressions in the clay that correlated with my emotional state. For example, when I felt calm and relaxed, it was easier to achieve smooth, seamless forms in the hands I created. When I felt more tense, the hands often reflected that emotion through more jagged, rough qualities.

Clay can also be a pleasant experience for some, bringing up positive emotions, and a negative experience for others, bringing up feelings of frustration, disgust, or anger. This is often associated with the sensory experience it provides to individuals. Because I am familiar with the material and have generally good associations, I could use it to vent any negative feelings. If I were feeling stressed, engaging in kinesthetic acts like wedging or squeezing clay would let some of those feelings out, which felt as if the feelings were released from me to the clay.

Cognitive thoughts surrounding clay-making can also cause affective thinking methods while working with ceramics. For example, through critiques with others, I found that the symbols of hands within my work are very emotionally driven. While I already knew this to some degree, there was also a level of pure emotion I had not fully grasped. Associations with the hand's backgrounds, meaning, process, and more all found their way into my subconscious and came out as emotions.

Cognitive

Cognitive processing often involves logical thought, using language and numbers. Interestingly, clay is rarely related to cognitive processing in the ETC because of its strong correlation to the kinesthetic level. However, I found throughout this process that it is a level of processing that often showed up in my work.

Making things with clay often feels like working through a problem. It is not always fully answering or solving that problem, but it is a way of coping and learning to understand it. Throughout this making process, I found that each piece served as a way for me to ask questions, answer them (or not), and learn what to do next. This problem-solving mindset itself is a cognitive process. Also, each piece has the critical aspect of figuring out how to make things work. Clay is very malleable in its wet state, which makes it hard to build strong, big, or tall structures. Figuring out how to do that is a very cognitive experience as well. Along with this, there is the immense amount of testing that must be done to create something with clay. Tests can include miniature versions of something to create a larger one, testing to see what a glaze looks like or testing to see what a clay looks like. Figures 23 and 24 show just a few tests done throughout this research project to achieve certain results when necessary.

Figure 23

Glaze Tests in the Kiln



Figure 24

Tests for Shrinkage of Clay During Firing



Another area that related a lot to the cognitive level was the process of glazing. To make glazes, one must know what materials to add in a certain percentage. One needs to have

a working knowledge of chemistry to achieve the correct color, finish, and melting temperature. Also, operating the many different kilns is a very cognitive process. To different firing methods, one must know what temperature the clay and glaze need to reach and how to get them there. An exciting example of this and how different the many firing processes are can be seen with these detail shots of two different glazed pots. Figure 25 and Figure 26 show two pieces with the same glaze combination but a different firing method. While many glaze surfaces are hard to control and, in this case, involve some luck, there is also a lot of knowledge and cognitive thought involved in understanding glaze chemistry and how a glaze will turn out. Similarly, Figures 27 and 28 show the exact same cup (from different angles) that was fired once using one method, and again using a different method, altering the glaze dramatically.

Figure 25

Detail Shot of Pot Fired in Wood Kiln



Note: By Geisz, A. 2023.

Figure 26

Detail Shot of Pot Fired in Electric Kiln



Figure 27*Glaze from Electric Firing**Note: By Geisz, A. 2023.***Figure 28***Glaze from Wood Firing*

Considering titles for work is another cognitive process. While I did not explore this area in as much depth, it is important to note the ways in which a title can effect a piece and how it is created and perceived.

Symbolic

During this process, symbols showed up in many ways for me as the maker. The most obvious one is the symbol of a hand. The hands took on different roles and meanings throughout the time I worked. They represented me, those around me, the clay, people I have not met, the idea of community, and so much more. They became a part of me and the pots I created far beyond the cognitive thoughts. The symbol of a hand appears in every pieces that was created for this research.

Another common symbol was the symbol of a pot. While many of the pieces are actual, functional pots, they also came to represent something more. A pot or a vessel can hold, which is symbolic for me as the maker relating to myself and how I often feel about

clay and the field of art therapy. Each piece created during this time can be viewed as a vessel that holds something other than itself. In my notes, I reflected on how clay holds onto emotions. Much like what was described in the sensory section, I found that when I felt tense, my clay often appeared rougher. When I felt calm, it was easier to achieve a smooth, soft surface. In this way, I viewed clay as a vessel for those emotions. Similarly, a pot serves as a physical object that can hold onto something else such as a flower, water, or grain. It is once again, an object that has the possibility of holding onto, or providing possible space for, something else, this time in a much more literal sense. Lastly, I found myself understanding the field and general idea of art therapy as a sort of vessel or pot. My notes explored the idea of the art medium taking on, or holding onto, the experience of the client in a therapy session. For example, if an individual processed feelings of grief using clay in a session, the feelings would eventually be transferred from the individual to the clay. That piece of clay would become a physical object that held onto those feelings, acting as a vessel for those feelings. Within this field, this concept can become crucial to the work we do with clients. Any form of therapy done with the use of art media, whether it is clay, paint, written word, or song allows for this to happen. The transformative act that occurs during therapy is held safely within the art media which allows for the maker, or client, to step away from those feelings and observe the vessel that holds them. Their struggles, thoughts and feelings are, in a sense, transferred from within themselves and placed into the vessel that is the art media, allowing them to then decide what to do with that vessel and take control over these thoughts and feelings. In this sense, the act of engaging in art therapy as well as the art therapist themselves, can be viewed as a pot, ready to contain. The view of the art therapist becoming a vessel aligns with Edith Kramer's concept of the third hand (Kramer, 1986). This concept does not directly tie to the use of clay, but to the practice of art therapy.

Creative

The creative level of functioning occurs when all the levels of the ETC are activated and present within an experience. Through this research, I explored how having an active art practice using clay allows one to engage in the creative level of the ETC continuously. Figure 29 shows part of the making process of the same pot previously shown.

Figure 29

Process Photo of Hand Attachment



Note: By Geisz, A. 2023

When making this piece, I truly understood and noticed myself traveling through the levels of the ETC. Observing this happen real time, for the first time, was an interesting experience and helped me to better understand how I was making work. The process began with quick, sensory, and kinesthetic coil building with no intention or concept of form behind it. This can be seen in Figure 30. From that moment, the affective and perceptual levels were activated, and I noticed the quality of the cylindrical form that created an emotional reaction. When I sat with my thoughts and regarded its form, it brought up a variety of feelings such as accomplishment, empowerment, humility, sadness, and responsibility. This reaction related to symbolic and cognitive thinking as the form reminded me of the stump of a tree that had been cut. With these feelings and image of a tree, I was reminded a variety of narratives including a tree from my childhood home, my interest in forests, my fear of climate change and deforestation and much more.

Figure 30

Process Photo of Loose Coil Building



Note: By Geisz, A. 2023

The process of creating the “stump” allowed for these associations to develop, which then allowed for a narrative to form. This narrative of a connection to the earth and nature then informed the creation of the hands and their seemingly random, organic placement, much like branches continuing to grow out of a stump that was recently cut. This is just one short description of how working with clay in a sensory/kinesthetic way can also bring up thoughts, ideas, and feelings through the framework of the ETC, thus providing the maker an experience of the creative level within in.

Continuing the process for this piece, the hand forms on the vessel were constructed and attached, involving perceptual, symbolic, and cognitive ways of thinking. Using perceptual processing, I found the appropriate placement for the hands on the cylindrical form. Symbolically, I continued to understand associations to certain symbols such as hands and trees, which then lead to a cognitive processing of the symbols such as understanding their significance and creating narratives about them. After the drying and bisque fire, further cognitive thought was used to glaze and fire the piece. I found myself understanding the hands and stump form as symbols for community and how humans have come to contain both connection and disconnection with the earth. Each of these thoughts came up for me through a recognition of symbols and thus, created a narrative for the work. This jump from sensory/kinesthetic, to perceptual/affective and finally to cognitive/symbolic shows how I processed my making and understanding of the work using a bottom-up approach of the ETC.

Throughout much of the research process, I focused on the experience of physically working with the clay. I found myself feeling that prior narratives and cognitive thinking within the work came too close to my personal interests beyond the ETC itself. After my research was complete, however, I continued to realize how the ETC was showing up in my

work. Figure 31 shows an in-progress image of a piece made much after my research was technically finished. When creating this, I had further let myself enter the creative level of thinking by going beyond the initial ideas I was working with in this study. Due to no longer focusing on the material informing the work, I was excited to create a piece that began in the cognitive component. For a few years, I had wanted to title a piece *Vessel Stew* as a sort of joke about a lyric in a song. Thus, this piece began within the cognitive realm of my brain in the form of a phrase. After making an initial bowl form, more and more symbology and meaning occurred for me.

Figure 31

Process photo of “Vessel Stew”



Note: By Geisz, A. 2023. Progress image of Vessel Stew in greenware.

While making this piece, many world and life events containing violence were occurring. The genocide of Palestinian people in Gaza began and was constantly on my mind and heart as I created many of the hands, feet and branches that would enter the bowl. While at my practicum site, working with immigrant children, I was hearing stories of trauma and abuse within their home countries as well as through their travels to and time within the United States. I found myself constantly thinking about the innocent lives around the world that were subject to violence every single day. While making this piece, I also encountered an act of violence within my own home. A small, lost mouse had made its way into my bedroom one night. After a day or two of sleepless nights, a friend provided me with a variety of traps to catch it. Without knowing much about catching a mouse, I used a combination of them to in what I thought was the most humane way possible. This however, resulted in a live, hurting mouse that was scared and injured in the middle of the night. In turn, this led to me actively taking the life of the mouse to end its suffering. This experience brought up many feelings about violence towards animals that occurs daily. I have been a vegetarian for years for this reason, however, I felt that I was a hypocrite and monster for what I had done.

Confronted with my own ability to kill a living thing, alongside the stories I was surrounded with of atrocities around the world, I found myself spiraling in thoughts of innocence and violence. The “stew” then came to represent this feeling and acted as a monument to acknowledge, honor, and witness the lives of innocents who are subject to violence.

When looking back on this piece, I can clearly see the ways I traveled through the ETC and entered the creative level of processing. I also found it to aid in my processing of the events described, helping me to understand my thoughts and heal in what ways I could.

This is evidence of how working within the creative level of the ETC can increase wellness and self-understanding. Images of this finished piece, as well as details about the making process, occur in the MDV section of the results. This all emphasized how understanding the ETC helped me to better understand the material of clay in an art therapy context as well as in my work as “fine art”.

MDV

The Media Dimension Variables need more research in relationship to clay. However, I found through this research that it shows up at almost every level of the art-making process with the material. For example, the MDV centers on the spectrum of materials going from fluid to restrictive and how those materials often activate different thoughts, processes, and products within the therapy space. It is interesting to note how clay is a material that can go from fluid to resistive and back again, unlike many other materials. Hydrating or drying clay changes its properties and, thus, its reactions and uses within a therapeutic setting. This quality of clay is one that allows it to touch on all the levels of the ETC so easily.

Another interesting relationship to the MDV that showed up in this research was how, utilizing the ideas of the MDV, one can intentionally bring themselves (or a client) through the levels of the ETC with one material. For example, I unintentionally did this in various ways and only later realized how I utilized MDV to move through the ETC. An example of this is how I timed myself to create hands. This act of timing an action puts a boundary on that material and maker and thus, changes the way of making. This limitation allowed me to enter more of a kinesthetic process, rather than cognitive. I went from considering in depth the position of the hand, the emotions it evoked, and the technical process of making it, to quickly and loosely creating through quick movements and feel of the material.

Tools/mediators are another aspect of MDV, and clearly played a role in changing the way I was working with clay. By removing the mediators, I was almost forced into a more kinesthetic way of creating the work. The lack of a mediator made my hand and the clay the only two things that worked together, which lowered the reflective distance of the making process. For example, the artwork made previously, as seen in Figure 13, was created through carving and slab building. The hands, up to the wrist, were made from a semi-dry block of clay carved away and hollowed out. This process allowed for more cognitive thought and reflective distance than a hand made through pinching and squeezing, such as the hands in Figure 15.

The task complexity and task structure of the work also aided in guiding me through the levels of the ETC. A great example of this lays within the work *Vessel Stew*, shown in Figure 31. This piece was by far the most complex in the sense that it had the highest task complexity and structure. While other works also had multiple steps, this had the most individual tasks that needed to occur before it was finished. It began with using a mold to create a large, loose bowl shape (Figure 32). Once finished, it had small holes drilled into it to provide a space for previous steps to attach. As it dried and become hard enough to withstand its own weight, it was flipped, and a foot was added on through throwing on a wheel, shown in Figure 33. While the initial bowl continued to slowly dry and go through bisque, many smaller pieces including hands, branches, feet and mice were created (Figure 34). These also had a small hole drilled in the back. Once the smaller pieces had dried and gone through bisque, everything was glazed and fired a second time. After this firing, each piece was attached into the bowl using small metal nails that were epoxied into both the small piece and the large bowl. The step of epoxying the pieces together using metal nails

demonstrates a high task structure with its specific steps that led to a specific outcome. A close-up of this nail is shown in Figure 35.

Figure 32

Loose Bowl Form



Figure 33

Foot



Figure 34

Individual Pieces



Figure 35

Nail Detail



This one piece went through such a variety of steps to come to a finish, thus, demonstrating high task complexity and task structure. With this increased task complexity and structure, I noticed an increase in reflexive distance alongside more cognitive and symbolic thoughts and processes. I was able to create the meaning and narrative that was previously explained as I went through the complex steps to make it. These processes viewed through the MDV, is much different than the task complexity and structure with an example like the 30 hands previously discussed. With low task complexity, there is less room for reflective distance and an increase in ability to experience sensory and kinesthetic processes.

Viewer Experience

Another interesting thing to note is that due to the four critiques I participated in, the viewers reactions unintentionally reflected each level of the ETC. They expressed and experienced the kinesthetic/sensory, perceptual/affective, and cognitive/symbolic levels, all from looking at, interacting with, and talking about the art in front of them.

Many viewers experienced the kinesthetic and sensory levels while viewing the work. They described a desire to touch, smell, and even listen to or taste the pieces as they observed them in critique. Many of the art therapy critique members explained that the visual language of the pieces caused them to want to explore the pieces using all their senses and that the bisqueware created a sense of curiosity to explore those senses. Due to this being observed particularly when viewers were looking at greenware or bisque clay the curiosity went down when the pieces were finished with glaze.

The affective and perceptual ways of thinking were also brought up through the viewers. Many of those with experience with clay noticed form and other qualities associated with the perceptual level. Interestingly, those with less experience using clay seemed first to notice affective feelings while viewing the work. For example, Figure 36 shows the 30 hands

that were previously seen in Figure 15. Once glazed, they gained a new quality that immediately evoked emotions such as sadness and distress in many viewers. Many of them described that the hands evoked “distress, death, decay” and that they brought of thoughts relating to these feelings in their own, personal lives. Interestingly, this did not relate to the experience I, as the maker, felt with the hands. My experience with creating them allowed for a different experience than the viewers. It is also interesting to note that they did not evoke these feelings as much before being glazed. As previously stated, glazing, or fully firing a piece can change the appearance of it dramatically, and often provokes a more cognitive or narrative way of thinking. This step of glazing the hands created more reflective distance for the viewer and thus, made it easier to create a narrative relating to them despite what I, the maker had intended.

Figure 36

Close up of Glazed Hands



Note: By Geisz, A. 2022. Finished hands, some broken.

This leads into the other ways the viewers experienced the cognitive and symbolic level of the ETC. Many of these narratives or symbol associations occurred after experiencing the affective component. For example, the feelings of sadness and distress previously mentioned brought many of the viewers to consider genocide and war. Viewing this work and considering these narratives also caused them to ask questions about these topics as well as consider how the image they saw brought about these ideas.

Incubation and Creative Synthesis

As previously stated, this research did not necessarily go through Moustaka's phases in order, which is the nature of arts-based research. Thus, the incubation phase occurred at multiple points throughout making process. A planned incubation phase happened after the initial semester of making artwork in Spring of 2023. This occurred over about a month of no art making and little writing. During this time, I tried to take a break from the research and let thoughts come to me as they wanted rather than forcing anything. After this break, I went to work with clay spontaneously and created Figure 29, which, as stated previously, was one of the most relevant pieces to this research as it entered the creative synthesis phase. The piece captures each level of the ETC more clearly than any of the others, and it was only after making all the other pieces and a short incubation period that I was able to produce such work.

To conclude this chapter of results, images of the finished pieces are shown in Figures 37 through 53. As previously stated, much of the making process happened in a nonchronological order which is why the results section is organized as such. These images, however, are in chronological order (in terms of initially building them from clay) to show the progress and change that occurred over time. While the process of making these pieces is

where much of the research was conducted, I believe that seeing them finished is also important to this study and helps conclude the creative synthesis phase of research.

Figure 37

30 Hands



Figure 38

Untiled Bowl



Figure 39

Vase VII



Figure 40

Detail of Vase VII



Figure 41

Vase VIII



Figure 42

Detail of Vase VIII



Figure 43

Vase IX



Figure 44

Detail of Vase IX



Figure 45

Untitled Bowl II



Figure 46

Detail of Untitled Bowl II



Figure 47

Cups



Figure 48

Detail of Cups



Figure 49

Untitled (Stump)



Figure 50

Detail of Untitled (Stump)



Figure 51

Vessel Stew (Bird's Eye View)



Figure 52

Vessel Stew (Side View)



Figure 52

Detail of Vessel Stew



CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study explored how clay can be applied to each level of the ETC and the depth of the MDV of clay. Data from the researcher's reflective experience, images of the work, and feedback from critiques all supported the hypothesis that clay can travel through the various components and levels of the ETC and change its media properties. This exploration was further supported and enriched through the many words, images, and thoughts from ceramic artists and art therapists.

Major Findings

This research provided a clear map of how quickly and often working with clay can bring a maker through the many levels of the ETC. In the results section, the process was organized according to the components of the ETC and MDV, and how different processes and techniques tend to land in different ways of brain functioning within the ETC. The findings also amplified how quickly this process happens and showed how all the levels and material qualities are so deeply incorporated into the art making process. This amplified the understanding that all the ETC levels can be present during the art making process. Further, it showed how the common misconception that materials evoke only one component of the ETC is incorrect. This misconception was explained by Hinz in her presentation on the ETC (2023) and will be discussed further in the section on importance of these findings. While there is some art therapy literature that discusses how a material could go through the levels of the ETC, this research provides a true deep dive into what that looks like with an individual, which has yet to be done.

Another discovery from this research was that viewing art media can bring someone through each level of the ETC. This was not part of the hypothesis and only came to light

through the many critiques throughout the study. Whether this is specific to clay is still being determined, but it could apply to viewing all art materials through the ETC.

Further findings conclude that clay can uniquely change its media properties physically. The MDV describes how art media is on a spectrum of fluid to resistive and that those properties often allow for a material to evoke a certain feeling in its user. This research has shown that clay can change from fluid to resistive and that working with ceramics provides that whole spectrum. This is unique in that other materials might not have the same ability to the same extent. Using a similar example to the one in the lit review, a resistive material like wood cannot become fluid in the same way hard clay can become soft. Similarly, a fluid material like finger paint cannot as easily become restrictive in the exact same way that fluid, wet clay dries to become dry and restrictive.

Lastly, this research amplifies how familiarity with a material and its properties can open many possibilities for its use. The more someone works with clay, the more they can understand its media properties and how to alter and use them, thus figuring out the many ways it can be used. As the researcher, I thought about how getting to know clay as a material is much like getting to know a person. As you get to know them, you learn to understand their boundaries, limits, and ways of working, thus making it easier for you to interact with them and continue to learn from them. Forming an intimate relationship with the material can create so much insight into how to work with it and what to expect from it.

Findings within Literature Review

As the researcher, I gained a new understanding of the ETC and how it shows up within clay work. When looking back on work cited in the literature review, it is clear how a client might move through the levels of the ETC and how an art therapist might use MDV to assist them. An example of this is with Edith Kramer's work with Christopher. As mentioned

in the literature review, Kramer viewed the experience through a Psychoanalytic lens. Looking back on that example using the ETC helps to understand how working with the material of clay may have helped the young boy through therapy. Each of his actions can be placed into a different level of the ETC, showing that he was working on the creative level during his time with Kramer. The kinesthetic and sensory components occurred as he first explored the material and in moments, he was actively moving the clay with his hands. The perceptual component showed up in him finding his way around the form of the bird and discovering how to make it through the examples Kramer gave him. Throughout his time working with Kramer and clay, he was able to regulate his emotions and reported feelings of pride in his work, demonstrating that he was functioning within the affective component. He also worked within the cognitive and symbolic components through his immense questioning, understanding of and knowledge of birds and what they meant to him as an individual. All these components working together, over time, allowed for him to experience the creative level. What Kramer had described as sublimation through the psychoanalytic lens, can also be seen and understood as functioning within the creative level of the ETC. Both sublimation and the creative level are described as a sort of symbolic act of transformation (Kramer, 1971 & Hinz, 2020). In other words, Christopher's work with clay in art therapy allowed for him to turn his feelings and behaviors of aggression into a more appropriate expression of emotion. His birds served as a symbol and as a vessel for this act of transformation that occurred within him while working with an art therapist.

Christopher's story also shows how the MDV could affect a client working with clay. Through the intense work of creating large scale, ceramic bird sculptures, he was engaging in processes that involved higher task complexity and task structure. Creating the five-foot bird involved many, very specific, steps such as building in parts. This demonstrates a high task

complexity, while the specific assembling of the finished parts demonstrates a high task structure. Further, the amount of clay and the size he worked at showed how Kramer controlled the boundaries of the material. She allowed her client to work within the material boundaries as she found appropriate, thus demonstrating how her knowledge, and understanding of the material aided her in her successful work with him.

Literature from the *Clay Field* can be seen through the lens of the ETC as well. As stated, Elbrecht and Antcliff (2015) described the importance of touch and its fundamental relationship to human experiences as a source to connect to and heal with clay. These same ideas, however, can be seen through the ETC and how the brain functions alongside the hands working with materials like clay. Through physical sensation and touch while working with clay, a client experiences the kinesthetic/sensory level of the ETC. From there, they can move through the different levels, provoked by any thoughts or emotions to enter the perceptual/affective level or the cognitive/symbolic level.

This exact experience is highlighted in the case example of a pregnant, 35-year-old woman, described by Elbrecht and Antcliff (2014). The woman began with difficulties feeling her emotions and had a strong aversion to using clay. Slowly, she went from only looking at the clay to touching it, squeezing it, and eventually crawling around in it. This marked her entry into the kinesthetic/sensory level. From there, she began to identify feelings relating to her situation and used the clay to physically express these emotions. This can be seen as her entering the perceptual/affective level. Finally, she moves on to creating symbols and narratives with the clay. For example, a small house was described as “lumpy” on the outside and “soft” on the inside. This can be viewed as her entering the cognitive/symbolic level of the ETC. As she continued her work in the clay field, she found resolve for her feelings and “gets rid of old trauma” with the help of clay and a trained art therapist. Her

experience perfectly fits with a bottom-up approach of the ETC in which she began at the lower levels and moved up through the components. This movement, enabled by the initial contact from hand to clay, provided a space for her to enter the creative level of the ETC, which could then benefit her overall wellbeing and emotional regulation (Hinz, 2020).

Looking back on Henley's work with Object Relations theory and clay in art therapy, we can again observe how the ETC was working within the case account he provided. The example shows Rashid reconcile his feelings about a racial attack in the news through clay work in a group therapy session. He began with pounding on clay due to intense feelings of anger, overwhelm and frustration about the situation. This action clearly lands within the kinesthetic/sensory level of the ETC. As Henley helped him to calm down, he put his emotions into the clay through pinching, squeezing, and pulling, which slowly helped him go from kinesthetic/sensory functioning to the affective component of the ETC. As he worked, he was able to express these emotions while he formed a figure, leading to the perceptual and symbolic components. Finally, he was able to describe the figure as a representation of himself and talk about how that related to his feelings about the situation that had upset him. Thus, resulting in a more cognitive/ symbolic connection and narrative around the clay work.

As stated in the literature review section of this research, each of these examples are viewed through a variety of theories, however, they can also be revisited through, or with the ETC. Reconceptualizing this previous literature shows how any therapeutic experience with clay can be viewed and understood through the ETC, and that with a more thorough knowledge about both clay and the ETC, individual art therapists can enhance their practice and better work with clients who have an interest in working with clay. This mode of thinking shows how the ETC can be used as another beneficial lens to look at client's observed healing, that can coexist with clinician's other, existing theoretical orientations.

Importance of Findings and Clinical Relevance

Understanding clay and its unique media properties allows for so much exploration of the material. When considering these findings, it is important to note how much familiarity and comfortability with clay as a material can change how it is used in general and therapeutically. The *Ethical Principles for Art Therapists* (2013) describes the importance of understanding materials to provide a safe and healthy environment for their clients. Further, it highlights the importance of cultivating creativity for us and for our clients. Art Therapist Moon (2002) also discusses the critical aspect of cultivating our own identity as artists to provide a “hospitable environment for new growth in ourselves and in others” (p. 47). Familiarizing ourselves with a variety of materials is critical for being a successful art therapist, and while clay is not the only important material to understand, it is one that is often viewed as intimidating or out of reach. Many art therapists have used clay to some extent but may have used it less or less frequently than other materials such as paint or pencils. Due to this unfamiliarity, many describe feeling uncomfortable or scared of working with clay alone or with clients. While this fear is understandable due to how unfamiliar the material is, it also hints towards the importance of art therapists educating themselves on using various materials. One clear concept in the literature is that clay is often a robust material to use in a therapeutic setting. Thus, evidence supports the importance of therapists becoming more familiar with it. From a broader view, this research shows how complex individual art materials are. As previously stated, it is a common misconception that art materials only fall into one category of the ETC (Hinz, 2023). This thinking can cause art therapists to limit materials by boxing them into one category, thus limiting the scope of the materials and how they can be used therapeutically. Understanding materials on a deeper

level, such as in this research, showcases how untrue this is and can encourage others to explore materials further.

Along these same lines, this research explores how the ETC and MDV interact with materials and goes into the complexity of the MDV. There needs to be more research on MDV, which makes it hard to grasp how intricate media properties are. Understanding MDV and understanding it within the context of materials can help art therapists expand their knowledge of art materials and the concept of materiality itself.

Finally, this research uniquely highlights how working artists think about the same thing as art therapists regarding material, just with a different vocabulary. The fields of art therapy and fine art are different. However, there is so much overlap and ways we could learn from one another. It is interesting to see how many ceramic artists are talking about the media properties of clay when there is so little research about it from art therapists. This type of research could bring art therapists and artists closer together and benefit from working together more.

Limitations

While many exciting findings come from this research, there are also limitations. Heuristic research inherently provides unique insight but is also somewhat limited because it comes from one individual whose perspective is, by definition, limited. In this study, the researcher also has many years of experience working with clay. In some ways, this is a benefit to the research. However, it can also be seen as a limitation because only some people have used clay to the same extent. Along with this, research finding shows how much experience with clay can amplify and hinder the material's ability to travel through the ETC. Thus, this research done by someone with different experience levels could produce different results.

Lastly, there is the limitation relating to the inaccessibility of clay. I was fortunate to have access to all the equipment need for this research, however, not everyone does. Accessing all needed materials is often expensive, time-consuming, and challenging, especially in a therapeutic setting. So, while this research encourages other art therapists to enhance their knowledge of clay, it also acknowledges the difficulty that comes along with accessing and fully utilizing it as a material within therapy.

Suggestions for further research

The study at hand opens the door for more research to be done. Many of the significant findings could become further research on their own. For example, more research can be done about other materials (not clay), exploring the MDV, and ETC levels within them. Other writings and research exploring the juxtaposition between theoretical views of art therapy processes alongside the ETC framework might shed light on making fuller use of ETC as a paradigm intrinsic to art therapy.

Finally, further research on how these findings can be applied to populations in a therapeutic setting could be done. For example, research that creates therapy activities using clay touches on each ETC level and how they affect the clients' engagement with them.

Conclusion

This research concludes that clay is a unique and complex material that allows its user to go through every level of the ETC. Ceramic artists and art therapists can significantly benefit from profoundly and intimately understanding this incredible material. A person using clay has the unique ability to travel among the ETC levels and use a material that can quickly go from a fluid to a restrictive. Its unique media properties and ability to change allow the maker to use it in various ways, and understanding this could be very beneficial clients in art therapy.

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