

The Meanings of Possessions of Adolescent in Art Talented Class: From Transitional Object Perspective

Shyue-Ying Chiang
Part Time Assistant Professor
National Taiwan Normal University
E-mail: shyueying@mail2000.com.tw

Abstract

Transitional object, an intermediate area of experience between infant and major caregiver, is one of the most notable contributions of Winnicott. During the time of separation-individualization, a transitional object helps calm the infant and make them feel secure, increases their sense of control, and assists them in coping with frustration better. The second stage of individualization occurs in adolescence, during which time the transitional experiences function similarly as they did in early life. The present study tries to understand the collecting meaning and relationships of visual art creativity in adolescent from the object relation perspective. The focus group is consisted of 9 members from a 7-grade art talented class. The results show that the various objects are not necessarily one's transitional object, but the transitional object may be among one of the possessions. Moreover, transitional object may be transformed to different activities including visual art creativities by adolescents. However, the overwhelming pressure to learn in the art talented class may have a negative impact on the adolescent's attitude toward art making, which may causes some of the teenagers transfer their attachment from visual art making to other forms of creative activities.

Keywords: separation-individualization. adolescent, possessions, transitional object, transitional phenomenon

1. Introduction

Transitional object is developed in an intermediate area between inner reality and outer world by one's illusion in early life. Through imagination, fantasy, daydream, creativities in this particular space, one is able to show the sense of control, integrate the inner mind, and stay calm and secure. The phenomenon occurs in the first separation-individualization stage, and the second stage of individualization occurs in adolescence, during which time the transitional experiences function similarly as they did in early life. Moreover, this phenomenon will be repeated throughout human life span when the need of autonomy arises. This study is interested in adolescent's transitional object. The motivations, purposes, questions, and limitations of this study are discussed below

1.1 Research motivations

The adolescent is confronting drastic biological and psychological changes on their way to adulthood. They face challenges when learning to be independent. For example, after the Ministry of Education lifted the hair ban in 1987, the junior high school students were able to choose their own hair styles, no longer being restricted to same old short, dull-looking hairstyle. The philosophy of discipline was not as restrict as before either. Therefore, the junior high school students were allowed to have greater freedom to determine their own behavior. Collecting small toy figurines as decoration and creating interesting little visual art products are important ways to express themselves. It ranges from scribbling in one's schoolbag and classroom table, making personal photo stickers, creating paper cards, storing up badge or small toy figurines, reproducing popular cultural products and so on. The adolescents display themselves various creative ways. Why does such phenomenon fall in one's adolescence in particular? What are the motivations and purposes behind these behaviors? How to better understand these phenomena through researches? Hopefully, this study could answer these questions and gain more understanding of the adolescent.

1.2 Purposes and questions

In order to fulfill the developmental tasks, adolescents are trying to be independent and to identify with themselves, however, their behaviors may be different from individuals in other developmental stages. By viewing the adolescent's behavior of collecting possessions and intimate objects as experiencing autonomy in separation-individualization stage from the perspective of Winnicott's transitional object theory, this research attempt to find out the relationship between transitional object and creativity of visual art task in adolescents from a 7th -grade art talented class, and figure out the meaning of it.

According to purposes above, the research questions are as follow:

- (1) Inquiring the varieties of collecting possessions by adolescents and the reasons behind from the transitional object perspectives.
- (2) Discussing the meaning of possessions of adolescents from the transitional object perspectives.
- (3) Exploring the relationship between the transitional object of adolescents and their visual art tasks.

1.3 Research limitation

Subjects of this research are 9 7-th graders, 6 females and 3 males, from an art talented class in a junior high school in Taipei area. In order to understand theoretical issues more regarding the issues of separation-individualization, transitional object and art experience, a focus group was held in this research. However, behaviors of the adolescents may differ from those who live in rural areas since the study was proceeded in Taipei city. Second, the limited amount of participants, the uneven gender ratio, and the selected age group may also influence the outcome of the research. Qualitative approach is the main research methods. Regarding questions about how to identify transitional objects, how to help participants understand the meaning of a transitional object correctly, and how to help participants to talk about their possessions with transitional object meanings, interviewing the participants in a focus group may be the best way to find out the answers. Finally, some of the participants had limited time being

interviewed due to having to go to the cram school right after the interview, which might also have an impact on the result of this research.

2. Transitional object and Transitional Phenomenon

2.1 The concept of human development by Winnicott

As a pediatrician and a psychoanalyst, Winnicott developed a notable human developmental theory when working with children. He created several influential concepts such as good enough mother, transitional object, true self and false self etc.. Transitional object is the most remarkable theory among these concepts. In order to grasp the concepts of the transitional object, developmental perspectives by Winnicott are described as below.

(1) Absolute Dependence

Winnicott (1953) stated that a newborn infant stays in an “absolute dependence” stage who could not stand alone from his mother, and who is totally dependent and fantasizes the omnipotence of the major caregiver. In this period of time, the infant believes in his own omnipotence because he cannot distinguish himself, the subject, and the major caregiver, the object. Winnicott observed, in order to sense of “me”, an infant is unable to perceive his body as himself but to sense his fist or a part of his blanket as “not me”. When the infant is growing, he can gradually recognize “me”, himself, and “not me”, outside of himself. Clair (2004) expressed that the infant explores the environment to find “me” and “not me”, and the mother is the major role to provide opportunities for the infant to begin to interact with environmental objects and to establish the relationship with them.

(2) Relative Dependence

Clair (2004) pointed out, when an infant was unable to operate “not me” in the environment, his sense of omnipotence reduced, then the infant is shifted to the stage of “relative dependence”. Winnicott (1971) believed, the infant probably could not tolerate the realistic situation without protection because he would sense his dependence toward his mother, and be anxious while she is away. However, the transitional phenomenon could help the

infant developing the ability to sense his inner reality and outer world in a realistic situation. During this period of time, the environment plays an important role of developing the concept of “me” while the mother or the major caregiver would be the most important object to interact with. If the mother is not good enough, then the infant may surrender to his mother and develop “false self”. A “good enough mother” will fulfill and not fulfill the baby’s omnipotent fantasy. Therefore, the baby has a chance to interact with the environment by himself and develop “true self”, yet he needs to overcome his frustration and anxiety when facing the reality and get comfort and security from the “not me” object (Winnicott, 1971; Li, 2000).

(3) Toward Independence

Clair (2004) declared, a baby would gradually need the caregiver less and less and be attached to something soft which is a substitution for his mother when the mother was away, at this moment, who would be able to develop independent and other mental abilities, and integrate himself and the environment. This is what Winnicott called “toward independence”.

Three stages of “absolute dependence”, “relative dependence”, and “toward independence” clearly describe the procedure of mother-baby interaction in the early developmental time while transitional object and transitional phenomena happened during the independent process.

2.2 Identification of transitional object

Winnicott (1953) started to discuss the theory of transitional objects and transitional phenomena in 1951, and the theory was published later. He observed a baby is able to wave his fist, to play with his fingers or thumbs, and to stimulate the oral area to satisfy the instinctive pleasure. After several months, the baby starts to find a soft blanket or a fluffy toy to play with. Winnicott (1971) stated that the soft blanket or the fluffy toy was the first “not me” possession. With the characteristic of separateness, this object is created by the baby owner when facing the issue of separation – individualization. This object comes from the baby’s illusion which portrays the decrease of his omnipotent feeling, and has a meaning of in between self and important others, assisting the baby in experiencing “me” and “not me”.

Therefore, holding a realistic existed blanket or a fluffy toy helps a baby to learn self concept and autonomy independently.

Winnicott believed that the intermediate area of experience stands between subject and object, helping a baby to realize his limited ability, and gradually learn to accept the reality. As a substitution of the mother, the baby invents his transitional object as a safe area without negating the sense of separation

Clair (2004) explained Winnicott theory, and he pointed out that transitional phenomena mean more than transitional objects, Such phenomena first happened when an infant tries to use his omnipotent fantasy to create and manipulate a concrete object around him such as sucking his thumb and touching his blanket to avoid anxiety when his mother is away. Transitional objects like fingers and blankets are objects existing concretely in physical reality, and are used to substitute for the mother's breast that brings comfort in fantasy by infant's control, which is neither the real mother nor fantasy, but the infant's intermediate area of experience. Winnicott (1971) observed the importance of transitional object, an object that the infant carries all the time and is sometimes much important than his mother. It helps solving the psychological problem of anxiety and loneliness, and decrease depression, which is "an object of anti-anxiety" (p.5).

Winnicott (1971) perceived illusion as basic experience of human being, and the transitional object is the result of illusion which symbolizes the baby's ability to distinguish reality and fantasy. The omnipotent illusion supports the baby to create transitional object and helps him marching toward independency. This experience can't be ignored because it stands between the outer and inner reality, and provides a sense of security and comfort to the baby when he feels anxious. The transitional phenomenon usually occurs when the baby is 4-12 months old, or even much later. Depending on one's age, sometimes it could also be transferred to some proper interests or related behavior.

However, Litt (1986) found in his research:

- (1) Transitional object attachment is not a general phenomenon in child developmental process.
- (2) Transitional object attachment is more common in the middle and upper

socio economic class family, which may be related to the parenting style.

- (3)None of the following are relevant to transitional object attachment, the sleep environment, feeding styles, gender, birth order, the number of siblings, when to stop breast feeding, and the number of caregivers etc..
- (4)Transitional object attachment is usually continued to 7 or 8 year-old or to adolescence age, but no evidence shows the use of transitional object can be associated with psychological illness.
- (5)Some evidences show that whether using the transitional object or not may due to personality differences.

No matter how people identify the transitional object, it exists only when the parents provide opportunities for a baby to have control power over his transitional object. Moreover, the transitional object seems to have its own temperate vitality. Winnicott (1971) implied that the transitional object would lose its meaning when one grows up, but wouldn't be forgotten by the owner. The forms of transitional objects can be transformed over time. Boys tend to love hard apparent objects (Kamptner, 1995) or electric games (Hull, 1985), while girls tend to transfer to the need of interpersonal relationship, family love, literature (Berzoff, 1989), or diary (Downey, 1978a; Sosin, 1983). However, there is almost no gender difference in one's first transitional object.

2.3 The meaning of the transitional object in adolescents

Many scholars considered that the transitional object portraits characteristics of a mother, such as caring, soothing, and providing a sense of security, and functions as the substitution of the mother. As a product of interacting between the baby and the environment, the transitional object helps one to learn independence, subjectivity, constancy, and consideration (Boniface & Graham, 1979; Garrison & Earls, 1982; Passman, 1976, 1977; Winnicott, 1953; Kamptner, 1995) . However, there are few researches about beyond childhood.

About the developmental psychology of adolescents, S, Freud thought that adolescents are in genital stage maturing in sexual development and seeking a person in different gender as loving object. Yet, Freud only pointed out that sexual drive would produce inner conflicts; he did not describe the

detailed biological and psychological changes. E. Erikson viewed human development from a social perspective, emphasizing developmental crises and missions in different ages, and adolescents would confront the crises of identity and successfully accommodate if they overcome the crises (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2008).

Transitional experiences solve the problem and allow one to avoid the inner conflict or to confront developmental crises. Like the baby manipulating the blanket to display self-control, the adolescents may use transitional objects to reduce anxiety and uncertainty. Tabin (1992) emphasized that self-objectification activates the process of self integration in infancy and reappears in adolescence.

Usually, transitional object can be totally manipulated by the owner who will integrate the inner self and change the senses of the environment when interacting between the inner and outer reality. Tabin (1992) stated that self-objectification means using self as his transitional object, and so to speak, transitional object symbolizes a part of the body, or the extension of the self. When one is in his early life, how important the transitional object is to him may depend on how often he carries it. As to adolescents, possessions may have similar functions. Adults who carry specific objects when traveling may be related to the transformed transitional phenomenon as well. Emotionally and cognitively speaking, the transitional object reduces anxiety for the owner and is the creation of self-realization and self-objectification.

According to above, functions of transitional object are integrated below:

- (1) Transitional objects provide psychological comfort. This is a main point of transitional object theory by Winnicott. Similarly, Hong (1978) indicated that the baby could keep calm and secure when associating the transitional object with his mother.
- (2) Transitional objects improves self concept. Tolpin (1972) stated that a baby enhances his self concept by fantasizing the transitional object, which indicated that the baby somehow devoted himself to his transitional object.
- (3) Transitional objects contain the concept of self-objectification. Tabin (1992) stated, transitional object can help a baby deal with the issues of

self-control and self-continuity, because the way that a baby uses transitional objects to exhibit himself as his transitional object. Therefore, transitional objects can be controlled by its owner, which is something that self-image or self-body cannot achieve.

Tabin (1992) thought that the process of self-objectifying by a baby would become an example when he grows up, especially when the adolescents are dealing with the crisis of self-control and self-continuity.

Moreover, Passman(1987) & Jalongo (1987) thought that using transitional objects is not a symptom of illness, and more scholars indicate that holding transitional objects is good for psychological and biological health (Boniface & Graham,1979; Mahalski, 1983; Provence & Ritvo, 1961). Newson, Newson & Mahalski (1982), Boniface & Graham(1979) pointed out that the transitional object could increase self strength. However, some scholars found that there is no difference whether one uses transitional objects or not (Sherman, Hertzog, Austrian & Shapiro, 1981).

Sandler (1985) implied that it is a normal defense mechanism of using transitional objects regressively and exaggerating in adolescents. Downey (1978b) described the value of defense mechanism in transitional objects lies in the meaning of self-comfort and self-actualization. From Tabin's (1992) point of view, self-objectification explains the need of transitional objects, and is mostly transformed into the autonomous learning, which is related to the issue of self-integration in adolescents.

Furthermore, Winnicott had similar thought as Freud. He believed that sexual drive is the character of adolescents no matter they are aware it or not. Therefore, adolescents' immaturity needs to be allowed. Such immaturity, including creative thoughts, sense of freshness, concepts of new life, etc., is the element of health. Jacobs (1995) stated if allowing immaturity is a natural process in personality development, one cannot pull up the seedlings in order to help them grow faster. Although personality development cannot be formed through education, the parents can provide opportunities and room for such development.

Hamilton(1999) extended the idea of the transitional object which appears by illusion in early life. He believed that the transitional object never stop being transformed into various interests and activities at different stages

of life in order to adjusting individual matters and emotional sustenance in latent stage, puberty stage and early adulthood.

From the theories above, most scholars believed that the adolescents are at the unique moment for their physical and mental development, facing sexual drive, actively establishing social and self identity, and learning to be independent. Their ability to create could satisfy the need of controlling by manipulating art materials. The behavior of self-control through art making is a concrete way of creating a space between self and object, the inner and outer world, fantasy and reality. Art can be viewed as a safe transitional space for learning and promoting independence and integration.

3. Transitional Objects of Adolescents

With calm and secure functions, transitional objects influence the development of the ability of integration during childhood and adolescence as well. However, theoretically speaking, there are individual differences in the process of transitional object transformation, and this study will attempt to explore the issue of transitional object transformation.

3.1 The meaning of transitional object transformation

Tolpin (1971) stated, as an illusion and substitution of the mother figure, the transitional object would become the source of security, helping one to develop from maternal regulation to self-regulation. Schneiderman (2000) indicated that the infantile transitional object could even process the symbolic alter ego, therefore, the area between subject and object would stimulate one's ability of symbolization.

Winnicott (1953) called the experienced transitional area "intermediate space", describing the place between self and not self, reality and fantasy. Galligan (1994) implied that there is no clear border of this space, and Schechter (1983) pointed out that young children connect the area when playing selflessly. In the process of play, children went through three steps: (1) Children would stay in a fantasy world when playing with an inconceivable egocentric attitude.

(2) Existing substantially in reality, the object can still be experienced by children.

(3) Even when children stay in a fantasy world, they can still truly connect with the real subject and the object.

The three steps display the overlapping reality of the subject and the object, which is neither a self centered illusion, nor a concrete object reality. When children play, draw, tell stories and write literatures, they stay in the space between fantasy and reality without experiencing any conflict.

Winnicott (1953) thought that the transitional object will lose its meaning gradually as children develop, yet, if the environment allowed children to play, draw, and tell stories freely, then they were able to transfer the transitional object attachment into creative activities. Schechter (1983) indicated that creative activities would bring pleasure and satisfaction for children and people of all ages. Moreover, creative tasks would help gain self esteem if the subject could show his autonomy and self-control under regulations.

Illusions can be transformed into creativity in a relaxing playful atmosphere. Therefore, adult's creative activities are similar to that of children's play. However, only a good enough mother can provide opportunities that could help one to change outer reality to fantasy. For adults, whether or not opportunities are present in the environment is crucial. The process of developing abundant creativity may lead one to an unfamiliar territory filled with curiosity which also implies the increasing possibility to deal with anxiety. The skills of creativity usually come from independence in the early life. One could be able to take a creative adventure only when one was in a state of independence. Winnicott (1953) believed that similar situations would happen in different stages of life when the need of independency increased. However, daydreaming won't directly produce creative work, but could become the pathway to invention; moreover, personal memories combined historical fantasy might produce mythology.

Fantasy is an important character of transitional phenomena. Whether transitional objects or transitional phenomena are both a creation by one's mind; thus, Winnicott (1971) tended to think that people could find extended feature of transitional phenomena in the whole cultural environment. Theoretically, the transitional object is allowed to be created through

opportunities given by parents in one's early life, and will be re-occur for the rest of one's life. This intermediate concept between inner reality and the outer world actually permeates one's life through many forms such as play, creative arts, religion, imagination, creative science, dream, amulet, ceremony and so on, which are all extensions of transitional phenomena that finally become different forms of art and cultural activities.

3.2 Possessions of adolescents

In order to inquiring the relationship between transitional objects and possessions of adolescents, contents of related literatures are discussed below.

Chen, Lin & Lin (2004) used questionnaires to investigate the collecting behaviors of elementary and junior high school students. This research showed that more and more scholars were interested in the meaning of collecting behaviors, and found that human beings have exhibit collecting behaviors since they were very young. One could confirm the existence of self by collecting which also might imply different psychological and emotional meaning and could be viewed as very early cultural activity. Kamptner's (1995) quantitative research approach used questionnaires for 264 adolescent age 14-18-year-old attempting to prove the connection of early life experiences and the meaning of possessions. The results showed that treasured possessions provide security and comfort, symbolizing the connection of the self and the mother which is able to decrease pressure and anxiety, and increase independence. The results of these two researches are associated with the transitional phenomenon.

However, the research of Chen, Lin & Lin (2004) focused on the varieties and habit of collecting behavior, but did not mention the psychological meaning. Kamptner (1995) found six factors related to collecting behavior. Among those factors, entertainment, materiality, social and outer self factors have largest difference from the meaning mentioned by object relation theorists. Similar findings were displayed in Chen's research. Moreover, Chen, Lin & Lin (2004) pointed out that trendiness and decorativeness of collection objects are important for collectors, while Kamptner (1995) mentioned that the collection objects reflect self identity

and the mirroring of self. Both research discussed the factors of age, gender, social issue and memory to the past.

In order to understand the transitional object of adolescents, this study referenced two researches discussed above. Even though Kamptner (1995) tried to explore the deeper meaning of adolescents' transitional objects, the quantitative research approach seems be unable to yield such conclusion. In this study, the researcher provides an idea of adjusting the research methodology as below:

(1)The possible limitations of questionnaire

Chen, Lin & Lin (2004) used the term "collection" while Kamptner (1995) used the term "treasure possession" in their research. However, "treasure possession" possibly imply the monetary value of the products and might mislead research participants. Although questionnaires offer quick results but it is rather difficult to obtain answers given with psychological comfort level and in a non-substitutable manner. Moreover, it is even more difficult to find answers related to the possible transformation of transitional objects in different age.

(2)The possibility of a qualitative research approach

When using transitional object as a substitution for the mother object, the key is that the object provides security and comfort. The object could decrease anxiety in separation-individualization time. Possessions may bring pleasure and have social functions, but not necessarily has the functions of the transitional object. If a research only explored the varieties of possessions, it is not enough and may be unable to obtain the answers of the inner psychic meaning of the objects. Therefore, qualitative research approach may solve the problem.

(3)Results showed multiple meanings of transitional object

Mirroring, self identify and social link are all existing in the meaning of the infantile transitional object. As for adolescents, the irreplaceable meaning of transitional object is wider, yet possessions are more or less with the meaning of it. Self-objectification of what Tabin (1992) said, is a way of using illusion to establish transitional object by self and which is good for

enhancing interaction between self and the environment. In order to understand these, qualitative research may help to integrate the multiple meanings of the transitional object.

Furby (1978) and Belk (1991) thought that valuable possessions could help adolescents to experience independence and good for self identity. More scholars pointed out that the function of possessions were similar to the transitional object that happened in early life, which increases security and comfort, connecting to the mother, and decreases pressure (Berg, 1982; Downey, 1978b; Rosenthal, 1981; Sosin, 1983; Straetz, 1976).

Besides, consciously or unconsciously, separation anxiety happen in adolescence and the object of separation might be the family or the familiar environment. In order to stay calm and secure in this moment, adolescents might seek to attaching to specifics to substitute their parents or family, the source of security.

3.3 A focus group

According to what are described above, this research would use qualitative research approach to explore transitional object of adolescents. Krueger & Casey (2008) stated that the focus group assists the searcher to efficiently explore specific experiences in a simple way. Therefore, a focus group interview is conducted in this study.

Before the focus group was conducted, the researcher explained the purposes and needs of this study to the teacher of the art talented class. Research subjects were selected through purposeful sampling and the teacher's assistance. Seven students who collect objects were willing to participate in this study. The researcher established relationships with the participants in the preparation meeting (2007/7/02 · 11a.m.), and showed them pictures to explain the meaning of personal possessions and the purposes of this research. The pictures showed objects that might possibly be possessions of adolescents, such as keychains, drop ornaments, action figures, bolsters, Japanese capsule toys, candy toys, various stationeries, and so on. Interestingly, it seemed that participants were not attracted by those objects. Two of them stated immediately that they didn't own similar objects and others two participants wondered whether they would be able to

participate because things they liked were quite different. The researcher affirmed them that as long as they were collecting something, they could participate in this study. The research then made appointment with them for formal interview. Before they left, the adolescents in the preparation meeting started to exchange information about where to find an art studio to sharpen their skills. It seemed that art learning was much more important than the issue of collecting (2007/7/02research diary).

Table 1 Interview questions of the focus group

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify the items you own from the pictures? Please introduce similar items you have in your schoolbag, on the school table or in the drawer? 2. Please describe why you like these items. Why do you collect them? 3. Please describe under what circumstance would you want to have them. 4. After you purchased them, what do you do with them? Do you put them in order? 5. What are the feeling that you have when you look at them? 6. If these things were lost, what will you do? Will you buy the exact same thing to replace it? Will you find something similar ? Or will try to do something to fix it? 7. Are the things you collect all the same type of thing? What does your collection mean to you? 8. Please describe your deeper feelings toward these collections. 9. Is there any correlation between the things you collect and your creative art works? 10. How do you feel about visual art? What does art making mean to you? |
|---|

Two more students were also interested in this study and jointed the formal interview. In the end, there were 9 participants in total, 6 females and 3 males, joining the focus group interview in the place of art room at school. The interview only lasted about one hour because students needed to rush to the cram school. Questions used in the focus group aimed at answering the research questions, including categories of possessions, reasons for collecting, emotional factors, personal meanings of art making, and possibilities of transforming one's possessions into creative works. The process of this focus group emphasized on the interaction of group members, attempting to guide members to talk more about the focus issues. Questions were listed in table 1.

The researcher and all the participants sat in a circle, assigning each one a number in order (number 1 was the one on the right side of the researcher, and so on). Number 1-4 was female, number 5-7 was male and number 8-9 were female.

Among all research participants, number 1 and 4 concentrated on answering questions and expressed clearly; participant number 5 showed his great interest in the research topic; number 6 and 7 were not very cooperative and made strange noises and interfered with the process of interview; number 8 and 9 were co-operative but expressed a lot of negative feelings due to their sense of inferiority and frustration about not having good enough artistic performance. At the end of the focus group discussion, participants were willing to share their collections by taking pictures (research diary of 2007/7/18).

After the verbatim was done, reading, marking the main point, coding sentences and arranging meaningful unit to several units, the researcher was trying to analyze results as objective as possible. Two experts who were professional specialty in object relation helped to verify the validity of the result.

4. Result and Discussion

The research is based on the theory of transitional objects and tries to understand adolescents' collecting behavior. Participants of the focus group came from a 7-grade art talented class. The result shows rich contents.

4.1 Categories and reasons of owning possessions

Kamptner (1995) stated that possessions of adolescents tend to be materialism. His research shows that the male tend to have 3C products while the female tend to have valuable things, such as necklace. Chen, Lin & Lin (2004) found that the adolescents had a wide range of possessions which are not necessarily expensive. In reality, expensive objects almost could not be found in this research. Besides, there is no gender difference in collecting decorative objects. Most of the objects are gifts from others.

According to research data (table 2), possessions can be categorized into 3 different groups: valuable products, unpurchased items of gifts, art works by the owner or DIY goods.

- (1) Valuable products: : drop ornaments (#1, 3, 5, 8), Japanese capsule toys (#5, 8), keychains (#1), Manga (#4), posters of favorite idols (#9), picture albums of traditional hand puppet shows (#2), tourist souvenirs (#2, 3), stamps (#5, 6), movie posters (#7). These collections are mostly free gifts from friends and relatives (#2, 3, 6, 7), buying with personal allowance (#4, 8, 9), or both (#1, 5).
- (2) Unpurchased items or gifts: advertisement DM (#2, 3), tourist souvenirs such as labels and DM (#2), memo pad from hotel, DM from museums or theme parks (#3), product tags from clothes (#7).
- (3) Art works and DIY goods: taking photography and storing in personal blog (#8), DIY action figure from Japanese capsule toy (#5).

Table 2 Varieties of possessions from research participants

| No. of participant | Varieties of possessions |
|--------------------|---|
| No. 1 (F) | drop ornaments (Snoopy, Doraemon), keychains |
| No. 2 (F) | pictures albums of traditional hand puppet shows, exotic products (dream catcher, bags from aborigine, wooden shoes from Holland), tourist souvenirs (labels, DM) |
| No. 3 (F) | Thank you cards from wedding, tourist souvenirs, drop ornaments, memo pad from hotels, DM from museums or theme parks |
| No. 4 (F) | Manga, especially the fantastic style |
| No. 5 (M) | Japanese capsule toys with action figures in human style inside, picture albums of Japanese capsule toys, drop ornaments, stamps |
| No. 6 (M) | stamps \ pet (stag beetle) |
| No. 7 (M) | product tags from clothes \ movie posters |
| No. 8 (F) | drop ornaments, note books, Japanese capsule toys, necklaces, something special, taking photography and storing in personal blog |
| No. 9 (F) | posters of specific idols |

By simply discussing “why do you collect them?” in the focus group, research data shows different reasons for collecting possessions. External factors include attractive appearance (#1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8), unintentional action (#3, 5, 6), influenced from others (#4, 6). Specific personal factors include good memories (#3), wish fulfillment (#2, 4), personal love (#5, 7, 8), and

idolism (#9). Internal factors include visual pleasure (#1, 3, 5, 6, 8), emotional sustenance (#1, 2, 3, 4, 8), releasing pressure (#3), identification with idol (#9), and inspiration of creativity (#2, 4, 5, 7, 8).

(1) External factors

- (a) Attractive appearance: "good looking" (7-3, 8-8, 5-17), "adorable" (1-5, 3-8), "pretty" (6-3, 6-21), "beautifying effects" (1-28). Visual pleasure is the most important reason and motivate adolescents to collect.
- (b) Unintentional action: "...Singapore is the first foreign country I visitedI took the memo pad from the hotel...then I started to come up an idea of collecting memo pad of places I used to visit...then I started to collect them and had more and more..." (3-6). Unintentional action came from life experience and became a reason for collecting.
- (c) Influenced from others: "My mother gave me a book of stamps" (6-3) said by participant number 6, due to this reason, he started to collect stamps. Being influenced by the classmates is also a good reason for collecting, "Once I saw it, I was infatuated with it" (4-2). The reason is similar to what Kamptner (1995) said about social issue of collecting.

(2) Personal factors

- (a) Good memories: "Footprints in the sand show where one has been" (3-7). Connecting possessions and personal life experiences best explains what Kamptner (1995) said about the meaning of connecting with the past.
- (b) Wish fulfillment: A wish that cannot be achieved in life can be entrusted to the care of an object. "I am eager to go to some places, so I started to store up things from those places" (2-8) participant Number 2 said. These objects are majorly tourist souvenirs from friends and relatives. Participant number 4 wish to become a manga writer and caricaturist (4-9), which motivates her to collect manga books.
- (c) Personal Preference: Collecting possessions do have personal reasons. For example, participant number 5 collected Japanese capsule toys with action figures especially in the human style just for

fun. Participant number 7 thought that product tags from clothes are tasteful, so he collected them. Participant number 8 collecting her photos in her blog is just for the sake of saving them.

- (d) Idolism: Due to identification, participant number 9 "collected posters of her favorite sport stars or movie stars" (9-1).

(3) Internal factors

- (a) Visual pleasure: This is the major reason of collecting.
- (b) Emotional sustenance: Participants expressed that "in order to express their feelings" (4-9), they "follow their heart to collect those items (2-15)". Sometimes, they "do feel much better when looking at those when were down" (1-28). These show that emotional sustenance is an important reason of owning possessions.
- (c) Releasing pressure: Generally speaking, participants tend to think that possessions functions as placebo. Participant number 3 said, "I think about it or look at it when I have a short break from study, and it may help motivate me to go on studying" (3-9).
- (d) Idolism : Participant number 9 likes to play basketball and to collect posters of her favorite idols, but "only limited to the specific ones" (9-3).
- (e) Inspiration of creativity: This factor may only happen in the art talented class. Participant number 2 stated that "I usually collect things I really want to draw" (2-19), participant number 5 thought that "opening a Japanese capsule toy and assembling the human figure inside is very interesting" (5-18), and participant number 4 expected that those mangas she collected would help her "become a manga writer" (4-9). Moreover, participant number 8 thought that her drawing skill is not as good as her classmates; so she transferred to photo taking and saving pictures in the blog for herself.

The results above help us to understand the categories and reasons of collecting. This research will then discuss the meaning of collecting possessions by adolescents from the transitional object perspective.

4.2 Meanings of possessions

Object relation theory pointed out that transitional object provides the function of self-control and comforting. Most importantly, nothing can replace

the personal transitional object. Do possessions of participants share similar characteristics? Participants were asked to talk about how they store possessions and how they feel if they lose their favorite possession. Results of the focus group interview are described below.

About the way of storing the possessions, the result shows that participants frequently leave those objects in noticeable places (#2, 3, 5, 6, 9), such as in the bed rooms(#2), on the desk lamp (#3) or wall (#9), in the cabinet (#6) or in the special cabinet for collecting (#5), or any other obvious places at home. About the meaning of possessions, participant number 2 stated that "if I collected something, there must be a special meaning to it" (2-11). If it is not displayed in an obvious place, participant number 5 would "feel...somewhat bored" (5-18). Participant Number 3 stated that she hung the drop ornament on the desk lamp and kept the DM in the plastic box because she "can look at it during the study break" (3-9). Moreover, carrying the object with them all the time is also a way of collecting. For instance, participant number 1 hung her drop ornament inside of her schoolbag and not showing it to others.

The loss of transitional objects in the infantile stage will cause huge emotional responses; so the participants were asked to talk about their feelings when the possession was lost. The result shows that the sense of loss is the common feeling when they lost their possessions, but they might not try to find the exact same thing to replace the original one. If their parents prohibited them from having these objects, parent-child conflicts would then arise. More detailed information is listed below:.

(1)Not necessarily finding the exact same object for replacement: Some participants stated that they would not buy the exact same thing to replace the lost object (#1, 2, 5, 4, 8), because they "wouldn't just project the sad feeling to another object" (1-17). Participant number 8 stated that "Through I can't do nothing about the loss, I still tried all night to find it" (8-18). Two participants described that they would find the exact same object to substitute for the original one (#4, 9). When asked if her favorite possession were missing and could never be found, participant number 1 responded exaggeratingly, "Then I don't want to live" (1-27). Participant number 8 implied that she could not tolerate the loss of her photo projects

and said, "I think losing an object is not a big deal, but if my photo project stored in the website were all missing, I will cry till I die" (8-19) and even "go to somewhere or someone to protest about it" (8-20).

- (2) The feeling of loss is the common reaction: Most participants expressed experiencing a sense loss (#1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9), and feeling "sad" (2-14), "weird" (3-13), "angry" (9-8), "upset" (#5), and even "can't go on living" (1-27), or "cry myself to die" (8-20).
- (3) Parent-child conflicts: If the parents prohibited their child to have the object, then the adolescents would have emotional reactions to it, which then turns into parent-child conflicts (#3, 4, 6, 7). The conflicts usually occur when the parents thought that collecting favorite objects and keeping them in an obvious place would have a negative impact on the academic performance of their children (#2, 4), or for some other concerns (#4, 6). Sometimes, parents even threw their possessions away without owner's permission (#7). All participants agreed that their possessions brought delights to them and did no harm to their school grade. Instead, these objects function positively by allowing them to project their affectionate feelings (#1, 2, 3, 4, 8) and to release pressure (#3).

The research result shows that the transitional object means deeply to the adolescents due to the reported strong sense of loss and the conflicts with their parents about the objects. According to the result, the five characteristics of the transitional objects are Irreplaceable, Soothing, Mastering, Sense of loss and the Ability to make decision.

- (1) Irreplaceable: According the research data, collections may not always be irreplaceable to the participants, which means that possessions may not necessarily mean the transitional object to them. For example, participant number 1 stated that among all her collections, only the small Doraemon decorated toy hanging inside of her schoolbag was irreplaceable to her. Participant number 3 has more affection towards the drop decoration hanging on her table lamp than anything else. Participant number 4 loves manga while participant number 8 holds dear her photo project in her blog, and they both could not afford to lose their favorite object. Participant number 6 collected product tags from clothes, and participant number 9

picked up posters of idols. Although participants number 2, 5 and 6 in the focus group described their possessions detailedly, their objects were not irreplaceable to them.

- (2)Soothing: Irreplaceable objects may always be the carrier for expression of emotions, yet, objects with such a function may not be irreplaceable. Participant number 5 collected Japanese capsule toys with human figures inside, he said, "The process of assembling the human figure is the most interesting thing" (5-18), and "if these human figures were broken and can't be fixed, they could only be thrown away" (5-30). He would not buying the exact same capsule toy for replacement because it is somewhat wasteful to him; he usually chose to "buy a different one" (5-25).
- (3)Mastering: Adolescents were allowed to use their allowance to purchase possessions, which helps explain Furby(1978) and Belk's (1991) viewpoint on how purchasing objects enables the adolescents to be more independent. In this research, only participant number 5 received help from his mother in collecting stamps; the rest participants all purchased objects with their own allowance, which shows their autonomy in collecting behavior.
- (4)Sense of loss: If the object is irreplaceable, it will then cause the sense of loss (#1, 3, 4, 7, 8). On the other hand, the loss of replaceable objects cause less emotional reactions such as "grief" (2-16), "pity" (5-26), and "sadness" (6-28).
- (5)Ability to make decisions: This issue about fighting for one's autonomy was not planned to be discussed in the focus group, but it was addressed by the participants. Some participants were bothered by their parents when they interfered with their decisions in collecting decisions (#3, 4, 7, 9). This result seems to prove that adolescents need to be allowed the freedom to decide their own transitional object, parent-child conflicts may arise.

According to research results, there are complicated factors of regarding object relations, and possessions are not necessarily equal to transitional objects. However, the transitional object still plays an important role in the stage of separation-individualization process.

4.3 The correlation between the transitional object and visual art creativity

It is important to learn to be independent and managing oneself when facing the issue of separation-individualization and the crisis of identification. In reality, adolescents seem to have autonomy, and yet still being under the influence of the parents or school authority, which may cause great anxiety and discomfort. The transitional object helps to solve such psychological dilemma. Hand (1995) pointed out that one will develop the ability of symbol formation and creative behavior when using the transitional object in the form of visual art making.

Time management is a way of showing the ability of autonomy, underlining the relation in free time and art making. Therefore, the topic of time management was brought up in the group discussion. Participant number 1 stated, "My free time was getting less and less after I entered junior high school..." (1-31) and she spent her free time on creative works. Only participant number 3 felt that she could freely use her time to do things she liked. Most adolescents from the art talented class expressed that they tended to engage in other activities other than art making in their free time (#8, 9). They "only make creative artwork when it is assigned as schoolwork...I rarely scribble now" (8-23).

Due to the importance of the psychological feelings related to transitional activities, this study attempted to discover how the concept of the transitional object influences art activities of adolescents. Some of the major reasons for the adolescents' art activities shown from the result include getting good grade (#1, 4), training self for specialty (#1), projecting feelings(#1, 4), releasing pressure (#4, 5, 7), getting creative inspirations (#2, 4), and considering the uncertainties of the future (#8, 9).

(1)Getting good grade: Pursuing good opportunities to enter a good school is the major task of junior high school students. Participants in the art talented class pay close attention to the qualification for entering a good high school. Therefore, art making means more than a pure creative activity, but a major means to get them to their dream land. Participant number 1 said, "When I draw, I thought of getting into a good high school.

- If I work hard in the art talented class, then I may be able to get into the art talented class in a better high school" (1-35).
- (2) Training self for specialty: Participant number 1 viewed art as a specialty and said, "If I train myself to be an art specialist, my life could be forever changed" (1-35).
 - (3) Functioning as carrier for expression of emotions: Drawing provides opportunities to "project and release feelings" (1-35), or "relaxing" (4-17).
 - (4) Releasing pressure: Participant number 4 stated clearly that art making helps her relax. Participant number 5 expressed that scribbling brought about feeling of relaxation during the break of math practice. He said, "Mathematical problems make my eyes sore, but art help them relax" (5-32). Participant number 7 expressed that "drawing is a way of resting" (7-39).
 - (5) Getting creative inspirations: Participant number 2 expressed, "There was not much ideas on my mind and I always got my inspiration from my collections" (2-19). Participant number 4 tried to connect creative work and writing, "I drew and made a free association with the drawing; then I might think that I could write a novel out from this picture. The inspiration possibly helped me draw some more things. Then I am able to continue writing my novel" (4-19).
 - (6) Uncertainties for the future: Being exposed to the stressful academic environment in junior high school, participant number 8 said, "I drew all the time before, but now, no home work, no drawing, and I even did scribbling less and less" (8-23). Participant number 9 even thought, "the environment would kill the interest of drawing" (9-10). Sometimes, unexpected bad grade might lead to sense of frustration and make it hard for them to have a good balance between the academic subjects and art courses, which sometimes even raised the idea of putting art away and studying only. Yet, participant number 8 said, "If I gave up just because of such a reason...I am reluctant to do that" (8-23).

Self-objectification indicates that adolescents are able to manipulate activities by themselves, and art is an important thing to express such an ability. Due to the characteristics of its irreplaceability, art can be done by an independent subject who chooses art materials, art forms, and everything in

the process of a creative task, and finally helps the artist relieving emotions and releasing pressure. However, does the art work of adolescents from the art talented class functions as the transitional object to them? If it does, what would they feel when they were not able to make art?

The result range from "It's unacceptable (#1, 2) ", "I have no idea" (#3), "It doesn't matter" (#7), to "I accept it but I would feel regretted about it" (#4, 5, 6, 8, 9). It seemed that there is no direct correlation between art making and transitional phenomena. However, participants did talk about the transformation of creative works which were related to the transformation of transitional object over ages. Related issues of possessions as decorations (#1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9), possessions as creative inspirations (#2, 4), possessions as art materials (#5, 6, 7), and possessions as art itself (#8) will discuss below.

- (1) Possessions as decorations: Most research participants decorate drop ornaments, Japanese capsule toys, accessories, tourist souvenirs and other things around somewhere close to daily life space, such as hanging them in the schoolbag (1-15, 8-8), using them for decoration (2-10, 5-20, 6-23), keeping them in table lamp (3-8), sticking them on the bedroom wall (7-10, 9-2).
- (2) Possessions as creative inspirations: Participant number 2 used pictures she collected as source of inspiration for drawing, but she "would never copy it " (2-19). Participant number 4 tried to combine her interest in manga and literature, hoping that she could become a diagram text creator in the future (4-19).
- (3) Possessions as art materials : Participant number 5 stated that the Japanese capsule toys must have DIY function so that he could play with it (5-4). Participant number 6 liked to make specimen of dead stag beetles and place it in a glass box, which seemed to be a way to express his love to this pets (6-23). Participant number 7 loved to hang product tags from clothes together (7-5).
- (4) Possessions as art itself: Participant number 8 saved her photo album and articles in her blog (8-8), and she is attached to the invented space a lot. She couldn't tolerate the loss of such space (8-19).

According to the result of the research, the autonomy of collecting and creating work are similar and with important psychological meaning from the perspective of transitional object theory. However, the correlation is not very strong because there are individualistic differences in the way of people showing autonomy and independency.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

Applying the theory of transitional object by Winnicott, one of the object relation theorists, this research was trying to explore how adolescents view their possessions as the transitional object and develop the relationship between these possessions and creative works, and moreover, how to use these possessions as the transitional object to increase comfort and decrease anxiety. The conclusions from the results of this research are listed below.

- (1) Categories and reasons of owning one's possessions vary: Prices are irrelevant to owning one's possessions and most possessions are gifts from friends or family members. The major reason of collecting is one's special feelings toward specific objects. Furthermore, appearance, personal reasons and inner feelings are important reasons for owning objects as well.
- (2) Possessions of adolescents do not necessarily carry a transitional meaning: Possessions are irreplaceable, controllable, and with the function of consolation, and it will cause the sense of loss if they were missing. Furthermore, parent-child conflicts occurred if children were not allowed to have their possessions. One may have many collections, but there may be only one thing with the most important transitional meaning, such as the drop ornaments hanging inside the schoolbag by participant number 1, or art photos saved in personal blog by participant number 8. The phenomenon shows that possessions may not be the personal transitional object, but one's transitional object may be one of the possessions that provide visual pleasure, saved as carrier of emotions, release pressure, and even give creative inspiration for adolescents.
- (3) Visual art works by adolescents have transitional meanings: Creative art

behaviors have transitional meanings, and for most participants functions as carrier of emotions and helps to release pressure. However, the pressure of getting good grades to enter a good academic high school among students in the art talented class, is the most important and realistic reason for adolescents of practicing art, which may decrease the influence of the meaning of transitional object. Actually, transitional meanings of art making vary for every participant. For example, participant number 1 and 2 have more needs for autonomy when making art while it doesn't mean much for participant number 7.

Just like what Litt(1986) said, the transitional phenomena is not a general situation occurred in everyone. Comparing to adolescents studied in general classes, adolescents in the art talented class were allowed to do art related works without complaining the academic performance. This may what Winnicott described as the importance of opportunities, which provide the chance for the adolescents to create the space between fantasy and reality. Ironically, the nature of pursuing good grades in art is against the nature of the transitional object, that the owner need to be ablt to control the object in his own will. Because of it, art could even causes inner conflicts and frustration to these adolescents. Therefore, the adolescents might transfer their creative energy to photography or blog writing.

However, this research did not address the issue of academic performance that may influence the art activities among these adolescents in the art talented class. Moreover, it is hard to compare the correlation between self-confidence and good grades in both academic and art performance, as well as the degree of adolescents attached to their collections or transitional objects. It is also questionable of how parents' attitude affected the development of the transitional object or of art activities with transitional meaning among adolescents. All of these above needs further researches to extend the ideas.

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