



Although the theories surrounding the mind as a machinist computational device are ripe with critical argument, it is safe to say that the brain and body operate as a series of interactive systems. Some of these systems are characterized by precise measurable phenomena and can be easily labeled and quantified: Endocrine glands secrete hormones, the kidneys expel toxins from the body and the heart pumps blood to deliver oxygen to cells. Other systems are harder to define, such as those that deal with thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Humans speak the universal language of symbolism when defining the more ambiguous concepts of the psyche. For example, a profound loss may have nothing to do with the cardiac system, yet describing grief is less readily available than the image of a broken heart.

Symbolic mental representations are multileveled and are formed from various sources of interacting data that are generated through sensory processes, movement, feelings, perception, and cognition (Lusebrink, 1996). Symbols range from very concrete to dynamic and complex. For example, the Hollander beater, a machine, is responsible for the simple process of transforming material into paper. If the material is a military uniform, the process becomes more complicated, as the uniform carries its own narrative. To explore the experiences of participants who offer their military uniforms in Combat Paper is a more challenging process and conducive to a therapy session, not a workshop. The warning on the Hollander beater is sufficient to caution the general public of the risks associated with it. Those who participate in Combat Paper, many of whom have been damaged by their military experiences, must develop their own descriptive labels. It is through Combat Paper workshops that military service members might become more comfortable with the benefits of art making, and further the potentials for healing that take place within the structure of a therapeutic relationship.

The potentials for outreach and healing through the combination of Combat Paper Workshops and referral for art psychotherapeutic intervention are explored in the following interview between Dr. Robert Pascuzzi, Department Chair of Neurology for Indiana University School of Medicine, and Juliet King, Director and Assistant Professor of Art Therapy at Herron School of Art and Design, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

Combat Paper: An Art Therapist's Perspective **A Conversation with Juliet L. King**

I: Professor King. Can you describe Combat Paper? What is it? Most people aren't that familiar with the term and what it represents.

PK: Combat Paper is a therapeutic arts experience that was started by a Veteran of the Iraq war, Drew Cameron and artist Drew Matott. When talking with Cameron I learned that through the process of war and return he found that he was drawn to papermaking again, which he had engaged in in the past, and he found himself immersed in the process of making paper. Cameron and Matott began to make paper together out of cloth and eventually military uniforms. It was in that process of, as he (Cameron) says, "deconstructing the rag," that he was able to work through many of his emotional and personal experiences just in the process of making paper. He loves to make paper! Cameron and Matott began providing workshops to allow others the opportunity to engage in the process that appeared to be transformative and helped to deal with or manage, or express some of the experiences and feelings that related to having served in combat. These experiences and feelings were in many cases not previously explored and discussed. Discussion and reflection was a free-flowing, organic experience where people would come in and work through the intricate, step-by-step process of papermaking. While not necessarily complicated, there are a specific steps and order to making paper from uniforms. It appears to me that Drew and Drew created these experiences in different communities and served to provide ways for people, primarily military Veterans but also other members of the community, to work together in a physical and creative process that links the past with the present and the future. An important additional step is Cameron's use of paper as a canvas on which to display his own artwork. So he is an artist and a papermaker. In sum, Combat Paper is a therapeutic art making experience that allows people to engage in the process of taking uniforms and materials, and taking them apart, and putting it back together in the creation of a new form.

I: What actually happens when one goes into the workshop?

PK: The workshops have a similar structure. There are four paper mills throughout the country. The primary mill (Cameron's) is in San Francisco, but under the Combat Paper name workshops take place throughout the country. From my experiences he provides a space for people to gather, asks them to bring their uniforms with them, and gives some instruction about how to take the uniforms apart, (deconstruct the rag). Typically the uniforms are taken apart by using scissors, and tools help remove the stitches. The rag needs to be small enough in size in order to go into the "beater." A Hollander beater is the pulp machine that takes the small cuts of cloth and mixes with water to produce a mash of malleable liquid pulp that can then be pressed into paper. Cameron calls his Hollander beater "The Oracle" which I think is interesting and symbolic in its

own way....the Oracle in Greek mythos being one that provides sage counsel, wisdom. The Hollander machine process is lengthy, and the resulting mash or pulp is then placed in a mold and deckle similar to a silk screen. In essence a couple of silk screens that press these little fibers that have been emulsified together to make a flat piece of paper. Once in the screen the water is removed and the substance is allowed to dry and in a day or two a firm piece of combat paper is born. Some people bring in their own uniform and they don't want their rag mixed with others. Other people are more flexible in their approach, and some people have specific uniforms from family members that they bring in that they would like to be sacred and stay individual. I think the process becomes symbolic to whatever the participant experience is or the purpose of making it in the first place.

I think the main goal of Combat Paper is to make paper. That's what he's trying to do. Sometimes those experiences are therapeutic, other times the outcome may have a different emphasis. The outcome depends on the here and now, and it depends on who makes up the group and on the needs and wishes of the participants.

I: At the beginning of the workshop is there some discussion of the psychology of the process or the symbolism of it or what Combat Paper has meant to other people?

PK: No. They don't do that because this is a papermaking workshop, not a therapy group. Drew is not a therapist and his goal is not to create an experience so that people will express their feelings about combat or process their memories, or discuss their trauma. That's not his goal and that's not his background. So he's very cautious and conscious of how he goes about conducting the workshops, and the goal of Combat Paper is to make paper, and what happens within that context again is dependent upon the constellation of members that are in the workshop. Sometimes because of the natural process of art making and what is created you know the products themselves spark the ability for dialogue, and of course naturally people start talking with one another about where they came from or they share common experiences. Or, somebody might get upset in the process of taking their own uniform apart because it might evoke certain kinds of memories.

There is a "supportive" component to the workshops and people in that place at that time we could call a "universality" in which everybody is in there together, and I think this kind of group process touches on themes of the existential. Discussions among the participants can become existential in nature. Many have been through similar processes of being in the military, or at least have a similar interest and understanding or they wouldn't be there in the first place. Such affords the opportunity to have people interact. But again, Drew and I have had many conversations about what is therapy and what is not. Often the attendees

of the workshops find the experience to be incredibly therapeutic and they may or may not know why, but they usually feel better at the end of the program. And I would attribute that to Drew as facilitator, the process of creativity and social engagement, and the transformation that occurs taking uniform to paper. I think that's a healing and life-enhancing process in and of itself. If things emerge and if memories emerge then that's an important part of that workshop as there is a continuum of self-expression. Caution is needed in that sometimes people are not as firmly in control of their feelings, especially if they've been through traumas. One must be thoughtful and careful about what is being revealed, reflected, and in some cases opened up to individuals who have a history of intense experiences.

I: Is there a likelihood or a need for an actual licensed therapist to be on site given the potential for people opening up memories and thoughts that could be in need of some professional support?

PK: I don't think that there's a need for Combat Paper workshop to have a therapist on site but I do think it's valuable to have communication about the purpose and the goals of why people are there, and I see Combat Paper as an experience to bridge the community or the members of the workshop into a space where they might be able to consider a therapeutic environment or engage in the therapeutic process. Because the goals of Combat Paper are to make paper and not to process feelings, I don't think it's necessary to have a therapist present, but to work in conjunction with a therapist would serve to enhance both a therapist's perspective and opportunities to offer to participants and would enhance the Combat Paper facilitator's perspectives in terms of potential psychological effects on those participants. So I think the combination of approaches can be especially powerful. We're working with people, communities, and in a society that is often difficult to engage in a process of getting help and some people have a harder time getting help than others. Stepping outside of oneself and one's experiences to be able to ask for help can be a challenge.

If a person has been through traumatic experiences or develops anxiety or fears that may or may not seem rational, in many cases it's easier to "stay inside" and separate self from the world. So we need ways of engaging people that are nonthreatening, that aren't overtly called "therapy". I was talking to a Veteran that I had worked with in a therapy group who had come to the Combat Paper workshops who said, "You know Juliet, if this was called "art therapy workshop" I would never come, but because it's Combat Paper and its run by a Veteran then I'm here. But once I'm in the room you've got me, right?" He then went on to discuss how he would be much more willing to engage in psychotherapy after having met me and being exposed to the creative process via the Combat Paper workshops. This is very important. Participating in Combat Paper can facilitate the relational process of opening up opportunities where people could see how working in this context or with these kinds of materials could be so helpful with the objective perspective of a therapist.

There is logic in having a Combat Paper facilitator working together with a trained therapist. It would be helpful if a facilitator of Combat Paper worked with an art therapist and was able to provide a referral for a person in the workshop or offer general options for all of the participants. Simultaneously, an art therapist working at a healthcare facility might recommend a person and his or her children to engage in something like Combat Paper as a way to encourage communication. Combat Paper is nonthreatening, it is safe, and it's easy to engage in.

I: Comment on why one might cut up his own uniform? Is he trying to do something more than make paper?

PK: There's the conscious goal of making paper, and to be prolific in that goal I believe feels good. Drew was drawn towards creating, and there is a reconstruction that occurs when we create something new. Freud would have called it sublimation, we might call it creativity and flow.... Taking unpleasant urges or feelings and being able to transform them throughout a process of creativity that allows different parts of psyche and cognition and emotional processing to integrate and become something new. That's a healthy process and I think that humans are intrinsically drawn towards that kind of reconstruction and healing. I think that embedded in the goal of making paper is this ultimately deeper level of being human and the exploration of what that means.

I: Talk about the symbolism behind the process of cutting out your uniform that you lived in for years and maybe during very stressful times, maybe life-threatening times. This protective shell that you wore, you're cutting it up. You would call it deconstructing it. Then you're making it something new, paper, and putting designs on it. Any thoughts about what that means and what it might represent?

PK: The uniform carries with it multi-dimensional layers of symbolism that range from a personal nature to a more collective. We wear uniforms in different context depending on where we are and what we do. The military uniform has different kinds of material or patterns associated with it depending on the branch of military that you're in. Where a person wore the uniform and their experiences in it carry with it a narrative, a personal narrative, and a set of specific memories, yet at the same time depending on where you are your uniform could look the same as everybody else's. From a personal to a collective I think that carries different elements of symbolism based on one's own personal experiences and then in the larger context what it means to wear a uniform and be in the collective. What is the purpose of being in a uniform in and out of combat, which raises larger questions of what is the purpose of combat and what is the purpose of war and peace? And I would also think that a uniform is like a shell in some ways or a persona that allows us to present ourselves in a certain way to other people and to ourselves, and so I think that that's meaningful. And

what is on the outside versus what's happening on the inside. So we walk around in what the Buddhist would call "skin bags" as if our bodies are just skin bags as a type of uniform. They represent what other people can see and we can subjectively and objectively understand about ourselves but the experiences and feelings, and perceptions, and cognitions, and everything else that happens on the inside is less specific.

I: How great is the need for therapeutic programming and screening and opportunities for military veterans in this country?

PK: It's a gaping incredibly huge need. We don't have sufficient comprehensive services and programming. Cognitive Behavioral interventions that are evidence-based are the primary reimbursable services provided through the VA are shown to be successful. At same time what we're finding is the results of symptom reduction are often not sustaining. And we're also finding through pilot groups such as art therapy and the more complementary therapies that rely on nonverbal and symbolic communication that it's really important to have ways of engaging in the therapeutic process that bypass the verbal descriptions of things. And so in my work with Veterans we have qualitative and quantitative data that this type of intervention is useful. Veterans tell us art therapists, "You know we need this. We don't have words to be able to describe. I don't even know where to start to describe what's going on with me." "I need the process of the art to just kind of tune out for a minute and escape. It feels better right when you get to kind of be a little bit more distanced from things....it makes it easier to talk"

When one makes and expresses symbolically in the context of the therapeutic intervention and relationship, they get to see themselves a different way, in parts and as a whole.....through color and lines and the formal elements of the artwork. Artwork is essentially a projection of who you are. Being able to talk about yourself with another and in a group are really important ways of beginning to practice feeling again and not being overwhelmed with feelings. Having others to hear and comment helps with this practice. The brain science is there to support how when we are overwhelmed with feelings in the emotional, more primitive part of the brain, it's more difficult to speak. Something happens that makes it harder for us to explain things. And so we have a gaping need for interventions that help to process on the more nonverbal and symbolic level prior to and in the process of reaching that more cognitive space and obtaining our goals.

I: Why is participating in CP so engaging?

PK: Well I think there are several things that make it so engaging. One is that it's facilitated by a person who has an expertise and a great depth of knowledge of what it is like to make paper, with the proper technique, and also has the depth of experience and intention in coming to the table to do this sort of thing. So the perspective and motivation behind the project is sincere, and I think that's very

important because it really helps to set the stage for a professional yet casual, welcoming environment.

I think the process of making paper, the transformative process, the process of creativity, the sublimation we talked about, does things to our bodies, facilitates a physiological response that promotes relaxation. In doing so I think that people are able to work through some challenging feelings or thoughts again in a safe environment. That might not even be conscious but to come to the table and take apart a uniform that you may have worn when something really disturbing happened, just being there on some level allows you to process through the experience even if you're not consciously thinking about it or talking about it. And I think that being able to process on some levels our experiences gives us more energy and potential to overcome some of the challenges that we face. I think being in the group and engaging in the process together is something that is fun and exciting, and interesting. I think it makes people feel better to work together. The medium of paper making I think is important too. There's a big difference between deconstructing rag and putting it through a pulp-maker and letting the water drain out than it is taking a pen and ink and trying to render the White House. So there's something non-threatening and safe about the messiness of the project I think. And sometimes people don't want or can't get their hands wet. They don't feel good doing that. Well, if you're in the workshop you don't have to get your hands wet, somebody else can wet their hands for you and work through the pulp. So, and then making paper it's never going to be perfect and it's never going to look how you think it's going to look because of the nature of the paper making, There's an ability to let go of some control in that process. I think also the ability to come out of a cognitive or linear state and allow the process to take care of itself is, feels comforting often times without being too challenging.

I see Combat Paper as a bridge that allows people the opportunity to learn more about something like art therapy, and I always describe it on a continuum: On one end there are therapeutic arts experiences such as Combat Paper and on the other the profession of art psychotherapy. Both may have goals of participant engagement through the creative process, but the art therapist will work on specific clinical goals with the client, such as decreasing anxiety or depression. We call this symptom reduction or increase in the health and wellness of the individual. At the same time though there's a lot of crossover. If we were able to offer more experiences for the community, for our service members, through the VA, through different Veterans organizations then we would have more of an outreach for both therapeutic arts experiences and art therapy intervention. We need both.

I: Professor King thank you very much for this enlightening discussion.

PK: Thank you so much.

Although therapeutic approaches involving art have philosophical distinctions from the profession of art therapy, they have in common the universal goal of healing through the understanding that comes from self-expression. May we continue to support the awesome potentials that emerge through the powers of creativity and collaborative human relationships.