

Expressive Arts Therapy Applied Research Method

Dr. Akihiko Morita

Professor, Tokyo Institute of Technology / Visiting Researcher, Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women

1. Quest for a Research Technique that Is Reliable, Valid and Non-coercive

I have been engaged in activities aimed at the eradication of human trafficking¹. Through this experience, I realized the importance of conveying victims' voices to policymakers. Subsequently, I thought about holding interviews with victims of human trafficking, primarily women from developing countries who are employed as sex workers in Japan. At the same time, I pondered how to interview victims fairly and equally. Namely, this would involve the application of a method that is non-coercive and non-exploitative from the victims' view points. At the same time, this method would maintain the reliability and validity of interviews.

The very act of interviewing human trafficking victims is influenced by the disparity of power between interviewer and victim. In this situation, the former is more powerful. Occasionally, the act of interviewing can be seen as "exploitation" of the victims. When a researcher interviews a victim, telling her that his purpose is to clarify the reality about human trafficking, can he use the information gained in such an interview for his academic paper? If that paper is written solely for his own academic achievement, and not as a form of support for the victims, is he "exploiting" them?

The most common answer to this question is "no." This is because many believe that scientific studies are necessary to gain objective knowledge about human trafficking. Many people believe that researchers should be objective, rather than sympathetic, since they should provide non-biased and accurate knowledge that is absolutely necessary for seeking solutions. The public expects that anti-trafficking policies should be determined based on rational, scientific studies by specialists, such as, scientists and therapists².

However, I cannot help but ask myself whether or not we may ignore victims' mental trauma and pain. Interviews and "objective" surveys often aggravate such a negative impact on the part of victims. Is there any survey method that ensures reliability and validity, while avoiding harm or "exploitation" of victims who are already suffering from mental trauma?

In the case of human trafficking, many "trafficked"

women often oppose inspectors regarding official recognition of such women as "victims" of human trafficking. According to Japan Network Against Trafficking in Persons (JNATIP) and International Labor Organization (ILO) Tokyo Office surveys³, there are only a few typical, or indisputable victims of human trafficking. As indicated by interviews carried out by the JNATIP, many "victims" believe that they came to their destination country of their own free will. Even after recognizing that they were deceived by traffickers, many often choose to stay in the destination country. This is because they believe they could never return home until they make sufficient money. Moreover, as long as they can send some money to their families, many victims tend to endure as much as they can. Accordingly, there are many "trafficked" women who are not officially recognized as "victims." Since official recognition as a victim impacts significantly on an individual woman's future life, the definition of victim status should seriously be considered by all related parties.

There are two different views or approaches to this gap between women's personal perceptions and a more objective judgment of their situation, i.e., whether or not they are truly "victims" of human trafficking. Advocates of the first approach suggest that even if women decided to go to destination countries to work as sex workers of their own free will, in actuality, they were forced to make that decision because of the economic disparity between developing and advanced countries. Accordingly, advocates of the first approach believe that the women should be regarded as victims of exploitation, even if they made their own decisions. On the other hand, advocates of the second approach argue that higher priority should be placed on women's own will and perceptions of their own situations.

If we take the first approach, it becomes easier to rescue trafficked women whose human rights are being badly violated, irrespective of their intentions. This approach is effective and valid when in actuality women were forced to decide to go to destination countries, without even knowing that they were forced to, and believe that they voluntarily decided to go there. The second approach, on the other hand, is essential for distinguishing human trafficking from illegal entry/departure to/from countries. However, in the case women originally agreed to go to destination countries but were then

exploited violently, these women have become victims of human trafficking after illegally entering their destination countries. Another problem with this approach is that we must determine whether or not these women were given sufficient information before making their own decisions. I found that many women were aware that they would have to work as sex workers. However, it was only after their arrival in Japan did they learn that they had incurred fictitious debts of millions of yen. In such cases, we cannot support the argument that the women are responsible for their present situations. However, this second approach demonstrates effectively that many women are subject to exploitation and violent acts, even when they do not fully meet the criteria for human trafficking victims.

Further discussions, however, may lead us to the recognition of the fact that these two approaches do not oppose, but complement each other. Whomever these women explain their experiences to, whether it is police, immigration officers or counselors, what they tell is “fiction” rather than fact. When they talk about their experiences, they tend to select, intentionally or unintentionally, what to tell and what not to. As indicated by Chizuko Ueno, vulnerable people who are questioned by inspectors tend to create stories that their listeners (inspectors) would like to hear⁴. Accordingly, however “objective” the police reports might appear to be, they are likely to be stories embellished by the storytellers to please the listeners.

In questioning victims of human trafficking, it is essential that inspectors ensure that victims feel completely free to describe whatever they had experienced. In this sense, finding a survey technique that allows victims to talk freely with self-confidence and peace of mind is therefore essential for objective inspection. Such a technique can support objective survey, which is primarily based on the second approach but at the same time complemented by the first approach.

- 1 As a staff member of UNICEF in Japan (1997 to 2004) as well as a steering committee member of the Japan Network Against Trafficking in Persons (JNATIP), I have been combating the problem of human trafficking.
- 2 S. McNamee and K. J. Gergen, *Therapy as Social Construction*, Sage Publications Ltd, 1992.
- 3 ILO Office Japan: *Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation in Japan*, 2004.
- 4 Chizuko Ueno, *Nationalism and Gender*, Trans Pacific Press, 2004.

2. Preparatory Discussion of a Research Technique employing Expressive Arts Therapy

My next question is what types of survey techniques allow victims to talk freely, with self-confidence and peace of mind, while concurrently maintaining the

reliability and validity of the stories they tell. I am currently exploring one candidate for such survey methods; namely, a research technique using “expressive arts therapy.”

Expressive arts therapy means not only the so-called arts therapy that uses visual arts (painting, sculpture, clay molding, collage, etc.), but also dance and movement therapy (expression through body movements), music therapy (expression through music, sound and voice), writing therapy (expression in forms of poetry, verse and prose), and drama therapy (expression through acting and performance). In short, expressive arts therapy is a comprehensive type of arts therapy, using a diverse media of arts. Expressive arts therapy was developed by Natalie Rogers, the daughter of Carl Rogers, who is well known for his Person-centered Approach. Natalie Rogers developed this therapy based on her belief that only in a psychologically safe environment where we are assured of not being analyzed or criticized by others, can we discover our inner self. And then we can express this inner self with full creativity and vitality, using non-verbal media (visual arts, movement and dance, music and sounds, voice, drama, writing, etc.).

According to Carl Rogers, there are three conditions that therapists should meet: (1) unconditional positive regard, (2) empathic understanding and (3) congruence. The expressive arts therapy has been developed by assimilating these concepts. I believe that vulnerable people, such as victims of human trafficking, are likely to tell their life stories more openly and freely if expressive arts therapy is provided by a therapist who satisfies the three conditions listed by Carl Rogers. In other words, as suggested by Chizuko Ueno, vulnerable people never tell their real experiences unless they believe that listeners share and respect their feelings⁴.

Expressive arts therapy also shares features with a form of play therapy for children⁵. Use of various arts media enables victims to express their emotions and experiences that they cannot express in a single medium. Moreover, use of multiple media brings about synergy, enabling deeper contemplation of self and greater self-expression. In this sense, we can consider the theatrical play performed at the workshop, we held in the Philippines in December 2005, as a type of research using expressive arts therapy technique. The play was performed with the cooperation of the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) and Development Action for Women Network (DAWN)⁶. Based on the results of the play, we believe that theatrical and other artistic expressions using expressive arts therapy can help heal victims of human trafficking.

- 5 Play therapy is a psychotherapy for children, in which various media of arts are used including drawing; *hakoniwa* (sand play technique); playing games; singing songs; playing musical instruments; dancing, performing ceremonies and storytelling.

6 Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA), a private theatrical company established in the Philippines in 1967, has thus far performed at least 300 original plays in Tagalog. At the same time, PETA holds workshops on drama making children, students, teachers, women, farmers and NGOs. Development Action for Women Network (DAWN) was established in 1996 to support Filipino women working in Japan and Japanese Filipino Children (JFC) in every way.

3. Theoretical Analysis of Research Employing Expressive Arts Therapy

(1) Research employing Expressive Arts Therapy as a Qualitative Survey Method

Sociological surveys dealing with people as study targets are generally classified into quantitative and qualitative surveys. In quantitative surveys, a fixed pattern is employed for both questions and survey methods so that the same survey can be conducted repeatedly. Similar survey results can be obtained irrespective of researchers who conduct the survey. In short, the quantitative survey is designed to ensure objectivity. In contrast, a qualitative survey is not designed to gain the same results. As typically evidenced in life story interviews, even the same speaker may tell different stories at different interviews by the same interviewer, or they may tell new stories to different interviewers.

According to definitions by Atsushi Sakurai, the “reliability” of a survey refers to the rate of gaining similar results from multiple surveys conducted by different researchers. “Validity” refers to the rate of correct results gained from a survey, or in other words, the fulfillment level of survey goals and the researchers’ expectations. In addition, Sakurai suggests that if we standardize conventional quantitative survey patterns so that we can use the same pattern repeatedly, such surveys will have higher reliability. If we have higher reliability, he assumes that this naturally leads to higher validity. On the other hand, Sakurai argues that such a standard for reliability is not applicable to qualitative surveys, such as, life story interviews. As an alternative standard, Sakurai proposes that researchers engaged in qualitative surveys should seek “transparency” of basic survey processes, ranging from data collection to analyses.

Among the qualitative survey methods, there are what we call the “realism approach” and “narrative approach.” Sakurai interprets the former as an interpretative and objective approach; the latter as an interactive and constructive approach. Researchers supporting the former approach collect life stories of many people, assuming that the life story of each individual represents one aspect of objective reality. Through inductive inferences of accumulated data, advocates of this approach believe that they can develop a theoretical model. They may modify this model to fit actual cases that they learn through life

story interviews. Using this method, these researchers believe that they can clarify social reality.

One research method representing the realism method is the Grounded Theory Approach (GTA), which is currently attracting keen attention. As a qualitative survey method, the GTA was developed during the 1960s by the American Sociological Association. According to Yasuhito Kinoshita, GTA is a qualitative survey method designed to induce an original theory from data analyses. Essential conditions for analyses comprise coding methods such as ① open coding and ② axial and selective coding, together with ③ constant comparative analyses, ④ theoretical sampling, and ⑤ theoretical saturation (which indicates time to terminate analyses). Of those, the constant comparative analyses are the most important. “Coding” refers to a process of compiling data systematically while categorizing them. “Theoretical saturation” refers to the moment when important concepts are no longer generated from constant comparative analyses. In addition, it means no further issues need to be confirmed by collecting additional data for theoretical sampling. Generally, GTA is believed to effectively explain and predict human behaviors and direct human interactions within limited boundaries. On the other hand, researchers using the narrative approach consider that life stories should be an outcome of the collaboration between interviewers and speakers. From these researchers’ perspectives, life stories should not always be consistent. Instead, these researchers respond positively to the addition of new aspects to previously told stories. Researchers of the narrative approach are fully aware that in addition to the above life stories related by the speakers according to specific plots, there can be other stories created through metacommunication that reflect social relations between the speaker and the interviewer.

Returning to the discussion of my own research method employing expressive arts therapy for interviews with human trafficking victims, I believe that this approach is close to the narrative approach or what Sakurai called the interactive and constructive approach. Whereas questioning by police and immigration officers shares similar characteristics with the realism approach or the interpretative and objective approach, research using expressive arts therapy is designed to deepen understanding of the perception of human trafficking victims regarding their own experiences.

On the other hand, in the GTA data collection process, researchers also collect non-quantitative images and drawings. Accordingly, we can analyze expressive arts data by GTA and induce a theory from such data, at least in theory. Accordingly, I believe that we should also employ GTA to analyze data that we obtain through research using expressive arts therapy.

(2) Research employing Expressive Arts Therapy as a Non-linguistic Survey Method

Through the qualitative survey method, interviews are conducted using language. Moreover, reports on interviews convey precise information to readers, if such reports are written logically and precisely. In this sense, linguistic survey methods, such as, interviews ensure higher clarity and objectivity. On the other hand, victims' stories expressed through non-verbal media, such as painting or dramas, are less objective, since an audience can interpret them more subjectively.

In this chapter, I would like to discuss differences between data expressed in verbal and non-verbal media.

Charles Taylor, a contemporary Canadian philosopher, suggests that expressive linguistic theory represents the current view of languages, which underwent a linguistic turn during the first half of the 20th century. He argues that "language" refers to all means of expression, including prose, verse, music, painting and dances because there are no longer any logical grounds for distinguishing a conventional concept of "language" from other media of expressions⁷. Masakuni Kitazawa defines human beings as animals that think using symbols. He suggests that although people use linguistic symbols to express abstract ideas, the majority of such ideas evoke concrete images or emotions, whether or not people become aware of the facts. He criticizes the current tendency of evaluating only conscious thinking and its product, writing (*écriture*). Writing, he believes reflects dualistic thought established in modern Western society.

In my view, however, it is not clear whether or not René Descartes, father of modern rationalism, referred only to logical and rational thinking when he stated, "*Cogito ergo sum*"⁸. In a paper written by Sigmund Freud during his final years, he admitted that highly intellectual operations, such as deep contemplation and ethical judgment, are conducted pre-consciously. Accordingly, we must not generalize that modern Western dualism is based on the opposition of reason and emotion; body and mind; and consciousness and unconsciousness.

In any case, I do believe that there are no theoretical grounds which consider verbal expressions superior to non-verbal forms of expressions. In this context, I would like to discuss features and advantages of non-verbal over verbal expressions. Kyoko Ono, for instance, proposes that through non-verbal expressions we can convey more information than through verbal expressions. She also suggests that literary works, such as, poetry and stories are different from straight and direct languages used in daily life. Specifically, she maintains, the former can convey rich spiritual images and symbols. Artistic works can impress both artists who created them

and their viewers alike. This indicates that artistic expressions have inter-subjective and universal character. Related to these concepts, art therapists commonly recognize that symbols and images, which are called the language of arts, can express the world of the unconscious, which cannot be explained by verbal media. What is more, paintings that show a specific emotion, anger for instance, have a universal character, transcending the diversity of expressions by individual artists⁹. Furthermore, as Natalie Rogers emphasizes expressive arts therapy is a means to discover our inner selves.¹⁰

What is more, expressive arts therapy can be used either in group therapy or a face-to-face session with a therapist, or even by oneself, depending on the mental situation of the individual client.

(3) Conclusion

In conclusion, in comparison with interviews using language, research using expressive arts therapy enables researchers to approach victims without causing the latter deep trauma. This research technique also has the advantage of using various art media depending on individual situations. On the other hand, this research technique is not suitable for a survey designed to confirm objective facts. We must study about the technique employing expressive arts therapy to determine whether or not it enables data-based theorization, as in the case of the GTA.

7 Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, Harvard University Press, 1995.

8 Benjamin Libet, *Mind Time: The Temporal Factor in Consciousness*, Harvard University Press, 2004.

9 For example, the picture shown below was collectively drawn by children at the workshop held in December 2005 in Manila, the Philippines, for children of former entertainers working in Japan. In this picture, a pregnant woman is standing in front of a pachinko (Japanese pin-ball game) machine. Many bills are also depicted. According to the children who drew this picture, the bills show that the woman is provided with financial support, and that "someone" loves gambling. Another child in the group said that her mother used to go to a pachinko parlor whenever her Japanese father was away from home. Once her mother was beaten by her father when he found her playing pachinko. She promised her father to stop playing pachinko after she was nearly arrested by the police at the pachinko parlor. The children explained that the heart marks in the picture represent the love between the parents.



10 A method in which different arts media are used consecutively is called "creative connection."

Natalie Rogers, *The Creative Connection: Expressive Arts as Healing*, Science and Behavior Books, 1997.