

ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

Book Review by Lesley Morris

Multicultural Family Art Therapy

Edited by Christine Kerr

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Multicultural Family Art Therapy is the follow-up to Kerr's previous publication *Family Art Therapy: Foundation of theory and practice* (Kerr & Hoshino, 2008). In this sequel, Kerr sets out to establish family art therapy practice "within an ethnocultural and empathetic context"(p.xix). She aims to provide an operative framework that enables clinical efficacy in work with clients of diverse ethnic origins, different to that of the clinician. Kerr writes from her perspective as the Director of Clinical Art therapy and Counselling at Long Island University USA, and clinical art therapist in private practice. I approach this book from my perspective as an art psychotherapist and art therapy educator with a clinical background working in UK state funded Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. I respond to the call to review my own culturally based assumptions and underpinning theoretical approaches. I am also crucially aware of the current context of changing health care systems in the UK, the mass movements of displaced and

traumatised peoples across the globe, and the need to rethink our relationships to the spaces and places in which we work and the client populations that we encounter.

The book begins with a preface and an overview of the 15 chapters authored by art therapists from 14 countries: USA, Canada, UK, Ireland, Australia, Israel, Russia, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Trinidad, El Salvador and Brazil. Kerr contributes to six chapters, with Long Island University (USA) international alumni, scholars and faculty members making significant contributions. The influence of USA and UK theoretical approaches is marked, and authors reflect upon the need for culturally sensitive adaptations in practice. An eclectic view of practice is reflected in a diversity of theoretical approaches to art therapy with families including the use of visual and verbal metaphor in narrative family art therapy, attachment-informed systems family art therapy, solution-focused, Kleinian object-relations, dyadic parent-child and mentalization. The possibility of an integrated model of 'multi-cultural family art therapy' that I anticipated from the title of the book was dispelled.

Chapters mostly begin with a broad historical and cultural overview, giving particular consideration to the social, political, ethnic and cultural influences on the family, revealing specifics of gender roles and family structure, and attitudes towards mental health intervention. Authors describe the professional development of art and family therapy within their different cultural settings and health care systems, and their practical adaptations to theoretical models. Chapters proceed with clinical case vignettes that exemplify the richness and diversity of International perspectives and art therapy practices with families.

Kerr's chapter on family art therapy in the USA provides a comprehensive review of the use of visual and verbal metaphors in narrative family art therapy practice, demonstrated in the vignette of therapy with a couple in her private practice setting. From Canada, Proulx and Winkel present an attachment-informed systems family art therapy approach to clinical practice with an ethnically and culturally diverse clinical population, with case material drawn from work with Aboriginal families.

Chapters 3 & 4 are concerned with the practice of art therapy with families within Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) settings in the UK. Nadija Corcos shares her perspective as an American born, UK trained and practicing Art Therapist. The case material describes solution-focused family art therapy practice with a mother and daughters. The art making in the sessions is focused on enabling the family to imagine and realise more positive family relationships. The context of Nadija's work in a semi-rural CAMHS setting contrasts with Elizabeth Hill's description of the socio-economic and cultural context of her work in an outer London primary school. Elizabeth reviews the literature pertaining to art therapy in UK schools, and on family-orientated art therapy. She considers the Best Practice Guidelines (BAAT, 2013) that support an eclectic approach to offering clinically appropriate interventions that are responsive to the needs of individual children and families.

In '*Keeper of the hearth*', (Ireland), Marianne Adams states that Irish identity is both particular and manifold, and that the therapeutic space needs to be open to a cultural matrix of community and family identity. She provides an expressive account of the Irish psyche hewn from the 'cradle of indigenous Irish culture', 'the grim abyss' of the potato famine, the 'hollowing-out effect of colonialism', and civil war. Marianne's work with traumatised children is held and thought about within a Kleinian and object-relations informed theoretical frame, which enables access to infantile experience and unconscious mental processes, appreciating, as in Irish folklore, hidden dimensions of experience. Marianne introduces her case material within a context of intergenerational fear, loss and struggle, highlighting the necessity of creating tenure within the community and systems around the adopted child.

Coulter acknowledges the challenge and importance of developing a distinctive 'Australian' art therapy. Like Marianne, she acknowledges the significance of trans-generational experiences of poverty, displacement, oppression, grief, and loss, added to this the current context of the mass movement of people seeking asylum in Australia. She conceives of the therapist's 'invisible knapsack of privilege' (McIntosh, 1988:147), alerting the therapist to the potential for self-projection of cultural assumptions onto the family system. She advocates deference to non-Western tradition and practice to work with the marginalised populations in the multi-cultural Australian context. Coulter endorses a narrative model using metaphors or therapeutic images

that originate within the family “because family members are the experts on their culture” (Jackson, 1988, p78), thereby promoting a more egalitarian therapist-family relationship.

Markman Zinemanas describes a dyadic model of child-parent art psychotherapy practiced in Israel informed by psychodynamic, attachment, and mentalization theory. Through case examples, the author explores the therapeutic implications of parent-child joint visualisation, and the processes by which implicit relational exchanges are expressed and become explicit in the art object, and are thereby available for thought.

Shestakova and Kerr describe the family institution in post-Soviet Russia as an intergenerational constellation, often living together and interdependent, with political and religious promotion of an ideal home-based materfamilias. There remains significant stigmatisation of psychological and emotional disorder, and of seeking therapy, and a cautious approach to Western theory that is not easily assimilated into mainstream Russian culture, or into the largely psycho-diagnostic frame of psychological practice. The SAMO studio in Moscow provides art therapy interventions facilitated by artists, psychologists and educators. The case study is from a family assessment in which the products of directed art activities are viewed as pivotal to understanding the predicament of the family, and guiding the sessions.

In their discussion of family art therapy in Singapore, Ng and Powell reflect on art therapy as an emerging profession with a scarcity of literature pertaining to practice specific to the Asian context. ‘The Art of Bonding’ is a community-wide art program that aims to strengthen family relationships through engaging in directed art activities promoting reflection, empathy, and effective communication. Specific interventions with families with a child diagnosed with ADHD have additional goals to educate parents in understanding their child, and facilitating relationships between the child, family and school. The authors adopt a psychodynamic model of art therapy practice informed by attachment theory that enables multiple layers of experience to be considered in relation to the particular presenting difficulties of each family.

The chapters on Taiwan, Korea, and El Salvador describe family art therapy interventions with immigrant populations in the USA. The authors write about historical and cultural development, acculturation difficulties, language barriers, and cross-cultural conflict experienced by families who seek to maintain traditional values and practices, whilst adjusting to different and conflicting cultural norms. Tang and Kerr (Taiwan) present case material undertaken within an art therapy program in an International High School in New York, where the therapist employs a solution focused model of art therapy informed by Bowen's (1985) systems theory, in which working with one family member can effect change on the whole family. Lee, Kim and Kerr (Korea) consider the dynamic impact on families of cataclysmic political and social division on families, and recent social changes. The authors consider the stigma associated with mental illness, promoting problem solving and psycho-educational counselling approaches with this population. Spirituality and religious belief are recognised as important cultural factors in relation to therapeutic work with Korean families, and the Belief Art Therapy Assessment (Horovitz-Darby, 1994) is employed in the individual art therapy casework described. Ramirez (El Salvador) describes a package of complementary therapeutic interventions embedded within an L.A. High School setting, including group, individual and family art therapy, employed in the treatment of an adolescent boy engaged with gang culture. The material emphasises the need for culturally and linguistically informed Mental Health Services.

From Japan, Shimono and Kerr provide a captivating review of Japanese family culture. They describe a collectivist culture in which obedience and compliance with elaborate codified group norms are valued, and self-abnegation, endurance and perseverance are virtuous. The case study focused on short-term art therapy work with two brothers and posits the hypothesis of a somatic response to anxiety, which cannot be spoken due to sanctions on direct communication embedded in this family culture. Japanese aesthetic non-verbal traditions and appreciation of visual arts make art psychotherapy an apposite intervention.

Sarah Soo Hon shares her perspective as a Trinidadian Art Therapist working in a cultural context in which parenting roles are traditionally gender based, children are required to be obedient and respectful, and physical chastisement is considered a norm (Sharpe, 1997). The plurality of family structures in the Caribbean is stressed, including children being cared for by the extended family due to economic pragmatism. Traditional psychotherapy is seen as

culturally problematic as collective responsibility is valued over individuality, and the therapist is perceived as an expert who can assist with problem solving (Gopaul-McNicol, 1993). In the clinical work described Soo Hon states that she took a “practical and involved approach to conflict resolution”(p216) using art making as a process to encourage talking and to support relatedness.

In the final chapter, Maciel and Kerr position the family as “the most important institution for Brazilians”(p247), and describe a family art therapy intervention within a private outpatient psychiatric clinic setting. The authors acknowledge the influence of American family theorists and predominance of systemic theory in family therapy practice in Brazil, presenting a rich narrative case study demonstrating the use of visual metaphors, and making art.

The book ends rather abruptly, and I would have welcomed a concluding chapter from Kerr to draw together the different perspectives, theoretical models and practices described, and evaluate the extent to which she feels her stated aims for the book are achieved. The strength of this collection resides in the space created for thinking about difference through consideration of the diverse ways in which art therapy is practiced with families internationally. The ambitious scope of this text provides a valuable introduction to international art therapy practice with families that invites further enquiry, and I recommend it to art therapists and other professionals interested in exploring the diverse use of art with families. The cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism pervades the contexts of current practice, and many art therapists continue to work with the unconscious residual effects of intergenerational trauma and grief. This has important implications for art therapy practice with families who are currently fleeing intolerable violence in their own countries, displaced and in exile. I also support Coulter’s plea for the development of distinct practices that are responsive to non-Western traditions, whilst moving towards an appreciation of the mutual influence when cultures meet and the possibility that this affords for new forms of art and clinical practice to evolve (Kalmanowitz, 2012).

Biography

Lesley Morris (MA) is an HCPC registered Art Psychotherapist in the UK, and a Fellow of The Higher Education Academy. She is a lecturer and placement coordinator on the MA Art Psychotherapy at Goldsmiths, University of London, and a clinical supervisor in private practice. Lesley has worked clinically within various Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service settings, with particular interest in parent-infant mental health, Looked After Children, and homelessness. She is currently engaged in developing exploratory research with colleagues on intercultural issues in the theory and practice of art therapy in the contexts of Singapore and London. She is also engaged in researching the Art therapy Large Group, and the “unconscious” through art making and exhibiting.

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