

SPACE EXPLORATION

ABSTRACT

The paper presentation will explore the concept of space for two clients with Anorexia Nervosa. Space defined as “the volume, expansiveness, density of a particular image in relationship to its surround” is often solely explored as a formal element (Robbins, 1987, p. 105). Rather space has a wide range of connotations within the therapeutic realm. In space the past and present unify creating a distinct mood or an atmosphere (Robbins, 1987). This atmosphere or therapeutic space negotiates the physical, emotional, psychic, and liminal space in order to build relationships and trust. Space explored through an Object Relations perspective allows the earliest experiences of negotiation between selfobjects and provides containment through the exploration of past and present experiences.

The art therapy studio offers a variety of art making spaces including the floor, table, and wall/easel. The ebb and flow from creating and processing art in one or multiple spaces creates a holding ritual to the therapeutic process that can mirror rituals of early experiences. The variation in spaces allows the client to move in and out of different psychic spaces creating safe transitional processes into and out of potentially regressive material. Through this engagement in the therapeutic space, shifts are created in the physical and liminal holding space between the therapist and client (Brown, 2008). It is reminiscent of the space the mother holds for the child to explore, play, succeed and fail.

As a result, inner representations of the past are expressed in the present and are organized and represented through images and pictures. The images and pictures become an additional way to explore physical, emotional, and relational space. “It is a place outside of one’s personal field where unconscious motivations can be externalized and held out for review by conscious thought. Transformed into acceptable representations of one’s thoughts and motivations, they can then be reintegrated to strengthen a weak ego” (Cavallo & Robbins, 1980, p. 119). In this space, art serves as the both the

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catalyst and the container. It gives the experiences concrete representation, elicits verbalizations and dialogues. The art therapist, space, materials, and product all serve as multiple selfobjects in the space. The opportunity to work with multiple selfobjects allows for various experiences of symbolization, internationalization, and relationships (Kilian & Pretorius, 2009).

The sense of space for an individual with Anorexia is complicated often residing in dichotomous processes from a rejection of not taking up space to taking up too much space. The physical, emotional, psychic and liminal spaces are negotiated with a central focus on the relationships with and around food (Dokter, 1995). This presentation will explore the multifaceted concept of space for two clients with Anorexia Nervosa. Client artwork will be displayed to document the process of negotiating different work spaces. In addition, the relationship with the art therapist will be discussed. In conclusion, the presentation will demonstrate the benefit of exploring space as a therapeutic goal towards gaining deeper insight into relationships and sense of self.

REFERENCES

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