ESSAYS ON THE CREATIVE ARTS THERAPIES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Read Johnson, Ph.D., RDT-BCT is an Associate Clinical Professor in the Department of Psychiatry, Yale University School of Medicine, and the Director of the *Institutes for the Arts in Psychotherapy*, New York City, a multidisciplinary training center. From 1985-1991 he was the Chairperson of the National Coalition of Arts Therapy Associations as well as the Editor-in-Chief of the *Arts in Psychotherapy*, positions through which he worked toward greater collaboration among the creative arts therapy disciplines. He was a founder of the field of drama therapy and was President of the National Association for Drama Therapy. In addition to his passionate involvement in the creative arts therapies, Dr. Johnson has contributed to the field of posttraumatic stress disorder, and with his wife, Hadar Lubin, MD, codirects the Post Traumatic Stress Center in New Haven, Connecticut. They have two children, Corinda and Adam.

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Imaging the Birth of a Profession

By

DAVID READ JOHNSON, PH.D.

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FOREWORD

David Read Johnson's *Essays on the Creative Arts Therapies* takes us on a twenty-year journey through the sometimes treacherous seas of the creative arts therapies field. Homer's Odysseus wanders from peril to peril for twenty years on the way home from the wars, while Penelope never gives up hope even while fending off the pack of suitors consuming the hogs, crops, and winestores. In this modern-day odyssey of an arts therapist, David relates the perils of being an arts therapist in a professional world that poses many threats. Like Odysseus, he never surrenders his passion for the field, like Penelope, his hope that the several arts therapies disciplines comprising it will work more in concert, less in isolation from one another, never dims.

I doubt there is a corner of the field David does not address in this collection of two decades worth of essays. Rather than producing a disjointed effect, they assemble into a mosaic. The collection begins with an examination of why a person opts to be a member of this minority professional community–he discovers it is both an election and a sacrifice.

David looks at the profession from the inside and out, beginning with history ancient and modern. He states we can incorporate, but not rely upon, or origin as shamans. To survive and thrive in the therapy world it is necessary to claim a theoretical base and to speak the lingua franca. In this connection, David highlights the principal theoretical schools from which the arts therapies have borrowed, and he writes a complex chapter using the most current of those tongues–object relations theory–in discussing our profession(s).

It is also crucial to survival to understand how our profession(s) are impacted by current trends in the health and mental health fields–such as managed care, brief treatment, or claims for biological primacy. It is said that when standing on the edge of the sword one has to keep dancing, and David creatively envisions a place for the creative arts therapies on the cutting edge of theory and practice in educational and therapeutic settings. He sees new opportunities for the field, especially in the treatment of trauma and substance abuse.

One unifying theme of David's explorations is that the arts will stand stronger together than separately. If we speak only separate languages in a house of Babel, we are likely to be gobbled up by larger entities.

Unrecognized shame dynamics, he posits, are a force keeping us down and apart. So he amplifies the numerous links amongst us and encourages cooperation. David explores interesting hypotheses, ranging from gender differences to tribalism to object relations theory, to explain why the boards of the professional associations have resisted a closer union, and he proposes forming the National Creative Arts Therapy Association, a model of cooperation based on the approach of the framers of our Constitution.

This is a book of wide-ranging experience. The writing is strong, clear and eloquent. It is immediate and intimate, as in the accounts of a mentoring relationship, a religious conversion, or a letter to his patient. It is urgent, as it surveys the many mundane challenges confronting the field (such as licensure, insurance, salary scales), and offers workable solutions. It captures the quiet essence of "being with" the client in the therapeutic encounter. It is bold in its proposals to secure a future for the arts therapies. It is imaginative in envisioning the growth in theory, practice, and influence the therapeutic arts can offer to our hurting world.

I will require my students to read these *Essays on the Creative Arts Therapies.* I wish a benefactor would place it in the hands of every member of the creative arts therapies associations. Everyone interested in the intersection of the arts and the psychotherapies will be enriched by this important volume.

Kenneth Gorelick, MD, RPT
Past President, National Association for Poetry Therapy
Co-Director, Wordsworth Center for Poetry Therapy Training
Washington, DC

PREFACE

This book is a compilation of my essays, both published and unpublished, concerning the integration of the creative arts therapy disciplines (art, dance, drama, music, and poetry) into one larger organization representing their clinical, scholarly, and public policy activities. These essays span 25 years of my immersion in the practice, study, and politics of the creative arts therapies: treating clients every day as a drama therapist, serving for six years as the Editor-in-Chief of the *Arts in Psychotherapy*, and for six years as the Chairperson of the *National Coalition of Arts Therapy Associations.*

This is a book about rites of passage, about naivete and maturity, about growing up, both my own and my profession's. It is about poetics and politics, about our tremendous potential to contribute to the public welfare and our deep fears of collaboration and dialogue. Throughout this book I take the position that joining together clinically, academically, and organizationally will be beneficial to the health of our field as well as that of our clients; that we are divided only by the nature of our different artistic media, not by fundamental theoretical or political agendas. I speak not only as a creative arts therapist, but as a member of several other professional groups for whom diversity, debate, and dialogue are accepted and productive norms.

Readers outside of the creative arts therapy field may wonder what all the fuss is about, for the "together we stand, divided we fall" position reiterated here has proven its worthiness during many diverse times and situations. However, creative arts therapists have yet to heed this message and, in my opinion, remain ensconced in relative isolation from each other as well as from the wider mental health fields. This is very unfortunate, for the creative arts therapies have much to contribute to mental health in general, and even more to each other's disciplines.

This book's criticisms of my own profession are embedded within a deep respect for the work and for the creative arts therapists with whom I have been fortunate to collaborate. Many of these essays attempt to highlight the power and poignancy that are reliably evoked by the use of the arts in healing. I remain profoundly aware of my own journey, for I entered college as a student of advanced physics, and there is not a day now that I do not thank God for my stumbling into drama therapy, where spontaneity and beauty combine with service and the intellect.

I hope these essays stir you; they variously offer personal meditation, polemical argument, practical advice, serious theorizing, and some comic relief. Throughout, you will sense my struggle to express simultaneously my love for and impatience with this, my dear profession, being too quietly born.

D.R.J.

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Who is responsible for a passion? Certainly those who believe in you, who see the nascent vision inside and encourage it. Foremost among these is Susan Sandel, a highly talented dance therapist who directed the creative arts therapy department I began my career in, and who, through the many years of our partnership, was always my guide and greatest supporter. Many others deserve mention: Ken Bruscia, my "older brother" who by sheer strength of character managed to carry us through the successful 1985 NCATA conference. Peter Jampel, Renee Emunah, Arlynne Stark, Sandra Graves, Ken Gorelick, Art Lerner, Judy Bunney, Dale Buchanan, Paul Fink, and Sylvia Halpern in particular advised and nurtured me through many a difficult time. Sally Kondziolka, Lynn Temple, Cindy Briggs, Robin Gabriels, Peggy Heller, Connor Kelly, Susan Kleinman, Cay Drachnik, Linda Gantt, Richard Scalenghe, Peter Rowan, Vivien Marcow, Cheryl Maranto, and Stephanie Katz were among many colleagues who worked with me in the interests of the creative arts therapies. Eleanor Irwin, Art Robbins, Bob Siroka, Shaun McNiff, Penny Lewis, Robert Landy, Myra Levick, Adam Blatner, Claire Schmais, and Joan Chodorow all have made significant contributions to my understanding of the creative arts therapies. I have had the opportunity to meet so many wonderful creative arts therapists, dedicated clinicians and spirited people, who made the time spent on their behalf seem so worthwhile. Thank you.

Yet there would be no need for passion if there was no resistance! And yes, there have been many who have served this crucial function and have kept my will keen with passion. To all those who have stood in the way of the creative arts therapies becoming a stronger unity, I thank you, for by pressing up against your intellect, political talent, and deep fears, I have learned much indeed.

Finally, to Hadar, my wife and partner in work and love, for your encouragement and advice, and to Corinda and Adam, who have given me a new and welcoming course for my passions.

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ESSAYS ON THE CREATIVE ARTS THERAPIES

Section 1

PROLOGUE

Chapter 1

A COMMUNITY OF CREATIVE ARTS THERAPISTS: MY OBJECT OF DESIRE

My reluctant agreement to convert to Judaism turned into outright hesitation when I learned that I might have to be circumcised. True, I had been circumcised at birth, but a "proper" circumcision was required for conversion, especially if one day I might live in Israel. My Israeli fiance had requested my conversion as much out of deep nationalism as religious preference, and faced with unthinkable alternatives, I submitted. My love for her prevailed over personal preference. Besides, I could handle this, I said to myself! Take a few classes, memorize a few blessings, do a ceremony.... no problem. But that was before I learned that a moyle would have to actually draw blood! A symbolic passing of a scalpel over my organ would be bad enough, but real blood *? This assault on my autonomy was surely too much to bear.*

I was an unlikely candidate for a career in the creative arts therapies, for my upbringing was entirely consumed by science and mathematics. Unforeseen pressures and chance events in high school and college fortunately guided me toward theatre. I entered Yale in advanced physics, but my distress over my father's alcoholism and the deterioration of my family life made the impersonal world of mathematics deeply unsatisfying. By mistake I wandered into a rehearsal of an improvisational theatre troupe, and was easily recruited. My studies quickly turned to theatre and psychology. In the theatre I found myself in ensembles of artists, incorporating drama, dance, poetry, art, and music in the productions, bound together by the press of opening night. My first job after college was at the Yale Psychiatric Institute, where I joined a team of creative arts therapists: dance, art, music, and video/photography. They quickly explained to me that what I was doing was drama therapy. My own knowledge and experience of drama therapy was profoundly affected by their mentoring and colleagueship. Over the years, I have developed long-term relationships with other creative arts therapists, both at the VA Hospital where I have worked, and in the wider New Haven

community. For many years we met for monthly luncheons to share our woes and accomplishments. We have witnessed each other growing up. Living in one place for a long time provides these advantages. These relationships have offered me a productive arena to explore the boundaries between, and similarities among, the different arts modalities.

These collaborative experiences gradually laid the foundations of my belief that creative arts therapists should unite in a larger organization in order to wield greater influence on social policies that will serve our clients and preserve our survival as a profession. These economic and political reasons I found, and still find, incontestable. Nevertheless, as external pressures on the profession, forcing either compliance or resistance, they have not provided creative arts therapists an inner motivation to join together.

> *I grew up as a Unitarian. The Unitarian Church is an ironic structure, almost an oxymoron, for though its name derives from the desire to "unite" people by advocating the basic principles of goodwill, peace, and faith, its members are dedicated iconoclasts, individualists, and agnostics. My mother told me that Unitarians were skeptics who went to church, just in case. For her, this contradiction was evidence of a basically scientific orientation, which was highly valued in my family. Converting from Unitarianism has little meaning, for the Church professes no specific dogma. I was taught that God was who I thought he/she/it was, and that the principle of religious freedom transcended any one set of beliefs. Given this background, it is curious that I allowed myself to convert to Judaism in my forties.*

I cannot remember when my passion for a united creative arts therapy profession began; perhaps in 1981 or 1982. Until then I was consumed with forming and sustaining the newly created National Association for Drama Therapy, and establishing the integrity of my own modality. I do remember my first meeting with the presidents of the other creative arts therapy associations in Philadelphia in 1982, where I was instantly made aware of the numerous political and economic advantages to our collaboration, and also was confronted with the profound hesitations among the friendly parties. For example, the financing of a few hundred sheets of letterhead for our coalition was problematic, and eventually unsuccessful. The meaning of our location in Philadelphia, yards away from where our Constitution was framed, was not lost on me, and I became ever more inspired by the obstacles our founding fathers must have encountered in bringing together a nation of thirteen autonomous states. For creative arts therapists, however, the task of uniting in a more powerful union has remained a daunting, and as yet unfulfilled project.

I spent the next decade devoting the majority of my time to this effort, and this book is a record of my dutiful strivings. In the summer of 1984, Myra

Levick convened a creative arts therapy conference in Philadelphia, where leaders in the various fields were allowed to dialogue freely with each other. This conference was very stimulating to me, and resulted in my first article on the subject (Chapter 2). A close colleague known for her iconoclasm read the article and wrote me a note, commenting simply, "almost inspiring." Torn between being flattered and annoyed, I read the paper again and agreed with her view that I had been holding back. Thus began my attempt to inspire, which is reflected in Chapters 3 through 6. By this time, NCATA had planned the 1985 Joint Conference in New York, and I had been selected both as the next Chairperson of the Coalition, and the Editor-in-Chief of the *Arts in Psychotherapy*, the primary interdisciplinary journal in the field. For six years I served in these highly visible and influential positions, both politically and academically, and the work consumed me. My passions coalesced in the pursuit of one aim: advocating for the creative arts therapies as a profession.

By 1990, the second Joint Conference in Washington, DC had been organized, and though the Conference was highly successful, or perhaps because it was so successful, the member organizations of the Coalition soon stepped back from pursuing a formal organization. In 1991, I left the Coalition, and in my writing shifted from inspiration to direct suggestion for a multi-divisional organization (Chapters 7 and 8), and then interpretation of what I detect as underlying shame dynamics within the field (Chapter 9). Chapters 10 and 11, not previously published, address the serious challenges we face from managed care.

> *I have quite an independent spirit, which I attribute entirely to my family, since independence has been in my family's blood for a long time. For example, my great grandfather, John Lewis, who was the mayor of Oak Park, Illinois at the turn of the century, was also known for his independence: it was said that in Oak Park there were eleven religious denominations, and John Lewis. Or at least that is what the independent members of my family told me they said. The message was clear. So for me to agree to convert to Judaism had only one meaning: submission, and submission was bad. Thus, I decided that if the conversion was to be tolerable, I needed to discover something of myself in Judaism, and I set out to do that with the help of a rabbi. This rabbi served me well, and when I learned that he was a Reform rabbi in a long line of Orthodox rabbis, I was comforted.*

It has been a great challenge to convince creative arts therapists that we share a sense of mutual identity. Though from an external view, the arts therapies seem clearly related and members of the same class, creative arts therapists do not often share such a view. The most significant reason for this dis-

crepancy is that though the arts lie within the field of aesthetics, each individual art form (music, drama, dance, art, or poetry) calls upon distinct talents, sensibilities, and personalities. Proficiency is attained through highly specialized and concentrated practice. The acts of painting, singing, reading poetry, dancing, and acting involve different parts of the body, and different modes of expression. Therefore, training in these art forms, a prerequisite for arts therapists, usually involves little contact with each other. Unlike medicine or psychology, creative arts therapists are not educated in one body of knowledge (such as aesthetics), only then to branch out into specialty training. The creative arts therapies were not originated by one founder, and then differentiated into separate orientations, as in many other forms of psychotherapy (e.g., psychodrama, psychoanalysis, Gestalt, Reichian). Instead of branching out, we seem to be reaching in, seeking the common trunk to our professional tree.

The arts therapies are therefore united in an *abstract communion*: that is, we are viewed as members of a class by those outside of the class. This form of grouping is called a *serial* group, in comparison to a *pledged* group, in which members jointly hold a representation of their group, and feel identified with each other (Sartre, 1960). Creative arts therapies are currently a serial grouping, and those of us advocating unification hope to achieve the level of the pledge. This has been difficult, because the major impetus for coming together are external threats: financial and political pressures from managed care, not internally felt needs. Therefore, some of our members have felt that they have been collectively defined as a family by others, not unlike African tribes, for example, who found themselves haphazardly organized by European colonizers into The Congo, or The Sudan.

I learned of the Jews' deep distrust for leaders, which is reflected in their use of multiple judges and ruling councils rather than single authorities, of majority rule rather than unanimity. In fact, I was amazed to discover that the Sanhedrin, an ancient judicial body of 70 rabbis, followed a principle that if someone brought to trial was convicted by all 70 judges, he would go free, for they believed that truth cannot be monolithic, and occurs only in a state of disagreement! My Rabbi shared a story of one Yeshiva where a rabbi proclaimed himself the Messiah, and upon his word thunder and lightning, floods, and rainbows were made to appear. The other rabbis said they would not follow him, so he ordered a lightning bolt to strike the Yeshiva. Still they did not submit. Finally, a great voice from above called out, "I am God. Why do you not believe that this rabbi is the Messiah and carries my Word?" The most learned rabbi of the Yeshiva replied, "Because we do not follow individuals, we follow only the teachings of the Torah through our study and discussion." I understood then why there were so many former Jews in my Unitarian church.

Serialization can be overcome through contact with each other. Creative arts therapists often work as colleagues in hospital therapeutic activities departments, and a number of articles have described joint clinical activities (see Selected Bibliography, Clinical Section). The two joint conferences were also significant interfaces for members. Several graduate programs have integrated more than one arts modality (Dulicai et al., 1989) and one book has been written on the education of all the arts therapies (McNiff, 1986). Scholarship on the creative arts therapies has been increasing as academic conferences have brought scholars together (see Bibliography, Theoretical section).

Another dimension of professional contact is public debate and dialogue about the relationship among the creative arts therapies. I remain bewildered that such a volatile, important issue in our profession has received so little public discussion (see Bibliography, Professional Issues). The issue of unification, or even collaboration within the structure of NCATA, must still be threatening; even association newsletters have tended to avoid it. Yet I believe that open discussion can only deepen and enrich our understanding of our profession, and need not be threatening. Indeed, in some sense this book is intended to sustain this nascent dialogue, a creative arts therapies version of The Federalist Papers (Madison et al., 1788).

Increased professional contact will reveal that we share a common body of knowledge. If an integrated profession is to develop, then core theoretical concepts need to be identified and articulated. Clinical and theoretical commonalities among the modalities need explication. As the editor of the *Arts in Psychotherapy*, I was frequently exposed to parallel formulations of theory and practice across the different modalities, though rarely did authors make reference to similar scholarship in the other modalities. The pervasive commonalities are evident in the philosophy of art (Langer, 1953), the psychology of aesthetics (Ehrenzweig, 1967), psychoanalysis and object relations theory (Freud, 1920/1966; Jung, 1954; Klein, 1955; Kohut, 1971; Kris, 1952; Mahler et al., 1975; Winnicott, 1971), developmental psychology (Piaget, 1951; Stern, 1985; Werner & Kaplan, 1963) and theories of healing (Frank, 1962; Harner, 1982). In Chapters 12 through 20, I make my contributions to this rapidly growing body of knowledge (see Bibliography). Greater dialogue among creative arts therapy scholars will stimulate theory development in all modalities.

What a discovery it was for me to find that Jews do not prescribe what one should believe about God, for they believe that the transcendent is not knowable in the usual ways. They insist, however, that one engage in the process of discovery through study and debate. I was amazed to find the dialectic discourse of the Talmud, in which commentary follows

commentary in a presumably endless process. Truth is sought through dialogue and sharing one's perspective; through confrontation of differences.

How, I wondered, could a group such as the Jews, who embrace debate, disagreement, and suspicion of monolithic authority, have survived as an integrated culture over so many years? Why does debate draw them together, when so often I have witnessed it push people apart?

This book is about these same issues: submission vs. assertion, debate vs. silence, autonomy vs. isolation, integrity vs. humiliation, within the creative arts therapies, which in many ways are faced with strong external pressures to join together, despite their profound reluctance. This book is my attempt to convince my colleagues of the greater good to come from uniting together, or, perhaps is a record of my still uncompleted journey toward understanding why such a step will not take place.

Perhaps the metaphor of conversion is apt, for conversion brings up deep threats to identity and submission to the Other. Yet, as I found in my own personal case, it is possible to join a larger community without giving up one's fundamental rights to autonomous thinking, belief, or practice, to embrace diversity and debate, and to begin the enriching dialogue among colleagues that we so deserve. The feared surrender and loss of control imagined by the reluctant convert can be transformed into delight in participation in a more diverse community whose values can be admired. I have no question that the values supported by a unified creative arts therapy profession will be those of creativity, autonomy, and relationship, only in larger measure. If, indeed, one function of the creative arts therapies is to make the evanescent present, by embodying spirit in the art form, then surely, over time, with patience and humility, we can bring this nascent community into being. That is my hope, and my desire.

The moyle's knife made a small incision on my foreskin, as two rabbis witnessed the ancient rite; I felt peculiarly held by their presence, and not so frightened. Naked, I entered the ritual bath, and spoke the blessings that announced me as a Jew. The process of conversion had taken place, but not so much through these symbolic actions, as within myself. The miracle was that I had transformed my submission to the Jewish religion into an assertion of my individuality. The circumcision and ritual bath had not diminished me through humiliation, as I had feared. Rather, I had extended myself through space and time by joining a cultural heritage of greater power, that I knew would fuel my creativity. I remembered my resentment when initially confronted with the necessity of conversion, but now, emerging dripping wet from the ritual bath, and hearing the rabbis' exultant "Mazel tov," I felt proud of myself.