

The Use of Creative Arts Therapy Within Adlerian Psychotherapy

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Many Adlerian psychotherapists use creative processes for a variety of purposes within Adlerian psychotherapy. For example, Rudolf Dreikurs (1953) believed music in therapy groups stimulated heightened social interest and willingness to cooperate with others. Gondor (1954) use art and play therapy with children to enhance their interpersonal relationships and “help the child understand the reasons for his disharmony, maladjustment, or symptoms” (p. 3). Sadie Dreikurs (1976) stated that the goals for using art within an Adlerian group approach were to: “alleviate isolation through participation, to change attitudes from discouragement to hope, from inadequacy to adequate functioning, from being self-oriented to being task-oriented, from tension to relaxation, from boredom to enjoyment—in short, to develop an optimal sense of belonging.” Finally, Nystul (1976) noted the possibility of using various creative arts media (e.g., music, poetry, art, etc.) to bring about heightened social interest and a phenomenological understanding of the client.

Unfortunately, some Adlerians may avoid using creative processes within Adlerian psychotherapy, because they believe that, in order to use a creative process such as music, they need to be a competent musician. The purpose of this paper is to present a four-part psychotherapeutic strategy that can be used by any therapist regardless of his or her background in the creative arts.

Theoretical Origins of Creative Arts Therapy (CAT)

The concept of the creative self lies at the heart of the Adlerian theory of personality. It was through this concept that Adlerian psychology evolved into a third force psychology stressing self-determination (Ansbacher, 1971). Adler (1973) described the self-determined nature of the creative self when he said: “The important thing is not what one is born with (or what one finds around oneself), but what use one makes of that equipment . . . To understand this it

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is necessary to assume . . . still another force: the creative power of the individual" (Ansbacher, 1971, p. 160). Since the creative self provides the individual with the capacity for decision making, Adler (1956) referred to it as the nucleus from which all movement occurs.

The phenomenological nature of life movement in Adlerian psychotherapy brings out another dimension to the creative self. From a phenomenological perspective, the creative self becomes a screen made up of past experiences through which the person's perceptual field is filtered. According to Adler (1973), the person perceives life (more appropriately, *ap*-perceives) according to his or her unique prior interactions with life. The person's view of life is therefore biased, resulting in a unique movement through life, the lifestyle.

As the screen or window to the world, the creative self would appear to represent the person's most authentic reaction to life. Contacting a client's creative self would therefore have potential therapeutic value for the phenomenologically oriented psychotherapist. By naming this central force the *creative* self, Adler provided the key that could lead the way to the creative self. It would appear that, by encouraging the client to engage in a *creative* process (e.g., music, poetry, art, play, etc.), the therapist could activate the client's creative self.

The Four Phases of CAT

The following four phases of CAT provide guidelines for using creative processes within Adlerian psychotherapy. They are based on the three-part strategy for using music within Adlerian counseling and psychotherapy by Nystul (1977).

Phase 1: Set the stage

The therapist can set the stage for a creative expression either formally or informally. Formally, the therapist could have various forms of creative material (e.g., musical instruments, art materials, toys, etc.) readily available in the interview room.

If the therapist felt uncomfortable with formally presenting creative material to the client, she or he could informally "set the stage" for a creative experience in a number of ways: (a) The therapist could ask clients if they have any creative outlets which they would like to share during the next session. (b) The therapist could mention his or her own creative outlet (e.g., poetry) that he or she could share during the next session. (c) In some settings, such as in university counseling centers, clients may have just left a class that related to a creative process (e.g., music, painting, or photography) and will therefore have their creative arts material with them.

Phase 2: Set an Example

Once the creative material is made available in the interview room (formally or informally), the therapist will often have to set an example by initiating movement in the direction of a creative experience. This can be accomplished in at least three ways: (a) The therapist can engage in a creative expression (e.g., read a poem) and thereby set a model for the client. (b) The therapist can encourage the client to engage in a creative outlet (e.g., draw a picture). (c) The therapist and client can agree to involve themselves in a creative expression together. Regardless of what creative outlet the therapist chooses to use, the therapist should never upstage the client's creative expression by putting his or her needs before the client's.

Phase 3: Set Yourself at Ease

The third phase of the CAT experience focuses on entering into what Allan Watts (1959) described as a state of no-mind (a state of consciousness that does not actively search for novelty). By avoiding a judgmental attitude toward the ongoing creative expression, the counselor is free (of the subject-object "I-it" dichotomy) to transcend with the creative forces to the experience of oneness with the client's creative self.

The resulting transcendental relationship represents a very intimate bond between the client and the therapist. A counseling relationship of this nature can be invaluable to the therapeutic process. At least two counseling outcomes can result from this transcendental relationship between the therapist and client:

(a) The experience of oneness is analogous to Adler's (1956) notion of "feeling with the whole of life," which the Ansbachers (Adler, 1956) noted was the direction-giving goal of social interest. The transcendental relationship would therefore appear to be the most intense level of social interest possible. Adler (1956) also indicated that a person's level of social interest was the barometer of the person's mental health. As the person becomes involved in the transcendental relationship, there would appear to be a heightened level of social interest and a proportionally high level of mental health.

(b) Since the transcendental relationship is experienced at a level of existence characterized by oneness, no dichotomies such as good-bad are possible. It is therefore a value-free level of existence. Many clients need an opportunity to interact in a value-free climate in order to avoid engaging in self-defeating strategies (e.g., being highly self-critical). If the client can have a very positive social interaction within the transcendental relationship, then the client would tend to be encouraged to continue to seek out meaningful social interactions.

Phase 4: Understanding the Client

Once the creative expression has ended, the client and therapist can gradually move out of their transcendental relationship and associated state of no-mind.

Since the client's creative expression (e.g., a song) was an extension of his or her creative self, the creative expression may be worth experiencing at a cognitive level. As the therapist and client listen to a tape of the song, the therapist could ask the client such questions as "What does the song say about you?" or "Could you describe yourself in terms of the song you just created?" By responding to these questions, the client will project him or herself into the song. Since the projection will be in relation to the client's creative self or window to the world, it would appear to represent the client's most authentic reaction to life.

By obtaining an understanding of how the client sees life, mistaken ideas and self-defeating strategies can be identified and reoriented. A case study is presented below to illustrate how CAT can be integrated into Adlerian psychotherapy.

The Case Study

Ron, age 6, an American Indian boy, was referred to the author for therapy at an Elementary and Junior High Bureau of Indian Affairs Boarding School. The dormitory staff referred Ron, because he didn't have any friends, seemed constantly unhappy, was doing poorly in school, and was frequently acting out (e.g., urinating in people's soda bottles).

Relationship Building and Insight

The first two interviews with Ron were spent in individual psychotherapy. Ron was very reluctant to get involved in therapy and spoke only when he was given intensive leads. The therapist then decided that a CAT group experience through the medium of play might facilitate some therapeutic outcomes. By placing Ron in the CAT play group, the *stage was formally set* (phase 1) for him to enter into a creative expression.

During the third CAT play group experience, Ron asked the therapist if he would play the Johnny Cash song they had heard in the dormitory the previous night. The therapist responded by asking, "Why not just make up a song about how you feel?" Ron responded a bit apprehensively to the request. Since Ron seemed a little uncertain about his ability to spontaneously make up a song, the therapist had to model or *set an example* (phase 2) of risk taking. He did this by suggesting that he would make up a song on his guitar. The therapist told Ron that his guitar song would have no words, but

Ron could add them as he wished. Soon Ron began to sing a very melodic and forceful song that was composed of the following words:

My mom comes home and daddy stays home
Momma goes home, daddy stays
Momma stays in the city when she wants to
Momma stays in the city when she wants to

Momma daddy, momma daddy
I just can't see to go

Daddy keep care of the baby
Daddy keep care of the baby
Daddy keep care of the baby

Please help me
I want to
I need help!
I need help!

I can't seem to stop
Daddy keep care of the baby
Good-bye, good-bye.¹

As Ron sang and the therapist played his guitar, the therapist attempted to *set himself at ease* (phase 3) and flow with the music's creative forces. The therapist then meditatively avoided analyzing the song as a good song or bad song and thereby transcended the subject-object dichotomy. In a sense the therapist offered himself to the moment as he entered into the state of no-mind. In doing so, the therapist had the opportunity to transcend to the level of oneness with his client.

The transcendence to Ron's creative self seemed to activate their social interest. After the song, the therapist and client felt very close. Ron's usual preoccupied disposition was replaced by a warm smile, not meant just for the therapist but also for the other group members. Perhaps the positive experience he had meeting the therapist gave him the courage to risk himself with others.

Identifying Mistaken Ideas

After Ron and the therapist finished their musical experience, they drifted out of their transcendental relationship and associated state of no-mind. With

1. The tape of Ron's song is available for loan on a restricted time basis.

a counseling relationship now established, they were able to meet for individual psychotherapy to review an audio tape of the song they had created.

To obtain a phenomenological *understanding of the client* (phase 4), the therapist asked the client to interpret what the song said about himself. As Ron projected himself into the words of the song, he told the therapist that when he was a baby he really wanted a father. Ron went on to explain that, because his father was black, his mother rejected him when he was born and had him placed in a hospital. A year later, his mother again took custody of Ron but by this time was separated from her husband. Ron's reaction to those early years was that black people were bad and, since he was part black, he was bad.

Ron then explained what the words "Momma stays in the city when she wants to" said about him. He told the therapist that he was left alone in his house on the reservation when his mother went on weekend drinking sprees. To Ron, this meant that his mother didn't love or care about him, and therefore no one loved or cared about him.

As the therapist listened to Ron's two interpretations, he could readily identify two mistaken ideas that were adversely affecting his self-concept and social interest. First, the idea that, since his mother left him alone, she didn't love or care about him, and therefore no one loved or cared about him. Second, black people were bad and, since he was part black, he was bad.

Reorientation

The therapist first confronted Ron with the uselessness of the notion that all black people were bad and, since he was part black, he was bad. Rather than preach to Ron on the merits of being black, the therapist introduced him to a very fine black friend. Through their informal meetings, Ron was soon convinced that being even part black could be beautiful.

The therapist then proceeded to help Ron overcome his notion that his mother's drinking sprees meant that she didn't love or care about him, and therefore no one loved or cared about him. The therapist couldn't work directly with Ron's relationship with his mother, since she lived 500 miles away. The therapist therefore used significant others (himself and a cook at Ron's school) through which Ron could generalize the experiences of love and care back to his mother. Ron's relationship with the cook was particularly therapeutic for Ron. Ron felt she loved him, and he enjoyed going to her home for weekend visits. There were several weekends when Ron's plans to visit her were spoiled, because she became involved in a social engagement. When this happened, Ron was heartbroken. With the encouragement of the cook and the therapist, Ron began to realize that, just because other people were important to his friends, it didn't mean he wasn't also important.

While the therapist worked on reorienting Ron from these two mistaken ideas, they also identified some specific needs that Ron wanted to try to meet. Most of all, Ron wanted to be able to get along better with his peers (e.g., be included in more activities in the dormitory). To help Ron achieve this goal, the therapist encouraged him to use his newly discovered strength (i.e., singing ability). He did this by helping Ron set up some concerts in the dormitory, which were successful since the children would try to find any way to pass the time during those long afterschool hours. By initially putting Ron in charge of some inexpensive musical instruments (e.g., Indian tom-tom drums), Ron always had eager people to help him put on a concert. Soon Ron's peers appreciated him for his own general social abilities which he was working on with the therapist during individual and group CAT psychotherapy sessions.

Validation of Ron's Growth

The following observations and test results provide a description of Ron's growth. Any conclusions drawn from the data should be made tentatively, due to intervening variables which may have also contributed to the reported changes.

As the CAT sessions continued, Ron's teacher reported that Ron seemed more alert and his attention span improved in many classroom activities. These improvements enabled him to perform much closer to his ability and develop more effective learning habits and attitudes. According to the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT), his reading level rose from a kindergarten level 1 at the beginning of the year to a 1.5 at the end of the year; his arithmetic ability progressed from a kindergarten level 3 to a 1.4; and his language ability increased from a 6.28 to a 7.48.

Sociometric testing indicated that Ron was a social isolate before involvement in CAT. After involvement in CAT for a period of 2 months, Ron had about the same number of friends as his classmates did. He also retained this number of friends, according to the sociometric tests which were conducted each month during the school year.

Observations by the dormitory counselors, pupil personnel staff, and classroom teacher indicated that much personal and social growth had occurred during the period that Ron was involved in CAT. Before his involvement in CAT, when someone asked Ron his name, it would be very difficult to determine whether he had said "Ron" or not. After 4 months of CAT, Ron would say his name clearly, even to a stranger.

Possibly the most significant change after CAT was recognized by Ron's mother when he went home for summer vacation. She felt that the relationship between Ron and herself had improved very much.

Summary

This paper attempted to describe Creative Arts Therapy (CAT) as a four-phase psychotherapeutic strategy that could be implemented within Adlerian psychotherapy. A case study was used to illustrate possible therapeutic outcomes of CAT, such as establishing a counseling relationship, increased social interest, and obtaining a phenomenological understanding of the client. Further research under more controlled conditions is needed to determine the specific effects of CAT in Adlerian psychotherapy.

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