

**Reflections of body image in art therapy: exploring self through metaphor and multi-media**, by Margaret R. Hunter, foreword by Richard Carolan, London and New York, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2012, 198 pp., £19.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781849058926

Margaret Hunter is an American art therapist and licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. She is co-founder of Meghan's Place Eating Disorder Centre in California. In this book, she shares her work from over the last 10 years with women who experience difficulties around body image and identity by presenting a creative treatment programme with insights into her particular approach.

It is a beautifully written book full of metaphor and symbolism for creative therapists to enrich their own personal awareness and their group therapy practice around this subject matter. Although not explicitly stated in the title, the programme targets only groups of women participants. Hunter offers a poetic invitation to women experiencing difficulties around identity and body image to embark on a creative journey below the surface to where they can engage in creative dialogue with their 'body- vehicles' whilst navigating through the waters and paths of their unique life journeys. She provides a refreshingly creative approach to this subject by providing a range of directives, which explore embodiment and projective techniques whilst also encouraging participants to engage in Mindfulness.

The reader is presented with a programme of creative experiential exercises from each chapter, which build together to enhance creativity, insight and self-help supports. There are thirteen chapters included which consist of: 1. 'Hoisting the Sails: The Journey of Self Discovery Begins'; 2. 'Lessons from the Ocean: Riding the Waves of Emotions'; 3. 'Art and Mindfulness: The Maiden Voyage upon the Waters of Life'; 4. 'The Heroine's Journey: Finding Hope and Strength from Within'; 5. 'Notion of Emotions: Rating Intensity and Environmental Influence'; 6. 'A Woman's Purse: Reflection of Self'; 7. 'If the Shoe Fits: Footwear for the Life Journey'; 8. 'Beyond Skin Deep: Barbie Finds Her Voice'; 9. 'Reframe Your Frame: Celebrating the Culture of the Human Body'; 10. 'Tree of Life: Exploration of Self in Nature'; 11. 'Thinking Outside of the Mirror: A Celebration of the Human Body'; 12. 'A Vase of Flowers: Depicting Self in Still Life'; 13. 'Heads and Tales: Creating a Body for Life'. The book also includes participant's black and white images and journal statements, which help the reader gain a deeper insight into the programme.

Hunter states that the book:

contains art processes that may be used effectively in prevention and early intervention related to body image concerns, or which may complement the model of a multi- disciplinary approach to treatment of eating disorders. (p. 27)

One can see how useful this approach could be for each work setting. However, Hunter's ease in sharing her considerable experience of working with this creative programme and her clear practical guidelines for each exercise may give the inexperienced therapist or mental health worker a belief that they can use the book as a 'How To' manual, with little or no other supports in place. This, I believe, would be a mistake.

Hunter offers a brief explanation of the theoretical models that inform the work in the introduction. These include: Humanistic, Existential, Gestalt, Psychodynamic, Object Relations Theory, Narrative Therapy, Body Image Theory and Mindfulness. However, notwithstanding the clear evidence of the author's sensitivity and wisdom towards her clients throughout the book, not enough depth is theoretically explored.

Hunter says

The presentation of ideas in chapter introductions is in line with the overall message of the book: celebration of diversity; joy in connection and strength to stand alone if needed. Consistent themes and

messages connect each chapter to the book as a whole; however, the chapters are not dependent on each other for meaning or value. (p. 14)

I do not agree with this statement. In my opinion, the exercises do not stand alone; instead, each activity taken in sequence builds on previous experiential activities and helps to create a sense of containment for participants. I have concerns about the intensity of feelings that participants would experience, given the subject matter, the directive nature of activities, and the power of engaging in creative expression.

Throughout the book, Hunter gives no mention to contra indications for the programme, nor does she provide an examination of the extent of mental health difficulties that participants may face. Although she mentions that the treatment programme may be suited to working as part of a multidisciplinary ED package, given the lack of special services available in Ireland it may be that this programme is more suited to preventative or early intervention work. Readers could have benefitted greatly had the author also included areas such as: theoretical approaches, supervision, contra-indications in terms of which groups of individuals may not have the ego strength to withstand this process, and issues around ethical discussion, for example, the need for co-facilitation to be employed in order to ensure safe practice for vulnerable clients and support for therapists working in this very difficult but fertile area of work.

In his foreword, Richard Carolan tells us that the author:

invites women to open their purses, consider their mirrors and try on new shoes. [...] She facilitates a dialogue with 'Barbie' and invites all women to become the captain of their ship. More than that, she offers navigational plans for the journey. (p. 10).

Although Hunter's invitation is much needed and will no doubt be embraced by creative arts therapists looking for inspiration with this client group, more in-depth navigational plans could have been provided in order to help keep the ship as safe as possible through the inevitable storms.

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