

WHEN WORDS DON'T SPEAK

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Words empty of meaning veil the elusive truth. Neither the speaker nor the listener can penetrate the protective defense. The unbearable truth lies latent and out of reach, particularly for survivors of childhood trauma. As psychotherapists, we don't read minds, but we can suspend logical, sequential thought to enter into a space of non-linear attunement. Picking up on subtle, nonverbal expressions and the language of symbols, we may free the truth imprisoned in the shadow.

In circumstances of early childhood trauma, unbearable experiences are locked away. Children whose feelings and perceptions were denied do not develop language for their subjective experiences. Overlays of a "false self" or rigid controls and alexithymia make people strangers to themselves. Art and expressive therapies provide a medium for symbolic expression from which client and therapist can co-construct meaning, and, in turn, develop language for experience.

Art is beautiful. Like poetry, song, good fiction or a good movie, we resonate with the artist's subjective expression. There is no right or wrong. You like it or you don't. It stands in contrast to the scholarly science of psychology which relies on linear thinking and scientific inquiry. Observation leads to questions as we try to understand phenomena in our human experience. Then we are taught to formulate hypotheses, select sound research methods to test the hypotheses, analyze the data, and report the results. Building blocks aligned on the solid foundation of empirical discovery become the structures for our work as science practitioners. But, psychology is both science and art.

The practitioner side of psychology is like any art form. We learn the craft, then suspend the rules to find our own unique style. Psychotherapy can very much be a creative process, and books have been written on the art of psychotherapy. The immersion into the client's subjective world draws on the intuitive and divergent thought processes of the right hemisphere. And, the exquisite attunement of being in the timeless space of shared subjectivity is both intimate and beautiful.

I never considered myself artistic growing up, although I did win the camp art contest when I was eight years old. Needing an elective in grade 12, I hesitantly picked Art. The teacher was surprisingly encouraging, though I continued to see myself as rather stiff and unoriginal. Like many other adolescents going straight on to university without a clear sense of identity or passion, picking a major seemed a bit arbitrary. Remembering the encouragement from my former teacher, I chose Art, which became my passion. It also became the language for my own unformed words.

PSYCHOLOGY IS BOTH
SCIENCE AND ART.

Psychology is both science and art. The balance between convergent and divergent thinking enriches both the science and the art of psychology. Art and expressive therapies enhance our psychotherapy tool box, particularly for clients whose life experiences have robbed them of language for their inner experiences. Without the ability to communicate inner realities, people often exist in depriving emotional isolation despite their apparent relationships.

FUNERAL OF SILENCE

Such is the archeology of sound:
the pickled larynx
set in a vinegar of silence
a quiet that collects in the mouth
a powdered tongue

Sonorous suspension
of words like small fossils, wrapped
in a tissue paper of quiet

The fat impulse pales
withers in cabinets, collects
like secrets tucked in cupboards

The wrinkled skins of wishes
joyless pills, black raisins
with a sweetness pulling into itself

A fermented exuberance
(chock full of preservatives)
whose speech bubbles float away

In the helium of silence

The cry escapes the sieve

There is a seepage of quiet

The utterance left holding
its breath, expires
its syllables falling like seeds
across the tight rope of the larynx
falling slowly into the dirt of sound
Consonants scattered between Vowels
as at the periphery of silence, there
is a

word

one small freedom.
full bodied.
in the mouth. ■

JENNIFER BAIN, MA
Expressive Art Therapist