Play Is Not Just for Children: How to Integrate Expressive Art Techniques for Counseling College Students

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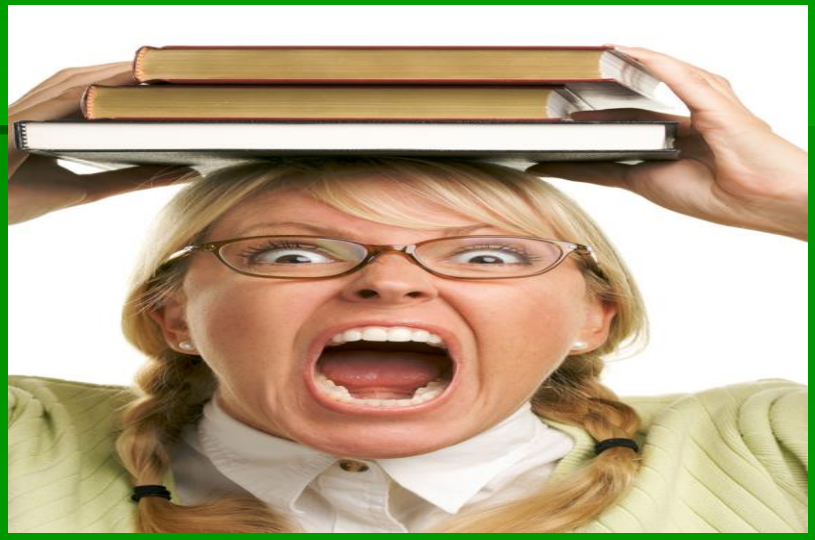


What we know about college students

- Increasing numbers of students seeking counseling for severe psychological problems
- Increasing levels of stress and isolation
- Adolescence extending (emerging adulthood)
- Brain still developing

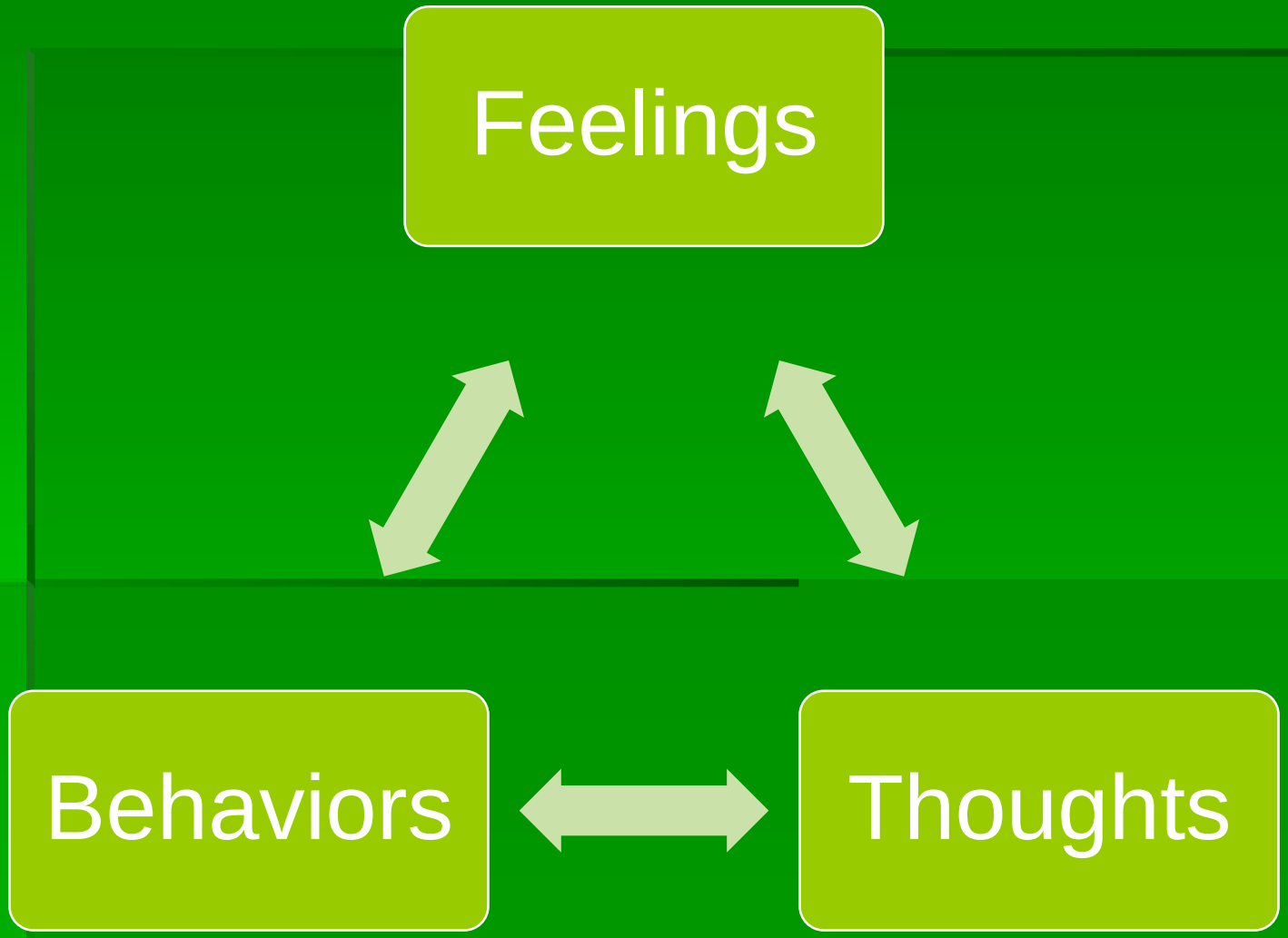
Common Issues Faced by College Students

- Stress
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Adjustment issues
- Identity issues
- Relationship concerns
- Social skills development
- Others???

Expressive/Play Therapy with college students

- Many counselors already use these techniques
- Not calling it “play therapy”
- Effective in addressing both “intrapersonal” and “interpersonal” issues
- Can address “stress” indirectly while focusing on other issues
- Proactive/strengths-based/wellness approach

FACILITATION OF TRIADIC CONNECTION



Origins of Play Therapy

- Jungian Psychology (Carl Jung-Psychiatrist trained under Sigmund Freud)
  - Unconscious/collective unconscious
  - Archetypes (shadow, anima/animus)—associated with memories and interpretations
  - Projective and expressive techniques may also tap into the unconscious

Origins of Play Therapy

- Main idea: Also crucial is the belief that dreams show ideas, beliefs, and feelings of which individuals are not readily aware, but need to be, and that such material is expressed in a personalized vocabulary of visual metaphors.
- Things "known but unknown" are contained in the unconscious, and dreams are one of the main vehicles for the unconscious to express them.
- Projective and expressive techniques may also tap into the unconscious

Projective Techniques

- Thematic Apperception
- Sentence Completion
- Expressive Arts (drawing, painting, sculpting, writing poetry)

Projective Techniques

- All of these allow the individual to assert the psyche through the symbolic content of dreams, imaginations, somatic experiences, and many kinds of expressive art.
- In Jungian psychology, bringing this symbolic content to conscious awareness is an important part of the healing process for individuals.

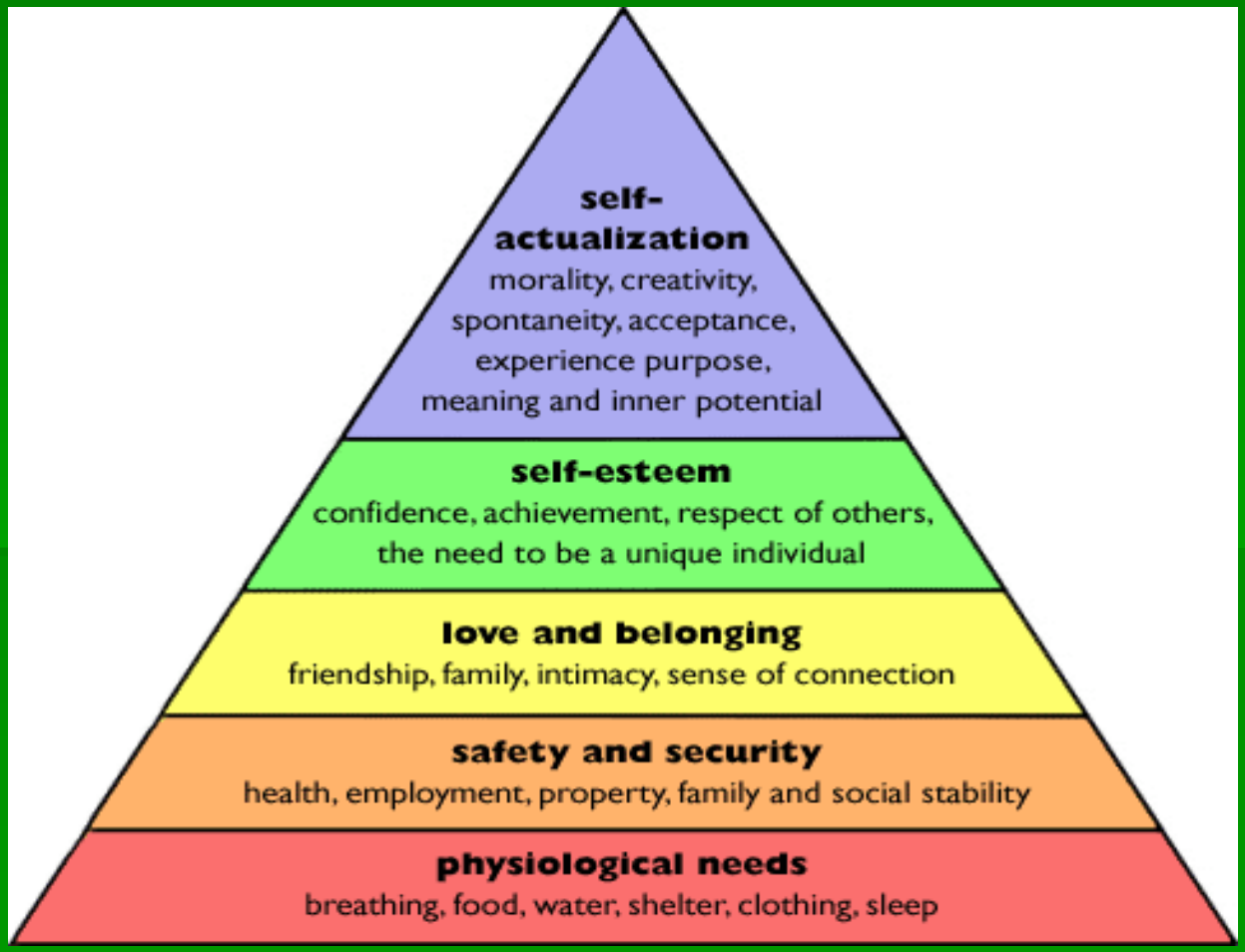
WHY USE PLAY AND EXPERIENTIAL THERAPIES?

- Allows the client to create visuals to assist in verbalizing their issues.
- Connection of affective and cognitive components.
- Sharing with others promotes connection and fosters healing (universality, cohesion)

Why Use Play and Experiential Therapies?

- Provides an outlet for emotional catharsis
- Appeals to different senses and learning styles
- Mind, Body, and Spirit Connection

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS



Expressive Art Techniques

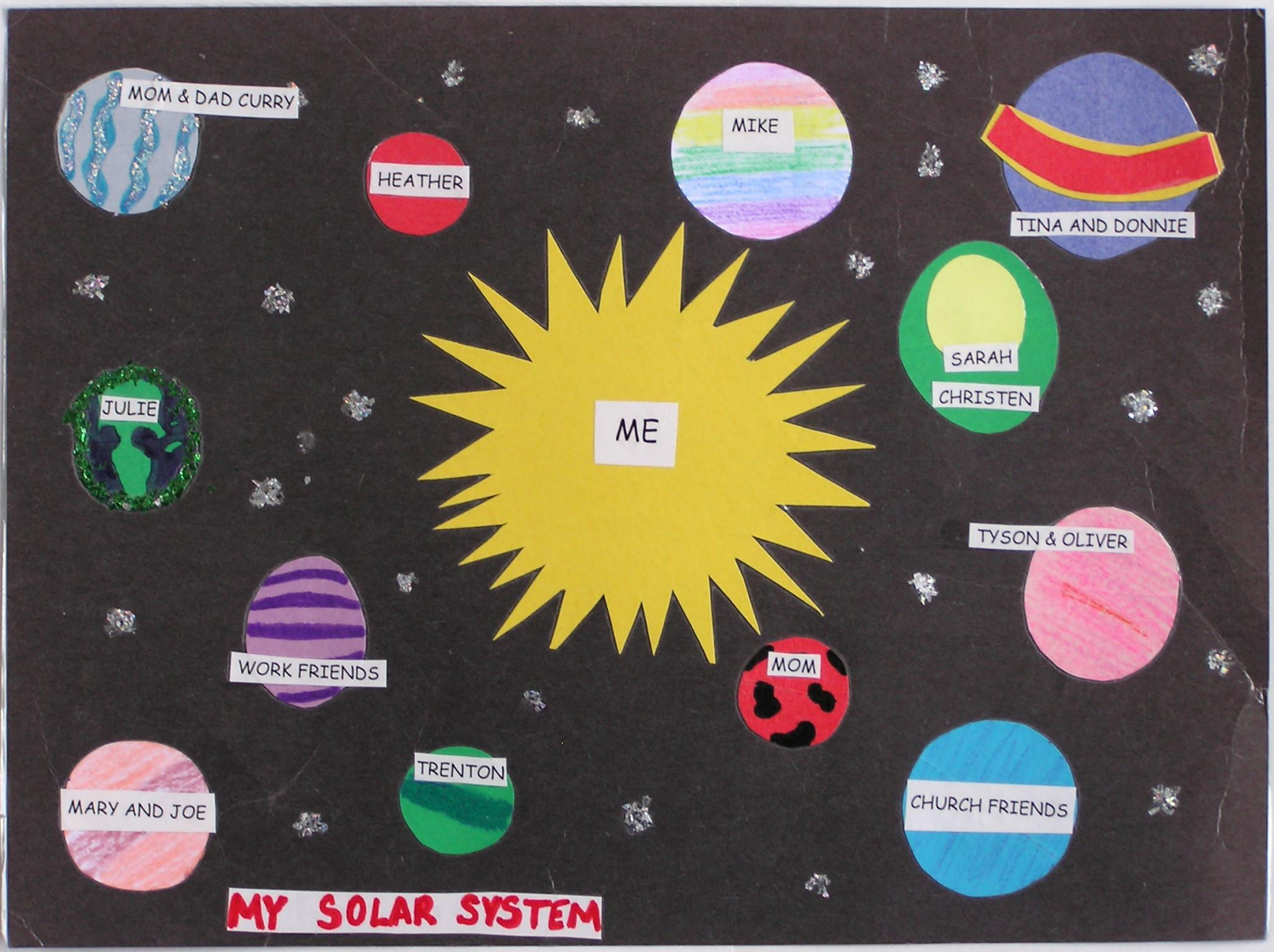
- Games
- Ritual and Ceremonial Goodbyes
- Sculpting/Collaging
- Biblio-therapy
- Eco-mapping
- Music

MASKING/SCULPTING

- Appropriate for all ages and developmental stages.
- Allows client to look at the “mask” he or she wears.
- Creates opportunity to discuss real emotions and when it is appropriate to remove “the mask”

ECO-MAPPING

- Appropriate for all ages
- Can be tailored to developmental ability
- Allows the client to see connections with others
- Allows the counselor to track changes in support network over time


MOM & DAD CURRY
HEATHER
MIKE
TINA AND DONNIE
SARAH
CHRISTEN
JULIE
ME
TYSON & OLIVER
WORK FRIENDS
MOM
MARY AND JOE
TRENTON
CHURCH FRIENDS
MY SOLAR SYSTEM

COLLAGES

- Appropriate for all ages
- Gives client an opportunity to create a visual that they can keep
- Creates a tool for explaining cognitions and emotions

LAUGH·OUT·LOUD
ENGAGED
SISTER TO SISTER
UNDO THE DAY
FREEDOM
BREAK FREE
TIFFANY & CO.
SWISS MADE
Just the idea of it intrigued her
"This is going to be fun"
she whispered to herself
LEAVE THE BULL BEHIND
SUCCESS
RealityCheck
color

Sand tray

- Appropriate for late elementary to adults.
- Allows the client to create a visual of current context and past context
- Displays social support network

Implications and Discussion

- Case example: Baylor University (Bolt & Paul, 2011)
- How do you/can you incorporate play/expressive therapy in your work?
- With which clients/issues might these techniques be most effective?
- Other discussion?