

Reflection on masculinities: Men in art therapy

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ABSTRACT

This personal reflection draws on perceptions from two practical art-making sessions – held at The Internationalisation of Art Therapy Conference (Singapore) and the 21st Birthday ANZATA Conference (Geelong). The author presented a paper and facilitated in art making in which he set out to address the presence, social silence and visibility surrounding male art therapists in the profession. As a male art therapist he wondered are men seen only through the lens of their masculinities or are there other ways of seeing men in this field? He was particularly interested in the gross, subtle and transgressive processes acted out in the lives of men who are art therapists and the manner in which men see themselves. The paper uses images generated in the two contexts to illustrate emerging ideas on men who are art therapists.

INTRODUCTION

As a male art therapist I have often wondered are men seen only through the lens of their masculinities or are there other ways of seeing men in this profession? So I approached the convenor of the 21st ANZATA Conference and my abstract was accepted. The convenor asked whether or not I would ‘consider women attending also’ due to numbers of registrations and the absence of men.

I had hoped to have a space for men only to explore the question. As we know from Tavani (2007), art therapy has “always attracted more female students and practitioners than males” (as cited in Junge & Asawa, 1994). This reflective statement is emergent ideas around the ANZATA conference in Geelong 2009 and the Singapore conference in 2010. I asked the audience and workshop participants to make the ‘ideal male art therapist in clay’ and these illustrations inform the reflection.

The Geelong event had very few men in attendance but the convenor was eager to ensure the workshop was able to go ahead.

The Singapore workshop was very much populated with men. Of the group of ten participants nine were men; in Geelong the theatre auditorium was full with around 50 women with only four men in attendance. The space for sharing was qualitatively different and more open in Singapore.

The men arts therapists who came to the sessions both in Geelong and Singapore spoke of being very able to ‘read,’ or sense the verbal and non-verbal encounters they experience around their masculinities and this was at the crux of the session.

Their stories and the art works created in the two sessions provide us with some insights in to what is an extremely complex and contradictory reality. Being seen as men there is no incontrovertible monolithic notion of their subjectivities. No two men are the same. So there are a myriad of possibilities in representing the places of men in art therapy contexts. However, it is noteworthy that I have had a lifetime of experience to develop my personal measures of my knowing as