The Arts in Psychotherapy 66 (2019) 101601

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

The Arts in Psychotherapy

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/artspsycho

Discussion

House as a mirror of self: A case study of a twenty-one-year-old female in an inpatient psychiatric hospital

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A B S T R A C T

The concept of house has been universally significant since its development some 8500 years ago. Its mythic and metaphoric meaning permeates the language, art, poetry, and music of virtually all cultures. Yet, contemporary art therapy literature has focused little on the significance and meaning of house imagery when it emerges as a choice of subject matter in the image making process. I present this case study in the hope that it will inspire the reader to think further and more deeply about the house should it emerge as an impromptu theme in art therapy. I provide a brief introduction of a 21-year-old African American female followed by a discussion of her artwork - the construction of what she described as her dream home made in art therapy sessions over a three-week period during an inpatient psychiatric stay. I employed a fairly traditional interpretive style to illustrate how the client's house and its various elements presented as a symbol of her ego-self and reflected how she viewed herself both as an individual and in relation to the outside world.

Introduction

A house is defined as a structure that provides shelter or habitation for a family or small group of people (House, 2019). It has been relevant in the development of virtually all civilizations. The first shelters were constructed by early humans to provide refuge during hunting and gathering expeditions approximately 30,000 years ago. Although these tent-like structures served as temporary homes, the nomadic means of early humans did not require lasting structures. The first permanent housing structures were constructed in what is now Turkey some 8500 years ago (Ching et al. (2007), Cirlot, 1981; Lambert, n.d.; van Vliet, 1998; Who Invented Houses, n.d.).

Over the ages, the house has provided a physical structure for domestic behavior – a dwelling creating virtual privacy for daily activities, where individuals can cook, eat, socialize, and rest, absent from the public realm and a place where, in many cultures, they are born and die (Ogdon, 1984; van Vliet, 1998). Consequently, the concept of house has become deeply entwined in our sense of self, well-being, and connectedness. Huskinson (2013) stated of the house, "We fear the idea of homelessness, it means a life on the streets, of not having a place to sleep, to eat, to be. Our home is our base, a place that roots us to the earth, to the city or the landscape; it gives us permanence and stability and allows us to build a life around it and within it" (p. 7).

During my 25 years as an art therapist, the house motif has often been a choice of subject matter for clients in my clinical practice, yet little has been written about the significance of house imagery in present-day art therapy literature. I have experienced a persistent doubt that we have not done all we should when contemplating the implications of the house when it presents in the art process. Art therapists frequently defer to literature on the House-Tree-Person technique when examining the importance of house imagery and how it may relate to a person's identity and sense of self. Regrettably, Heathcote (2012) has determined there is comparatively minimal literature on the house when compared with that of the tree and person, thus moderating the assessment's usefulness for exploring the implications of house imagery. It is my hope this case study will contribute to our understanding of the house motif should it emerge as a choice of subject matter in art therapy.

The concept of house and its significance can be examined on many levels, from many perspectives, and there is no all-embracing conclusion. For instance, much has been written within the disciplines of psychology, anthropology, sociology, history, architecture and philosophy about the importance and implications of the house. Similarly, Sociologist Shelly Marc (1977) asserted, "Many researchers now understand home as a multidimensional concept and acknowledge the presence of and need for multidimensional research in the field" (p. 64).

In 1909, psychoanalyst Carl Jung highlighted the intimate association of house with the self when he analyzed his dream concerning a multileveled home he came to recognize as his own. Jung experienced his dream at the time he was developing his theory on the collective unconscious, consequently he proposed the house and its various levels were a model of the mind. He viewed the house as a mirror of self, and each floor represented a level of the human consciousness. Jung recalled how the features of the home became progressively older as he descended down the staircase which lead him to believe the upper story represented realms of consciousness, the lower story the personal

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2019.101601
Received 4 June 2018; Received in revised form 24 July 2019; Accepted 5 November 2019
Available online 09 November 2019

unconsciousness, and the subterranean level as the collective unconsciousness. (Crenshaw & Green, 2009; Jiyoung & Gabsook, 2013; Kato & Suzuki, 2015).

The field of psychology began to examine the house as a possible symbol of self through the House-Tree-Person (H-T-P) technique. Initiated by Buck (1948), the assessment required participants to draw each subject on a separate sheet of paper. The drawing task aided the clinician in obtaining information regarding the person's degree of personality integration, maturity and efficiency. The house tends to evoke associations concerning home life and interfamilial relationships. In children, it seems to access their attitude regarding the home situation and relationships toward parents and siblings. For married adults, the rendering of a house may represent the person's domestic situation in relationship to his or her spouse (Hammer, 1967; Oster & Montgomery, 1996). For a more comprehensive overview of the House-Tree-Person (H-T-P) technique, refer to Betts, 2012; Betts, 2016; Buck, 1948, 1992; Buck, 1981; Burns, 1987; Chih-Ying et al., 2011; Dyer, 2018; Groth-Marnat & Roberts, 1998; Hammer, 1967; Handler, 2014a, 2014b; Kato & Suzuki, 2015, Kato & Suzuki, 2016; Lopez & Carolan, 2001; Ogdon, 1984; Oster & Gould, 1987; Oster & Montgomery, 1996; Roysircar et al., 2016; Stanley & Kirchner, 1972; Stoddard, 2003; Tharinger & Roberts, 2014; Wohl & Kaufman, 1985; and Yu et al., 2016.

Oster and Gould (1987) asserted architecture and interior design has long recognized that we consciously and unconsciously use our home environment to express something about ourselves. Furthermore, the preceding author alleged the house and its various contents give testimony to who we are and exist as symbols of our ego-selves. She said of the house:

> The colors we chose, the objects we select, the pictures and posters we put on the walls-all of these have aesthetic or functional meanings of which we are aware. Many of them also are projections, or messages from the unconscious, in just the same way that our dreams contain such messages (p.52).

Marc (1977) concurred and asserted a person's house can be an expression of his or her identity and sense of self. Beck (2011) too recognized the importance of the house and asserted it is part of our self-definition and distinguishing us from others. Similarly, English architect and designer Edwin Huskinson (2013), asserted, "…the very idea of home is so tied up with our selves that it can seem almost inseparable from our being" (p.7). The preceding author stated the house is a "vessel for containing meaning," thus a person's life can be read through his or her home and its content. He observed of the house:

> …there is the more obvious role of the home as the projection of self. The façade is, quite literally, the face, the expression with windows for eyes and a door for a mouth and, once inside, each room has its role in the representation of a part of our inner lives. The hall represents a shadow of the time when a home was a single living space containing every activity; it announces arrival and departure. The kitchen is a space of transformation and alchemy, of raw materials into sustenance, but it is also the space of the mother and of refuge, the warm, secure women. The bedroom is fraught with a complex symbolism of birth, sleep, sex, dreams and death. The cellar represents the dark recesses of the subconscious upon which our public lives are precariously built; its counterpart is the attic, with memories and secrets of the past (p.15).

Speight, Isom, and Thomas (2013) recognized the house as one of the most important objects used to express our identity and sense of self. They proposed the house is part of our "communicative system" used to exchange information about our status, values and meaning. The authors asserted, "…the materials people use in the house, the furniture they install, the pictures they hang, the plants they tend, etc. are all messages about themselves or to others" (p.4).

Financial psychologist Kenneth Dyer (2018) proposed scholars of psychosocial development, such as Furth (1988), have delivered ideas that furnish an additional dimension of meaning for home – the notion that people change over time, hence the meaning and significance of home will transform throughout a person's life. In the same way, architect and author Clare Oster and Gould (1987) asserted home can mean different things to different people and that meaning can change throughout the various phases in one's lifetime.

The Case of Latoya

The setting was an acute inpatient psychiatric hospital where all adults were required to participate in group art therapy. Art therapy was part of an expressive therapy milieu and viewed as an ancillary service. Observations in art therapy were shared with members of a multidisciplinary treatment team. Group membership in art therapy changed as participants were discharged and new individuals were admitted. The group met bi-weekly; size varied from 8 to 10 patients. The group was not homogeneous and included people with a variety of psychiatric and substance use diagnoses. Time was provided at the end of each session for patients who wished to share and discuss their imagery.

All individuals participating for the first time were shown around the art studio and oriented to the various materials, storage spaces, and so on. The studio was stocked with art materials and had a sink, places to sit, and table space. I approached art therapy from a psychoanalytic perspective with the hope of creating a potential space that allowed personalized work, symbolizing the participants' unconscious processes and life experiences. Subsequently, a non-directive approach was employed in the sense that participants were provided a variety of media and encouraged to use these materials according to their own choices and needs. This approach permitted participants the opportunity to explore and play with the art materials without restraint and boundaries.

I selected this case example to demonstrate to the reader how the house and its content can give testimony to a person's identify, sense of self, and interfamilial relationships. I employed a fairly traditional interpretive style that included a "phenomenological approach" whereby I initially reacted to the image in its totality and/or its parts on an impressionistic level before engaging in a structural analysis that focused on specific interpretations associated with each element (Lopez & Carolan, 2001). Additionally, analysis of the house and its various elements were obtained through mutual exploration with the client, as well as historical and current contextual information. van Vliet (1998) understood that the individual's explanation of the symbol is greatly enriched when conceptualized in the context of what is known about the person historically and presently. Acosta (2001) pointed out the complexities of interpretation and urged art therapists to use all resources and information in an exploratory manner such that the image is understood as greater than just a consolidation of its individual parts. van Vliet (1998) concurred and asserted, "…interpretations of a drawing alone are not recommended, as the narrative and context are necessary to obtain a fuller and often more complex understanding" (p.39). Betts (2012) was of the same opinion and stated, "Assessment should be understood as an evaluative process, incorporating tools that are used in the larger context of a process entailing triangulation of data from multiple sources" (p. 206).

Malchiodi (1990) and van Vliet (1998) cautioned against universal interpretation of specific signs or exclusive use of psychoanalytic models in interpretation. Likewise, Gedo (2013) recommended therapists not put their trust wholly in symbolic interpretations originating from a dictionary of symbols yet cautioned against swinging to the opposite extreme and completely devaluing this approach. Data should be examined from a number of theoretical and pragmatic perspectives as well as the clinician's own clinical experience and insight (van Vliet (1998). Erickstad (2012) recognized the importance of clinical intuition when obtaining meaningful information about clients and recommended "cooking without a cookbook" – to transcend beyond the

information given and the restraints of validated measurements. The preceding author asserted, “We know that clients derive considerable benefit, therapeutic and otherwise, from being understood and learning to understand themselves better, and that those who work with them in therapeutic or even in forensic or human resources settings can use such highly personalized, in-depth understanding to great advantage” (p. 10).

The house and its various elements may have several symbolic meanings superimposing each other or occurring simultaneously at different levels. Cohen and Cox (1995) and Senan (1993) concur, asserting “multileveledness” of a drawing or a single element of a drawing can communicate a multitude of related and/or contrasting meanings simultaneously. Similarly, Waller, Pleven, and Groterath (1999) observed that images can have many different layers of meaning even within the same picture or object. Malchiodi (1990) agreed and proposed the symbol is fluid and it can be used to represent just one idea, or it can be associated with a wide range of meanings.

Latoya (pseudonym) was an African American female who appeared younger than her 21 years. She took great pride in her appearance and was meticulous about her clothes and make-up. She was often flirtatious and presented as overly self-confident, yet behind this façade was extreme unhappiness and low self-worth. She was hospitalized for a depressive episode and extensive alcohol use. Like many women who struggle with a substance use disorder, Latoya was confronted with a complex constellation of interdependent bio-psycho-social factors comprised of but was not limited to, psychological symptomology, trauma and abuse, relationship problems, family disruption, and complications with parenting.

Latoya was single with two children ages one and three. Due to allegations of neglect and her need for inpatient treatment, her children were placed in the care of the Department of Human Services. Latoya was unemployed and transient, frequently living with friends and acquaintances for brief periods. She often placed her children in the care of others while embarking on extended drinking binges to shield them from the harmful effects of her alcohol use. Lacking essential social resources and supports, it became increasingly difficult for her to provide a stable home environment for her children. She had no contact with her family of origin and grappled with intimate relationships overall. Furthermore, Latoya survived an extremely traumatic childhood in which she suffered physical and sexual abuse and had no positive attachments. Her father’s a chronic substance use and her mother’s emotionally unavailable resulted in Latoya herself being placed into care at age seven due to abuse and neglect. She was hospitalized three weeks, during which she attended six art therapy sessions.

Once in the art studio, I showed Latoya around the room and introduced her to the materials and space. She surveyed the room and gravitated to a large box of scrap wood resting on the floor. She positioned herself alongside the box and scoured through the wood pieces periodically pausing to examine the irregular shapes and forms for inspiration. At one point, she raised her head and enthusiastically announced to the group, “I know…I’m going to build my dream home!”

During her 3-week hospitalization, Latoya focused solely on the construction of her dream home (Fig. 1). Her initial two weeks were devoted toward building the entry floor which consisted of a living room, kitchen and bathroom (Fig. 2). Latoya’s entry floor conveyed a feeling of domesticity and spoke to the rudimentary needs of everyday life. The entry floor was constructed with wood pieces fashioned together with hot glue making it architecturally strong and enduring. “I want this home to last,” voiced Latoya. As she worked, she alluded to her history of homelessness and the lack of permanence, connectedness and stability in her life. A sidewalk, crafted from tile pieces, lead to her front door. The walkway complemented her home and was a welcoming first impression. The door was fashioned from wood and a tile piece served as a doorknob. The doorknob was placed high on the door implying concerns regarding accessibility and interpersonal relationships (Oster & Montgomery, 1996). Furthermore, the door was without

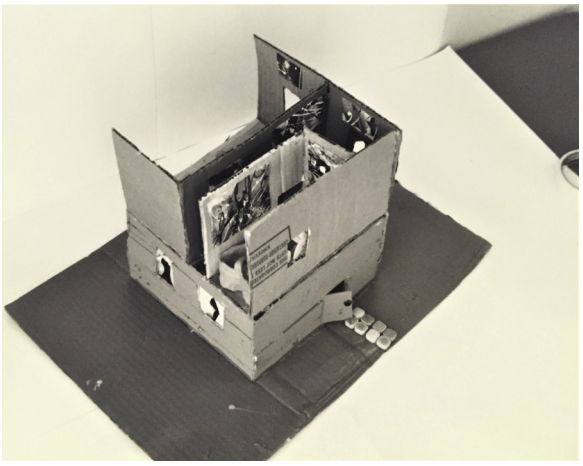

Fig. 1. Latoya's Dream Home.

Fig. 2. Entry Floor.

a window suggesting less comfort with the interaction of inside and outside worlds (Crenshaw and Green, September 2009). When questioned about her door, Latoya asserted, “I have trouble letting people in…It’s hard for me to trust people after what I have been through.”

“Doors and doorways have been symbolic across cultures for as long as history has been recorded. A door is both an entrance and an exit, so it has been associated with portals and passages on many levels throughout history” (Hammer, 1967). The nature of the door itself is to create a barrier between two distinct areas (Symbolism of doors, n.d.). Subsequently, the entryway controls social engagement and regulates communication between elements of the outside world and that of the intimate internal space (Kidd & Wix, 1996; Roysircar, Colvin, Afolayan, Thompson, & Robertson, 1982). Similarly, Heathcote (2012) asserted, “The door is the most obvious expression of transition from one realm to another, a slightly magical mechanism that makes solid wall permeable” (p. 92). The question to be explored was whether Latoya’s partially open door was meant to escape the confines of the house or invite the outside world in or a combination of both.

Latoya’s partially opened door may have represented temptation and conveyed the irresistible urge to explore. Heathcote (2012), stated of the door:

> A door that is open is one thing, a door that is shut is another, but a door that is partly open offers a glimpse of something beyond. It hints perhaps at the state between consciousness and dreaming but also at the idea of voyeurism, the glimpse of something forbidden, a snatch of overheard conversation or a momentary eyeful of forbidden fruit (p. 96).

The significance of a partially open door is the anticipation of new possibilities. The barrier placed before us has been removed and we are permitted to cross the threshold into something novel. We are summoned forward into change, with nothing to negotiate except the transition of one space to another (Symbolism of doors, n.d.).

Oddly, Latoya's entry floor has widows on the sides and posterior, but no windows are constructed on the face of her ground level. Gedo (2013) asserted, "Odd representation often points out a specific problem area of which the individual may or may not be aware but needs to be brought into the open" (p. 39). Windows have several significant roles. Huskinson (2013) said of the window:

> The window (or wind-eye) is the element that most closely resembles its function in the face; it is the opening for seeing. If eyes are the windows to the soul, then windows are the eyes by which the house and it inhabitants are judged and through which the world is perceived (p. 106).

Similarly, Rapoport (1982) proposed that widows are "important mediators between the inside and the outside – between the mental, social, and environmental ecologies within, and those without" (p. 2). The preceding author asserted windows are thresholds that permit us to simultaneously view equally inside and outside. Huskinson (2013) concurred and stated, "Windows are the apertures through which we communicate with the outside world, but they work both ways." (p.99).

The lack of windows on the face of her entry floor seemed to illustrate Latoya's apprehension and ambivalence regarding direct access to her inner world as well as her hesitancy to openly communicate with the environment. Crenshaw and Green (2009) asserted the lack of windows can indicate a fear of being examined by others or conversely a fear of perceiving the outer world. Latoya's placement of windows on the sides and posterior of the home indicated she preferred circuitous interaction with the world as opposed to direct. Additionally, it may have implied vigilance and watchfulness. When questioned about her window placement Latoya responded, "I don't want people walking up to my house and peeking in…but I need to know what's going on around and in back of my house." Latoya's heightened vigilance was a reasonable response to her worldview. African Americans (particularly women) from low income housing developments can experience their world as dangerous and hostile (Roberts, 2015). Consequently, Latoya's watchfulness was an understandable reaction to her surroundings and life experiences.

Latoya's front door entered to a lavishly decorated living room. The walls were painted with neutral colors and the floor was carpeted with a colorful paisley fabric. The room was furnished with a big screen television fashioned from wood as well as a matching couch and ottoman made from wood and upholstered with a flower-patterned cloth. Latoya stated, "I can relax on my couch while I watch a movie on my big screen TV…I don't have to think about anything…It's my place to escape." Latoya's well-equipped entertainment room provided her the means and opportunity to remove herself from the stressors of everyday life. "It's my escape from reality," voiced Latoya.

Latoya's kitchen consisted of a tiled floor; sink molded from clay, and a wooden table with tiled top. Huskinson (2013) asserted the kitchen is where rudimentary materials are transformed into sustenance and it is the space of refuge, warmth, and nourishment. The preceding author stated, "In symbolic terms it is the place of miracles as well as that most closely associated with the mother and domesticity itself" (p.60). Latoya's kitchen was missing key appliances such as a refrigerator and stove. Gedo (2013) asserted it is important to discern what is absent from a picture. The preceding author proposed that missing elements may represent what is lacking in the person's life. van Vliet (1998) concurred and stated, "…sometimes the information lies in exactly what is there, and at other times, what is important is what is not there." The absence of key appliances may have represented Latoya's lack of social resources and supports to adequately address the nurturance and domestic needs within the home. Lastly, the bathroom addressed only rudimentary needs and consisted simply of a toilet molded from clay.

At the center of Latoya's entry floor is a staircase fashioned from wood. Bryson (2011) maintained no one knows precisely where or when stairs originated, but the most ancient wooden staircase yet discovered dates from around 3000 years ago. Throughout history stairs have held great significance in many cultures and its depiction is one of the most meaningful symbols of architecture (Erikson, 1959). Huskinson (2013) proposed the symbolic meaning of stairs is the most obvious of all the architectural elements – the ascent or descent from one domain or plain to another. Rainwater (2017) was of the same thought and proposed the staircase is the "symbolic spine" of the house and its qualitative differences of ascending and descending derive from the images of Heaven and Hell. For psychoanalyst Carl Jung, the house represented the self and the stairs allow for movement between levels of human consciousness (Kato & Suzuki, 2015; Oster & Gould, 1987). Similarly, Jiyoung and Gabsook (2013) proposed that stairways connect the different levels allowing movement and communication, so each level is not experienced in isolation but in its totality. Latoya's staircase allowed movement between the ground floor which embodied the ordinary of everyday existence to the upper floor which depicted her make-believe world. A closer examination of the staircase indicated it was not structurally sound nor was it securely anchored to the wall suggesting the connection between her diverging worlds was precarious.

Latoya spent her last two art therapy sessions working on the second floor of her dream home. Her upper floor conveyed a feeling of make-believe and fantasy. Unlike her entry floor, which was constructed of wood, the upper floor was assembled from sheets of cardboard making it less structurally sound and lasting. Latoya was aware that her hospitalization was time limited, thus she may have substituted building materials to speed up production. The upper floor consisted of a small foyer, bathroom, and bedroom (Fig. 3). The second level was saturated with vivid hues of red, pink, green and purple creating what felt like a make-believe and surrealist atmosphere. On the walls, were drip paintings reminiscent of works produced by abstract expressionist Jackson Pollock.

At the top of Latoya's staircase was a small foyer or corridor. Huskinson (2013) stated of the corridor, "[It]…has never been a desirable feature; instead it is a space created by necessity. Neither has it ever been a space in which one dwells, instead it is a place of transition between spaces" (p.158). The foyer permitted passage from the staircase to the neighboring rooms. She painted the corridor a deep green. It is difficult to assign a specific meaning to color, yet common associations to deep green are growth and restoration (Deaver & McAuliffe, 2009; Gedo, 2013; Mallett, 2004). Latoya's empty foyer, traditionally considered as an undesirable space, could have potential for

Fig. 3. Second Floor.

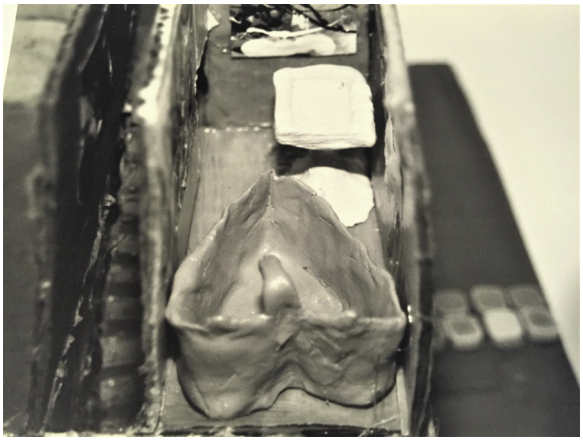

Fig. 4. Latoya's Bathroom.

Fig. 5. Latoya's Bedroom.

opportunity and growth.

Latoya's bathroom (Fig. 4) was painted with passionate hues of deep reds and soft pinks inferring love, warmth, and romance (Bach, 1990; Gedo, 2013; Mallett, 2004). A pedestal sink and heart-shaped bathtub were molded from clay and painted pink. Her bathtub (Fig. 4) resembled the iconic sweetheart tub created by Morris Wilkins in 1963 as part of a romance package at the Cove Haven resort in the Poconos Mountains (Cooper, 1974; Schaverien, 1992; This valentine's Day, n.d.). The heart has been a long-established symbol of love and passion in western culture (Clark, 2014; Malchiodi, 1998). Symbolism of Doors (2019) concurred and suggested heart imagery can symbolize romance, sensuality, and affection. Group members giggled with delight as Latoya assembled the romantic components of her bathroom. "This is a place for me to get pampered and loved", stated Latoya. Oster and Gould (1987) and Bryson (2011) also recognized the bathroom can be a space of sensuality and pleasure. Similarly, Huskinson (2013) suggested the contemporary bathroom has become a space of luxury, indulgence, sensuality and can often be associated with sex.

Latoya's bathroom was a space for her fantasies of self-indulgence and romance. However, a closer examination of the bathroom revealed the absence of a door suggesting lack of opportunity and possibly self-sabotage (Dalley et al., 1987). She may have believed her desires for romance and self-pleasure were unattainable, forbidden or undeserving. Latoya stated, "When you have two kids, it's hard to find time for yourself and meet men." Despite group observations, Latoya made no attempt to create a doorway to her bathroom, suggesting her romantic and self-indulgent fantasies would remain closed off and inaccessible.

Often art can clarify the space between client and therapist, bringing to light unconscious dynamics of the relationship shared between the two (Blatner & Collins, 2009; Cartwright, 2011; Deaver & McAuliffe, 2009; Gedo, 2013; Jiyoung & Gabsook, 2013; Schaverien, 1999; Wolf, 2010). Similarly, Tharinger and Roberts (2014) asserted the analysis of the imagery must be reviewed in the context of the client's interpersonal relationship with the clinician. Schoeberl (2014) concurred and proposed the interactive nature of art therapy lends itself to a client projecting feelings about the therapist. Latoya's bathroom may have mirrored aspects of our transference/countertransference relationship and the omission of a doorway illustrated attempts to confine and regulate our social engagement.

Latoya's bedroom (Fig. 5) was painted a deep purple implying imagination, royalty, and wealth (Gedo, 2013; Mallett, 2004). "It's a bedroom worthy of a queen," boasted Latoya. The floor was carpeted with pastel colored fabric. A bed was constructed from wood and pastel colored cloth was used to create a bedspread with matching pillow cases. A dresser and mirror were fashioned from wood and painted purple. Latoya cut a door in the wall permitting access to the bedroom. "I finally have my own bedroom…my own space…no kids to bother me," announced Latoya. Huskinson (2013) asserted the bedroom is a chamber for retreat, allowing for intimate activities such as sleep, personal conversation and sex. Latoya discussed how being a mother of two young children directly affected her personal time, sleep and ability to have intimate relations with men.

Group attendees pointed out to Latoya that her dream home lacked a bedroom for her children. Latoya became visibly uneasy when confronted. I wondered if, in Latoya's make-believe world, there was no room for her children or if it portrayed her fears that the system supposedly supporting her might be unwilling to return her children to her care or a combination of both. She sat back in her chair, paused, and stated, "Sometimes I wish I didn't have kids…I know as a mom that is a horrible thing to say…but there are days those kids are too much for me." Latoya disclosed her feelings of ambivalence toward parenthood and acknowledged feeling overwhelmed and needing help as a mother. Balancing multiple roles is a common occurrence for women of color and some African American women are expected, and expect of themselves, to have the capability to handle multiple roles and responsibilities (Stoddard, 2003).

The group drew Latoya's attention to the empty foyer at the top of her staircase and encouraged her to convert the empty space into a bedroom for her children. The vacant and once undesirable space now provided an opportunity for her to create room for her children. Latoya's feelings of distress were lifted, and her sense of hope renewed when she discovered there was a solution to her quandary. She smiled with optimism and stated, "I'll get to work on that in our next session." Latoya was discharged from the hospital before she completed construction of her dream home.

Conclusion

In this case study, Latoya used the art process to construct what she described as her dream home in art therapy sessions over a three-week period during an inpatient psychiatric stay. Her house and its various elements presented as a symbol of her ego-self and reflected how she viewed herself both as an individual and in relation to the outside world. Her multilevel home represented two plans of consciousness. The entry floor consisted of a living room, kitchen and bathroom and represented the ordinary of everyday existence. Her kitchen portrayed concerns with domesticity and the lack of social resources and supports to adequately address nurturance and domestic needs within the home. Latoya's well-equipped entertainment room provided her the opportunity to remove herself from the stressors of everyday life.

The upper story consisted of a foyer, bedroom and a bathroom, its dream-like quality depicted her make-believe world. The bathroom was a space for self-indulgence, romance, and sensuality. The lack of a bedroom for her children implied her fantasy world had no room for her

children, her fears that the system supposedly supporting her might be unwilling to return her children to her care or a combination of both. Her staircase allowed movement between her diverging worlds of reality and fantasy in an effort to experience them in their totality.

Latoya's dream home became a vessel for containing meaning and was a projection of her ego-self. Her home, its decoration, design and contents revealed issues and needs that were communicated to the treatment team and addressed in therapy and aftercare planning. Huskinson (2013) asserted of the home, "…throughout our lives, whether we are conscious of it or not, our home and is contents are very potent statements about who we are. In particular, they represent symbols of our ego-selves…" (p.9).

Latoya was discharged from the hospital before fully developing an understanding of her dream home. Nevertheless, the art process provided her the opportunity to express and explore unresolved issues related to home. The art process provided Latoya a medium where alternative realities, attitudes, and feelings could be expressed, examined and tried out. Her dream home may have been a response to the lack of permanence, connectedness and stability in her life. Chih-Ying, Tsyr-Jang, Helfrich, and Ay-Woan (1992)) asserted creativity can be used for wish-fulfillment, at which point the individual's imagination is a surrogate for reality. Senan (1993) concurred and stated the image can substitute for something desired but seen as unattainable.

Before leaving the hospital, Latoya decided to leave her dream home in my safekeeping, which had many potential meanings. She may have wanted to depart with the possibility of someday returning to complete her work (Chih-Ying et al., 2011). Latoya shrugged her shoulders and stated, "Who knows…I might be back," implying her work was unfinished. Additionally, by relinquishing her dream home she may have been leaving behind a painful reminder of unfulfilled dreams or the fact that she had no place to take it; both distressing reminder of her struggles to create a home for herself and her children.

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