Chapter 10
Expanding the Range of Puppetry in Expressive Play Therapy

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ABSTRACT
This chapter focuses on expanding the therapeutic application of using puppetry as a communicative tool in the service of psychological growth and integration for children. A continuum of more than thirty descriptors of puppetry formats are presented that each hold specific value within therapeutic interventions. The types of materials used to construct the puppet and their cognitive, emotional, and sensory connections are explored, as is the impact of uniquely created productions versus commercial products. The authors also define the limitations and challenges of certain types of puppetry, which can evoke or incite different reactions within different stages and phases of psychosocial treatment. Examples of case vignettes are provided from a Child and Adolescent public services agency in an inner-city environment.

INTRODUCTION
This chapter focuses on advancing the therapeutic application of puppetry as a communicative tool in the service of psychological growth and integration for children. Initially inanimate, the puppet can be brought to life through words and movement echoing the motions made by humans. Accordingly, puppetry has long been used and recognized as a vital projective and communication tool in therapy allowing for the safe disclosure of thoughts, emotions, affective responses, and physical expressions (Bromfield, 1995; Carter & Mason, 1998; Hartwig, 2014; Irwin, 2002; Ivon, 2014; Jenkins & Beckh, 2002; Lebedeva, 2012; Oaklander, 2007; and Steinhardt, 1994). Related literature (Bromfield, 1995; Burneikaite, 2009; Carter & Mason, 1998; Hartwig, 2014; Irwin, 2002; and Jenkins & Beckh, 1995) has highlighted the importance of choosing puppets that are suitable for therapeutic use. Despite these
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explorations, there is limited research integrating therapeutic issues within a continuum of the range of puppetry available to clients in play therapy.

The understanding of the physicality of puppetry and its range of therapeutic applications can be expanded through the proposed “Puppetry in Play Therapy Continuum” (PPTC) framework that considers the elements of structure, materials, process, and symbolic and metaphoric content. Carter & Mason (1998) defined puppetry into four basic commercially made formats – 1) Hand puppets, 2) Marionettes, 3) Muppets, and 4) Ventriloquist dummies. The authors propose an amplification of that premise naming at least thirty different descriptors of puppet making that hold specific value within therapeutic applications. Within the chapter, the PPTC of different puppets is outlined and explored. The authors also create a framework of therapeutic materials that define different uses of commercial and uniquely created products that meet specific treatment goals and provide opportunities for a range of diagnoses. For purposes of the chapter, examples of case vignettes from a pilot research project designed to explore the potentiality of this expansion using a non-directive, humanistic, and relational approach, are presented and examined.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Therapeutic Use of Puppets

Puppets allow for freedom of expression, providing opportunities for connection with others. Inherently creating metaphor, they are designed to communicate and have the ability to voice wants, needs, and desires that the individual who creates or operates them may fear to express (Ackerman, 2005). Current professional literature suggests that soft hand puppets, which are easy to manipulate, are purported to be the type of puppet best suited for therapeutic purposes (Bromfield, 1995; Carter & Mason, 1998; Hartwig, 2014; and Oaklander, 2007). The authors recognize the benefit of soft hand puppets and deepen this posture, examining the importance of the physicality of the puppets including the structure, materials, and mode of construction. Bromfield (1995) discussed elements of physicality and briefly considered this concept when he stated, “All aspects of puppet play - including form, manifest and latent content are fair game for observation and examination” (p.442). He supported his recommendation of soft hand puppets based in part on his observation that the hard rubber wolf in his collection was rarely used. Since rubber is hard and non-pliable, and the “personality” of the wolf “aggressive”, the authors are curious about when and how puppets, such as the hard rubber wolf, or puppets of other materials, are used and how this correlates with the client’s presentation and diagnosis. The authors contend that examining the use of puppets made of a variety of materials and puppet types are needed in order to explore a full range of expression and affect.

The expanded range of puppetry encompasses the symbolic and metaphoric meanings of the puppets as well as the materials and mode of construction. The authors found minimal research exploring these elements together or in the creation of self-made puppets and toys. In addition to proposing soft hand puppets, the literature supports selecting puppets based on personality and roles (Carter & Mason, 1998; Hartwig, 2014; and Irwin, 2002). Hartwig (2014) proposed specific puppet categories - friendly, foolish, and frightening - and recommended choosing puppets from each category to allow clients to fully communicate an extensive range of thoughts, emotions, and experiences.