The animal symbol within: An exploration of the potential benefits of exploring animal symbols in art therapy with children.

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A Research Paper

in

the Department

of

Creative Art Therapies

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

August 2014

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the research paper prepared

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Entitled: The animal symbol within: An exploration of the potential benefits of exploring animal symbols in art therapy with children.

and submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Creative Arts Therapies; Art Therapy Option)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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ABSTRACT

The animal symbol within: An exploration of the potential benefits of exploring animal symbols in art therapy with children.

Andréa Bédard-Gascon

A constant dilemma is battling within humans: acknowledging their animality or refuting it in the name of humanity. By refusing to acknowledge the bond we share with nature, we are alienating ourselves from an essential part of our identity. Reconnecting with our animal-self through a therapy process has emerged as a healing technique (Myers, 1998). The purpose of this paper is to answer the following question: *How might animal symbols be helpful with children in art therapy?* This research question will be investigated by linking theories about the human and animal relationship. Children's natural attraction to animals will be further explored. Looking at therapeutic benefits of the use of animal symbols in therapy, animal totem, shamanism, and the theories of Freud, Jung and Winnicott will be explained. Then, the research will focus on art therapy interventions. Finally, a hypothesis for an intervention for children 5 to 8 years old with psychiatric difficulties, who have issues with self-esteem, problem-solving, coping and transitional difficulties, impulse control and relationships will be presented.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this paper would not have been possible without the presence of many incredible people.

To Stephen Snow, thank you for your supervision during the elaboration of this paper.

To the wonderful professors that guided me during those two years in the program.

To my classmates who have quickly become dear friends. We made it together through the amazing journey that this program was. I know I'll always be able to count on you.

Un merci spécial à maman et papa, votre appui et amour inconditionnel ont fait toute la différence. Vous m'inspirez à toujours persévérer et poursuivre mes rêves.

Merci Julien d'être resté à mes côtés durant ces deux années. Les moments difficiles et heureux auront rendu notre amour toujours plus fort.

Famille et amis, merci pour vos pensées positives.

Un petit merci pour mon petit chien, Chico, qui a fait sentir sa présence tout au long de la rédaction de ce travail. Ta chaleur m'a tenu compagnie.

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Introduction

"Inside all of us is hope. Inside all of us is fear. Inside all of us is adventure. Inside all of us is… a wild thing." (Hanks & Jonze, 2009)

Animals as an ancestor for humankind are at the foundation of our biological construct (Fonseca, 2008; Mackenzie, 1999). A constant dilemma is battling within humans: acknowledging their animality or refuting it in the name of humanity. Feeling connected to nature used to be the norm for humans (Andrews, 1997). Humans lived in unison with nature. Nature dictated the seasons of life and humans relied on nature to guide their destiny. Even though we might feel farther from our animal nature, we surround ourselves with animals and animal images. If you think of emblems, logos, sport teams, TV shows, books and pets, to name a few, you can easily come up with many animal symbols in your environment. Even in our language, we use animals as metaphor for qualities we admire in others: courageous like a lion, strong as a horse, cunning as a fox. We also employ negative epithets: mad like a dog, stubborn like a donkey, slow like a turtle (De Silva, 1965). Animals have become a means to describe others' character qualities. According to Steven Mithen in *The Prehistory of the Mind* as cited in Melson (2001), the human brain's evolution includes 3 domains of thought: the social, thinking about other humans; the natural, thinking about animals; and the technological, thinking about things. In recent times, animals have become integrated in the category of things. They are not part of the natural world anymore and have been deprived of their real wild identity. We put them in zoos, make fictional characters and objectify animals. By refusing to acknowledge the bond we share with nature, we are alienating ourselves from an essential part of our identity.

Reconnecting with our animal-self through a therapy process has emerged as a healing technique (Myers, 1998). The purpose of this paper is to answer the following question: *How might animal symbols be helpful with children in art therapy?* This question will be explored by identifying literature on animal symbols and animal imagery, explaining how they are used with children, and looking at therapeutic benefits of making animal images in an art therapy setting in order to develop a hypothesis for an intervention.

Since children have a natural tendency to be attracted to animals, it does seem intuitive to use animal symbols to connect with children (Case, 2005; Melson, 2001; Myers, 1999). Through an exploration of a chosen symbol in an art therapy process, the child might internalize the desired quality of an animal as a way to strengthen their sense of self. The goal of the hypothesized intervention is to facilitate difficult transitions in the child's life. First, I will explore the development and psychological needs of children from 5 to 8 years old. Then, the human-animal relationship and children's relation to animals will be defined. This paper will cover the research on the use of animal symbols as a therapeutic tool, including animal spirit and totem, Freud, Jung's theories about archetypes, and Winnicott conception of the *transitional object*. Finally, specific examples of art therapy interventions using animal symbols with children will be identified which will lead to my own hypothesis for an intervention in the last section of this paper. Foremost, I will start by defining some terms that will be important for the rest of this paper.

Definitions

Animal

There is a natural emotional engagement with animals because we are intrigued and fascinated by them, which makes them a significant interest that motivates learning (Myers, 1998). This explains the choice of using animals as a therapeutic subject. Children are especially curious about animals and are good at maintaining their interest for prolonged amount of time. I want to include more than only real animals in this research. Children's lives are surrounded by imaginative, fictive, fantastical, and *mythological* animals which can be as powerful as any real animals for symbolic use.

Symbol

Symbols can be defined as having an ulterior meaning from the obvious one (Stewart, 1996). One example of a symbol could be a horse that represents masculinity for someone and strength for someone else. Symbols have the abilities to stand as something visible for a meaning that is invisible (Stewart, 1996). The way images hold at the same time different feelings and meanings can be seen as their symbolic capacity.

When thinking about symbols, the first instinct is to think of signs in our daily lives. Those signs, readily explained and made for us, are used as universal meaning, for example, the women and men figure for restroom indication (Cox, 1989; Kaplan, 1979). Those signs, as useful and familiar as they are, tend to represent less than their potential. Symbols, on the other hand, can hold many meanings. Human experiences range from what is understood to infinite possibilities that cannot be completely comprehended, for which we must resort to symbolic language (Jung, 1964). The concept of symbol in therapy and in this paper, is intended as this greater and whole representation of human

experience. An important aspect of symbols in therapy is their potential to express and contain complex feelings, emotional states and thoughts (Jung, 1964; Stewart, 1996). Words are one way to express complex constructs and they are probably used the most often. However, to be able to attain a certain resolution of a personal symbol, someone needs to experience the imaginative, affective, sensory, and kinesthetic aspect of it (Lusebrink, 1990). Words might not be enough. Including other ways to experience a symbol would be beneficial, for example, drawing, imitating, researching and dreaming about your personal symbol. The Expressive Therapies Continuum is an art therapy tool intended to explore different levels of functioning (Hinz, 2009). The idea is that everyone has a preferred way of relating and expressing themselves. Increasing flexibility in moving from one dimension to another is desirable. The different level of functioning gives you a unique input, and integrating those experiences allow for a whole understanding. The ETC includes the sensory, kinesthetic, affective, perceptual, symbolic, and cognitive level.

The roles of personal symbols can also vary from representing an unconscious conflict or wishes, repressed or unresolved issue of the psyche, and it is said that symbols are an important way to reach those core issues (Stewart, 1996). According to Freud, a symbol emerges from the unconscious as an image that contains repressed wishes and latent thoughts (Lusebrink, 1990). The acknowledgement of the symbol's contents, with the help of the therapist, is thought to facilitate the healing process. Jung has also formulated his own theory about symbols which encompasses the concept of archetypes and collective unconscious (Lusebrink, 1990).

Imagination, creativity and the capacity to make images, which is believed to be unique to humans, is at the roots of symbol making (Henderson, 1999; Jung, 1964; Kaplan, 1979; Stewart, 1996). Representing symbols through images as a container for emotions with the use of imagination and creativity in an art therapy process is at the core of this research.

Imagery

The imagery part of this research stands for the art process. If we take the example of the horse representing masculinity, the image would be the horse and the symbol of the horse would be the multi-dimensional meaning of masculinity. The image is the visual representation of the symbol. In art therapy, sculpture, painting and drawing animals are going to be used as a way to explore and better the understanding of the symbol. Even if words are used to explain symbols, words lack a multi-dimensional and complex meaning that symbols evoke. Images are also a way to make symbols an accessible representation to the psyche (Lusebrink, 1990). As symbols appear as images to us in the first place, it makes sense to elaborate them in the form of images. An image can also be a mental representation created by the mind and can engage many senses (Ramos, 2013). In other words, an image can be perceived by the senses or can be created from within, with imagination. Creating images from imagination is possible because of "the capacity for imagery: humans have been able to see an object, maintain a mental representation of that object in their minds, and recall that object at a later point in time" (Ramos, 2013, p. 16).

Before language was invented, human used image-making as a way to communicate (Lusebrink, 1990). It is still our first way to understand and communicate

with the world around us as babies and toddlers. We record the world in images for our first few years and then, words come into play. In that perspective, it make sense that the most profound and intense conflicts in ourselves appear through symbols in images. Art making can serve as a means to channel those unconscious images and work toward resolution.

Art therapy

Art therapists believe in the power of art-making to hold healing properties. The Canadian Art Therapy Association (2013) states on their website that "art therapy combines the creative process and psychotherapy, facilitating self-exploration and understanding. Using imagery, colour and shape as part of this creative therapeutic process, thoughts and feelings can be expressed that would otherwise be difficult to articulate." The emphasis of that definition is based on the assumption that clients will project on an image their inner conflicts. There are two approaches to art therapy: art as therapy and art psychotherapy. Art as therapy focuses on the process of making art and art psychotherapy uses art as a symbolic expression of unconscious material. In this paper, both approaches will be important in building an intervention. Art is also helpful in containing emotions (Hinz, 2009).

Imagination

Imagination can be defined as having the ability to creatively see an object or a gesture as standing for something else (Myers, 1998). It fits quite nicely with the definition of symbols which brings the idea that we use imagination every time we invent or decode a symbol. Imagination and creativity can be developed and seem more accessible in children as no social norms are yet engrained in them. Ramos (2013) puts

forward the idea that memory focuses on the past while imagination proposes potentials for the future. The use of imagination in therapy seems like an important aspect for helping clients improve their future.

Children

This research focuses on children from 5 to 8 years old, because of developmental reasons that will be explained later. The proposed intervention is also meant for children who have self-esteem, problem-solving, coping and/or transitions difficulties, which, in my experience, is true for many of the children with psychiatric problems. The population that this research focuses on will be explained in greater detail in a section on that topic.

<p style="text-align:center">Literature Review</p>

Research methodology

This research uses a qualitative and theoretical methodology. Qualitative research focuses on the social meaning of different experiences through words and text rather than numbers (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Theoretical research intends to critically evaluate and link already existing theory in order to create new ones (Junge & Linesch, 1993). This exploratory research intends to look at theories about children and animal symbols in art therapy in order to propose an intervention, but also to propose further study that could be done on the subject to advance the field of art therapy (Grove & Zimmerman, 1997). This research uses an historical-documentary methodology with data obtained through the analysis of research from different fields (Battalio, 2002). It could also be referred to as historical social research since the subject of the research is grounded in societal theory (Best, 1991). The analysis of data is made mainly through

the synthesis of books and articles found on the topics (Junge & Linesch, 1993). It is important to look at the past to understand theory about human beings, without forgetting that the knowledge gathered is intended to be used in the future. Research is in that sense a process where questions are always going to be answered by new and more complete theory (Tulard, 1991).

The standpoint taken for this research includes postmodernism since this research does not intend to show a single truth but rather partial truths about the topics (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Post-positivism includes theory about holistic thinking, intentionality, symbolism and historicism (Junge & Linesch, 1993). Holism within a post positivist perspective stands for interpreting a group as having some properties as a group rather than looking at individuals within the group. Holism can also stand for looking at an individual as a whole rather than isolating certain aspects of the self (Corsini & Wedding, 2000). Intentionality includes the reason why people do what they do rather than only looking at the behaviors. It is concerned with emotions and cognition, symbolism is about interpreting and understanding the experience of human through the symbolism of their behavior and historicism includes the historical context (Junge & Linesch, 1993). In that sense, the approach taken by this research also includes post-positivism. The research is meant to explain the children and animal relationship as a whole without pretending to be talking about each individual and unique human experience of animals. It also takes into consideration the emotional, cognitive, symbolic and historical context of that interaction in relation to an art therapy process.

Population

The population targeted with this research is children from 5 to 8 years old who have different psychological challenges. This specific age range was chosen for their natural interest in animals and their willingness to explore in art therapy. The psychological development stage of the children of that age range will first be explored. Then, the needs of children who live with psychopathology will be discussed.

Developmental psychopathology perspective. The developmental psychopathology perspective is an important aspect of my clinical practice. This approach differs from child psychology and abnormal psychiatry in that it relates to the development of the child and believes that all pathologies are a result of a process, which means that disorders develop, expand or decrease and change over time (Gardner, 1984; Scroute & Rutter, 1984). Developmental psychopathology core principles include developmental, normative, systems, multilevel and agency principles. Psychopathology occurs during the development of a person in contrast to a normative development, within a complex system of interactions within the person and with their environment, at many levels of functioning, and the person possesses agency in their development (Masten, 2006). In other words, disorders are caused by many factors that are inter-related and affect many areas of a person's life. This perspective has been used to evaluate and build psychotherapeutic interventions for children (Shirk, Talmi, & Olds, 2000).

Developmental psychology. The main developmental concept that will be explored is the theory of mind. Before the age of 3, children don't see the intentionality of behaviors; the world is unpredictable. Later on, children start to understand that things can be experienced within a mental frame rather than only through tangible space

(Melson, 2001). When they acquire a theory of mind, it enables them to predict the world around them through interpretation and intention of behavior (Myers, 1998). At that point, children understand pretend play because they are able to recognize that the intention is different from the behavior. In that sense, animals are perceived by children as also having a theory of mind that allows them to have intentions (Melson, 2001). Piaget mistakenly thought that children under the age of 7 believed in animism; perceiving inanimate and animate objects as being alive. However, recent studies show that children are actually able to differentiate the animal category from inanimate objects as young as 3 years old (Melson, 2001). Thus, from a developmental perspective, children are able, quite young, to distinguish that animals are as alive as humans and also to attribute them the function of thought.

The ability for children to pretend to be an animal helps them master social roles as humans (Myers, 1998). The fact that a theory of mind establishes for children the ability to pretend is an important point to consider, in thinking about the intervention that this research will hypothesize. Also, the ability for children to create mental imagery was tested in a study by Kosslyn, Margolis, Barrett, Goldknopf and Daly (1990). They compared the capacity to generate images from memory from 5-year-olds, 8-year-olds, 14-year-olds, and adults. The results showed the cognitive system for imagery making does function by the age of 5 and that it improves as we get older. Those results are important for this paper because the ability for children to hold on to a mental image is crucial for the proposed intervention. This is one key factor that will be integrated into the hypothetical intervention.

More specifically the age range of 5 to 8 years old is within the latency period. Considering the reality of this period in Western countries, children go through an important transition at the age of 5 by starting school (Case & Dalley, 2008). It can be understood as a distancing from family and movement toward society (Reddick, 2008). Separating from your family and joining a new circle of people is a big transition for children. Fitting in with peers becomes even more important.

Sublimation is one important defense mechanism that occurs during the latency stage. According to Winnicott (1965), in order to preserve the positive experience of their family, children experience a split because of the comparison between their experiences of family with their experience of peers. Reaction formation is also a defense mechanism that develop during that stage (Reddick, 2008). The sexual drive that children are experiencing is sublimated for feelings of shame, because of the society we live in. This redirection of sexual feelings toward more socially acceptable ones can be shameful for children, as they perceive their natural instincts as inappropriate and bad. Because of this reaction formation, latency-aged children need to strength their self-esteem and build confidence in their skills and ability (Reddick, 2008). Children start to internalize their relationship and pattern of attachment (Case & Dalley, 2008). Their reactions toward others stem from their past experience of similar relationships.

One interesting concept in differentiating animals from humans is the gestation period of development (Neumann, 1973). The level of maturity of animals when they are born is quite superior compared to infants when they come out of the womb. Infants require another year of development before attaining similar level of maturity. In that sense, after the intra-uterine phase of 9 months, there is still a post-natal extra-uterine

phase that they go through with their caregiver. This social period of gestation indicates that human are social beings.

Important for the art aspect of this paper is the development of artistic abilities in children. Around the ages of 4 to 7, children go through the "Sentence-picture stage" (Somogyi, 2003). Drawings of children of this stage start with simple shapes connected to each other as a representation of objects and people. Children then move toward including all details of the objects and people (Levick, 1998). They also start to invent and tell stories about their drawing which reflects their ability for creativity and their sensitivity for their surroundings (Somogyi, 2003). They use fantasy and image-making to communicate anxieties because language is not elaborate enough to do justice to their thoughts and feelings (Case & Dalley, 2008). Taking into consideration those developmental aspects of the drawing capacity of children, it seems like a critical stage to start exploring symbols, because of their new ability to create fictional images and stories.

Psychiatric psychology- Psychopathology with children. The reasons for consultation in art therapy for children of 5 to 8 years old vary greatly, but some main issues seems to be constant among them. They almost all seem to have difficulties facing challenges and transitions (Melson, 2001). Self-esteem, problem-solving, relationship and controlling impulses are difficult or lacking (Hickey, 2001). Establishing a strong self-concept through self-knowledge and confidence is key in helping those children. The definition that people have of themselves including attributes, feelings, abilities and character is known as self-concept (Corsini & Wedding, 2000). Gaining a positive self-knowledge can help individuals cope with difficult situations and have the affective skills

to overcome challenges (Hickey, 2001). Children with psychopathology tend to build defenses against others, because of their lack of confidence in their impulse control and the judgement of others. Melson (2001) stated that animal contact is a way to slowly and safely break those defenses. He was talking about contact with real animals. That living connection can help to create a link, build a relationship and regain trust in humans (Melson, 2001). In a way, they can act as a transitional object to redirect attention and confidence toward peers and adults. That known healing potential of interacting with real animals is called zootherapy or animal-assisted therapy. However, this paper will not cover those therapies. Animals share this special relationship with humans. Looking at that human-animal relationship through a wider lens will be a crucial section of this paper.

Human-animal relationship

The human and animal relationship has evolved over the years. The next section of this paper will be an overview of this relationship, from an historical perspective; then, reviewing the influence of Darwin's theory of evolution; next, talking about two binary concepts, animality versus humanity; and finishing with the children and animal bond. Wilderness and nature are slowly disappearing from our daily life. This connection to nature has however been seen as an important facet of our humanity (Hillman, 1997). In other words, Henderson (1999) has said that the emotional unconscious identity is lost without the natural environment connection which, therefore, makes humans feel alienated. Nowadays, we see animals as logos of companies, sporting icons, national symbols and religious and political emblems (Melson, 2001; Myers, 1998; De Silva, 1965). Those symbols indicate that animals have been an important way for humans to

identify themselves with symbolic characteristics of those animals. We are able to connect desirable traits of animals to ourselves. Also, in our language, there are many metaphors that make references to animals, with both positive and negative associations, as I explained in the introduction (Myers, 1998; Arluke & Sanders, 1996).

There is an interesting concept called *anthropomorphization*. This idea stems from the belief that animals have the capacity for cognition, in other words, an inner life (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Myers, 1998). Humans are basically imposing intentions and wishes onto animals. Booth (2007) states that "we tend to understand other humans in terms of our own experience and this extends to our view of animals" (p. 43). Imposing human traits or thought onto animals might be a mistake, in the sense that we are completely ignoring the actual experience of animals. In that way, anthropomorphism is a natural human activity that has been extended to the natural world that we as humans struggle to understand. Making the animal world more human is our way of making sense of it.

On that note, in understanding human and animal bond, we need to look at pets because of the closeness and immediate relationship to us. The inability for animals to speak our language allows for a special connection that doesn't rely on social norms and conventions (Myers, 1998). Relating to an animal doesn't require the same socially appropriate behavior than relating to another person. In order to ground the pets' behavior into a context that makes it more understandable, owners talk to and for their pets (Arluke & Sanders, 1996). By verbalizing their actions and granting intentions to the pets, the identity of the animal is created in the owner's mind. Sharing with others those verbalizations makes the animal a concrete, real and whole being, able of having

thoughts. We have to keep in mind that this whole process, which is part of the anthropomorphism, is based upon a human point of view and that the reality of the animals' true nature is analysed and understand from that human perspective.

Historical perspective

The historical perspective of the human-animal relationship will now be explored in this section. The first obvious reference to animals is in the prehistoric drawing in the caves of Europe (De Silva, 1965). There is evidence of emblems of animals as representing clans of hunter-gatherer cultures universally and those totems have been persisting as the system beliefs for over 60 000 years (Melson, 2001). Thereupon, maybe as an influence, many cultures have used animal symbols to represent their gods (Melson, 2001). Half-human and half-animal godlike figures can be traced back to the Ancient Near East (De Silva, 1965). The Greek mythology has also utilized animal symbols (Melson, 2001). For example, the snake as a representation of healing and medicine has been persisting throughout history and the caduceus, the World Medical Association emblems, still includes two snakes. Masks, totems and rituals expressed the importance granted to animals in the spiritual life in Polynesian, African and American-Indian cultures (De Silva, 1965). One interesting finding is that animal clay figures were the oldest toys discovered until now, dating from 1000 years before Common Era, and representing heads of foxes, birds, dogs, crocodiles and lions (Manes, 1997)

As we can see, animals have been attributed many meanings over time and space (Myers, 1998). The experience of Western culture has however been different because of the Judeo-Christian heritage. Thus, the religious myth of Adam and Eve banished from the Garden of Eden because Eve got tricked by the serpent to eat a fruit from the

prohibited tree can be seen to represent our distrust in the animal nature and our animality (Mackenzie, 1999). Western culture has consequently separated human and nonhuman into two distinct categories (Myers, 1998). Even the symbols of animals as gods have been used to serve the Western culture instead of truly listening to the natural world for answers like the indigenous culture (Mackenzie, 1999). Our cultural and spiritual heritage has been all along dividing us from nature, putting humanity on a pedestal. Jung talks about the split between the self and the shadow. Hidden in the shadow lies the self and, to attain wholeness, the self needs to become "friend" with the shadow (Jung, Jung, & Meyer-Grass, 2008).

Darwin

The evolution theory of Darwin is an important milestone in our understanding of human and animal relationship. The idea that human beings and all animals have common ancestors have brought us closer to our animal nature (Myers, 1998). Even if Darwin's theory has been around for more than a century, it is still a struggle for humans to accept their own animality. Feeling close to the bond we share with animals somehow translates as a betrayal of our humanity and social expectation. Emotions and cognition is what humans see as fundamental to human nature, but interestingly, humans attribute emotions and intentions to animals (Myers, 1998). Darwin, Moore and Desmond (2004) said that "the difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, certainly is one of degree and not of kind" (p. 126). In other words, we are simply further in the evolution process than animals but we are from the same common origin.

Animality vs humanity

A significant love story of many 90's children is the Beauty and the Beast, a movie of Walt Disney. The original story was written by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve in 1740 (Cummins, 1995). In the story, "as Beauty loves the Beast, she accepts the "wild parts" and, by doing so, allows them to be integrated into a now humanized person" (Melson, 2001, p. 149). This concept is quite close to children's process in the sense that bodily instincts need to be controlled, inhibited and managed to fit the social norms (Myers, 1998). Jung also talks about this split within every human, between the self and the shadow (Jung et al. 2008). He calls it a fragmentation of the ego and an assimilation is needed between the self and shadow part of the psyche.

There is undeniable similarity between children and animals, maybe because children are closer to their animal nature. They also have no problem seeing animals as their equals. The creation of a self-concept in our culture does imply that the child should separate themselves from the nonhuman (Myers, 1998). Mackenzie (1999) has indicated that the animated quality of animals might be a reason why humans want to distinguish themselves from animals without fully succeeding. The negative parts of human are then projected onto animals as being the shadow side, the wildness (Mackenzie, 1999).

Estés (1992) also talks about this negative shadow of someone's psyche. The idea is to strengthen our sense of intuition as a way to reconnect with our shadow. She said reconnecting will bring spontaneity, not in the sense of being unwise, but in the sense of listening to our true nature, being real. The confusion between the mind -- rational, social, appropriate and orderly side -- and the body -- wild, bestial, instinctive and

sensitive side --, might stem from this unintegrated animal self (Myers, 1998; Arluke & Sanders, 1996). We are torn between the need for convention and order in social rules and the freedom of following our instincts.

According to Case (2005), engaging with an animal symbol allows us to reconnect with this animal self within us. In the original Maurice Sendak's book (1988) called *Where the Wild things Are* and the movie of the same name, the young boy, Max, who is confined to his room because of his inappropriate behavior while wearing a wolf costume, uses imagination to connect with that monstrous part of himself. He invents a world with monsters that allows him to relate to those scary feelings that he is experiencing. Experiencing ourselves as animals might be a way to promote reconciliation between our humanity and animality.

In the trilogy called *The Golden Compass* by Philip Pullman (2011), every human has a daemon following them. The daemons are external physical manifestations in the form of animals that represents the person's inner psyche. During childhood, the daemon can change form at will until adolescence when the daemon settles in its most relevant form. Those creatures are interesting in thinking about a personal symbol that would be visible for everyone to see that would represent your inner self, accurately.

Thinking about fantastical books that utilize the animal guide, Harry Potter comes to mind. In the third book of Rowling (2001), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban,* the charm "Expecto Patronum" is performed for the first time. This spell conjures a protective animal that works like a shield. The wizard must draw their power from a positive memory. The wizard cannot choose the animal that will emerge from their charm, the animal they share the most affinity with will become their guardian. Those

stories that include animals as guardians are often shared with children at a young age and influence them in their relation with animals.

Children's relation with animals

Our connection, appeal and fascination to living things as genetically based is called biophilia (Melson, 2001; Myers, 1998). This concept can be easily seen in children's interest in animals. Children are surrounded by a myriad of animal images in storybooks, television, pets, toys, figurines, stuffed animals, costumes and school work. Myers (1998) said that children are saturated with animal characters. Those characters portray human qualities that children can relate to (Melson, 2001). Interestingly, it has been found that the animal chosen by children of different ages seemed to reflect specific characteristics of themselves and their stages of development (Myers, 1999).

Another example of the great interest of children in animals is the study of Evelyne Goodenough Pitcher, a psychologist, who collected 360 stories from children of 2 to 6 years old, about half girls and half boys (Melson, 2001). The instruction given to those children was simply to tell a story. About 85% of the 5 year olds, 80 % of the 3 year olds and 65 % of the 2 and 4 year olds included animal characters in their story. Some animals were helpful allies and some were terrifying enemies. Those stories were thought to depict the perception of the self and their world by the children including their fears and wishes (Melson, 2001). Another compelling statistic is that half of children from 2 to 10 years old reported seeing animal images in Rorschach inkblots. This percentage reduces as children get older to a quarter of the adults reporting seeing animals in the same inkblots (Melson, 2001).

A child that is attracted to a dog will think that the dog is also attracted to him. This shared emotional and cognitive state exists because children see others as sharing the same feeling of attraction or repulsion as they experience (Myers, 1998). In that sense, another child could believe that a dog hates them and is mean to them but, it is actually the child who is afraid of the dog. By projecting their affect, attention and intention onto the animals, children make animals' behavior coherent with their beliefs. The attunement to animal behavior seems natural because of the ease with which they impose meaning on their actions (Melson, 2001).

The relationship of a child with his pet can be compared to a parent-child relationship in that he shares affective states, provides protection and gives unconditional love (Myers, 1998). This relationship can also be extended to stuffed animals or animal characters as transitional objects. The real or transitional animal stays as a significant figure for the child as long as they need it (Melson, 2001). Those two concepts of attachment and transitional object will be explained in the therapeutic potential section of this paper.

Through those experiences with real and imaginative animals, children learn, from a young age, what it means to be an animal, especially characteristics like tame versus wild (Arluke & Sanders, 1996). Fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm and Disney movies, which are prevalent in popular culture, reinforce the good, tame and helper animal versus the wild, bad and destructive animal (Melson, 2001).

Pretend play, as we will see later, can act as a way to explore children's animal nature by taking on animal roles and by allowing a space to let go of social pressure (Melson, 2001; Myers, 1998). One important aspect to justify the use of animal symbols

is that children consider animals' feelings as being immediate (Melson, 2001). This implies a capacity to connect and to use animal symbols as representing parts of themselves.

Effectiveness of animal symbol as a therapeutic tool

Different schools of thought have come up with concepts on how animal symbols can be used in a therapy process. This exploration of animal symbols as a therapeutic tool will start with animal spirit and totem; then, look at Freud's theory about instincts and wishes; also, I will explore Jung's conception of archetypes and symbols of the human psyche; and finally, the clinical implication of other thoughts and theories on the subject.

Animals have been said to open up symbolic and projective power as a way to reveal and resolve unconscious wishes and fears, sexual anxieties, intra-psychic conflicts, and relational, emotional and physical problems (Mackenzie, 1999; Melson, 2001; Myers, 1998). Thinking about the animality versus humanity dilemma, symbols of animals can help reconcile those two dimensions of the self by eliminating the binary thinking into a continuous definition of humanity (Myers, 1998). Also, animal symbols can represent our potential for wholeness (Mackenzie, 1999).

An important aspect of therapy that is especially true with symbols is the idea that symbolic meaning is a social and cultural construct (Arluke & Sanders, 1996). While dealing with people from different cultures, it is important to consider the cultural background in which the symbols take their meanings. Animal imagery is universally present in human's imagination but their meanings can vary greatly from one person to the next and from one culture to the next (De Silva, 1965).

Animal spirit and totem

The first use of animal symbols as a healing entity is through the belief in animal spirits, as it has been discussed in the historical perspective section about the human and animal relationship. This belief in which animals souls can act as a guide is called animism (Melson, 2001). It has been used by shamans as a healing agent in many cultures. Instead of seeing this animal alter-ego as bad, bestial and undesired, aboriginal people embrace it as a guide that connects them to their environment (Arnold, 1996). This force is often revealed in dreams or rituals in order to be analysed and understood by a shaman. An animal spirit can be present to support and teach the individual how to gain new desired capacities (Campbell, 1983).

The origin of totemism relates to "the lineal descent of members of a clan from its founding spirits" (Arnold, 1996, p. 83). Animal totems, in aboriginal cultures, have been a symbol of the human relationship to nature and a way to represent an individual or a clan identity (Campbell, 1983). On an individual basis, an animal symbol can help improve our self-knowledge, inspire growth and healing, protect and connect on a spiritual level (Andrews, 1997; Campbell, 1983). Any natural being you feel connected to can be your totem.

Gallegos (1983) proposed a technique that he used in his private practice in psychotherapy. The technique connecting the chakras system with animal symbols, similar to the totem theory, has been helpful in reintegrating parts of the self into a harmonious whole. By associating each chakra with an animal, the patient is asked to imagine what those animals need; if the animals have something to tell or teach; and they are thanked for their presence. Each animal is introduced to the other animals to see how

they interact with each other and how potential conflicts can be managed as a team. The animals are seen as parts of the self and so treated with a lot of respect and empathy from the patient and the therapist.

Freud

According to the theory of the self of Freud, the id represents our instincts. Considering that the instinct is perceived as the animal within us, the id is a metaphor of our animality (Mackenzie, 1999). The "id impulses" must be controlled in order for the ego to mature (Myers, 1998). Exploring animal projections can be a way to reach the unconscious. Little Hans is a case study that gives an example of Freud's theory about animal symbols. This young boy had an extreme fear of horses. Through the process of therapy with Freud, the conclusion was that horses represented father figure and that the oedipal complex of Little Hans had not been successfully dealt with (Melson, 2001; Myers, 1999; Myers, 1998).

The tension between expressing and repressing our instinct is a constant dilemma for human beings according to Freud. Dreams and sexuality were seen as the main means to release some of that tension (Mackenzie, 1999). This might explain why animal symbols often appear in dreams (Melson, 2001). Animals in dreams are a significant area of research in itself and will not be covered in this paper.

Jung

Animal symbols, according to Jung, have also represented the shadow side of the self, our instinctive nature (Myers, 1998). Instead of thinking that those negative symbols should be controlled or gotten rid of, Jung puts a positive twist on it, saying that we should accept those parts of ourselves (Melson 2001). Coming to terms with our true

nature is the key to living as a whole and complete individual. Jung sees the instincts as an essential part of human reality that should not be controlled but rather understood, and animals can be a relevant symbol to work toward taming of those instincts (Mackenzie, 1999).

Jung's concept of archetypes refers to symbols that are common to the human experience and reside in the collective unconscious (1964). Those symbols seem consistent in the history of mankind. They can also be used in therapy because of their healing energy and potential (Stewart, 1996).

From transitional object to transitional symbol

Other therapy techniques where animals are used as symbols will be explored in the art therapy section of this paper. In order to understand the direction that the intervention proposed in this paper will take, we will see how the theory of the transitional object can be used with animal imagery and then internalised to promote independence for children.

In the theory Winnicott (1971), the main goal of the transitional object is to foster a healthy move through stages of life for children. As the children transition from relating in fusion with the mother to being a separate entity, they need reassurance from anxieties and fears (Blondel, 2004; McCullough, 2009). The transitional object fulfills that need since it exists in a space between the mother and child (Mitchell & Black, 1995). It contains at the same time a part of the child and a part of the mother. This familiar object acts as a reminder of the comfort of the mother. The child has internalized soothing experiences from his early life with the mother and is able, with the transitional object that contains the memory of that comfort, to self-sooth. Ramos (2013)

has explained that "a stuffed animal as a transitional object utilizes mental imagery to provide comfort for the child in the absence of a caregiver—even when the mother is not physically present, the tactile and visual imagery that is stimulated by the stuffed animal is reminiscent of similar experiences provided by the mother" (p. 46).

At any point in our life, a transitional object can also help to define who we are (Gasparini, 2012; McCullough, 2009). Some people, for example, would wear their favorite sweater for an interview or an exam, as a way to attract luck. The power projected onto the sweater acts as a catalyst of inner wishes. This is how the object exists at the same time in an inner and an outer reality (McCullough, 2009). It can be a plain physical object like a piece of fabric, but this blanket holds such greater meaning. The psychic energy invested in the transitional object might be perceived as lost (Csikszentmihalvi & Halton, 1981). The energy is instead reintegrated from the object to the self (Case, 2005). It is a Jungian concept of "deintegration" and then "reintegration". The person invests parts of himself onto an object to then be able to internalize the projected image. As the person is successful in overcoming their feeling of helplessness and distress with the transitional object, their sense of self becomes stronger (Stevenson, 1994). In that sense, imagery can act as a transitional object (Ramos, 2013).

The idea is also that the child will not always have at reach his transitional object to rely on. The mental image of that object will provide, at some point, the same benefits as the actual object. This process is called internalization of a transitional object. When that process happens, the actual physical object is not necessary anymore (Litt, 1986). Symbol formation is more developed in children at that stage and they are able to hold onto a mental image of their transitional object without needing the tangible one

(Lusebrink, 1990). It seems appropriate to say that a symbol explored through physical means, i.e. art materials, could possibly in the same way be internalized. At first, the child might need a tangible object, like a small sculpture, but could then avail himself of a mental image. Borrowing a sand therapy concept, a memory of a visual image can serve as a talisman (Steinhardt, 1998).

The wished goal of internalizing is to allow for a deeper processing of the symbol. Instead of staying at a "surface-level processing" where the tangible object is always necessary, the internalization elicits a profound learning imprinted in the person that has lasting effect (Le Cornu, 2009). For a concept to be internalized, it needs to have some kind of positive echoing within the self. An external compelled symbol forced onto someone can have negative impact on their psyche, but an integrated symbol tends to promote positive outcomes (Roth, Kanat-Maymon, & Bibi, 2011). It then seems crucial for therapeutic purposes that the person sees the chosen symbol, to be internalized, as a complement that could be integrated to their personality. The symbolic power comes entirely from the person's belief in it (Stevenson, 1994).

The symbolic meaning of an image refers to more than the literal meaning (Jung, 1964). Watkins (1976) gave the example of a bird in a dream. You cannot assume that what you know about birds apply to that specific bird. "It is not a real bird and it is not just a bird" (Watkins, 1976, p. 109). The bird symbol in a dream is not a representation of a real bird and your symbol can be evoked without a real bird's presence. The symbol can then take multiple meanings and have multiple facets (Hinz, 2009). It can be modified to fit the needs of the person in a particular moment or situation.

We are, as humans, the only species capable of symbol formation (Hinz, 2009; Rubin, 2001). The conscious and unconscious mental capacity necessary for that process relies on a sufficiently developed ego function. Despite the cognitive development, it is said that symbolic thinking can be taught (Hinz, 2009). It can be difficult even for adult to think symbolically of images. Relating those images to a known fairy tale or a myth can be a way to help shape metaphoric thinking. Case (2005) said that the "natural and mythical world offer a huge range of images that may be drawn upon to find a match for an internal state" (p. 25). Lusebrink (1990) also proposed a step by step process for engaging in a symbolic thinking about an image. First, the client should engage in the art making process. At that stage, verbalization about the meanings of the image might be hard. Many clients would say something like "I have no idea what I did." The second step is to allow for association to emerge naturally. The therapist could ask the client to elaborate on another drawing of the same symbol or change art material. Then, the next step would be to amplify the characteristics of the symbol and to have a broader dimension to the place of that symbol within a mythological frame. Fourth, the client would create an environment for the symbol to evolve in, like a story or a series of images. Finally, the last step is to contemplate the meaning of the personal symbol in an archetypal language (Lusebrink, 1990). The idea is also to expend the understanding of the personal symbol and bring new perspectives that can then be integrated back into the self-definition of the individual (Hinz, 2009).

It is also important to note that there are two different types of symbol; the regressive and the progressive symbol. The regressive taps onto unconscious materials and childhood conflicts. The progressive one taps onto the future oriented goals and

toward psychological growth (Hinz, 2009). The idea of a symbol as a transitional object would be oriented toward the progressive material. Using a Jungian approach, the symbol would encompass psychic energy striving to develop the personality of the individual (Lusebrink, 1990). Thinking back about the concept of imagination that was defined earlier, using imagination rather than memory can be a way to focus the energy toward the future. Asking the client to imagine themselves as an animal rather than asking about an animal that they always felt close to in their life, would be a good example of projection.

Art therapy

Talk therapy can be hard especially for children, since they don't have yet the necessary skills to express complicated experiences and emotions in words. Integrating the use of metaphor can facilitate the exploration of those difficult experiences and incorporate imagination and creativity (Henderson, 1999). The use of art making is a good way to engage children in therapy. Also, it has been said that if we repeatedly imagine a positive experience, our mind perceives it as being real and consolidates the experience into our sense of self (Ramos, 2013; Stewart, 1996). This is another reason for the use of imagination in therapy as a way to integrate positive healing and learning.

Probably many art therapists use animal themes in their practice without ever writing articles about it. Even spontaneously, in my experience, children often draw and paint animals. Building on that interest, the Children's Apperception Test is a projective assessment for children of 3 to 10 years old. There are different versions of the test using human and family characters, but the animals' version was designed because it was thought that children would have an easier time projecting themselves onto animal

characters. Those animal characters will help in breaking resistance. The child is invited to tell a story about 10 cartoon drawings which are intended to help express conflicts within the child's inner life (Melson, 2001).

The Expressive Therapies Continuum proposes an activity for exploring a self-symbol with clay (Hinz, 2009). The directive is to choose an object that defines one aspect of the self, but for children, they specify that animals are preferable. Many references talk about animals as a good way to relate to children, since they are found in many children's stories (Case, 2005; Hinz, 2009; Lusebrink, 1990). In that sense, animal imagery is so readily available in children's mind that it is easy for them to connect to those images. In some ways, animals are universal (Lusebrink, 1990). In every part of the world, children are exposed to the ecosystems of living beings.

Animal imagery

On that note, art makers all over the world have had a fascination with animals since the beginning of art history (De Silva, 1965). Animal imagery can hold many personal meanings, although some general collective meanings have been listed by Andrews (1997). Power, emotions, challenges and need for control are some of the characteristics related to terrestrial animals. Flying creatures are related to heaven, hope, imagination and concepts. Aquatic animals can refer to creativity, intuition, feminine essence and the circle of life. We must keep in mind the singular relation to a chosen symbol in therapy.

The idea is to take advantage of that unique symbolic capacity in a therapeutic setting. Children seem to prefer to identify themselves with animals, and the symbolic capacity of animal symbols can help them in many ways. Self-exploration in therapy by

choosing and identifying with an animal can help with the development of a sense of self. Integrating wished qualities perceived in an animal would be the goal (Henderson, 1999). As was said before, children are spontaneously attracted to animals which makes them more inclined to see animals in dreams, especially between the ages of 3 to 10 (Melson, 2001). Specific characteristics can be easily identified in animals, for example their strengths and weaknesses. By relating those qualities to ourselves in a therapy process we can see what might resonate with parts of ourselves and what qualities we hope to achieve (Henderson, 1999). Animal symbols can hold many levels of symbolic meaning and act as a "transformer of energy" (Lusebrink, 1990). Using a chosen symbol to work through some defense mechanisms and build a strong sense of self can be very empowering. Even though, it has been said that animals can represent negative and wild parts of the self, it can also be helpful in promoting growth when used properly in therapy (Melson, 2001). The next section of this paper will explain some therapy techniques that use animal symbols as a helpful tool.

Techniques

Reddick (2008) used art therapy in a classroom setting as a way to work through the group dynamics. One of the activities that the author proposed is that each child choose an animal that they think represents them and draw it. Each member of the classroom is asked to present their animal to the group and then get together in small groups to create "families" of animals. Through this process of identification with a personal animal and a collective family of animals, the author helped them manage relationships. Instead of removing a child from the classroom when a problem occurred, the author worked with the group to find solutions. Reddick (2008) said that "working

with children's experience of their class from within the class is different to working with these experiences in an art therapy group" (p. 88). The group dynamics were made more visible with the help of the art making and this experience shifted the functioning of the classroom.

Hickey (2001) proposed the use of animal imagery in therapy through the Native American practice of totem. The child is invited to pick an animal and use clay to shape the animal or make a mask. They explore resolution of problems; the child is asked what they think their animal might do in a specific challenging situation. During the course of therapy, references to that animal totem is made as a way to integrate the wished for attributes of that animal. In that way, the animal helps the child find solutions to difficult problems in their life. It is a way to increase positive sense of self, coping skills, promote change, and articulate their strengths. Hickey (2001) added a cautionary note in that some children might only find aggressive solutions that they act through their animal symbol and those should be redirected toward other solutions.

Henderson (1999), a counseling psychologist, used animal symbols to explore a sense of self in an individual therapy process with adolescents. The participants were asked to choose the animal that they could relate to the most; some pictures of animals were offered as options. Each participant spent two to eight sessions talking about their choice; exploration of the different characteristics and qualities of the animals were important. In a way, those animals became a metaphor for each participant throughout the sessions.

Reznick (2009), a child psychologist, proposed a program using imagery for children of all ages. The program includes nine tools that are presented to the child

through the therapy process. The imagery allows the process to bypass the defenses of children. The program is meant to help children learn to help themselves. The third tool that the author proposed is quite relevant to this paper: meeting a wise animal friend. The child needs to imagine an animal that could be a protector who would share his wisdom with the child. This technique represents a special access to the child's own agency and own wisdom. Even though, the message is delivered through the animal, it all comes from the child's mind. The fourth tool is the personal wizard. Reznick (2009) proposed this tool when the animal friend is not enough. The concept revolves around magic. The wizard can help the child to face different challenges. Even though, this tool is proposed as a substitute for the animal friend, I think that staying with the animal symbol and allowing that animal to have powers would be more beneficial. The child has already connected to an animal, keeping the same guiding figure would be, in my opinion, easier than coming up with a new symbol. Finally, the fifth tool is another relevant one for this paper; receiving gifts from your inner guides. Either the animal friend or the personal wizard can give gifts that reflect, as a metaphor, the needs of the child. Asking those guides to give you something is a good reflection of asking for help instead of waiting for help to be given to you. Reznick recommended that the child uses some artistic expressions to strengthen the internalizing aspect of the tools (Ramos, 2013). The art making component of my hypothesized intervention is more substantial than in Reznick's, but some aspects of it are inspired from his model.

Hypothesis for Intervention

The intervention proposed as a hypothesis in this paper is a flexible, sensitive and organic model that could be adapted to each individual. I see this as a possible tool for

working with children in an art therapy context, individually. The time spent exploring each step of the process depends greatly on each child. For example, some children might need more time to choose their animal symbol while others might know right away what they want. Forcing or accelerating the process to fit a certain time frame would not be appropriate in therapy. Just to keep in mind that, ideally, we want to follow the child's needs and pace. We can sometimes forget the inner capacity that r children have to seek what they need. Trusting their ability to heal can be crucial.

The purpose of this intervention is to focus on the strength of the children projected onto an animal symbol to build problem-solving abilities. As was discussed earlier, children with psychiatric problems don't have strong self-esteem and a good self-concept. Self-worth is often lacking in children seeking therapy (Fink, Levick, & Goldman, 1973). They often identify with the diagnosis that they have, and have a hard time identifying their positive qualities. They may have been told too many times that they cannot listen, and behave and express themselves properly. They become convinced of that negative self-identity, when, in fact, the diagnosis is only *part* of who they are. Acknowledging the positive aspects of themselves is the first step toward self-esteem. Identifying qualities directly in themselves is threatening for many of them and they seem unable to come up with any strength. This is where the animal symbol comes into play. By asking them to relate indirectly gives them the necessary space to be able to do so. Once they are able to identify positive qualities in their chosen animal, a projective exploration of problem solving can begin.

The resolution of problems would be explored using those positive qualities. Instead of relating to difficulties with a negative behavior, the animal will help them use

their strengths to deal with it. Anger, fear and anxiety can be better controlled when the child believes in their own capacity to solve their problems. The stage of exploration can vary in length depending on each individual. The goal of this step is to internalize positive ways of solving problems. The animal acts as a guide to direct the child in the right path. The way the animal becomes a guide will be explained later, but it can be helpful for the child to keep a totem or small figurine of the animal with them. The totem can act as a transitional object and a reminder in difficult situations of the positive solutions to their problems. It can also be helpful in improving their impulse control, if they have the object with them. Of course the main goal is for the child to be independent from the transitional object and the therapist, and be able to solve his problems on his own. The last step of this intervention is to acknowledge the animal strengths as now being part of the child's sense of self. When the positive qualities are well integrated, the child is able to recognize them as part of who they are. Problems and difficulties don't stop when therapy is over. Every child is confronted with problems, but the end result depends on the child's capacity to deal with it. I will now explain in details the four steps of the intervention.

Choosing an animal

Choosing the animal symbol is the first step. It is thought that the chosen animal will reflect in some ways parts of the child's whole self. The therapist can ask the client to pick an animal that they like, that they feel attracted to, or that they admire. The client can be further directed by being proposed to choose an animal that they think can help them and guide them. Children's natural interest toward animals should aide the client to come up with their choice. If however, the client seems unable to choose from memory

an animal, pictures can be proposed as guidance. Pictures can limit the diversity of animals since the therapist selects the images. We do not want to limit the child in the types of animal to choose from but sometimes, when anxiety is too high, it might be helpful to provide a choice. The therapist should think to include fantastic and fictive animals, for example, dinosaurs, dragons, mermaids, etc. Symbols can hold many meanings. Those meanings don't have to refer to literal characteristics of animals. One example could be if a child decides that their turtle is really fast. It is common knowledge that turtles are not the fastest animals, but the symbol can hold contradictory meanings, relating to the child's projections and unconscious wishes. This turtle, with further exploration, might reveal that the child wishes to be a faster learner, but at the moment struggles with it. That example is meant to show that we should not assume we know what our symbol has to teach us based on our prior knowledge of it. In that sense, Sandner and Wong (1996) have proposed two things to consider in working with a personal symbol. Intellectualization of your symbol can prevent a full affective and instinctual experience. Premature interpretations of your symbol and uncareful handling of it can destroy the aliveness of the animal. The animal can be helpful in supporting and teaching the child as a healing agent. The child projects part of himself onto a symbol and the symbol acts as a reflection of those projections. This reflection helps the child to acknowledge those parts and accept them. The next stage is the exploration of the animal symbol without directing the animal into a specific and predictable path but letting the animal guide the child.

Exploring through art making

The second stage of the intervention is to explore the potential of the animal through art making. Representing the chosen animal in images can act as a container for all the meanings of the symbol and the affective capacities. Art is the symbolic speech through which the symbol is experienced. The child might choose to first draw the animal symbol because of his facility with the material. The therapist can then propose other mediums. The symbol could be explored using the 7 components of the Expressive Therapies Continuum (Hinz, 2009). The first component, the sensory level, involves the senses, for example using smelly markers. The kinesthetic component could be explore by pounding clay the way the chosen animal would. Drawing from an image a blind contour of the animal would fit in the perceptual component. Emotions should be involved during the affective exploration. The cognitive aspect could be to research the animal characteristics. Symbolic component could be explored through making masks. The creative level requires an integration of different components. Those are examples of possible art making techniques that can be used, but the possibilities are infinite. Andrews (1997) proposed many possible learnings that can be done through the exploration phase. The child needs to learn to honor, attune and respect their animal. The animal, in turn, can communicate, give strength and power to the child. Adaptive skills and control can also be gained from the symbol. Using a multitude of art materials can be helpful in exploring different facets of the symbol. The exploration can include, in addition to the art making, embodying, dancing, mimicking, imitating and reading about your animal (Andrews, 1997). Sandner and Wong (1996) also proposed active imagination, meditation and free floating attention to help discover characteristics of your

animal. As was discussed earlier, Lusebrink (1990) suggested a process for engaging with your symbol. Elaborating and amplifying the characteristics of the animal can be helpful. It can also be suggested to create an environment for the animal or create a story about the animal. I would also add that representing the animal with different art materials can help in discovering many meanings.

Problem-solving and transition object

Once the animal symbol seems more familiar to the child, the child can suggest and elaborate upon different personal conflicts and problematic situations. The goal is to help the child gain insight and/or distance from their problems, by imagining what the animal would have done in concrete examples. This can be achieved through their play, pretend play, inventing stories, imagining and art making. The therapist can ask the child what their animal would have done in specific situations if taking a more behavioral approach. The therapist could also let the child instinctively put the animal in conflicting situations, if taking a psychodynamic approach. The strategy is to help direct the child into finding what strengths would help the animal solve their problems. The situations can relate to relationship difficulties, to impulse control, to transitional and coping problems. Since words are not elaborate enough to encompass all the thoughts, feelings and meanings that the child is trying to express, I would propose using art making at that stage of the intervention. The children are at a developmental level where they can draw elaborate characters and invent stories. They have the capacity to explore their difficulties with images. The theory of mind, that has been explained earlier, gives the children the capacity to understand others' intentions. Theory of mind also brings the ability to pretend. The child is able to pretend to be an animal and pretend that their

animal can solve problems. Those hypothesized situations that the child is asked to imagine can only be possible because of the theory of mind capacity. Once the child explores different problems through fictional stories and pretend play, during a certain amount of sessions, they should start to slowly master the use of their new qualities of strength for problem-solving. Transferring those new abilities to real life situations is the next step. By carefully making links between the animal's problems and the child's problems, the therapist can help facilitate the integration of the problem-solving skills. However, it is not always necessary to be concrete when making links between the imagined playful world and the real world. Staying within the play is often even better. Some children might need a transitional object to be able to do so. The transitional object acts as a reminder for the child of the possibility to use strengths to solve problems instead of relying on their past behaviors. If the child usually throws a tantrum when they are not listened to, they might be reminded, by having their animal guide with them, that they could instead use their words to express themselves and be patient. Of course it takes practice and the internalization of those coping skills will take time.

Acknowledging the animal strengths as their own

The final desired stage is that the child can come to acknowledge that the strengths perceived in the animal are in fact their own strengths. Children have a tendency to build defenses against others, but once they strengthen their locus of control and the judgement of others is positive, they don't need to isolate themselves from others anymore. They will also experience self-worth and self-esteem. By imagining repeatedly the same situation, the child's mind perceives the situation as being true. It

means that by practicing through the animal symbol that implements good resolution of problems, the child starts to consolidate that problem-solving capacity as its own.

Limitations and future research

An important aspect to keep in mind in thinking about the intervention that was outlined above is the perspective of an empathic, holding and safe therapeutic relationship. It is one major factor of a successful therapy process, if not the most important. Also, not every child is interested in working with animal images. Some children might be scared of animals. There are still many unanswered questions relating to this topic. The process of exploring the animal symbol seems like an important one, but what exactly should be done to strengthen the permanence of the internalization of the symbol is not clear. The use of different art materials can be helpful. Also, the children are growing and changing at such a fast pace that the animal symbol might also change with them. Thinking about the book, *The Golden Compass* (Pullman, 2011), the daemons changed until adolescence, which could happen in the selection of a personal symbol with some children. Whether the internalization of the animal symbol will occur with every child is also an unpredictable aspect. The age range of 5 to 8 years old that I am suggesting seems like the most appropriate population for this intervention, but it could probably be used with older children that show an interest in animals. The question is also whether children of 5 years old are too young to focus on the same symbol for prolonged sessions. This specific topic of research could benefit from more investigation. The hypothesized intervention should also be experimented with, at length, before coming to any unfounded conclusions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have been looking at many historical, philosophical and psychology related theories. This paper has touched upon the definition of symbol as having an ulterior meaning from the obvious one and as standing as something visible for an invisible meaning. The difference between symbols and images has been explained. The imagery referred mainly to the art making and to visual representation of a symbol. There was also the idea of mental representation and the capacity for imagery of humans. Those two concepts were important in explaining the process of the intervention. We saw that art therapy could be used with an art as therapy approach and an art psychotherapy approach. The intervention took advantage of both ways of working by putting emphasis on the process of art making as being therapeutic and on the potential for projection of unconscious materials.

The key population for this intervention is the children of 5 to 8 years old with psychiatric difficulties. We looked at the main issues that those children have, i.e. self-esteem, problem-solving, coping and transitional difficulties, impulse control and relationship. That population also seems to have a natural interest in animals. Those children have developed a theory of mind that allows them to understand intentions and pretend play. Both concepts are crucial in effectively using the intervention proposed. The fact that by the age of 5, children are capable to generate imagery, which means that they can hold on to mental images, is also important. Around that time, the transition from family to school happens. That transition fosters a defense mechanism called reaction formation. Children need to develop a strong self-esteem to be able to appropriately face that transition. We also saw that the artistic abilities of that age range

allow them to meet the demand of the intervention in terms of representing characters and story making.

Animals are good at breaking the defenses of children and maintaining attention. Relation to animals allows for a break from social conventions. Animals can be found in prehistoric drawing, emblems of clans, totems, representation of gods, masks and rituals. Darwin's evolution theory was also looked at in terms of its influence on humanity. In the animality versus humanity section of this paper, we saw the dilemma that humans are facing: the fragmentation of the self into the ego and the shadow. The wilderness was explained as the animal's part of ourselves which Freud thought we should control, whereas Jung thought we should accept it and Estés thought we should reconnect with it. Many books, movies and stories from popular culture were also discussed in this paper as a way to show the influence they have on children and adults.

In the art therapy section, we saw that Expressive Therapies Continuum (Hinz, 2009) proposed the use a self-symbol made of clay that represented an animal. Reddick (2008) used animal-symbols in a classroom setting to work through group dynamic issues. Hickey (2001) used animal totem and the goal was to imagine what that animal would do in difficult situations. Animal symbols were also utilized by Henderson (1999) in order to explore different characteristics of clients. Reznick (2009) created a program using imagery to propose different tools to clients. One of those tools was an animal friend that would act as a protector for the child.

Finally, combining those theories allowed me to propose an intervention which included four sections. The first step is for the child to choose an animal symbol. Then, the exploration of that symbol through art making was proposed. At that point, it was

possible to explore problem-solving through play with the help of the animal symbol. The use of a transitional object, outside of therapy, was also proposed. Eventually, acknowledging the animal strengths as their own was the goal to promote independence and self-esteem. On this last note, I hope that this intervention can be helpful for other therapists and that future research on this topic will help to better serve children with psychiatric problems.

"It is, perhaps, not serendipitous that the word art is encased in the word earth".

-Henderson (1999)

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