

Weaving an Imaginal Approach to Psychotherapy

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Imaginal Psychology is a distinct discipline within the field of Psychology, placing the Soul at the center of its inquiry and practice.- Institute of Imaginal Psychology

What is the Imaginal and an Imaginal approach to Psychotherapy?

The image that comes is of weaving thick bundles into the container that gathers, and gathers again the threads, ropes and weaving rags of all that form and inform imaginal practice. Weaving the container again and again back around to gather and meet itself in deeper and richer circles of whole-making. As the threads become rope and are gathered and woven into a strong container, so are the healer and the wounded one gathered, woven and held in the deepening transformation.



This document names the threads which weave together as the numinous sometimes illusive imaginal, which is in and around us always. As these threads of foundation weave together they build the image and feeling of Soul-healing, an imaginal approach to psychotherapy.

Foundational Weaving Threads of Imaginal Practice

The founding tenants of Imaginal Psychology include:

- The Body is Spirit in physical form.
- The Body is the home of imagery, holding the somatic roots of imagery.
- Body is central to creativity, creative arts through the body hold the Sacred.
- Direct Experience is central to Imaginal Practice – inviting us fully into our inner knowing, our direct experience.
- Through Direct Experience, we connect the Soul with our birthright to mystical experience, we connect with our direct experience of the God of our understanding.

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to crawl, on your knees, across the desert.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body

Love what it loves.

Mary Oliver, Wild Geese





- Validity and deep meaning are re-integrated into Direct Experience through the body, this changes or shifts one's center of gravity away from being externally focused and defined, towards an inner or Soul-centered, inside-out-self-perspective as primary.
- An inside-out perspective as primary is deeply sustaining and self-validating.
- Altered and expanded states of consciousness and trance states are a basic human need which are present in Direct Experience through art making, guided journey work, Integrative Breathwork®, explorative/expressive somatic practices, and Imaginal Psychotherapy.
- The healer holds within themselves their own wounding – made ever conscious, the wounded one coming for assistance holds within themselves a healer, this is the archetype of the Wounded Healer.
- The Wounded Healer archetype invites both therapist and client to enter into the mythic imaginal realm which holds the symbols of healing and awareness.
- Image is held as the 'intimate other' which comes for our healing.
- Engaging with symbolic material opens the way for re-orienting and re-balancing within the client.
- Deep connection with the Earth and the cycles of nature are held as interrelated to our own physical self in the body – as we value, respect and treat the Earth so do we the BodySpirit.
- By going more deeply into the body, into embodiment, into imagery and Direct Experience we are also deepening and expanding our authentic self into all that we are and all that we touch. This is whole-making, Spirit embodied.
- Whole-making and Soul-centered living opens us to the life that wants to be lived through us.
- Imaginal practice provides guidance from the inside-out for sustained and deeply meaningful life choices which continue to nourish and ground us.





What Does This Mean for The Field of Psychotherapy?

An imaginal perspective holds these foundational tenants as valid and richly, personally informative. The invitation is learning to access this deeply guiding source of inner wisdom and learning to draw from it the guidance to take right action in the world. Working in the imaginal realm links us to the wisdom of the heart and takes us out of the imbalanced sickness of over emphasis on the intellect and rational, linear thought. It invites our indigenous (inner, innate knowing) wisdom through reconnecting us to body wisdom and a valued experience of our personal imagery. The imaginal invites us to re-member our connection with the cycles of nature and the rhythm of the earth, of which we are an interdependent part, reminding us we are akin to all things. The imaginal restores our inner guidance system allowing us to *live from the inside out*, expressing our Soul-self through the life we create.

The imaginal requires a cognitive perceptive ability uniquely its own, an imaginative consciousness which allows entry into a realm as real as the manifest world (Epstein, 2007). This cognitive ability, the ability to perceive and imagine possibilities, is a critical missing link in therapeutic approaches which focus on changing thoughts as the origination point of life change. Coming home to the Soul-centered potency of Imaginal Psychology invites us back to our indigenous roots, to our embodiment and holds the possibility of infusing cognitively based therapies with greater impact.

What Invites the Imaginal in Therapy?

Imaginal Practices which help to both develop this perceptive ability and bring forth the riches of deep inner guidance includes:

- Art process, Art Therapy
- Authentic Movement, dance/movement therapy
- Developing the Fair Witness
- Lyrical poetic writing
- Guided journey work
- Guided Soul retrieval as reintegration
- Somatic, bio-energetic work
- Psychospiritual Integrative Breathwork®

Developing this perceptive ability and learning to mine the riches of the imaginal life as a source of right action in daily life is a primary underpinning and offering of Imaginal Psychology. An imaginal approach to psychotherapy can be a powerful healing paradigm on its own or in conjunction with other healing modalities.

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Breif Biography:

Dr. Shannon Simonelli is an Imaginal Psychotherapist, registered Art Therapist, Certified Integrative Psychospiritual Breathwork® Practitioner, and Certified Pastoral Counselor. She comes from a background of over 20 years in the field of mental health working with various populations in clinical and private practice settings. She has worked as a body worker, she studied and practices Authentic Movement and is earning a certification through the 5Rhythms Center for Therapeutic Studies, applying the ecstatic dance work of Gabrielle Roth to therapeutic practice.

She is an Assistant Professor at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in the College of Education's Center on Disability Studies, adjunct faculty at Chaminade University in the Masters in Counseling Psychology program in Honolulu, and at The Union Institute and University in Cincinnati Ohio.

Shannon maintains a small private practice and runs an art therapy group at the Children's Alliance serving teens and tweens in the foster care system whom have been sexually abused. Shannon teaches students and therapists to integrate imaginal practice into their work, and is building this part of her work.

If you are interested in learning more about Imaginal Psychotherapy and Imaginal Practice please contact Dr. Shannon Simonelli at: Shannon@DrSimonelli.com or (808) 988-5555

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This article is a synthesis of numerous readings and years of study and practice. For a more extensive reference list please email the author.