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THE HISTORY, DYNAMICS, VALUES, AND
LIMITATIONS OF POETRY THERAPY

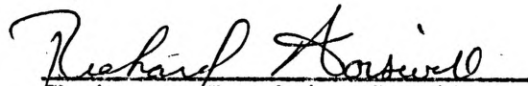
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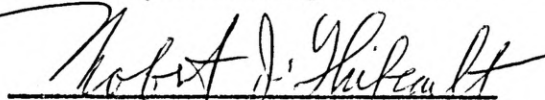
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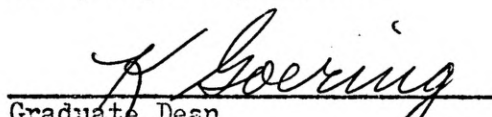
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Chairman, Examining Committee


Head, Major Department


Graduate Dean

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ABSTRACT

A review of literature was conducted in the area of poetry therapy to investigate the history, dynamics, value, and limitations of poetry as a therapeutic tool.

The research available in the area of poetry therapy was minimal and diversely scattered throughout various relating fields of study.

The challenge to utilize innovations that will enable professionals to function more efficiently and productively in meeting client's needs is the paramount endorsement for the study of poetry therapy as a potential therapeutic mode.

The poet combines the simplicity of form with the complexity of metaphoric abstraction in order to facilitate the sense of organic unity. Man's mental health is a reflection of this unity or lack of unity.

When man builds insulating barriers against the experienced and perceived painfulness of human encounter, poetry has been found effective in catalyzing a growth process in the individual which eventuates in the removal of these barriers.

Thus, the researcher did conclude from this study that poetry therapy was a technique worthy of utilization in the counseling session, and that further research and study on the technique was merited.

Another conclusion drawn from this study was that research in the area of poetry therapy is sparse and shallow. Descriptive research and testimonials have been the chief methods for presentation of data regarding the use of poetry in the counseling session.

Therefore, more extensive research should be done comparing individual and group counseling centered around poetry therapy with counseling sessions where poetry therapy is not used. Also, further research needs to be done to determine counselor effectiveness and literary background, to determine areas of psychopathology where poetry therapy is most effective, and to obtain the client's views concerning poetry therapy.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Poetry is a language, a form of communication that is the artistic use and blending of words and sounds that are derived from human need and experience. The ways in which these words and sounds are used, combined, and patterned gives them a reality beyond the words themselves. (Barron, 1974) In portraying this reality, the poet combines the simplicity of form with the complexity of metaphoric abstraction in order to facilitate the sense of organic unity. Man's mental health or psychopathology is a reflection of this unity or lack of unity.

In the pathologically oriented person the symbol becomes the reality. The person tends to make the symbol concrete and factual. He builds an insulating barrier against the experienced and perceived painfulness of human encounter.

In an attempt to penetrate the repressive barriers of the psychopathic individual and break through resistances, poetry has been used as a tool in the therapeutic setting. the use of poetry therapy is becoming more widely acknowledged by counselors, psychologists, and psychotherapists because of

its integration of the emotional and/or intellectual understanding of universal experiences and its ability to be dissected and used for the acquisition of insight by the patient more readily than personal symptoms or behavior. (Leedy, 1969)

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is reviewing the literature concerning the background of poetry therapy, the dynamics and therapeutic interaction of poetry therapy, the practical use of poetry therapy, and the limitations of poetry therapy.

Need and Purpose of the Study

The schizophrenic stands, in his isolation, as a monument to the aloneness we all feel, a failure at creative human interaction. No one poses to us a greater challenge to our creativity. Yet we, with all our increased material, are unable to be creative with the medium we use. (Sonne, 1964:425)

Sonne has given but one example of the monumental challenge to utilize innovations that will enable professionals to function more efficiently and productively in the area of psychotherapy where the psychotherapist strives to put clients in touch with themselves and the worlds in which they live. This is a

paramount endorsement for the use of poetry therapy. It is because of the potential value of poetry therapy that it is critical this area be explored for the purpose of improving the effectiveness of the therapeutic session.

A university counselor or education department, as well as psychotherapists in general, can benefit greatly from knowledge of the therapeutic value of poetry therapy, in that training programs can be improved, providing students exposure to the poetry therapy technique so that the student has access to another potential mode of therapy.

Limitations

The research for this study was conducted at the library of Montana State University. Numerous requests for materials not held by Montana State's library were made to other libraries and institutions, but a rather poor response was received from these requests.

Centers for the use and promulgation of poetry therapy are located in the East, namely New York, Pennsylvania, and also in California; thus, the research material available in this area is limited in comparison to those areas known as poetry therapy centers which have a greater supply of

available research material.

Definition of Terms

Poetry therapy is the inclusion of poetry in the therapeutic counseling session, either the creation of or the reading of or both, used for the purpose of helping a patient reach levels of emotional insight more adequately than conventional dialogue. Poetry therapy allows the patient to identify with other human beings who have experienced similar conflicts, anxieties, and feelings.

Bibliotherapy is the process of assimilating the psychological, sociological, and aesthetic values from books into human character, personality, and behavior.

A poem, as referred to in this paper, is words-in-order that help the reader see and feel, perhaps know more about himself. A poem contains an order filled with images and senses; a moment is depicted that the individual is asked to share himself in.

A metaphor is a figure of speech involving the application to one thing of a name or action belonging to another thing in order to indicate a resemblance. The metaphor links the unknown to the known, thus putting the reader more in touch

with the world he already has.

Rhythm is the pace a poem keeps, how fast the words move, accompanying the rise and fall of emphasis. There are five basic rhythm patterns that authors use to give movement to their poetry: iambic (unaccented syllable followed by accented), trochaic (accented, unaccented), anapestic (unaccented, unaccented, accented), and dactylic (accented, unaccented, unaccented). Also, there is free verse which contains an irregular metrical pattern.

Summary

The pathologically oriented person builds an insulating barrier against the experienced and perceived painfulness of human encounter. In an effort to penetrate this repressive barrier of the psychopathic individual, an innovative usage of poetry as a tool has been utilized by psychotherapists in their endeavors to put clients back in touch with themselves and the worlds in which they live.

It is the purpose of this paper, through a review of literature, to explore the background, the dynamics and therapeutic interaction, the practical use, and the limita-

tions of poetry therapy in order to familiarize professionals with this potential mode of therapy.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature in the area of poetry therapy is minimal, diversely scattered throughout the areas of psychology, psychotherapy, sociology, psychiatric nursing, penology, education, and English literature. Historically, poetry therapy had been incorporated in the more encompassing field of Bibliotherapy, "the process of assimilating the psychological, sociological, and aesthetic values from books into human character, personality, and behavior." (Lerner, 1973:1336) However, within the last ten years the merits of poetry therapy have been recognized, establishing it as an independent technique. It must be emphasized here that poetry therapy is a tool, not a school. It is the person who is important, not the poem. If properly used, poetry therapy can open up vistas of feeling which, if properly synthesized, may lead to positive kinds of behavior. (Shiffrin, 1973)

The material covering this technique is organized under the following topics: Background of Poetry Therapy, Dynamics and Therapeutic Interaction of Poetry Therapy, Practical Use of Poetry Therapy, and Limitations of Poetry Therapy.

Background of Poetry Therapy

The early Greeks conceived Apollo to be the God of both medicine and poetry. Somehow in their ancient wisdom they closely associated the relationship between poetry and the art of healing. (Leedy, 1969) Aristotle, too, in writing about tragic poetry in Poetics observed that the passions pity and terror could be "corrected and refined", implying that these painful and disquieting elements of man could be expelled through the reading of the tragedies. (Card, 1969)

It (tragedy) excites emotion, however, only to alloy it. Pity and fear artificially stirred, expel the latent pity and fear which we bring with us from real life . . . In the pleasurable calm which follows when the passion is spent, an emotional cure has been wrought. (Butcher, 1951:246)

Aristotle goes further in associating the therapeutic value of the reading of verse by describing the process undertaken between the emotions of the reader and the art medium:

The painful element in the pity and fear of reality is purged away . . . the curative and tranquilizing influence that tragedy (verse) exercises follows an immediate accompaniment of the transformation of feelings . . . to purify and clarify them (emotions) by passing through the medium of art. (Butcher, 1951:254-255)

Centuries later Sigmund Freud, by crediting the discovery of the unconscious to the poets, linked modern medical insight to

the psychological institutions of the past. Freud stated that the poets were the first to "salvage from the whirlpool of their emotions the deepest truths to which we others have to force our way, ceaselessly grouping among torturing uncertainties." (Freud, 1953:147) Thus, poets were here recognized for their analyses and revelations about human condition long before the study of man's behavior was formalized into a science.

Following Freud, other great theoreticians who recognized the cathartic value of poetry were such men as Adler, Jung, Moreno, and Reik.

It was in 1928, however, that a man by the name of Eli Greifer started pioneer work in the field of poetry therapy in New York City. He began a campaign to show that a poem's didactic message has a specific healing power in itself. For forty years he endeavored to further poetry therapy by documenting and testing his principles at Creedmoor State Hospital, Willoughby House Settlement in Brooklyn and Staten Island Aid for Retarded Children, Inc. as well as helping to nurture young co-workers and colleagues. (Shiffrin, 1973) As a result, poetry therapy today is utilized in psychotherapeutic

sessions from the east to the west coasts of the United States.

Dynamics and Therapeutic Interaction
of Poetry Therapy

A poet writes poetry to express his feelings, phantasies, and fears, to relieve and expand himself, and to share this expression and development with others. As Freud so aptly stated, a poet can be compared with a little child at play:

. . . every child at play behaves like an imaginative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or more truly, he rearranges the things of his world and orders it in a new way that pleases him better. (1965b:45)

Poetry, thus, may help a person discover his inner being, allowing that person to get in touch with feelings and emotions and be able to identify and work with them. A person's sudden insight into a facet of his problem because a poet's lines provide understanding and catharsis can be as significant to the patient as though an analyst were interpreting for him. (Lerner, 1973)

The purpose of poetry is not to provide a soft bed for the tired reader to rest in when he hasn't the strength to do anything more energetic. The purpose of poetry is to expand and intensify one's sense of life by giving examples of one man's

look at the intensities of his own life as the intelligence in his head has ordered them into the shape of the poem. (Leedy, 1969:86)

The production of a poem may be considered a problem-solving activity. The poet's motives are conscious and deliberate, his output the result of a skillful use of his tools to express rather than to conceal. (Robinson and Mowbray, 1969) A study by Tedford revealed that meter (iambic, trochaic, anapestic, dactylic) was perhaps one of the most expressive tools at the disposal of the poet. Hevner (1936) too found from his study that meter had the greatest effect on the emotions of the reader and that the consonant sounds had the next largest effect.

Meter . . . is not useful in discriminating forcefulness from grace, but vowel sounds are most useful on this diameter of the feeling circle; meter is very effective in determining the happiness or sadness of the poetry, while vowel sounds are quite ineffectual in this capacity. The 3-syllable meter is most of all effective in lending the poetry its playful, sparkling, humorous qualities, its happiness and brightness and its impetuous, elated, restless feeling. The 2-syllable foot is sharply and consistently contrasted with these clusters of feelings and lends especially dignity and earnestness, sadness, tenderness, and serenity anapests were jovial, joyous, humorous, merry, sparkling, light, gay, spirited, sprightly, impetuous, playful and bright. For the iambic meter the significant adjectives were solemn, serious,

earnest, sober, ponderous, sad, grave, majestic, heavy, and dignified. (Hevner, 1936:431-432)

Thus, two-syllable feet (iambs and trochees) evoke feelings of heavy, sad, earnest and tragic, along with the sensation of outdoors. Three-syllable feet (anapests and dactyls) evoke the cluster of light, happy, playful, and humorous, as well as indoor. (Tedford, 1972)

Also, the poet uses fantasy to elicit meaning in a fresh context. Symbolization is used as an illuminator; distortion is used as a clarifier. In order for the poet to reveal the conditions of humanity, he must first be aware of the state of his own life and soul which requires a maturing, growth-process. This growth-producing experience is compatible with the therapeutic aims of psychotherapy. (Leedy, 1969)

In all cases, the goal of psychotherapy is to bring about a more mature integration of personality. Poetry seems to be geared to this integrative purpose. (Robinson and Mowbray, 1969:191-192)

Counselors help clients to be themselves, accept feelings and make changes they choose. Poems that counselors can use speak straight, are themselves what they intend to be, and give the client a sense of being there with the speaker at the same time, thus in itself meeting the requirements for effective counseling. (Margolis, 1971b)

Margolis states that therapy thrives on commitment as does poetry. The poet is committed to expression in his self-appointed form; to guide the reader inside the realm of awareness; to permit the reader to feel through the poet's thoughts and emotions; and then to let this experience alter how the reader perceives and reacts to life and reality. (1971) Consequently, the therapeutic use of poetry in its various phases does involve creativity, enhancement of self-expression, and the development of insight. In essence, the creative act that takes place occurs in both poet and reader, and as Leedy points out, "to create is in some sense to be born again." (1969) In the end, the poem becomes symbolically an understanding someone with whom the patient can share his hopes, dreams, and despair. (Mussen, 1967) As A. F. Fultz points out, the patient then becomes engaged in a "doing" rather than a "being done to". (1966) The patient becomes aware of his inner feelings at a conscious level, achieving one of the chief goals of psychotherapy. (Lerner, 1973)

In poetry, the poet's goal is to help the reader see and feel, perhaps discover more about himself through the use of words-in-order that are filled with images and senses. "In

short, each poem written by a poet is a moment we are asked to share ourselves in; in a sense, it (the poem) is its own counseling session." (Margolis, 1971b:58)

In counseling, as in the creation of a poem or in the reader's response to it, the client is engaged in identifying or projecting himself into a character, expressing feelings associated with the character and his situation, and becoming aware of some feelings or part of himself, which is shared with the counselor, that may either help the individual like himself more or motivate him to change some of his unacceptable behaviors. The counseling process helps an individual re-establish a sense of equilibrium by "turning the inside out, and sometimes the outside in, by transferring the private into the public through therapeutic sharing." (Margolis, 1971:11) Consequently, over a period of time in a counseling situation, personality facets that are kept inside, hidden, and private are converted into something that can be outside, found, and public.

An individual fights, loves, leaves, or laughs usually in relation to another person or group, imagined or real. His feelings are usually derived or created at a specific

time and place. The counselor offers the client, with the help of poetry in a poetry therapy session, a place and emotional tone in which to focus. In the counseling session there is a place and a person with whom the client can pretend and chance to be the person he wishes. The poem, therefore, should mirror as much as possible the client's dramatic situation, the relationship among the characters and where and when the action takes place. Eventually, with successful counseling, the illusions of the client disappear and he is, feels, and does what he wants to be. The client begins to actively participate with people and situations outside counseling; he no longer needs repressive barriers to protect himself from the demands of life.

Poetry proceeds largely by comparisons and identification of imagery, but does not justify them according to scientific logic. (Leedy, 1969) The chief tool used for this comparison and identification process is the metaphor. The metaphor contains surprise, similarity and contrast, relationship, and power. An apt metaphor can link unconscious, conscious and interpsychic levels and more. Metaphors are the "reservoirs" of relationships and the instruments for relating. "In

psychotherapy, the psychotherapist endeavors to establish a poetic and permanent organic unity with the psyche of his patient, and shares with his patient in participating in the experience of composing metaphors." (Sonne, 1964:425) Sonne further states that, "A metaphor is something which is diminished if explained and must be jumped for to be obtained." (Sonne, 1964:426) It is the reliance on the role of the imagination and the implicit participation that metaphors elicit that accounts for so much of the therapeutic value of poetry. (Leedy, 1969) Thus, mankind creates metaphors in speech, poetry, dreams, and ultimately through use of the counseling relationship itself to help fellow human beings integrate all of their senses and competencies in order to achieve a sense of unity and equilibrium.

This integrating process of metaphor and poetry has been called by various names down through the ages. Burnshaw called this mystic process "relational unity"; Elizabeth Drew called it the "organic system of profundity and froth"; Martin Foss expounded on this same process as the "creation to the unconditional simplicity of the absolute". (Margolis, 1971b:66) For each, the metaphor does in a moment what

counseling takes on as its main goal: the integration of body, brain, and beauty. Therefore, the combining of the metaphor of poetry and the therapeutic counseling session can help produce an awakening and a unifying, linking the unknown to the known, taking the familiar and making it unique in order to put the client more in touch with the world he already has. In essence, the counselor-client relationship can be termed metaphoric. The relationship to each member is independent as their own, and yet at the same time it represents how, particularly the client, relates to people, who resemble the counselor, outside the counseling office; "the relationship is metaphoric in the sense that it stands for other relationships." (Margolis, 1971b:15) The client can experiment symbolically with words and actually with behaviors in the counseling relationship. The counseling relationship with its inclusion of various types of metaphoric expression becomes an analogue of other non-counseling relationships.

Consequently, poetry may be utilized in reflecting the inner turbulent mental state experienced by the patient. By utilizing the poetic process, "the inner becomes the outer, or the conscious, making it tangible and workable." Or,

conversely, "poetry may also quiet the outer so that the inner, greater reality, may be experienced." It is when one finds oneself in touch with the inner reality that poetry may be the vehicle of expression to make known to the outer consciousness, the peace, joy, happiness, and pain of the inward states. (Leedy, 1969:125)

In order to draw some of the previously mentioned concepts together and bring them out of their nebulous state and present them in a more concrete manner, an example of how a poem works in a counseling session follows:

Imagine this client with her problem.

A young woman in love with a young man of a different race, class, or reputation, finds herself caught between an unapproving father and her boyfriend. The father is typically paternal and won't hear of this boy's intrusion on his daughter.

Arguments are ineffective, and the girl has difficulty confronting her father with her feelings.

She seeks counseling and is faced with some of the same difficulties - inability to express herself and achieve what she wants in and out of the

counseling relationship. The counselor reads this short Yeats' poem with her.

FATHER AND CHILD

She hears me strike the board (table) and say
That she is under ban
Of all good men and women
Being mentioned with a man
That has the worst of all bad names;
And thereupon replies
That his hair is beautiful
Cold as the March wind his eyes. (Yeats, 1965:266)

The poem is divided into two parts, the first section ending with "bad names". This is the father speaking, tough and to the point. All the words he used (except for "women" and "mentioned") are short and one syllabled, almost like shouts or commands. These sounds, "sh", "g", "in" are spoken at the front of a nearly closed mouth. His mind is made up and that's that. The guy has a bad name and it's spoiling his daughter's reputation in the community. Even the three end rhymes ("ban", "women", and "man") frame the father's anger.

But love and the daughter's convictions to it slice through even her father's military. Everything that constructed the poem's first five lines changes in the last three,

when the daughter speaks her heart. Words have many syllables; she has time for that. There is softness in the sound ("p", "t") and openness in the mouth ("thereupon", "hair", "eyes"). Even the rhyme in the girl's voice are wide ("there-hair", "replies-eyes") and spaced with different sounds in between, to give the sense of structure in an atmosphere of freedom. And to complement these sound and rhythm differences, where the father is objective to the point of court reporting, the daughter is metaphoric. It is not only that the boy's hair is beautiful and his eyes reach her cold as the March wind, but indeed, the young man is beauty; he is the March wind for her. And this no father can combat or compete with.

In eight lines, so carefully controlled, the poem comes to all of this: the facts, the feelings, and the fantasies. What it takes the counselor and client sometimes sessions to get at, the poet manages in the moment of the poem.

In summary, a poet writes poetry to express his feelings, phantasies, and fears, to relieve and expand himself, and to share this expression and development with others. By identifying with the poet's poetry, a person can get in touch with feelings and emotions and gain an understanding of

himself as the poetry expands and intensifies the reader's sense of life by giving examples of one man's look at the intensities of his own life.

In order to achieve his desired outcome, the poet utilizes the tools of meter, fantasy, symbolization, distortion, images, senses, projection, and comparison by use of metaphor, to mention but a few. The end result is a moment the reader is asked to share in which helps establish a sense of equilibrium in the individual by "turning the inside out" and transferring the private into the public through therapeutic sharing. Thus, the poem provides an emotional tone and a place that mirrors the reader's, in this case, the client's, dramatic situation. Therefore, the combining of the metaphor of poetry and the therapeutic counseling session can help produce an awakening and a unifying, linking the unknown to the known, taking the familiar and making it unique in order to put the client more in touch with the world he already has.

Practical Use of Poetry Therapy

A theoretical argument for the use of poetry in counseling is presented in this section of the paper by integrating

concepts from the Dynamic and Therapeutic Interaction section with desired objectives and goals of psychotherapy.

Poems are effective for many reasons. Their economy allows them to be used handily in time-limited counseling sessions. Metaphor leads to great affective response. It allows the client to work through himself in forms that are close to us: music, order, and image.

A national, community, or family mental health begins with good, one-to-one relationships. The poetry therapist knows this and uses poems to help the client identify how he informs others who he is (SELF), what he would like from them (NEED), how he gets what he needs (PROCESS), and why others are important to him (MOTIVATION). (Margolis, 1971:282)

Furthermore, it is recognized that there exists important similarities among dreams, daydreams, and poetry, particularly in origin, evolution, and function. The context and structure of these elements resemble properties of counseling itself and therefore show a natural affinity for use within the counseling relationship by promoting catharsis in the client through aesthetic allusion.

The literary work dreams a dream for us. It embodies and evokes in us a central fantasy; then it manages and controls that fantasy by devices that, were they in a mind, we would call defenses, but being on a page, we call form. And the having of the fantasy, and feeling it managed, give us pleasure. We bring, then, to works of art two expectations that permit a willing suspension of

disbelief: we do not expect to act on the external world, we expect pleasure. Even if the work makes us feel pain of guilt or anxiety, we expect it to manage those feelings so as to transform them into satisfying experiences. (Holland, 1968:75)

One of the therapeutic and social functions of poetry is that it takes the individual's best and worst phantasies and recreates them in forms he can face and ultimately integrate with himself. The poet can mask what he or society views as shameful wishes or fears through use of skillfully manipulated language and place the reader in a one-step removed distance position. From this vantage point the reader can criticize, applaud, reject or accept the characters, feel feelings he may not allow himself to feel under ordinary circumstances because these are not the displayed components of his own personality, but of someone else. As Faber has stated:

The insight psychoanalysis gains from fantasy, then, causes us to expect a state of things in which an actual experience which made a strong impression on the writer calls up the memory of an earlier experience, generally belonging to childhood, which, in turn, arouses a wish that finds a fulfillment in the work in question, and in which elements of the recent event and the old memory should be discernable. Freud maintains that when we hear such fantasies in their "raw" state or condition they "repel" us or "leave us cold." But when the artist presents us with his creations, or even describes his personal fantasies for us, we

experience a satisfaction, a pleasure, which finds its origin in a number of sources. This is because the writer softens the egotistical character of the daydream by changes and disguises and bribes us by the offer of a purely formal, that is, aesthetic, pleasure in the presentation of his phantasies. (1969:249-250)

Consequently, there is safety for the client from this vantage point, and at the same time, an attraction to the poetry because the reader is capable of mastering a potentially threatening situation. (Margolis, 1971b)

Just as the patient in psychotherapy reluctantly yields his secrets to his own awareness, so does human nature only grudgingly allow itself to be scrutinized and systematized into the formulations of the various behavioral sciences. On the other hand, the poet entices participation. In effect, he says, "Here are my sorrows and my joy, my hopes and my fears. It pleases me to share them with you. If you see yourself in the mirror of my art and feel comforted or strengthened, follow me." (Leedy, 1969:9)

Whatever else we can say about the counseling relations, one thing is clear: the temporary need for dependency is one of its reasons for being. Clients find themselves in need of help, whether it is in making a decision or changing

a particular feeling or behavior. Clients seek help from a professional group, namely psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors, who they deem as more stable, more knowing, and certainly more powerful in deciding what is best for them.

(Margolis, 1971b)

At the outset of counseling, the client consciously and unconsciously makes the counselor into that part of himself he feels he can't be at the present moment, whether it be a better decision maker or moral guardian. The counselor stands for some segment of the client the client wishes he could be, control, or understand. Consequently, the client comes to identify, either positively or negatively, with the counselor, that portion of himself the counselor represents; the same is true with characters in poems and particularly their use in counseling.

The client who feels he is similar in experience or feelings to characters in poems affords himself the opportunity of making developmental connections. Also, identification with others, counselor or characters, can foster the positive reinforcement of behaviors, values, or feelings the client is having difficulty establishing for himself. In this same

way, identification, by projection into the life of a poem's character, strengthens the client's sense of himself and allows him to try on different roles to see which fit best.

Thus, our so-called 'identification' with a literary character is actually a complicated mixture of projections and introjections, of taking in from the character certain drives and defenses that are really objectively 'out there' and of putting into him feelings that are really our own, 'in here'. And needless to say, we do not just incorporate a character's drives and defenses - we incorporate the whole character, clothes, features, manners, physique, and the rest. (Holland, 1968:278)

In identifying with a poem's character, the client has a variety of materials on which to project himself: feelings, thoughts, actions, or even unconsciously, with a phantasy or fear the poem may be disguising. A client in the relatively safe counseling relationship can identify with characters in poems that take him back to old problems, make him face present conflicts, or help him anticipate difficult situations. Through identification his sense of loneliness and isolation can be reduced.

One of the primary goals of counseling is self-acceptance that the client can experience all of himself, feelings, thoughts, and body, with a high degree of positive regard. As he identifies with the counselor or poem's character,

he experiences a wide range of feelings: relief, frustration, anger, joy, to name a few. If the counseling relationship is well established, the client can share these feelings with the counselor. He can say, this is me now because these are my feelings. Positive or negative identification triggers feelings and the counseling relationship may allow the client to feel himself as real and integrated through the unashamed expressions of these feelings. This action is a movement toward self-acceptance and competency in interpersonal situations. The client can feel and express to the counselor how and in what ways the poem's characters may or may not resemble him, but he must also experience them as real if the poem helps me feel these things, thinks the client, and this is who I am.

. . . properly structured approaches to imaginative literature enable the patient to be both participant and spectator, and in so doing, serve to develop his ego-integrative tendencies . . . Hence whether the reading of books serves to bring about a re-discovery of the self, a more adequate understanding of others, an alteration in the concept of reality, or a changed concept of value, in any case the accomplishment of any one of these ends, and in whatever order, will contribute to the achievement of insight.
(Schrodes, 1950:173,178)

A poem by stimulating feelings through identifications can

allow the client to express feelings in a relationship that accepts them. The client can test their vitality with the counselor and decide in what ways this awareness and self-acceptance can be taken outside the counseling office.

Although insight may not lead directly to behavior change, the client views self-acceptance as an essential mainstay in itself, and a forerunner to meaningful behavior change. Poetry helps the client get in touch with all of himself, helps him like it, and used co-jointly with counseling, keeps the individual together. (Margolis, 1971)

Also, poetry therapy stimulates interpersonal relationships. The whole thing in poetry therapy is to bring about the exposure of emotion in the patient, the interaction of emotions among the patients. In this way, poetry catalyzes and sets into motion other group processes that facilitate therapy. (Coogan, 1966) Thus, in a group atmosphere, patients are more spontaneous and critical, and as a result there is more emotional responsiveness with less aggression. Therapeutic interpretations are made with more ease and safety since the relatively unthreatening interpersonal relationships pose a minimum of threat. (Shiffin, 1973)

Group poetry therapy may also be particularly helpful in reducing resistance, insofar as it aids insight, encourages, and suggests new forms of behavior. (Fultz, 1966) Lerner also points out that poetry therapy permits group cohesion and therapeutic results with a more heterogeneous group than is possible with conventional techniques. (1973)

Schrodes lists the following as elements of poetry therapy that make it conducive to the counselor-client relationship.

Poetry therapy helps the client:

1. Talk about problems which he ordinarily finds difficult to discuss.
2. Recognize by vicariously experiencing characters' lives that he is not alone with his problem or drastically different from the rest of society.
3. Expose himself to conflict situations in the poem without actually being in danger of the real situation.
4. Inhibit infantile behavior patterns by substituting socially acceptable ones learned from poems.
5. Enlarge his interests and attitudes.
6. View the motivations and feelings of other

people (characters) in situations similar to his own.

7. Discover alternative solutions to his problems.

8. Formulate the causes of his difficulties by viewing these problems objectively in characters' lives.

9. Prevent growth of neurotic behaviors by vicarious participation. (1950)

Molly Harrower, a poet and psychotherapist who has become a leader in the field of poetry therapy states:

I write poems because they solve a conflict, because I am ill at ease spiritually and want to clarify my thoughts and feelings. I write poems because from some inner chaos, I am driven to create order. I write poems because I am flooded, overpowered by feelings which have been provoked by some aspect of life or nature. This great bulk of feeling can only be subdued or brought under control if I allow some intellectual craftsmanship to work on it, to produce a manageable thought which I can control in the place of the all-pervading emotions which control me. (1972)

The very act of creating is a self-sustaining experience, and in the poetic moment the self becomes both the ministering "therapist" and the comforted "patient". Thus, poetry therapy, either the creation of or the reading of, helps to lift the cover to a deep well of feelings which can then be discussed, dealt with, and integrated, that the patients can unburden themselves of these feelings in an accepting, non-

judgmental atmosphere; that they can express sad and joyous feelings without retribution; that, in the counseling setting, they can share, if they wish, some hitherto unexpected feeling or "look together through a new window." (Leedy, 1969:51)

Poetry oftens leads the reader to do the impulsive rather than the "sensible" thing. The influence that poetry has upon the client is not based upon the use of intellect or reasoned judgment alone. Reading a poem is essentially an emotional experience.

That is why someone who is emotionally disturbed can often feel a poem more intensely than other people. Such a person is more likely to be governed by his emotions than by his reason. (Blanton, 1960:5)

Another factor worthy of note with the use of poetry in the therapeutic counseling session is that the reading of a poem is a very private and personalized activity which the client can carry out by himself, an act in which he is not dependent upon others and which he can find a great deal of emotional satisfaction and release. Therefore, in a small way the patient is able to assume personal responsibility, another chief goal of therapy.

Imperative to the Practical Use section is the inclusion of criteria which can be used to determine which poems are

effective in the therapeutic poetry counseling sessions.

If the counselor is to make intelligent use of the great variety of (occupational) literature available, he must have standards for judging the adequacy of these materials. These standards should be applied in evaluating materials for purchase as well as in determining the use of materials already at hand. (Baer and Roeber, 1964:145)

The following is a listing of the criteria set forth by Margolis (1971b:78-79)

EVALUATION FORM FOR POEMS USED IN COUNSELING

I. Client Response

- a. This poem stimulated the client to express more of his (a) feelings, (b) thoughts.
- b. This poem helped the client express topics (feelings or thoughts) he has never expressed before.
- c. This poem helped the client take initiative in exploring himself.
- d. This poem proposed solutions that the client viewed as relevant to his problem.
- e. The poem helped the client change some behaviors he had set for himself as goals in counseling.
- f. The client verbalized positive and/or negative feelings: (a) about himself, (b) about the use of the poem.

II. Counselor-Client Relationship

a. This poem helped the client verbalize his feelings toward me.

b. This poem changed the client's view of counseling:
(a) positively, (b) negatively.

c. The use of this poem brought us closer to termination. (May be evaluated at termination.)

d. My client learned how to use poems therapeutically on his own.

III. Counselor Response

a. I felt comfortable and competent introducing and using this poem.

b. This poem helped me better understand more parts of my client.

c. The use of this poem helped me structure future sessions.

d. I made an appropriate choice with this poem for use with this client.

e. I need more work with this poem to evaluate its usefulness.

Leedy has placed the isoprinciple as paramount in his requirements for the selecting of poetry.

The isoprinciple, effective in music therapy, has proved important in the choice of poems for use in poetry therapy. A music that has the same feeling as the mood or mental tempo of the patient has proved a valuable tool, so poems that are close in feeling to the mood of the patient have been found helpful . . . the poem becomes symbolically an understanding someone with whom they can share . . . (Leedy, 1969:67-68)

The depressed patient cannot identify with a thoroughly optimistic poem. Instead, a depressed poem with an optimistic note at the end would be used which allows for the patient to identify with the author which thus lends credibility to the hopeful line. (Litterine, 1974:1)

Therefore, if the counselor is well aware in these different areas, the selection of a poem can go fairly smoothly, assuming the poems are available. The greater congruity between the poems and the counselor's awareness of events, feelings, and client-counselor relationship, the greater value and potential the poem will have for the client.

In reviewing the values and practical use of the poetry therapy technique, it was revealed that poetry's economy allows for it to be used easily in a time-limited counseling

session. Poetry entices participation; poetry contributes to the patient's sharing of common fears that were secret, personal, and festering. Poetry therapy hits at the level of wish-fulfilling thought, the need of the patient to be well, healthy, adequate, strong, accepted, and loved.

The poet can mask what he or society views as shameful wishes or fears through use of skillfully manipulated language and place the reader in a one-step removed distance position. From this vantage point the reader can criticize, applaud, reject or accept the characters, feel feelings he may not allow himself to feel under ordinary circumstances because these are not the displayed components of his own personality, but someone elses.

A poem, by stimulating feelings through identification, can allow the client to express feelings in a relationship that accepts them. The client can test their vitality with the counselor and decide in what ways this awareness and self-acceptance can be taken outside the counseling office. Poetry helps the client get in touch with all of himself, helps him like it, and used co-jointly with counseling, keeps the client together.

The whole thing in poetry therapy is to bring about the exposure of emotion in the patient, the interaction of emotions among the patients. In this way, poetry catalyzes and sets into motion other group processes that facilitate therapy.

In addition, the very act of creating is a self-sustaining experience, and in the poetic moment the self becomes both the ministering "therapist" and the comforted "patient". Thus in a nonjudgmental atmosphere where sad and joyous feelings can be expressed without retribution, the patient can unburden himself and discuss, deal with and integrate his released feelings, creating order out of inner chaos.

Limitations of Poetry Therapy

The values of poetry therapy are many; however, as with every technique there are a number of factors that must be taken into consideration which add a qualifying dimension to the usage of that technique. The various authors utilized throughout Leedy's book (1969) suggest a number of areas that might have bearing on the therapeutic outcome with the use of poetry therapy.

Creativity may serve the process of resistance. It may be used to enhance self-esteem rather than to alter behavior.

There have also been cases of a paradoxical reaction to dysphoric materials by the severely mentally disturbed. Schizophrenics have reacted positively to a pessimistic poem that had been reacted negatively to by "normals".

Individuals with higher IQ's tended to profit more from poetry therapy than the average or subaverage individual.

Individuals who have literary ambitions may not be suitable candidates for poetry therapy due to their critical literary tendencies.

The selection of poems to correspond with the same feeling as the mood or mental tempo of the patient is of utmost importance. This selection process requires that the therapist be well informed in the area of poetry and be familiar with what poems are at his disposal.

Poems that are more regular in their rhythmic scheme have proved more helpful than poems with less conventional patterns.

Didactic poetry that undisguisedly urged a moral course of action almost invariably raised hostile reactions in a subgroup which resented the assumption of superiority, the arrogance of the poet, the attempt to impose a parent-child

relationship on the poet/reader relationship.

It was also found that two therapists were better than one when conducting poetry therapy counseling. Sessions that were conducted by only one therapist were judged significantly less successful.

Furthermore, there appeared to be types of personalities that would more likely accept precepts, data, and moralizings of didactic poetry. The first type is manifested by individuals with dependent personalities who have not yet broken symbiotic ties, who form quick transferences to those who assume authority. Secondly, persons who think of themselves as highly moral, that good deeds will be rewarded and evil punished are more acceptable to the presentation of didactic poetry. Third, immature personalities also can be influenced by precepts of moralizing poetry.

(Margolis, 1971b)

Another potential problem in using poems is that the poem may allow the client to intellectualize his problem, objectifying it to the degree that it is not his problem. Thus, the authors recommend avoiding

. . . abstractions and to encourage the patient to talk about the specific relationship between himself and the poem. (Leedy, 1969:36)

Also, the poem may become a refuge for the client, counselor, or both. It is possible that when therapeutic encounter becomes threatening, when spontaneous feelings are expressed, the poem may be a safe place in which to retreat or be a handy weapon used for the purpose of distraction. (Margolis, 1971) When client growth also involves counselor-client confrontation, there is sometimes a natural tendency for either of the pair or both members to avoid the issue.

We become phobic, we run away . . . When you get close to the impulse, to the point where you just cannot believe that you might be able to survive, then the whirl starts. You get desperate, confused. Suddenly you don't understand anything anymore . . . (Perls, 1969:38)

The flight tendency is constantly close at hand, encouraging the individual to take the easier course of action. It is necessary that ground rules be established first, and most important, that trust, respect, caring, unconditional positive regard saturate the poetry therapy counseling setting.

The counselor must take care that he does not choose poems that primarily meet his own interpersonal needs: "the therapist must not permit his own conscious feelings and attitudes during phases of treatment to intrude in his

relations toward the patients." (Noyes and Kolk, 1963:505)

Another limitation, as pointed out by S. I. Hayakawa in a statement in Leedy's book, Poetry Therapy is as follows:

The metamessages of poetry are often missed in silent reading because they are unheard; not every reader going over a poem on the printed page knows how it should sound. But the therapist should be able to recreate the sound so that he may reach by incantation as well as by oblique, imaginative symbols, levels of response that cannot be achieved by ordinary discourse. (1969:271)

This places strong responsibility on the therapist that he be knowledgeable in all areas of poetry and also that he be able to read well. The client as well, is limited in the use of poetry therapy if he cannot read well and has to depend upon another for this service.

In summary, there are a number of factors that must be taken into consideration when considering the possible use of poetry therapy. Paradoxical reactions to dysphoric materials have been manifested by the severely mentally disturbed.

Individuals with higher IQ's tended to profit more from poetry therapy than the average or subaverage individual.

Individuals who have literary ambitions become enwrapped in literary criticism rather than therapeutic goals.

The selection of poems to correspond with the same feeling as the mood or mental tempo of the patient requires that the therapist be well informed in the area of poetry and be familiar with what poems are at his disposal.

Thus, these qualifying factors as well as the limiting factors of poetry therapy which serve the process of resistance and self-esteem in the client rather than a therapeutic movement toward the incorporation of the components of the poem in altering behavior, the necessity for auditory as well as visual stimulation in the use of poetry, the consideration necessary for the evaluation of personality type and its influence on the effectiveness of poetry therapy are but a few of the limiting factors that have bearing on a professional's decision to use or not use poetry therapy in his counseling session.

Chapter III

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Research

Historically poetry therapy is not something new. Its therapeutic qualities have been recognized by the ancients as well as the moderns. King David and King Solomon of Biblical times recorded their overflow of powerful feelings which purged their souls as well as helped their fellowman down through the ages to find comfort, joy, and peace.

Aristotle, too, observed the tranquilizing influence of verse on the transformation of feelings. He expounded on the pleasurable calm which follows when passions are spent after having been artificially stirred through the medium of art.

Centuries later modern medical insight was linked with the psychological institutions of the past where poets were recognized for their analyses and revelations about human condition long before the study of man's behavior was formalized into a science.

It was in 1928 that Eli Greifer started pioneer work in the field of poetry therapy in New York City. He and

his fellow workers saw the usefulness of poetry therapy as a tool in helping their clients get in touch with feelings and emotions and identify and work with these emotions in a growth-producing experience.

The first thing one thinks about when poetry is mentioned is the metrical format. Studies by Tedford and Hevner revealed that meter was perhaps the most expressive element of the poem in revealing emotion, both of poet and of reader. Thus, a counselor knowledgeable in this area could gain insight into his client's emotional state by noticing the type of meter used in the poems the individual chooses to read or write.

The therapeutic use of poetry in its various phases does involve creativity, enhancement of self-expression, and the development of insight. Identification with character's lives, integration of body, brain, and beauty as components of poetry and life, development of symbolic relationships, and expressing feelings, phantasies and fears are but a few of the catalytic characteristics of poetry that sets into motion other processes that facilitate mental health. Thus, goals and objectives of psychotherapy can

be realized with the help of poetry therapy.

The poem becomes symbolically an understanding someone with whom the patient can share his hopes, dreams, and despair. Through this symbiotic interaction, the patient becomes aware of his inner feelings at a conscious level, achieving one of the chief goals of psychotherapy.

There is an integration of all the client's senses and competencies in a poetry therapy session to help the individual achieve a sense of unity and equilibrium. When one finds oneself in touch with the inner reality, poetry may be the vehicle of expression to make known to the outer consciousness, the peace, joy, happiness, and pain of the inner state.

Another primary goal of counseling is self-acceptance, that the client can experience all of himself, feelings, thoughts, and body, with a high degree of positive regard. As he identifies with the counselor or poem's characters, the patient experiences a wide range of feelings from relief, frustration, to joy or exhilaration. In a well-established counseling setting, the client can share these feelings with the counselor. He can say, this is me now because these

are my feelings; thus the client is allowed to feel himself as real and integrated through this unashamed expression of these feelings. This action is a movement toward self-acceptance and competency in interpersonal relationships.

However, much of the research in poetry therapy is shallow and just a reporting on how it works, why it should work, and how it did work in a particular instance. The research has been, for the most part, descriptive. The testimonial serves to attract and convince. That is not to say that descriptive and testimonial research is to be completely disregarded; but the limitations of any system or tool must be recognized. Professional confidence in a system or theory demands this.

Therefore, in order to give a "complete" picture of poetry therapy, a number of the limitations are presented in summary. Poetry therapy is not a panacea. An individual's IQ level has a tendency to influence effectiveness. The client's personality and like or dislike for poetry certainly has a bearing on the use of poetry in a therapeutic setting. The poem allows for an avenue of escaping confrontation through intellectualizing or distraction. There is a heavy

responsibility placed on the counselor to be knowledgeable in the area of poetry and syntax in order that he be able to meet both audio and visual need in the presentation of poetry therapy.

Thus, by recognizing these limitations and their influence on the successful use of poetry in the counseling setting, a counselor can be prepared to either accept or reject poetry therapy as a potential mode of therapy.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this review must be individually measured by counselors, therapists, and other professionals desirous of facilitating mental health in their patients.

1. Research in the area of poetry therapy is sparse and shallow. Descriptive and testimonial research have been utilized as the chief methods of presentation for information regarding poetry therapy.

2. Any tool or method that has a potential for accelerating the counseling termination date is worthy of consideration.

3. This writer concludes that there are positive

practical uses for poetry in the therapeutic setting.

Reducing threat, facilitating emotional insight, promoting identification, encouraging self-acceptance are but a few.

Recommendations

As a result of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. More research in the area of poetry therapy should be done comparing individual and group counseling sessions centered around poetry therapy with counseling sessions where poetry therapy is not used.
2. Greater research is needed where the client's views concerning poetry therapy are revealed.
3. Further studies should be conducted to determine the effectiveness of counselors with a literary background versus counselors with no training in the area of poetry.
4. Research into areas of psychopathology to determine areas of greatest effectiveness with the use of poetry therapy is needed.

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