

Rowan University

Rowan Digital Works

Theses and Dissertations

5-9-2000

The effects of journal writing on self-concept in group therapy

Kimberly A. Moffitt
Rowan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd>



Part of the [Educational Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Moffitt, Kimberly A., "The effects of journal writing on self-concept in group therapy" (2000). *Theses and Dissertations*. 1717.

<https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/1717>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact graduateresearch@rowan.edu.

THE EFFECTS OF JOURNAL WRITING ON SELF-CONCEPT
IN GROUP THERAPY

by
Kimberly A. Moffitt

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 12, 2000

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved 5-9-00

ABSTRACT

Kimberly A. Moffitt
The Effects of Journal Writing on Self-Concept in Group Therap
2000
Roberta Dihoff, Ph.D.
School Psycholog

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of journal writing on children's self-concept in group therapy. It was hypothesized that students using journal writing would receive higher scores on a self-concept measurement than students who did not participate in journal writing.

The sample included 29 students from a school-based mental health program in kindergarten through eighth grade. Subjects completed a pre and post test using the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. Subjects in the experimental group participated in four weeks of journal writing between the pre and post tests while subjects in the control group did not. Test scores were analyzed and compared using a two-way mixed analysis of variance.

Results indicated that there was no significance between pretest and post test scores after implementing journal writing. Post test scores rose for both the experimental group and the control group.

MINI - ABSTRACT

Kimberly A. Moffitt
The Effects of Journal Writing on Self Concept in Group Therapy
2000

Roberta Dihoff, Ph.D.
School Psychology

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of journal writing on children's self-concept in group therapy. Results indicated that there was no significance between post test scores of the experimental and control groups after implementing journal writing. Post test scores rose for both groups.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take the time to thank those individuals who assisted me throughout the writing of my thesis.

First, I would like to thank my parents who have supported me throughout my educational

career. They have encouraged me to flourish in my academic, professional, and personal life. I am grateful for the values they instilled in me and for the motivation they gave me to succeed.

I would also like to thank my boyfriend and confidante, Michael, for his infinite patience.

Without his unconditional support, the completion of this thesis would have seemed improbable. I am grateful for his giving friendship and his ability to build my confidence.

I will always be appreciative of his desire to listen to my ideas and my frustrations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ii
LISTS OF TABLES AND FIGURES.....	v
CHAPTER	PAGE
1. THE PROBLEM.....	1
Need.....	1
Purpose.....	2
Hypothesis.....	2
Theory.....	2
Definitions.....	4
Assumptions.....	5
Limitations.....	5
Overview.....	6
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	7
Writing and Overall Well-being.....	7
The Value of Creative Arts Therapies.....	10
Self-concept.....	14
Self-concept in African American Students.....	16
The Effects of Creativity on Self-concept.....	18
Conclusion.....	19
3. DESIGN OF THE STUDY.....	20
Sample.....	20

Measurement.....	20
Variables and Hypothesis.....	21
Design.....	21
Summary.....	22
4. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS.....	23
Statement of Hypotheses.....	23
Results.....	23
Summary.....	25
5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....	26
Summary.....	26
Conclusions.....	26
Discussion.....	27
Implications for Further Research.....	28
REFERENCES.....	30

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLES	PAGE
1. Table 4.1: Mean and Standard Deviation.....	24
2. Table 4.2: Difference in Mean Scores.....	24

FIGURES	
1. Graph 4.1: Group Mean Scores.....	25

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

Need

This researcher has been a therapist with children in a school-based therapy program for two years. The researcher was interested in determining if the use of journal writing in therapy with children will assist them in raising their self concept.

When conducting psychotherapy with children, building rapport and facilitating disclosure can be difficult tasks. Children as clients are in the midst of developing cognitive, social, and emotional skills; they are not always able to simply verbalize problem areas and feelings. There is a need to examine additional ways to therapeutically support children as they move through the psychotherapeutic process, particularly in building self concept.

Expressive therapy or creative arts therapy techniques offer children safer and more appropriate ways in which to confront their feelings. Such expressive techniques include role play, art, music, play, psychodrama, and bibliotherapy. One technique which could prove to be a useful tool is journal writing. Research exists which has examined the benefits of creative arts therapies; however, additional research needs to examine the benefits of writing in the therapeutic relationship. The specific use of journal writing as an expressive therapy is important to examine as it could provide an outlet for catharsis and the opportunity to develop insight. This study will attempt to contribute support for using journal writing in both individual and group therapy with children.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of journal writing in group therapy on children's self-concept. It attempted to examine the question of whether or not there is a relationship between journal writing and higher self-concept. Two groups already receiving therapy participated in the study with one group utilizing journal writing while the other group did not. This study attempted to present support that journal writing will be beneficial for the clients in raising self concept.

Hypothesis

Students in group therapy who are exposed to journal writing will ultimately develop higher self concepts than those students who are not exposed to journal writing in group therapy. Students in the first group will be exposed to journal writing and will receive higher scores on a self concept scale than the students in the second group who will not be exposed to journal writing.

Theory

Existing research and theory advocates the use of writing in creative arts therapy. Writing as a therapeutic technique has benefits for the self and for the therapy group. Clients who utilize writing are embarking on their own journey of self-discovery and using that self discovery to build communication within the therapy group.

The History of Journal Writing

The earliest known journals were kept by the Chinese in the first century A.D. and were historical documents; this documentation continued for centuries, with the documentation of the Mayflower landing in journal form (Youga, 1995). Journals as personal expression began to appear in the time of the Renaissance. More intimate journal writing emerged in France during the Revolution, and the confessional and

passionate style of this writing led to the publication of many journals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe and the United States (Youga, 1995). For the past several decades, writing has proved to be valuable for women who were unable or forbidden to have any writing published in a literary world dominated by men. Writing has begun to receive attention as a beneficial therapeutic tool as pioneers in the field of journal writing have seen the benefits of journal writing throughout history; one example of coping through journal writing can be found in *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

Recent Theory of Writing

In using writing to assist the client in developing self awareness, Mazza (1987) used writing in brief psychotherapy. He incorporated creative writing into several "phases" of therapy, beginning with the use of a daily journal and ending with more structured writing. Mazza (1987) stated that writing in therapy "can be helpful in providing the client with new experiences which promote early engagement in the therapeutic process" (p. 83).

Williams (1991) provided additional support for the idea that writing can be a tool for self discovery. In her work with sexual abuse survivors, Williams addressed the use of writing to explore the clients' beliefs about trust, safety, power, and self-esteem. Williams (1991) theorized that writing is empowering for the clients because it allows for the change in troubling belief systems as well as the opportunity to give voice to otherwise undisclosed feelings.

Theory also discusses the benefits of writing in group. Goldstein-Roca and Crisafulli (1994) discussed the use of writing within a treatment model called Integrative Creative Arts Therapy (ICAT). The authors reported on the use of writing in an unstructured format to facilitate the expression of feelings. Goldstein-Roca and Crisafulli (1994) state:

In ICAT's poetry groups, we encourage the use of analogy or direct reference to feelings and/or thoughts without restriction as to grammar, spelling, or content. Giving patients this freedom of expression often aids in decreasing their anxiety as evidenced by their increased willingness to participate after these freedoms have been explained to them. (p. 220)

The authors discussed sessions involving a 16 year old client who used the ICAT. Many of the techniques took place in group sessions. The writing seemed to provide an outlet for the client to express her emotions while at the same time processing them. This dual benefit of writing within this therapy model allowed for the client's progress.

Chavis (1986) emphasized the use of writing, specifically poetry, in group therapy. Her case studies "illustrate how poetry can help clients express and identify feelings, can stimulate awareness of such family issues as role conflict and communication difficulties, and can encourage creative problem-solving in the face of situational crises" (Chavis, 1986, p. 121). In group therapy, the use of writing seems to help clients realize that common themes exist in their lives, as exposed in their writing. When the clients share their writings, they experience the comfort in identifying with other group members (Chavis, 1986).

Definitions

Self concept: a child's perception of his or her strengths, abilities, and self-worth.

School-based partial program: a mental health program which conducts group and individual therapy in a school setting; clients receive therapy for one to three hours per day.

Group therapy: therapy (consisting of at least ten clients) which addresses social, emotional, and behavioral functioning through discussion, therapeutic activities, and behavior modification.

Clients: children, ages 7 to 13, who are enrolled in the school-based partial program, meaning that they receive both group and individual therapy.

Structured journal writing: writing tasks which have a specific direction or form, such as journal topics or sentence completion.

Unstructured journal writing: writing tasks which have no specified direction; the client is responsible for choosing the topic about which to write.

Assumptions

Concerning this study, some assumptions were formed. The researcher facilitated the experimental group which was exposed to journal writing; in this way, the researcher gave the writing tasks to the clients. The researcher was accompanied in group therapy by a second therapist. Two other therapists facilitated the control group which did not receive the journal writing tasks. It was assumed that the different therapists would not influence the results of this study as all therapists had received the same training. It was also assumed that none of the clients had previously used journal writing in group therapy as a way to enhance self concept.

Limitations

This study has limitations due to population, size, and age. The study examined a population from the inner city; all of the students were African American. The study did not include subjects from suburban or rural areas. There was a lack of diversity. Each

group included approximately at least 10 subjects. The ages varied from 7 to 13. Because the sample size was small, it was difficult to compare scores between age groups. Due to the homogeneous group and small sample size, the results of the study cannot be applicable to larger, more diverse groups.

Overview

In CHAPTER TWO, important literature regarding self concept in children as well as the use of writing with children will be reviewed. CHAPTER THREE will discuss the design and methodology of the study. CHAPTER FOUR will include the analysis of the data and results of the study. CHAPTER FIVE will include a summary and conclusion as well as implications and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Current research indicates that writing and the use of other creative arts therapies are beneficial to overall health as well as the therapeutic process. This section will first review studies which show a connection between writing as disclosure and overall well-being. Because other forms of creativity are significant therapeutic tools, this chapter will also review some of the existing literature on creative arts therapies. Next, the chapter will present a review of self-concept in children in school, with attention given to the effects of classification and family influence. As this study focuses primarily on an entirely African American subject pool, a section of this chapter will review research on self-concept in African American children. Finally, the chapter will conclude with research that connects creativity to self-concept, a brief summary of all of the findings, and implications for future research.

Writing and Overall Well-being

Can writing about traumatic experiences lead to better health? A research synthesis conducted by Smyth (1998) found that a writing task led to improved health in four areas: reported physical health, psychological well-being, physiological functioning, and general functioning (Smyth, 1998). The psychologist James Pennebaker has conducted extensive research in the uses of writing as an alternative for coping with stress. The thinking that prompted the use of writing was the belief that avoiding disclosure of thoughts and feelings is a form of inhibition (Pennebaker, 1997). In inhibition, the autonomic and central nervous systems are working to constrain behavior; it is theorized that this constraint can lead to increased illnesses and other mental and physical problems related to stress (Pennebaker, 1997). "Letting go" through disclosure, or essentially being uninhibited, is theorized to be a way of coping that leads to positive

overall health. The suggestion is that writing about traumatic experiences leads to cognitive processing, which in turn leads to positive physiological change (Pennebaker, 1989).

Pennebaker first examines the benefits of disclosure through talking about traumatic experiences. In one study, Pennebaker examines the connection between disclosure and health among Holocaust survivors. Pennebaker (1989) predicted that disclosure through interviews would positively influence long-term health. During the interview, the autonomic nervous system activity (ANS) was monitored through recordings of the skin conductance level (SCL) and heart rate (HR). The prediction was that those survivors who exhibited low SCLs while disclosing extremely traumatic information would be in better health than those who had low-levels of disclosure (Pennebaker, 1989). The reasoning behind this monitoring was that the subjects who exhibited lower SCLs were more uninhibited with their disclosures than those with higher SCLs. Subjects were contacted a week before and 14 months after the interview to discuss their health. Pennebaker (1989) found that survivors with lower SCLs during high level of disclosure were in better health a year after the experiment than the survivors with low levels of disclosure.

Researchers began to examine the use of writing tasks to generate disclosure. With respect to the use of writing, Pennebaker (1997) states:

The writing paradigm is exceptionally powerful. Participants—from honor students to maximum-security prisoners—disclose a remarkable range and depth of traumatic experiences. Lost loves, deaths, incidents of sexual and physical abuse, and tragic failures are common themes in all of the studies. If nothing else, the paradigm demonstrates that when individuals are given the opportunity to disclose deeply personal aspects of their lives, they readily do so. Even though a large number of participants report crying or being deeply upset by the experience,

the overwhelming majority report that the writing experience was valuable and meaningful in their lives. (p. 162)

Pennebaker (1997) goes on to assert that disclosure through writing can lead to physical and mental well-being and a development of a positive way of coping.

Pennebaker (1988) conducted another study with introductory psychology students, assigned to one of four groups. The control group was asked to write for 15 minutes each day for four consecutive days on trivial topics. The remaining groups were labeled trauma-fact, trauma-emotion, and trauma-combination; the subjects in these groups were instructed to write about their most traumatic experiences for four days, according to the guidelines of their assigned group. Each day, before and after writing, the subjects completed questionnaires about their health. For six months after the experiment, data was collected about visits to the health center for illnesses. The results of the study showed that subjects in the trauma-emotion group and the trauma-combination group reported the most anxiety and depression each day after writing; however, in the follow-up questionnaires, these groups reported feeling the healthiest, happiest, and least anxious. The trauma-facts group and the control group appeared unaffected by the writing. Overall, according to data, the trauma-combination group showed a drop in visits to the health center after the experiment than the subjects from the other groups (Pennebaker, 1988).

In a study by Lepore (1997), 74 subjects participated in a writing task pertaining to taking a required examination for acceptance to graduate school (such as the GREs or the GMATs). One group was given instructions to write about thoughts and feelings pertaining to the test, including goals and the effects of the exam on their lives. The control group was instructed to objectively describe their activities over the course of 24 hours, including socialization and studying. The subjects were explicitly told not to mention feelings or opinions. Several measurements were used to assess depressive symptoms, intrusive thoughts, and the extent to which the writing task was "meaningful

or personal" to the subjects (Lepore, 1997). The results indicated that subjects who wrote the expressive essays had lower levels of depressive symptoms as the exam date approached than the subjects who wrote about the trivial topics. Lepore (1997) also discusses the connection between intrusive thoughts one month before the exam and depressive symptoms three days before the exam in the subjects in the control group, but not the subjects who wrote the expressive essays. Lepore proposed that the expressive writing task could have given the subjects the chance to process their stressors through a positive way of coping (Lepore, 1997). Implied in these findings is the idea that superficial writing tasks do not lead to beneficial emotional expression as do writing tasks that provoke insight.

Bootzin (1997) advocates additional studies on the effects of writing on coping with specific problems. In this way, Bootzin believes, the use of writing may be further developed in order to have more explicit directions within the therapeutic context (Bootzin, 1997). Although more research needs to be conducted on the effects of writing on specific psychological problems, writing in therapy can be a diverse procedure and one which is best suited to the individual needs of the client. Writing is one way to focus on the use of creativity in a mental health setting, but as follows, but the following studies will concentrate on other pertinent creative arts therapies to show the benefits of creativity.

The Value of Creative Arts Therapies

The use of creativity has assisted in the therapeutic process in providing outlets for disclosure and expression of feelings. With respect to the creative process in therapy, Talerico (1985) writes:

There is a natural and powerful link between the creative process and therapy because, like many therapeutic approaches, creativity encourages expression of feelings, confidence through risk-taking, communication with the

unconscious, development of new insights, resolution of conflict, reduction of anxiety, and rechanneling of psychic energy for problem-solving purposes.

(p. 231)

Such creative arts techniques include art and music therapy, dance and movement, drama, bibliotherapy, poetry therapy, and journal writing. These therapies aid in developing creative problem-solving and coping of emotional issues (Harvey, 1989). They also help in allowing the client to "externalize the problem", a technique in which the clients are able to separate the problem from themselves in order to change their perspective and develop new perspectives in order to cope with the problem (White, 1984).

Creative arts therapies can also be viewed as the use of the defense mechanism of sublimation. Feldman (1993) defines sublimation as "a defense mechanism, considered healthy by Freud, in which a person diverts unwanted impulses into socially acceptable thoughts, feelings, or behaviors" (Feldman, 1993, p. 486). Elliott (1979) discusses the use of creativity as sublimation in therapy because the creativity holds importance for the patient; the client is using his or her own creativity to develop self-esteem. Rather than using more maladaptive defense mechanisms, the clients are essentially addressing their problems through creativity.

Examples

Bibliotherapy is a creative arts therapy technique which theorizes that through reading, the client can identify with the literary characters and through this identification, become more able to express their thoughts and feelings (Gladding, 1991).

Bibliotherapist Hynes (1987) discusses the uses of bibliotherapy in a women's shelter through reading poetry written by battered women. In a group setting, the members read and react to a poem through a four-step process which Hynes (1987) outlines: recognition (the process of determining that the literature has a connection to one's own life experience), examination (self-awareness through examining images, language, and

metaphor), juxtaposition (viewing the poem in several different ways in order to clarify a way of approaching their experiences), and self-application (evaluating the meaning of their response to the poem to determine changes in feelings and actions, which is particularly important if the clients are learning to take action for themselves). The process of bibliotherapy as a creative arts therapy is beneficial in that it evokes creativity and insight in the identification with a character's own experiences which are similar to the client's own experiences.

As previously discussed, creative therapies can allow for Whites's (1984) idea of externalizing the problem. Zimmerman and Shepard (1993) examine the use of conversation, art, and writing in treatment of bulimic women in group therapy. The participants were nine undergraduate women suffering from bulimia. Each participant was asked to name the negative influence of their bulimia in order to externalize the bulimia as separate from themselves. The subjects then drew pictures of this externalized force and wrote letters to the externalized influence in an effort to further separate and process the problem (Zimmerman and Shepard, 1987). Through self-reports, the members of the group asserted that they underwent positive changes from the externalization through the changing of negative self-perceptions and problem behaviors (Zimmerman and Shepard, 1987).

Poetry therapy is another form of creative arts therapy. Woytowich (1994) proposes that just as writing is an effective tool used by educators, therapists can also incorporate this technique into the therapy setting. Clients write about significant events and subsequent thoughts and feelings; the therapist and client then explore the verses together (Woytowich, 1994). Gladding (1987) writes that when using poetry therapy with children, the therapist should use three guidelines: if reading poetry, the poems should be relevant and brief; the poetry exercises should be clear and structured; the students should have the freedom to express themselves in their own way, such as words that don't rhyme and poetry that doesn't have a strict format. Gladding (1987) also advocates the use of

poetry with other expressive arts therapies such as art and music therapy. Poetry is "helpful in promoting increased sensitivity and insight among young children while assisting them in achieving greater cognitive, emotional, and behavioral awareness of themselves, others, and the world in which they live" (Gladding, 1987, p. 310).

Kissman (1989) describes poetry therapy as a way to record thoughts and feelings through verse. Furthermore, poetry therapy helps to express feelings that could lead to maladaptive behaviors and concerns in personal and interpersonal relationships if those feelings are not expressed (Kissman, 1989). Mayers (1995) takes the use of poetry therapy one step further in examining the use of songwriting, which is the writing of words and development of a tune in order to foster self expression. Songwriting can be particularly helpful with traumatized children because they are encouraged to be creative and in control of the helping process (Mayers, 1995). Mayers (1995) cites case studies in which traumatized children found ways to decrease anxiety and distress as well as to learn to cope with traumatic situations (Mayers, 1995).

Journal writing, the creative arts focus this study, is described by Macnab, Beckett, Park, and Sheckter as an important facilitator for psychological coping:

Journal writing can be a release for grief, anger, and stress and measurably reduces depression. Writing can be a powerful tool for reflection and self-discovery in any life situation. Keeping a journal can be a valuable process for gaining clarity, balance, and honesty, as well as dealing with issues that are difficult to verbalize. (p. 150)

Macnab et. al. (1998) used journal writing with parents of premature infants to determine if journal writing had an effect on reducing stress. Of the subjects who kept a journal, 73% reported that writing had a positive effect on reducing stress. The topics were unstructured; further studies should concentrate on the comparison of structured versus unstructured journal writing to determine if there is a difference in the benefits of these types of journal writing.

Jordan and Luciano (1995) propose that traditional psychotherapy and writing in therapy can benefit each other. Writing is cathartic and can lead to insight; the client and therapist can discuss the writing to open up communication (Jordan and Luciano, 1995). The client has the responsibility to complete the writing, so the self-realization that may occur is a direct connection to his or her actions.

Bondy et. al. (1990) studied the use of writing within a "personal life history book" in the group treatment of foster children. After writing for 12-16 weeks, problem behaviors were significantly reduced and academic performance improved (Bondy et. al., 1990). The rise in academics indicates that writing could have helped in coping with life stressors as well as raising self-concepts. Mazza (1993) suggests that along with helping the client to change behavior, a creative arts therapy focus such as poetry therapy can assist in assessing problem behaviors and developing treatment. To illustrate this suggestion, Mazza (1993) discusses prior research in which the poetry of two adolescents was examined; this poetry indicated suicidal ideation (Mazza, 1993). Poetry--and additional forms of writing and creativity--can assist both the client and therapist in monitoring and evaluating the client's thoughts and feelings to determine the appropriate treatment.

Self-concept

Salmivalli (1998) defines self-concept as "one's perceptions of one's unique attributes and traits" (Salmivalli, 1998, p. 334). From an early age, children use words such as "nice", "shy", or "mean" to explain others' behaviors (Daniels, 1998). Haynes (1990) writes that self-concept of children is "an important aspect of psychosocial development" (Haynes, 1990, p. 199). Their behavior is a reflection of their self evaluations. Haynes (1990) stated that children receive messages about themselves first from their parents, next from teachers and their peers. These messages become a part of children's own developing self-concept.

One particular study examined whether or not high or low self concept related to these dispositions could be a predictor of behavior (Daniels, 1998). The subjects were asked to predict feelings and performance of characters based on their levels of self esteem. The subjects predicted that characters who liked themselves would be more confident in a challenging situation and would perform better. Daniels (1998) suggested that this finding leads to the assumption that children have the ability to determine the link between self esteem and performance; however, he goes on to state that at a very young age, children may overgeneralize positive characteristics as connected to "good" behavior. As cognitive development occurs, it might be possible for children to better distinguish between self concept and behavior with more valid explanations.

Atherly (1990) hypothesized that students in a higher socio-economic status would have higher self concepts than students on a lower socio-economic status. Results found that students in the school from a lower socio-economic background reported themselves to be less happy and less well-behaved than students from the more affluent schools (as reported through the *Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale*); however, their views of their academic abilities were not negatively affected. Overall, the self-concepts of the students from the more economically depressed schools who excelled in certain subjects were higher than the students' overall self concepts from the more affluent schools. Atherly (1990) suggests that it is academic ability rather than socio-economic status which affects a student's self-concept.

Another study by Stanovich, Jordan, and Perot (1998) compared the self-concepts of four groups of students: one group was categorized by disabilities, one group was identified as being academically at-risk, one group spoke English as a second language, and the fourth group was noncategorized. All students in the study were participating in a special education/inclusion program. Stanovich et. al. (1998) found that students who were categorized had lower self-concept scores than the students who were noncategorized. Subsequently, these students also scored lower on a measure of social

integration. These findings indicate that students who are "labeled" are more likely to have a lower perception of their abilities and to be more socially isolated than peers who are not labeled.

In a study by Pierangelo (1980), the self-concepts of three groups--those classified as learning disabled, academic underachievers, and academic achievers--were examined. The differences in their social interactions were also studied. Pierangelo (1980) found that students who were classified as learning disabled scored lower in self-concept and social interaction than students who were academic achievers. The same differences were found between the underachievers and the achievers. The results of this study and the results of the Stanovich et. al (1998) study seem to indicate that classifications or labels have a negative effect on self-concept. It could be that the self-concept of the students is contingent upon the type of label, for example, a student's self-concept may be lower if he or she is in special education and perceives this label to mean that he or she is less capable than a student labeled as achieving. It is also important to further investigate social self-concept as in both studies, socialization was affected by the classifications, indicating that lower self-concept made the subjects less confident in their socialization skills.

To assist in building self-concept, support in developing needed skills could be helpful. McCarty (1993) examined the effects of participation in a social support program on the self-concept of fourth graders. The results of the study showed that subjects who participated in the program had higher self-concept scores than those who did not participate in the program. Further research in this area would be beneficial to determine what types of social support programs are most effective and if they would be helpful with those students who are classified, particularly in developing confidence in socialization.

Self-concept in African American Students

For the purpose of this study, this researcher will examine some of the research available on self-concept of at-risk African American students as the subjects in this study are composed of entirely African American subjects. Wood, Hillman, and Sawilowsk (1996) described at-risk African American students as at-risk due to low/poor socio-economic conditions and academic achievement at least two to four years below grade level. The outcomes of these stressors are family problems and behavioral problems.

Does self concept affect school adjustment, and if so, what dimensions of self-concept are the strongest predictors of behavior? Haynes (1990) examined these relationships in a study of 142 African American students in an urban school. Six self-concept dimensions were related to three behavioral domains: general classroom behavior, group participation, and attitude toward authority. Children's concepts of their own behavior was the biggest predictor of each of the three behavior areas (Haynes, 1990). This indicates that the children's views of themselves had an influence on their progress in school, in groups, and with authority. According to Haynes, the findings seemed to indicate that the "Children became what they believed themselves to be" (Haynes, 1990, p. 205).

Wood, Hillman, and Sawilowsky (1992) administered the Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale to 196 African American students who were academically at-risk and underachieving in an urban middle-school population. The findings indicate that despite being at-risk, the subjects scored high on global self-concept. Wood et al. (1992) discussed that when the measurement is one of racial self-concept, previous research seems to show that the self-concept scores are significantly lower.

In a disadvantaged urban setting, does the family influence self-concept in African American students? Halle, Costes, and Mahoney (1997) state that "it should be noted that although economic hardship and social discrimination provide difficult obstacles to overcome, parents' behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, goals, and lifestyles may circumvent the

detrimental effects of poverty, thereby fostering not only achievement striving but also academic success in some disadvantaged children) Halle et. al, 1997, p. 527). Halle et al. (1997) examined which behaviors and beliefs of parents of economically disadvantaged children fostered academic achievement. The results showed that parent's perceptions of their children's academic abilities were associated with achievement scores, even more so than the children's own academic self-concepts. There was no connection between specific behaviors and children's achievement, a finding that Halle et. al. (1997) believe needs to be further addressed so that caretakers can effectively combine beliefs with achievement-promoting behaviors.

Obiaker (1992) reports that African American students struggle in school with race, gender, and class perceptions; however, Obiaker proposes that according to traditional models of self-concept, African Americans are overgeneralized to have low self-concepts (Obiaker, 1992). Obiaker states that since the typical instruments that are used to measure self-concept are normed on cultures different from that of the African American student, it is not valid to compare their scores. Obiaker also asserts that because educators often judge African Americans to have a low self-concept, the students are merely fulfilling this belief through their behaviors (Obiaker, 1992). Obiaker proposes that in the schools, educators need to challenge their students while at the same time being sensitive to their needs. The educators should avoid labels. Another recommendation was for the development of relative programs that address self-appreciation and achievement of goals (Obiaker, 1992).

The Effects of Creativity on Self-concept

Harvey (1989) conducted a study examining the effects of creative arts therapies on four variables of creative thinking, self-concept, motivation, and reading achievement in elementary school students. The study implemented creative arts sessions using art, music, and movement. the activities were given two times a week for 30 minutes over a

twelve week period. Pre and post test measurements were used to assess each of the four variables. Findings of the study were that the creative arts therapies were positively correlated with increased verbal and creative thinking as well as reading comprehension. Students also become more acutely aware of their creative capabilities, indicating a growth of self-concept (Harvey, 1989).

Flaherty (1992) reported that students who participated in a holistic creativity program had an increase in self-concept as measured by the Piers-Harris. The program included such creative outlets as art, movement, writing, and drama. Flaherty (1992) proposes that since the creativity had a positive effect on the student's self-concept, educators should begin to incorporate more creativity into the classroom in an effort to raise self-concept.

Conclusion

The existing research on creative arts therapy, particularly writing, indicates that creativity in therapy with children would be a beneficial tool for expression of feeling. Because writing appears to have a positive effect on health and on the ability for disclosure and insight, writing could be a powerful element to raising self-concept. The studies on self-concept seem to indicate that the students' own perceptions of their abilities affect their academic and social progress. As many children today are labeled according to their academic placement, the self-concept of these children could be a reflection of what they expect to be *able* to achieve.

There is little research examining the effects of creativity on self-concept, though the studies explored in this chapter indicated a correlation between higher self-concept and creativity. With that information, it would be important and advantageous to further explore how creativity could assist in raising the self-concepts of children, particularly through journal writing. CHAPTER THREE will detail the design of the study which will address the benefits of journal writing on raising self-concept.

CHAPTER THREE: DESIGN OF STUDY

Sample

In this study, the population consisted of 29 students from a school-based, partial hospitalization program in South Philadelphia. The students were referred to this mental health program by teachers, parents, or the school counselor. The partial program was held at two different public schools in the inner city, consisting of grades kindergarten through eighth. The students came from families with a low socioeconomic status. The students ranged in age from 8 to 13 years old. The subjects were all African American students. From the first public school, sixteen students participated in the journal writing in the experimental group. The control group consisted of thirteen students from the second public school who did not participate in the journal writing.

Measurement

Self concept was measured by the *Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale*. The *Piers-Harris* is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 80 items. The items were statements to which the subjects answer "yes" or "no" when applying the statements to how they feel about themselves. The *Piers-Harris* was written on a third grade reading level and was normed to be used with children ages 8-18. The scales was designed to measure the effect of a child's self-evaluative attitude and behaviors on self-concept (Piers, 1984, p. 2). The *Piers-Harris* has six subscales: Behavior, Intellectual and School Status, Physical Appearance and Attributes, Anxiety, Popularity, and Happiness and Satisfaction.

Test-retest reliability coefficients of the *Piers-Harris* ranged from .42 (with an interval of 8 months) to .96 (with an interval of 3 to 4 weeks). With respect to validity, the *Piers-Harris* reported that estimates of content, criterion-related, and construct validity were obtained. During the development of the test, items with low discriminatory power

were dropped in order to build content validity into the scale. The scores and responses of other criterion groups were compared to the *Piers-Harris*; validity results indicated that scales which resemble the *Piers-Harris* in age range and test format had the higher correlation. The normative mean score for the *Piers-Harris* was 51.84.

Variables and Hypotheses

In this study, the independent variable was journal writing. The dependent variables were the pretest and post test scores on the *Piers-Harris* scale.

Null hypothesis: Journal writing will have no effect on children's self-concept.

Alternative hypothesis: Students who participate in journal writing activities will attain higher scores on a self-concept scale than students who did not use journal writing.

Students who did not participate in the journal writing activities will not have an increase in self-concept scores.

Design

This study was a 2 X 2 with repeated factor design. The data was obtained from two school-based partial programs (within the same mental health company) at two different urban public schools. The experimental group received group therapy three times a week, one hour per day. During each one-hour session, the subjects participated in a fifteen-minute, structured journal writing activity, facilitated by two therapists. The researcher used structured journal writing tasks from Kranz's (1996) therapeutic journal *All About Me*.

The control group also received three days of partial services with each session running for one hour. These subjects did not use journal writing during their therapy;

their groups were also facilitated by two therapists. All therapists in the program have received the same training in working with children and in facilitating group therapy.

Both groups took the *Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale* before the experimental group began the journal writing tasks. After journal writing was incorporated into therapy in the experimental group for four weeks, the *Piers-Harris* was given again to both groups. The pre and post test scores were then compared within each group and to each other.

Summary

This study obtained data from subjects in a school-based partial program in two different inner city public schools. The two groups contrasted in the structured journal writing task that was given, with one group using journal writing while the other group did not. Scores from the *Piers-Harris* were given before and after the experiment to observe if an increase in self-concept existed in the group using the journal writing.

The following chapters will give the data and discuss the results from the analysis. Based on these results, conclusions will be discussed as well as implications for future studies.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

In this chapter, the introduction will revisit the purpose of the study and will briefly discuss the methods of the study. The hypothesis will then be restated. Finally, the results will be presented and summarized.

The purpose of this study was to compare the effects of journal writing on self concept. Two groups participated in the study with the experimental group completing structured journal writing activities while the control group received no journal writing tasks. The experimental group consisted of 13 subjects while the experimental group consisted of 16 subjects. The self-concepts of the subjects were evaluated in a pretest and a post test. Self-concept was evaluated using the *Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale*.

Statement of Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis: Journal writing has no effect on pretest and post test scores from the subjects in the experimental group.

Alternative Hypothesis: Students who participate in journal writing activities will attain higher scores on the *Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale* than students who did not use journal writing. Students who did not participate in journal writing activities will not have an increase in self-concept scores.

Results

A two-way mixed analysis of variance was performed on the data. The Mean pretest scores of the control and experimental groups were as follows: (Mc=60.462, SD=6.540; Me=61.923, SD=11.599). The Mean post test scores of the control and experimental groups were as follows: (Mc=61.923, SD=9.970; Me=56.000, SD=15.218). These results are indicated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Mean and Standard Deviation

	N	M(pre)	SD(pre)	M(post)	SD(post)
Contro	13	60.462	6.54	61.923	9.97
Experimental	16	55	11.599	56	15.218

The mean of the control group rose 1.461 from pre to post scores. The mean of the experimental group rose 1.00 from pre to post scores. These results are indicated in Table 4.2.

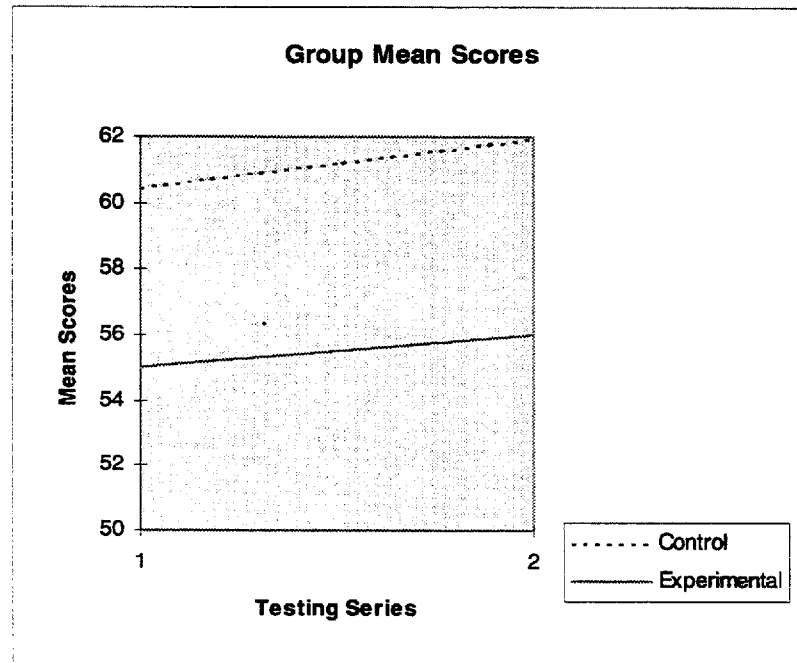
Table 4.2: Difference in Mean Scores

	M(pre)	M(post)	Difference
Contro	60.462	61.923	1.461
Experimental	55	56	1

Comparison of the test score results shows that the control group rose .461 higher than the experimental group. The results indicated that there was no significance at a .174 level between the pretest and post test scores in the experimental group after implementing the journal writing activities.

Graph 4.1 gives an illustrated description of the pretest and post test scores for the experimental and control groups. The graph displays the range of scores across the two testing series. The control group (dashed line) had a higher score at the onset of the study. After the experiment of introducing the journal writing was completed, the post test results indicated that the control group still maintained higher scores than the experimental group (red line), indicating no effect from the journal writing.

Graph 4.1



Summary

The results of the data showed that there was no difference in self-concept scores between groups after journal writing was implemented into the experimental group. Based on these results, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. The results indicated no support for the alternative hypothesis. While the post test scores for the experimental group rose, the post test scores also rose for the control group. These results will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

In group therapy with children, creative arts therapies can offer innovative ways to build rapport and to develop therapeutic techniques for addressing clinical issues. Specifically, the creative arts technique of journal writing could benefit clients in group therapy in providing them with a safe and introspective way to express their needs and feelings. Journal writing could also offer children in therapy the opportunity to build self-concept if the activities are structured and address the way in which children feel about themselves.

This study was designed to examine whether the use of journal writing would improve the self-concepts of the subjects who used writing in therapy. *The Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale* was used in pre and post tests with the experimental group which used journal writing and the control group which did not participate in journal writing. Post test scores were compared for both groups to determine if the journal writing had an effect on scores.

Conclusions

The results of the study indicated no significance between the post test scores of the control and experimental groups. After conducting a two-way mixed analysis of variance on the data, the results showed that scores rose for both groups. The rise in scores of the experimental group cannot be attributed to the implementation of journal writing because the scores rose for the control group as well. These results indicated that

other factors must be attributed to the change in scores. This researcher believes that the rise in self-concept scores could be due to change in life stressors or daily mood changes.

Also, the normed scores for the *Piers-Harris* have a mean of 51.84, as listed in the testing manual (Harris, 1984). The mean pre test scores for the control group and experimental group were 60.462 and 55, respectively; the mean post test scores were 61.923 and 56, respectively. Both the pre and post test scores were higher than the mean of the normed sample, indicating either subject tendency to answer more favorably than accurately or already high self-concepts among subjects.

Discussion

The focus of this study was to investigate the benefits of journal writing in group therapy on self-concept. The results suggests that implementing journal writing has no effect on positive changes in self-concept. One possible reason for the insignificant findings is that the actual amount of time in which journal writing was implemented in the experimental group was not long enough to warrant a change in self-concept scores. Another factor is the fact that the subjects have a variety of mental health diagnoses, making them a very heterogeneous group. This factor could have affected both their willingness to adequately use the journal writing activities and the validity of their responses on the *Piers-Harris*. For example, subjects with behavioral diagnoses such as oppositional defiant disorder could have scored high on both the pre test and the post test due their perceptions of their own behaviors as acceptable and justified. They might not have used the journal writing as an outlet for exploring their self-concepts. The post test scores of children with emotional disorders might have been positively affected by the journal writing; however, when included with the test scores of the other subjects, this data might not have been sufficient enough to indicate a significant change. Finally, dail changes in mood could have affected the test scores, which could be attributed to the rise in scores for the control group as well as the experimental group.

Implications for Future Research

This study was limited in that it did not address the effects of age, gender, and type of education (special education, regular classroom, etc.) on the results of the study. Future research in examining these factors might be beneficial in exploring which groups journal writing will positively affect. Another suggestion for future research is to address the effects of race on journal writing and self-concept. In this study, the population was limited to all African American subjects. The results cannot be generalized to other populations, indicating a need for further research.

Future studies should address the need for a more homogeneous group of subjects in order to address the effects of writing on subjects with a particular diagnosis. In this way, these studies could be beneficial in addressing whether or not certain disorders gain more insight and self-concept from journal writing than other disorders.

Another consideration for future research would be to implement the journal writing in individual therapy sessions rather than in a group setting. In this manner, the subjects would have a more personal setting in which to write about their feelings a self-concept. Another suggestion for future research would be individual administration of the Piers-Harris as completing the test in the presence of peers could have affected accurate responses. As previously mentioned, both the pre and post test scores were higher than the mean of the normed sample. These results could be due to responses that were given to be perceived as favorable. Future studies could assess if journal writing has more of an effect when both the tests and journal activities are given independently. Future research should also examine the use of unstructured journal activities to determine if less specified directions lead to more productive writing sessions.

Another suggestion for future research would be to examine the effects of journal writing in homogenous groups, not just with diagnoses but also with the specific target of the groups. The literature seemed to indicate that writing as well as other creative arts

therapies were used in homogeneous groups such as survivors of sexual abuse and treatment of foster children. Future studies might address the benefits of journal writing in raising self-concept within these specific groups.

References

- Atherley, C. A. (1990). The effects of academic achievement and socio-economic status upon the self-concept in the middle years of school: A case study. Educational Research, 32 (3), 224-229.
- Boozin, R. R. (1997). Examining the theory and clinical utility of writing about emotional experiences. Psychological Science, 8 (3), 167-169.
- Chavis, G. G. (1986). The use of poetry for clients dealing with family issues. The Arts in Psychotherapy, 13, 121-128.
- Daniels, D. H. (1998). Age differences in concepts of self-esteem. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 44 (2), 234-258.
- Elliott, C. J. (1979). The patient's creativity in reorganization of the representational world. The International Review of Psychoanalysis, 6 (4), 455-465.
- Flaherty, M. A. (1992). The effects of a holistic creativity program on the self-concept and creativity of third graders. Journal of Creative Behavior, 26 (3), 165-171.
- Feldman, R. S. (1993). Understanding Psychology. Massachusetts: McGraw-Hill.
- Gladding, S. (1987). Poetic expressions: A counseling art in elementary schools. Elementary School Guidance and Counseling, 21 (4), 307-311.
- Gladding, S. & Gladding, C. (1991). The ABCs of bibliotherapy for school counselors. School Counselor, 39 (1), 7-13.
- Goldstein-Roca, S. & Crisafulli, T. (1994). Integrative creative arts therapy: A brief treatment model. The Arts in Psychotherapy, 21, 219-222.
- Halle, T. G., Kurtz-Costes, B., & Mahoney, J. L. (1997). Family influences on school achievement in low-income, African-American children. Journal of Educational Psychology, 89 (3), 527-537.

Harvey, S. (1989). Creative arts therapies in the classroom: A study of cognitive, emotional, and motivational changes. The American Journal of Dance Therapy, 11 (2), 85-100.

Haynes, N. M. (1990). Influence of self-concept on school adjustment among middle-school students. The Journal of Social Psychology, 130 (2), 199-207.

Hynes, A. (1987). Biblio/poetry therapy in women's shelters. The American Journal of Social Psychology, 7 (2), 112-116.

Jordan, K. B., & Luciano, L. A. (1995). Programmed writing and therapy with symbiotically enmeshed patients. American Journal of Psychotherapy, 49 (2), 225-236.

Kissman, K. (1989). Poetry and feminist social work. Journal of Poetry Therapy, 2 (4), 221-230.

Kranz, L. (1996). All About Me. Arizona: Northland Publishing.

Lepore, S. J. (1997). Expressive writing moderates the relation between intrusive thoughts and depressive symptoms. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73 (5), 1030-1037.

Mayers, K. S. (1995). Songwriting as a way to decrease anxiety and distress in traumatized children. The Arts in Psychotherapy, 22 (5), 495-498.

Mazza, N. (1993). Poetry therapy: Toward a research agenda for the 1990s. The Arts in Psychotherapy, 20, 51-59.

Mazza, N. (1987). Poetic approaches in brief psychotherapy. The American Journal of Social Psychiatry, 7 (2), 81-83.

McCarty, P. S. (1995). An assessment of the effects of a social support program on the self-concept of fourth grade students as measured by the Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale. Dissertation Abstracts International, 55 (7-A), 1829.

Macnab, A. J., Beckett, L. Y., Park, C. C., & Sheckter, L. (1998). Journal writing as a social support strategy for parents of premature infants: A pilot study Patient Education and Counseling, 33 (2), 149-159.

Obiaker, F. E. (1992). Self-concept of African-American students: An operational model for special education. Exceptional Children, 59 (2), 160-167.

Pennebaker, J. W. (1997). Writing about emotional experiences as a therapeutic process. Psychological Science, 8 (3), 162-165.

Pennebaker, J. W. (1989). Confession, inhibition, and disease. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), Advances in Social Psychology (Vol. 22, pp. 211-244). New York: Academic Press.

Pennebaker, J. W. (1989). Disclosures of traumas and health among holocaust survivors. Psychosomatic Medicine, 51, 577-589.

Pennebaker, J. W. & Susman, J. R. (1988). Disclosure of traumas and psychosomatic processes. Social Science Medicine, 26 (3), 327-332.

Pierangelo, R. (1980). Adolescent learning styles, self-concept, and social interaction. Dissertation Abstracts International, 41 (2-A), 628-629.

Salmivalli, C. (1998). Intelligent, attractive, well-behaving, unattractive: The structure of adolescents' self-concept and its relations to their social behavior. Journal of Research on Adolescence, 8 (3), 333-354.

Smyth, J. M. (1998). Written emotional expression: Effect sizes, outcome types, and moderating variables. Journal Of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 66 (1), 174-184.

Stanovich, P. J., Jordan, A., & Perot, J. (1998). Relative differences in academic self-concepts and peer acceptance among students in inclusive classrooms. Remedial and Special Education, 19 (2), 120-126.

Talerico, C. J. (1985). The expressive arts and creativity as a form of therapeutic experience in the field of mental health. Journal of Reading, Writing, and Learning Disabilities, 1 (3), 55-60.

White, M. (1986). Negative explanation, restraint, and double description: A template for family therapy. Family Process.

Williams, M. (1991). Verbalizing silent screams: The use of poetry to identify the belief systems of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Journal of Poetry Therapy, 5, 5-20.

Wood, P. C., Hillman, S. B., & Sawilosky, S. S. (1996). Locus of control, self-concept, and self-esteem among at-risk African-American adolescents. Adolescence, 31 (123), 597-604.

Wood, P. C., Hillman, S. B., & Sawilowsky, S. S. (1992). Self-concept among African-American at-risk students. perceptual and Motor Skills, 74, 465-466.

Woytowich, J. M. (1994). The power of a poem in the counseling office. The School Counselor, 42, 78-80.

Youga, J. (1995). Journal writing. In M. Ballou (Ed.), Psychological Interventions, (137-151). Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers.

Zimmerman, T. S. & Shepard, S. D. (1993). Externalizing the problem of bulimia: Conversation, drawing, and letter writing in group therapy. Journal of Systemic Therapies, 12 (1), 22-31.