

Are art-based therapy groups an effective intervention to raise the self-esteem of adolescents with low confidence in self and abilities?

Prepared By: Joe Llewellyn
Date: 25/05/2011

CLINICAL SCENARIO

According to Berk (1996), self-esteem ranks among the most important aspects of self-development because evaluations of our own competencies affect emotional experiences, future behavior and long-term psychological adjustments. Low self-esteem is common in many adolescents and can lead to poor academic performance, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, criminal behavior and the ability to effectively interact with others among other things. Ultimately it reduces the ability for someone to achieve what they want in their lives.

From personal experience and the opinion of many experts (Case & Dalley, 2008) art therapy is considered an effective way to raise self-esteem and is becoming increasingly popular.

FOCUSSED CLINICAL QUESTION

Are art-based therapy groups an effective intervention to raise the self-esteem of adolescents with low confidence in self and abilities?

SUMMARY OF SEARCH, 'BEST' EVIDENCE' APPRAISED, AND KEY FINDINGS

There has only been a very small amount of research conducted about this issue. Only one qualitative study was found suggesting there is a clear lack of information on participants experience of art therapies and this study did not completely answer the research question as a few of the participants were pre-adolescents. All other studies were low quality quantitative studies according to Taylor (2007). This is because they often lacked control groups and comparison groups which would allow you to see exactly what was having a positive effect on self-esteem. This was mostly because of the lack of funding, time available, and the lack of similar institutions to compare effects of no intervention. Despite this the evidence reviewed showed that self-esteem did significantly improve after participants took place in an art based therapy group. This was shown by the use of reliable pre and post intervention self-perception scales. The articles reviewed were chosen for best evidence and to cover two different types of research of the purpose of this assignment.

CLINICAL BOTTOM LINE

Based on the evidence collected and critically appraised, there is evidence to suggest that art-based therapies help raise self-esteem but it is unclear on whether other therapies conducted at the same time influence this or the best way to conduct art therapy groups.

LIMITATION OF THIS CAT:

This critical appraisal has been peer reviewed by one lecturer as part of an assignment for Otago Polytechnic, School of Occupational Therapy. The breadth of the review has also been limited by the assignment requirements (ie. 2 articles only were reviewed).

SEARCH STRATEGY:

The method used to find articles that were relevant to the research question was database searching. The databases searched were CINAHL, Proquest (Psychology and allied health), Pubmed, and the Cochrane library. All five articles were found via CINAHL though only one full-text was available through it. The other four were found through Google Scholar, the ERIC database, on request from the British Library, and the last was found in a hardcopy in the Robertson Library.

Databases searched	Search Terms	Limits used
CINAHL	"Art Therapy" AND "self esteem" AND ("adolescen*" OR teenag*)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clients 18+ - Clients had low self-confidence - Did not include other therapies
ProQuest	"Art Therapy" AND "self esteem" AND "adolescen*"	None
Cochrane Library	"Art Therapy" AND "self esteem" AND "adolescen*"	None
PubMed	"Art Therapy" AND "self esteem" AND "adolescen*"	None

INCLUSION CRITERIA

- clients 18 years of age and under with low self confidence
- published between 1991 and 2011
- available without needing to be purchased

EXCLUSION CRITERIA

- published prior to 1991
- clients over the age of 18
- Art-based therapy was combined with other forms of cognitive treatment (Such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or Dialectical Behaviour Therapy)
- If the articles are not from peer-reviewed journals

RESULTS OF THE SEARCH:

Study Design/ Methodology of Articles Retrieved	Level (Taylor, 2007, p15)	Author (Year)
Quantitative Study	3	Hartz, L., & Thick, L. (2005).
Quantitative Study	3	Pifalo, T. (2006).
Quantitative Study	3	Walsh, S. (1993).
Quantitative Study	3	Higenbottam, W. (2004).
Qualitative Study	5	Coholic, D., Lougheed, S., & Lebreton, J. (2009).

BEST EVIDENCE

The **two** chosen for further analysis are:

- Coholic, D., Loughheed, S., & Lebreton, J. (2009). The helpfulness of holistic arts-based group work with children living in foster care. *Social Work with Groups*, 32(1-2), 29-46.
- Hartz, L., & Thick, L. (2005). Art therapy strategies to raise self-esteem in female juvenile offenders: a comparison of art psychotherapy and art as therapy approaches. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 22(2), 70-80.

The two articles were selected to represent different forms of evidence. Although the best evidence was found in the quantitative work, for this exercise it was required to analysis two different types of research.

The first article by Coholic et al (2009) was selected as it was the only piece of research found that was not quantitative – it answers the research question but also includes children as well as adolescents in the research. The second article by Hartz and Thick (2005) is a quasi-experimental quantitative study that compared two different forms of art-therapy. It is a level 3 in Taylor's (2007) levels of evidence as it lacks a control group meaning it cannot be a level 2. They both included art therapies that aim to raise the self esteem of adolescents with low self-confidence.

SUMMARY OF BEST EVIDENCE

Title of article: "The helpfulness of holistic arts-based group work with children living in foster care."

Aim/Objective of the Study: To provide an overview of the authors research on the helpfulness of holistic arts-based group-work for the development of self-awareness and self-esteem for children age 8-18. The research was conducted to discover new knowledge about holistic practice as it is a developing field.

Study Design: This paper is a descriptive qualitative study. It uses a *grounded theory* approach.

Setting: A 2-hour weekly group is conducted with children from a small town in Ontario, Canada.

Participants: 35 children attended 6-week groups. Most children attended multiple times although it is not clear how many. They were made up largely of Native-Americans and the rest were European Canadians. The author states that this is because children showed a desire to continue and that 6 weeks is not long enough for children to incorporate learnt techniques into their lives. The first three groups were facilitated with adolescent females and the rest with equal numbers of males and females aged 8-12.

Referrals for participation in the groups came from workers in a children's aid society in the local area. A selection criteria was not stated apart from the children had to be in foster care and have low self esteem/confidence.

Method: A grounded theory approach as that aim was to generate knowledge and theory. A broad topic area is set up and the author gathers data on it from participants who are seen to have a particular knowledge of the topic (Taylor, 2007). The research carries on until all avenues have been perused- because of this the research is continuing.

Data was gathered from analyzing group sessions and by post-group individual interviews. These were both videoed and transcribed for the purpose of analysis. Research data (the transcribes) were then converted into systematic schema for examining the meaning, discovering themes, and making connections amongst concepts. Data comparisons were made and assigned labels using guidelines from Tan (2006). It was analyzed using guides from Glaser and Strauss (1967). This analysis was to enable the authors on how the holistic methods of treatment (art groups) shape practice process and whether or not participants perceive it to be useful. After the 6 week group each child was interviewed to discuss their experience in the group. After finding that this was difficult for children foster parents also took part in the latter groups.

Additionally, all participants complete the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept scale which is the most widely used self-report measure in psychological health in children aged 7-18. This was completed pre and post intervention. Wilcoxon tests are used to allow the comparison of these results.

15 groups were conducted over three years.

Findings: All participants and foster parents noticed improvement. Most students felt more comfortable/positive with themselves and connected more with their feelings. They could now cope with their feelings in a more constructive manner. Small groups, optimally made up of four children, produced the best results. This is thought to be because small groups are more intimate.

Original Authors' Conclusions: The art-based group used in the research helped improve self esteem/confidence among participants. This is helped by the fact that they are encouraged to be creative and enjoy themselves. They also provided a less threatening than a counseling group where feelings have to be discussed. This is especially beneficial with the client group as many participants do not have access to and/or do not want to engage in counseling. Further research is needed to study the effectiveness of this kind of group. The authors plan to do this by conducting similar research with control and comparison groups.

Critical Appraisal:

Validity / trustworthiness of the results:

Taylor (2007, p96-102) suggests that certain questions need to be asked to identify whether a piece of qualitative research is trustworthy. These questions are answered in the two paragraphs below.

Aspects that suggest the article is not trustworthy:

The confirmability of the article is in doubt in this article as it is hard to say if it is neural because randomized selection is not used. The selection process is very vague, only stating that participants were referred from a local children's aid society. This may mean that the children benefited from the group due to their specific situation and others who were not referred wouldn't. For example the majority of participants were Native-American and as expressed in the article the group gave them the opportunity to express themselves as Native-Americans – possibly due to their situations and the culture of the country they have not been able to before. This in itself could have lead to the increase in self esteem rather than the intervention as a whole.

To determine this, and to show that it was the intervention that made a difference and not other factors, comparison and control groups needed to be used. Because they were not we cannot say. The authors acknowledge this and are planning further research. There is also no mean age of the children- they could be mostly 8 or mostly 14 and we would not know. This is significant as an eight year old thinks differently and responds differently to the world around them differently to a 14year old.

The interview used does not appear to be a recognized one which means that it may not be tested and therefore not be reliable and meaningful. It may also not be transferable to another setting/country. It may change the results as it could lack important questions or be bias in one direct skewing the data collected..There is also no mention of an ethics committee.

It is also unclear who/how many people analyzed the data and they did nto check with clients whether identified themes were correct – this could have lead to misinterpretation of the data.

Aspects that add to the trustworthiness of the article:

The article had a clear aim and used many recognized methods of analysis throughout the processing of data which would suggest that the conclusions are valid and dependable. This would also make it the research easily transferable. The length of time and amount of groups studied would add to the credibility of the research as lots of data was processed from a long period of time to come out with the results.

Summary/Conclusion:

It can be seen above that there are many criticisms of the article but this does not mean that the data does not have value. Pre/post testing clearly showed that participant's self-esteem increased after the groups and methods of data analysis were very clear. Another post test would be valuable to be able to see if the raised self-esteem lasted. This would tell you if clients would need follow-ups or more group sessions in the future to maintain progress.

As it stands this research suggests that art therapy groups will raise the self-esteem of clients in practice but it is unclear whether or not it was the art therapy; being part of a social group; or of giving the clients a connection to their culture that lead to raised self-esteem. More research is required to find this out so that clinicians can use the most effective approach.

Title of article: “Art therapy strategies to raise self-esteem in female juvenile offenders: a comparison of art psychotherapy and art as therapy approaches.”

Aim/Objective of the Study: To test whether Art Psychotherapy or Art as therapy is more effective for raising self-esteem in female juvenile offenders.

Study Design: Quantitative: a quasi-experimental study (compared two interventions but had no control group as there was no other centre in the state offering art therapy)

Setting: High security juvenile residential treatment facility, United States of America.

Participants: 31 adolescent females; 18 Caucasian, 10 African-American, 3 Hispanic. All were in the residential treatment facility after committing felony-level crimes. 4 participants were released during the study and as a result were not included in final results.

Assignment of participants to “core-groups” that receive art therapy on arrival to the centre meant that a true randomization could not take place. However this process is designed to create equivalent diversity among the groups. Participants had to volunteer for selection (half did). These participants were then randomly divided them into one of the two experimental groups. After departures 27 people took part – 12 in psychotherapy and 15 in art as therapy.

Method: Art as therapy group was compared with an art psychotherapy group. All participants filled in a well recognized, highly reliable, pre/post self-esteem measure – The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA). The Hartz questionnaire – An art therapy self esteem questionnaire scaled from 1-5 was also used post intervention. This was created by the authors.

Ten 1 and ½ hour therapy sessions were conducted over a 12-week period. They were conducted by the 1st author who is a masters-level art therapist. The same art projects and materials were used by both groups. The different was in the tailoring of instructions, warm-ups and closures for each group to reflect on the different approaches. For example the psychotherapy approach discussed symbolism in the art work where as the art as therapy group discussed artistic techniques.

Results: The Hartz questionnaire showed that self-esteem had improved in participants but showed no significant differences between the two groups. The SPPA data was analyzed using *Fishers t*. This showed that different aspects of self-esteem were raised in each group- Appearance and behavioral conduct in art as therapy and only appearance in psychotherapy. Other categories were described as “approaching significance.”

Original Authors’ Conclusions: Both groups increase self-esteem significantly. There were no significant differences between the two groups except social acceptance was improved more in the art as therapy group and behavioral conduct in the psychotherapy. The author also talks about how some aspects of self-esteem were “almost” significantly different which meant psychotherapy showed change in close friendship and art as therapy is social acceptance.

Critical Appraisal:

Validity / trustworthiness of the results:

Taylor (2007,p55-65) suggests that certain questions need to be asked to identify whether a piece of quantitative research is trustworthy. These questions are answered in the two paragraphs below.

Aspects that suggest the article is not trustworthy:

To get more reliable results the clients needed to be randomly assigned. This was recognized by the authors but was unavoidable *due* to constraints of the setting. There was also a randomization process on client's arrivals at the centre which is good but still not as reliable as a truly randomized trial.

A major flaw in the study was the lack of a *control group*. This was also because of the setting as there is no other centre in the state offering the same kind of treatment to compare to. This is why they chose a quasi-experimental study. As there was no control group and the participants were receiving other forms of treatment such as CBT and family therapy, self-esteem could have been raised after these other groups or in a combination with these other groups rather than just from the art therapy.

The most major problem in the article is the authors analysis. Most of it is based on a category in the table of approaching significance ($p < 0.10$) as well as significance ($p < 0.05$). Results can either be significant or non-significant based on their p -value. This means that the approaching significance parts in the analysis are non-significant and therefore have no meaning. If the author suspects that these are significant then a RCT needs to be conducted with bigger sample sizes. These bigger sample sizes may show significance as the sample used was small to be gathering quantitative data from.

The method does not state if the sessions are at regular times each week. This could alter results as external factors could change how they react to the group. For example they could be tired in mornings or may have had a family session beforehand.

Aspects that add to the trustworthiness of the article:

The study acknowledged that participants were released during the study and as a result were not included in final results. It also acknowledge that bigger samples were needed.

The authors used a well recognized pre/post measure in the SPPA which suggests that the results would be reliable, valid and the test transferable. This lead to relevant data being measured that made the two groups easy to compare while still measuring if the interventions raised self-esteem. Data was also interpreted to see if it was significant using a recognized test which shows that the results were reliable. The questionnaire was not tested for reliability however and did not offer any quantitative results that the SPPA did not. It was not stated how the data from it was interpreted either. This suggests that it was not needed.

Both groups were treated equally by being given the same projects and the same time frame which also suggests results are valid.

Summary/Conclusion: The study shows that art therapy in a clinical setting when working with people who have committed crime is a helpful intervention to raise self-esteem. It is however due to the nature of the study unclear if it works with male adolescents and whether on its own it raises self esteem or with a combination of other treatments. It is inconclusive whether it would be better to use art as therapy or art psychotherapy in treatment although it states in the conclusion that there is a difference.

The evidence may be hard to apply to New Zealand as there are not any similar centres and therefore there are not the same kinds of groups.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, EDUCATION and FUTURE RESEARCH

A critical summary of the evidence presented in the two critiqued articles suggests that art-based therapy helps to raise self-esteem in adolescents both in the community and in in-patient settings. However both articles reviewed, and all the other articles found in the literature, had low levels of evidence and did not completely relate to the research question.

Small amounts of research have been done around the world because there is low funding available to employ art therapists and for art therapy research – most of which comes out of North America. As there are not many art therapists and it is a relatively new field, there are only a small number of people able to do research while practicing. This also means it is hard to do large scale randomized controlled trails as shown in the reviewed quasi-experimental study.

Because of the lack of control groups and the way that participants receive other treatments in correlation with art therapy it is impossible to confirm whether or not it is the art therapy or the other treatments that are having an effect on self-esteem. There is also a lack of information around whether or not the content of the art groups have the effect of raising self esteem or whether it is art groups in general. More research is required in order to clear this up that involves comparison groups and control groups.

Most research found focused on female and not male adolescents that also suffer from low self-esteem. The effects of different activities in the groups and the groups themselves may differ with males. Research needs to be done to identify this.

Until all of this future research is completed it is hard to conclusively say how effective art based therapies are in raising self-esteem, whether they work by themselves, or if they need to be combined with other specific therapies and techniques. All research found in the literature review must be read critically and used cautiously in practice until future research is conducted. In terms of Occupational Therapy practice the evidence suggest that art-based therapies have a positive effect on adolescents self-esteem and that the use of an art group would be beneficial as long as participation in the group is voluntary. This means that changes to relevant service to include art groups would be beneficial. However there is no evidence on the most effective way to run these groups to get the most positive outcomes.

REFERENCES

- Berk, L. E. (1996). *Infants, children, and adolescents* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Case, C., & Dalley, T. (2008). *Art therapy with children: from infancy to adolescence*. London: Routledge.
- Coholic, D., Loughheed, S., & Lebreton, J. (2009). The helpfulness of holistic arts-based group work with children living in foster care. *Social Work with Groups, 32*(1-2), 29-46.
- Hartz, L., & Thick, L. (2005). Art therapy strategies to raise self-esteem in female juvenile offenders: a comparison of art psychotherapy and art as therapy approaches. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association, 22*(2), 70-80.
- Higenbottam, W. (2004). In her image: a study in art therapy with adolescent females. *Canadian Art Therapy Association Journal, 17*(1), 10-16.
- Pifalo, T. (2006). Art therapy with sexually abused children and adolescents: extended research study. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association, 23*(4), 181-185.
- Taylor, M. C. (2007). *Evidence-based practice for occupational therapists* (2.edition. ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Walsh, S. (1991). Future images: an art intervention with suicidal adolescents. *Applied Nursing Research, 6*(3), 111-115.