PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND INTRAPERSONAL CONGRUENCE OF WOMEN INCEST SURVIVORS PARTICIPATING IN A PERSON-CENTERED EXPRESSIVE ARTS WORKSHOP

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ABSTRACT This study investigated the effect on psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence for women incest survivors, engaged in ongoing group psychotherapy, who participated in an Expressive Arts Workshop. The Expressive Arts Workshop utilized a person-centered approach. This approach invited each participant to explain what her art, music, and movement experience was like without interpretation from others. After a participant finished explaining what seemed important to her, group members were encouraged to focus on internal feelings related to what they had witnessed and were invited to share those internal reflections. The results of this study demonstrate that using person-centered expressive arts increases psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence of adult women incest survivors. Thus, person-centered expressive arts used in conjunction with group psychotherapy can be effective in enhancing psychotherapeutic outcome.

Introduction

As adults, survivors of incest are typically faced with self-defeating feelings of powerlessness, worthlessness, confusion about sexuality, and an inability to trust in intimate relationships (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Lehan & Wilson, 1985). The person-centered approach to psychotherapy provides a vehicle for experiences that develop self-awareness, personal value, a capacity to nurture and care for self, and the ability to trust which are essential ingredients for working with survivors of incest (Chew, 1998; Knight, 1996).

Since incest is shrouded in secrets and threats of don’t tell (Classen, 1995), some therapists (Rogers, N., 1993; Rogers, P., 1993; Simonds, 1994) feel nonverbal modalities offer important options for exploring personal stories and issues relating to past childhood sexual abuse. These therapists integrate nonverbal modalities, such as art and movement, with traditional psychotherapy when working with incest survivors. Through positive one-on-one relationships with therapists and in groups with other survivors, opportunities to develop a sense of trust and insight are encouraged and supported (Knight, 1996; Courtois, 1988).
These experiences may foster an increase in a survivor's sense of psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence.

Review of the Literature

Sexual exploitation of a child by a caretaker is a traumatic experience whether the perpetrator is a blood relative, stepparent, foster parent, step-sibling, or partner of a biological parent (Cruz & Essen, 1994). Cruz and Essen (1994) make the observation that sexual abuse of a child by anyone, be it a family friend, teacher or stranger, often has a devastating impact on the child. Childhood incest victims experience a wide range of psychological effects which vary, in part, due to the nature and duration of the abuse (Finklehor & Brown, 1986).

Whatever the individual facts of the abuse, several areas appear to be of universal concern to those who have been sexually abused as children. David Finklehor (Finklehor & Browne, 1986) defines the traumatic effects of childhood sexual abuse as: Traumatic sexualization; stigmatization or damaged goods syndrome; betrayal; and powerlessness. In fact, many authors have written about similar constellations of problems for adult incest survivors (Claussen, 1995; Cruz & Essen, 1994; Howard, 1990; Leehan & Wilson, 1985).

Group Therapy

Group therapy is often recommended as the best treatment setting when working with survivors (Courtois, 1995). The group experience offers survivors an opportunity to develop ongoing relationships which are trustworthy, experience community, and increase intrapersonal congruence (Briere, 1989). Therapeutic groups provide a place for survivors to talk with others who have similar experiences about past trauma and present life issues of shame, guilt, and lack of trust (Knight, 1996). In an article on factors affecting group therapy outcome for adult sexual abuse survivors, Hazzard, Rogers, and Angert (1993) state their belief that the interpersonal base of group work fosters exploration of the most insidious after-effects of the abuse—Namely mistrust, secrecy, and shame.

Creativity

In his work, Art and the artist (1932), Otto Rank explored the use of creativity to understand and integrate life's experience. For Carl Rogers, psychological health and creativity "borders on equivalence" (Gaylin, 1965, p.13). This implies that when one experiences mental health and well-being, one also has access to his or her creativity. Jung (1960) theorized that creativity is found in the archetypes and symbols arising out of the collective unconscious, and through using these archetypes and symbols one can find personal meaning in both the seen and unseen aspects of an event. Rollo May (1953) added to a humanistic understanding of creativity by stating that an authentic creative process is one that brings something new into being which in turn enlarges human consciousness. Moustakas (1977) wrote that creativity involves personal growth, self-renewal and self-actualization. In his view, it is a matter of extreme importance for a person to be able to express creatively his or her accurate feelings. Creativity, then, can be seen as a pathway toward psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence.

Using expressive arts with adults reintroduces elements of play into the therapy session. Psychologist Diane Frey (1992) states that adults need to play. She continues by declaring that the activity of play enhances an adult's ability to be creative and assists in a person's ability to grow physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually. In her own practice, Frey (1992) finds that play therapy with adults is a powerful tool to help clients
integrate the disoriented self, discover undeveloped aspects of self, and expand their range of communication.

**Expressive Arts Therapy**

Pat Allen (1995), an expressive arts therapist, declares art is a means to know the self and that a “relationship with our imagination is a relationship with our deepest self” (p.3). Lusebrink (1989) echoes that idea when he writes that visual expression evokes creativity and promotes awareness and integration of the difference between an individual’s inner experience and outer reality. This idea is further supported by Wadeson (1980) when she writes about the important insights and changes clients often experience when they reflect on their creative work. She feels the client’s creativity is focused by the experience of drawing and finds a connection between the fact that visual images encourage the emerging of fantasy material and getting in touch with “deeper layers of consciousness, bringing to bear on the creative processes richer resources than may be ordinarily available” (Wadeson, 1980, p. 7).

It is a common tactic of perpetrators to intimidate and frighten a child into keeping silent about sexual abuse by telling the child she must protect loved ones and the child herself (Classen, 1995). Expressive arts offers an alternative way to tell without talking, releasing a survivor to fully explore his or her past trauma without breaking the no talk rule. Many therapists feel expressive arts, such as dance, art and storytelling offer the most efficient and powerful access available to unconscious material and unrecognized emotions (Johnson, 1987).

**Objectives**

In this study, the question asked was “does including person-centered expressive arts as a means of encouraging creative expression and self-awareness provide a healing environment for incest survivors?” Women incest survivors who were in traditional psychotherapy groups were given a person-centered Expressive Arts Workshop, as a means of assisting them to find alternative ways to understand and communicate their own internal experience.

The primary hypothesis under investigation in this study was that adult female incest survivors currently receiving group psychotherapy would experience an increase in psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence after participation in a person-centered Expressive Arts Workshop as indicated by scores on standardized measures of psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence.

**Methodology**

Study subjects were 16 adult women incest survivors who were engaged in group psychotherapy on an on-going basis. The subjects were African-American, American Indian, and Caucasian community members, ranging in age from early twenties to mid-fifties. Two women held a full-time job and one woman held a part-time job. The other women were not working and were using some form of public assistance. Nine women were in transitional housing after experiencing domestic violence and/or drug abuse. One group member had cerebral palsy and was mute. She communicated with the group by writing all her responses, which one of the group leaders would then read.
Four testing sessions were conducted (see Table 1). During the initial testing session, subjects were asked to complete the Mental Health Inventory (MHI) and two Semantic Differential (SD) instruments designed to reflect how the subject actually felt (current state) and how the subject would most like to feel (ideal state). Three weeks later, prior to the person-centered Expressive Arts Workshop, the MHI and the two versions of the SD were repeated. The second testing session was designed to measure any change to psychological well-being or intrapersonal congruence that occurred during the waiting period. Immediately after the second testing session, the Expressive Arts Workshop was given. At the conclusion of the workshop, subjects were asked to fill out a Workshop Evaluation Questionnaire (WEQ) and the two versions of the SD. One week after the Expressive Arts Workshop, subjects were given the MHI. The one week delay for giving the MHI was necessary to allow for the wording of the questions which all asked about how the subject felt during the last week. Three weeks after the expressive arts intervention, the MHI, the two versions of the SD, and a Lasting Impact Questionnaire were given.

In this study the dependent variables are psychological well-being, psychological distress and client congruence. The independent variable is the expressive arts treatment. It was hypothesized that the expressive arts treatment significantly influences an increase in subject psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence. To test the hypothesis statistically, a comparison of means using a t test with an alpha level of .05 was used. These data were examined using a two-tailed, paired-sample dependent group t test. Results from the Workshop Evaluation Questionnaire and Lasting Impressions Questionnaire are also reported.

Table 1 – Testing Sequence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TESTING SEQUENCE</th>
<th>T-1 (Day 1)</th>
<th>T-2 (Day 28)</th>
<th>T-3 (Day 28)</th>
<th>T-3 (Day 35)</th>
<th>T-4 (Day 49)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MHI</td>
<td>MHI</td>
<td>Expressive</td>
<td>SEQ</td>
<td>MHI</td>
<td>MHI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD (2)</td>
<td>SD (2)</td>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>SD (2)</td>
<td>SD (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adult women incest survivors have difficulty with self-awareness, the capacity to nurture and care for self, and the ability to trust (Chew, 1998; Knight, 1996). Correspondingly, as a means of quantifying psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence of participants before and after the intervention, instruments were chosen that would reflect changes in (a) self-awareness, (b) self nurturance, and (c) trustfulness of others. The Mental Health Index (MHI) measured anxiety, depression, loss of behavioral/emotional control, general positive affect, emotional ties, and life satisfaction (Davies, Sherbourne, Peterson, & Ware, 1988). The Semantic Differential (SD) scale used in this study measured eight qualities: warmth, flexibility, depth, openness, pleasantness, steadiness, and helpfulness (Bradford, 1997). The SD was chosen to reflect changes in affect and life satisfaction. Two questionnaires were created to determine participant satisfaction and lasting impressions from participation in the person-centered Expressive Arts Workshop.
Mental Health Inventory

The Mental Health Inventory (MHI) is a 38 item measure of psychological distress and psychological well-being that was developed in 1975 for use with general populations. The MHI is based on a hierarchical model of mental health composed of psychological distress and psychological well-being which includes anxiety, depression, loss of behavioral/emotional control, general positive affect and emotional ties to others. The MHI can be found in the RAND publication, Scoring Manual: Adult Health Status and Patient Satisfaction Measures Used in RAND’s Health Insurance Experiment (Davies, et al., 1988). Questions in the MHI are phrased to ask about a subject’s experience during the previous month. For this study, questions were revised to ask about a subject’s previous week.

Semantic Differential Instrument

A Semantic Differential (SD) instrument (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957) was used to measure intrapersonal congruence. The SD consists of twenty four pairs of bi-polar opposites, (e.g., happy—sad) arranged on a seven point Likert scale. The instrument was administered by asking subjects to record how they actually felt and how they would most like to feel. The closer together the scores were on the measures of the current-self and the desired-self, the more intrapersonal congruence a subject was presumed to experience. Therefore, if measures of the current self and the desired self moved closer together, the subject was reporting an increase in intrapersonal congruence. The instrument utilized in the present study draws from Osgood’s original 40 adjective pairs (Osgood et al., 1957).

Workshop Evaluation Questionnaire

The Workshop Evaluation Questionnaire is a series of 13 questions designed to record participant reactions to the expressive arts experience. Ten of the questions use a five-point Likert scale ranging from extremely (five points) to not at all (one point). Questions were grouped. The first group of five questions asked if the session was meaningful, beneficial, satisfying, important, and revealing. The following group of five questions asked if the respondent felt: connected to others, in touch with her inner self, understood, happy, and peaceful. The final three questions were open-ended. Scoring the first 10 questions is accomplished by adding up the number of points for each respondent. Fifty points represent the highest, most positive score possible, and 10 points the lowest possible score.

Lasting Impressions Questionnaire

The Lasting Impressions (LI) Questionnaire was designed to measure the impact of the Expressive Arts Workshop. Memories of workshop activities were elicited from participants by giving subjects a questionnaire that asked about what a subject remembered and had tried on her own since the Expressive Arts Workshop. Open-ended questions were asked, such as “What, if any, activities from the expressive arts experience would you like to include in your on-going therapy group?” To score this questionnaire, responses were grouped into categories. These categories were: self-awareness, positive reaction, unsure, negative reaction, and no response.
Description of Expressive Arts Workshop

The Expressive Arts Workshop activities were designed to give participants the experience of expressing themselves through activities that were not focused on verbally communicating life events. The expressive arts activities consisted of guided visualization, music, movement, and drawing.

The workshop began with an overview of planned activities. Guided visualization was used to create an atmosphere of relaxation and calm. Participants were asked to imagine a safe place within themselves and told they could return there any time they wished. Next, participants were encouraged to doodle to music in an effort to enable a playful and uncritical attitude toward expressing themselves. Doodling was selected to encourage participants to draw without conditions of worth causing them to judge the artistic merit of their work. The doodling activity was followed by movement to music without talking. Movement followed the doodling exercise, which was a solo activity, to promote working with others and trusting in a non-verbal connection with others. The movement activity began with slow, meditative music. Initially, each person was encouraged to find individual space and not to talk or look at others in the room. After a few minutes, participants were instructed to find a partner without talking and to move in unison. The movement piece of the workshop ended with everyone being asked to join in a circle quietly and gaze into each others’ eyes as the group moved together. This completed the first half of the workshop and was followed by a ten minute break.

After the break, the designated activity was to draw a life map that was to include a person’s past, present and future. Maps could be drawn in any way that made sense to the individual. Every activity was followed by a brief time for each participant to share her own experience with the activity and to share whatever feelings or information surfaced in response to the sharing by others. Participants were asked to stay with their own internal feelings and to only share what they were feeling or experiencing at the moment.

Results

To test the effectiveness of person-centered expressive arts therapy, the overarching hypothesis was divided into six operational hypotheses. The first three hypotheses addressed psychological well-being.

1. Adult female incest survivors, currently receiving group psychotherapy, will experience no change in psychological well-being during the waiting period prior to the expressive arts intervention as measured by scores on the Mental Health Index (MHI).

2. Adult female incest survivors, currently receiving group psychotherapy, will experience an increase in psychological well-being after participating in the expressive arts intervention as measured by scores on the MHI.

3. Adult female incest survivors, currently receiving group psychotherapy, will maintain an increase in psychological well-being during the post-test period following participation in the expressive arts intervention as measured by scores on the MHI. The last three hypotheses addressed intrapersonal congruence.

4. Adult female incest survivors, currently receiving group psychotherapy, will experience no change in intrapersonal congruence during the waiting period prior to
experiencing the expressive arts intervention as measured by scores on the Semantic Differential instrument (SD).

5. Adult female incest survivors, currently receiving group psychotherapy, will experience an increase in intrapersonal congruence after participating in the expressive arts intervention as measured by scores on the SD.

6. Adult female incest survivors, currently receiving group psychotherapy, will maintain an increase in psychological well-being during the post-test period following participation in the expressive arts intervention as measured by scores on the SD.

Results of Hypothesis 1-3, Psychological Well-being (Table 2-3)

Table 2 - Psychological Well-Being Mean Scores at T1, T2, T3, and T4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean - T1</th>
<th>Mean - T2</th>
<th>Mean - T3</th>
<th>Mean - T4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>122.73</td>
<td>120.00</td>
<td>114.91</td>
<td>115.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean score at time 1 was 122.73. The mean score for time 2 changed to 120.00. This simple numeric change represented a small decrease in psychological well-being. The mean score for time 3 was 114.91 and represented an increase in psychological well-being immediately after the intervention. The mean score for time 4 was 115.36 and represented a decrease in psychological well-being during the post-test period.

Table 3-Paired Differences of Psychological Well-Being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypo.</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Paired Samples Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mean Diff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>T1 - T2</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>T2 - T3</td>
<td>5.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3(a)</td>
<td>T3 - T4</td>
<td>-.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3(b)</td>
<td>T1 - T4</td>
<td>7.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. The subjects' mean difference on the Mental Health Index (MHI) between time 1 and time 2, the waiting period, was 2.73 which was not statistically significant (t = .62, p = .517, two-tailed). Thus, the hypothesis that subjects would experience no change in psychological well-being over time alone was supported.

2. The subjects’ mean difference on the MHI between time 2 and time 3, the intervention period, was 5.09 which was statistically significant (t = 2.46; p = .034, two-tailed). Thus, the hypothesis that subjects would experience an increase in psychological well-being immediately after the Expressive Arts Workshop was supported.

3a. The subjects’ mean difference on the MHI between time 3 and time 4, the post-test period, was -0.45 which was not statistically significant (t = -.17; p = .87, two-tailed). Accordingly, the increase in psychological well-being that was experienced by participants immediately after the Expressive Arts Workshop was maintained through the post-test period. Thus, the hypothesis that subjects would maintain the level of psychological well-being experienced after the Expressive Arts Workshop was supported.

3b. However, not supported was the hypothesis that psychological well-being would be maintained over time from the beginning of the project through the post-test period. Between time 1 and time 4 the mean difference was 7.36 (t = 2.085; p = .064). Thus, the hypothesis that an increase in psychological well-being would be maintained over time was not supported in this instance. This difference in results reflects some maintenance of the increase in psychological well-being after the intervention but the increase was not significant when compared to psychological well-being of participants at the beginning of the project.

To summarize, when examining psychological well-being empirical support was found for all three hypotheses. Group members experienced a statistically significant increase in psychological well-being, as measured by the MHI, immediately after the Expressive Arts Workshop. The increase in subject psychological well-being did not show significant change during the post-test period which indicated the increase in psychological well-being was maintained. However, when the psychological well-being of participants at the beginning of the project was compared to the psychological well-being of participants at the end of the project, the increase in psychological well-being did not prove to be statistically significant.

Results of Hypotheses 4 - 6, Intrapersonal Congruence (Tables 4 - 5)

Table 4-Intrapersonal Congruence Mean Scores at T1, T2, T3, and T4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean - T1</th>
<th>Mean - T2</th>
<th>Mean - T3</th>
<th>Mean - T4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36.91</td>
<td>47.00</td>
<td>30.27</td>
<td>47.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During T1 the mean score was 37. During T2 the mean score changed to a 47. This represented an increase in the amount of locations between what participants choose as their current-self and their desired-self which represented a non-significant decrease in intrapersonal congruence. During T3 the mean score was 30. This score represented a reduction in the number of locations between the current-self and the desired-self and indicated a significant increase in intrapersonal congruence. During T4 the mean score was 47 which represented an increase in the number of locations between the current-self and the desired-self. This increase in the mean score represented a significant decrease in intrapersonal congruence.
Table 5 - Paired Differences of Intrapersonal Congruence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypo.</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Paired Samples Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mean Diff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>T1 - T2</td>
<td>-10.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>T2 - T3</td>
<td>16.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6(a)</td>
<td>T3 - T4</td>
<td>-17.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6(b)</td>
<td>T1 - T4</td>
<td>-10.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. The subjects’ mean difference on the Semantic Differential (SD) scale between time 1 and time 2, the waiting period, was -10.09 which was not statistically significant (t= -1.71; p=.12, two tailed). Thus, the hypothesis that subjects would experience no change in intrapersonal congruence over time alone was supported.

5. The subject’s mean difference on the SD between time 2 and time 3, the intervention period, was 16.73 which was statistically significant (t= 2.48; p=.03, two tailed). Thus, the hypothesis that subjects would experience an increase in intrapersonal congruence (as represented by a decrease of 17 points between current-self and desired-self) immediately after the Expressive Arts Workshop was supported.

6(a). The subjects’ mean difference on the SD between time 3 and time 4, the post-test period, was -17.18 which was statistically significant (t= -2.29; p=.05, two-tailed). Thus, the hypothesis that subjects would maintain the level of intrapersonal congruence experienced immediately after the Expressive Arts Workshop was not supported.

6(b). When looking at the subjects’ mean difference on the SD between time 1 and time 4, the beginning and the end of the project, was -10.5455 which was not statistically significant (t= -1.71; p=.12, two-tailed). This also indicates that the effect of the intervention did not last over time.

When examining intrapersonal congruence (hypotheses 4, 5 and 6), empirical support was found for hypotheses 4 and 5. Therefore, group members experienced no significant change in intrapersonal congruence during the waiting-period, and a statistically significant increase in intrapersonal congruence immediately after the Expressive Arts Workshop. However, participant intrapersonal congruence showed significant negative
change at the post-test period. Intrapersonal congruence was not maintained, rather participants demonstrated as little intrapersonal congruence as at any time during the entire research project.

To summarize, the mean scores for T1 and T2 show an increase of 10 points which represents a decrease in intrapersonal congruence. From T2 to T3 the mean score shows a decrease of 17 points which represents an increase in intrapersonal congruence. From T3 to T4 there is an increase in the mean score by 17 points which represents a decrease in intrapersonal congruence. Furthermore, when comparing time 1 and time 4, there is essentially no increase in the amount of intrapersonal congruence experienced by participants.

**Workshop Evaluation Questionnaire (Table 6)**

The Workshop Evaluation Questionnaire used a five point Likert scale ranging from *extremely* (five points) to *not at all* (one point) to record subjects’ reactions to the workshop, (e.g. do you feel connected to others, in touch with your inner-self, understood). Responses chosen by participants ranged from *extremely* (five points) to *somewhat* (three points). No subject chose *slightly* (two points) or *not-at-all* (one point). The mean response for all participants was *very* (four points).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Responses by Individual Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>extremely (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants evaluated the workshop as either *very useful* or *extremely useful*. The lack of any neutral or negative responses indicates an overwhelmingly positive response to the person-centered Expressive Arts Workshop as an adjunct to ongoing group psychotherapy.

**Lasting Impressions Questionnaire (Table 7)**

The Lasting Impressions Questionnaire asked eight questions to determine whether participants remembered any of the activities of the workshop and whether participants had incorporated any of the workshop activities into their daily lives. Responses tended to fall within several categories. These categories have been designated as *self-discovery*, *positive impact*, *unsure*, and *negative impact*. Self-discovery was evident in such responses as: “It explains why I write what I write.” Positive impact was evident in such responses as: “It was fun and I felt like I was letting out my child side.” Unsure responses were evident in such comments as: “I don’t really think its changed me in a way I can think of.” Negative responses were evident in such comments as: “Too intense at this time.”
Table 7 - Workshop Impact on Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-discovery Impact</th>
<th>Positive Impact</th>
<th>Unsure Impact</th>
<th>Negative Impact</th>
<th>No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Activities in the Expressive Arts Workshop did leave a lasting impression on most participants. Although, many individuals’ responses to activities from the workshop were positive, some participants recounted negative feelings about various activities. Only a few of the participants had experimented with the expressive arts activities from the workshop at home, but the majority of participants expressed a desire to include similar activities in future therapy.

**Expressive Arts Workshop Process Observations**

**Activity One: Guided Visualization and Relaxation**

The workshop began with a guided visualization. This activity elicited smiles, sighs, relaxation and a general decrease in moving around. One woman began crying and left the room to compose herself. At the end of the activity, this woman shared her feelings of never having any time to get in touch with herself and how much she misses that. When participants were describing the “safe place” they visualized, pictures of meadows, gardens, a kitchen in grandmother’s house, and an inner cave were mentioned.

**Activity Two: Scribbling to Music**

The second workshop activity involved using markers to draw designs in response to music. The intent of this activity was to free participants from feeling restricted and critical of their work. The music began as lighthearted and happy then changed to dark and driving. This was followed by very rhythmic dance music. In general, participants reported having an enjoyable time with this exercise although many group members reported feeling angry or irritated by the second piece of music. One person loved that piece and drew flowers with bright, light colors. Another person reported drawing her anger during the second piece of music and stated she did not like listening to that type of music. One participant showed off her drawing of what she called “skippity-do-da” in response to the final piece which elicited smiles and laughter from others. One person declared that piece of artwork “delightful.”

**Activity Three: Movement to Music**

After taking a break for refreshments, group members were asked to begin to move to music without talking or making eye contact with others. As the exercise progressed participants were asked to make eye contact with others, find a partner without talking, and
move in unison. This progressed to groups of three and ended in a big circle. One woman could not bring herself to make eye contact or move with others. She stayed in a corner of the room with her eyes closed and lifted her hands up high as she moved them gracefully to the music.

During the time for sharing reactions several group members talked about feeling left out, frustrated and excluded by the woman who did not join in the paired activity. However, there was general agreement that each person had to do what felt safe. Another group member talked about how she loved to move and, although she was embarrassed to do this exercise, she was going to go home and try it with her children. One person giggled and whispered during the exercise. She said she did not want to do the exercise and felt silly. She reported feeling like the older kid in her was saying do something while the child in her was saying don't. One person who had a great deal of difficulty feeling comfortable with this exercise talked about being a child and entering many talent contests to sing and dance and how much she enjoyed being in front of a crowd. Several group members wondered what had happened to change her. One group member talked about feeling a great emotional wave that connected her to herself and others in the group.

Activity Four: Drawing a Life Map

As a final exercise, group members settled down to begin their life map. Several people expressed concern about how to do this right and what should be in the map. Once started, everyone took the work seriously and put a lot of effort into telling their story, with the exception of one person who stared at her empty paper, made a few marks, and stated she could not face this task. The group became so quiet the group leaders could hear people breathing. At completion, group members wanted more time to draw and more time to discuss their life maps. There was a range of responses from very detailed (e.g., “This is when my dad raped me”) to symbolic (e.g., “These black lines are when bad things happened to me”). Several group members wanted to take their map home and continue. One woman talked about how she was overwhelmed by how much had happened to her when she looked at her map. Another woman reported feeling more accepting of remembering and talking about her husband dying since it was down on paper. She expressed feeling his death was contained by being in only a part of her life map and that her life has continued.

Discussion

This study hypothesized that it is possible to enhance psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence for incest survivors by including person-centered expressive arts activities with on-going traditional group therapy. To provide a heightened level of detail, this basic hypothesis was divided into six working hypotheses. This partition was created to effectively isolate the dimensions of psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence. Four of these six hypotheses were supported throughout the entire cycle of the waiting period, intervention period, and post-test period. Two hypotheses—that the increase in psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence would be maintained over time—were not supported. Thus, expressive arts therapy proved to be effective in enhancing psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence.

During the waiting period, prior to the intervention, no significant change was observed for either psychological well-being or intrapersonal congruence. Immediately after the person-centered expressive arts intervention, a significant increase in both psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence was observed. However, psychological well-being
was not maintained at a significant level during the post-test period. Intrapersonal congruence not only was not maintained during the post-test period but returned to the pre-intervention low. This departure from the expected is intriguing and certainly warrants further exploration.

During the post-test period, participants became more integrated during the person-centered Expressive Arts Workshop but were not able to sustain a sense of positive affect and personal integrity through the post-test period. There are several potential scenarios to explain why psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence did not hold-up over time. From a person-centered perspective it is possible that after the Expressive Arts Workshop, group members were more aware of experiencing self and realized that alternative ways of expressing themselves through art, music and movement offered them the experience of being internally and externally congruent. It is possible that participants became more aware of their internal affect and upon reflection during the post-test period realized the full extent of the incongruity between their current-self and desired-self. It would be interesting to know what, if any, qualitative changes occurred in measures of intrapersonal congruence between the waiting period and the post-test period. This information might elucidate subtle changes in the nature of responses during each period. For example, there may have been a shift from reporting incongruencies in physical parameters (e.g. “stiff” “flexible”) during the waiting period to emotional parameters (“happy” “sad”) during the post-test period. Such a shift might indicate a deepening understanding of one's own internal experience.

Although some participants found one or more of the expressive arts activities distasteful, every participant found at least one activity that they felt benefitted them. Further illumination about the post-test period increase in psychological well-being and decrease in intrapersonal congruence was evident in the written responses to questions about the experience of the workshop. In responding to the Workshop Evaluation Questionnaire many positive remarks were made about wanting more time to spend with art, music, and movement and wanting to include these activities in other group sessions. Several group members expressed appreciation for the workshop. Responses regarding what activities participants would like to continue in therapy included all the activities offered during the workshop. When questioned about what changes participants would like made to the person-centered Expressive Arts Workshop, comments ranged from more time for expressive arts activities, more time for sharing about an activity, and more opportunities to experiment with the expressive arts.

These positive reactions by participants were in contrast to some remarks that indicated negative feelings about various experiences during the Expressive Arts Workshop (e.g., “I still feel negative about the story/picture activity, too intense at this time”). Although negative reactions were few they potentially reflected a participant getting in touch with formerly unrecognized aspects of self. For example, one participant reported being angry with one of the musical selections and expressed her anger in her scribbling. Thus, she was acting from a place of intrapersonal congruence. Previously, this person had never expressed anger.

The Lasting Impressions Questionnaire was given during the post-test session to determine what impact the person-centered Expressive Arts Workshop had for participants. Although the investigator expected to find some impact from this limited exposure to the expressive arts, the preponderance of responses indicated a desire for more expressive arts activities in the future and implied a significant impact on client’s desire to continue using the expressive arts. When asked about any negative impact from the person-centered expressive arts activities, one participant wrote that the life map brought up a lot of “old shit” and there was not enough time to both draw the map and talk about the feelings it brought up from
within. Although this person felt negative about the experience of drawing her life map, she was also involved and integrating a view of what her life had been like from a different perspective.

Several participants expressed having a changed understanding of who they were and wrote: “It explains why I write what I write”; “It helped me to better understand why I was the person, or why I acted out the way I did.” One indication that the Expressive Arts Workshop had an impact on group members was that nine out of ten respondents would recommend the expressive arts to others and one participant wrote that the workshop was the “greatest experience of my life.” This is a robust indication of the effectiveness of using person-centered expressive arts activities with incest survivors.

There are obviously limitations to this study. The design of the study required participants to attend multiple group sessions. Collecting data at four points during the research project generated more information than a single pre-test and post-test session. Due to the difficulty of locating research subjects and the dilemma of asking incest survivors to wait for treatment after they were selected for the study, no control group was used.

One positive result of the testing protocol including an initial waiting period was that information about the effect of participation in group therapy, in contrast to the expressive arts intervention, on participants’ psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence was available for analysis. Even though multiple sessions made it difficult to retain subjects to the end of the project, the information provided was worth the effort.

In addition, both the size of the subject pool as well as multiple testing sessions posed difficulties. One of the difficulties with requiring four testing sessions was that some group members were absent from any given session. Of the sixteen subjects that began the study only ten completed all the testing sessions. One person completed all but the last session. Reasons for missing sessions ranged from travel, to sickness, to child-care problems. The issue of limited sample size is, unfortunately, typical of studies with this population. The present study has added one more piece of information to a very small amount of available documentation concerning what might be effective when working with survivors.

The planned workshop activities were too numerous, and not enough time was left for sharing what the experience was like for each person after completing an activity. There were requests for more time than was available for each activity. Indeed, the final activity, a breathing exercise, had to be omitted on the day of the workshop due to time constraints. On the positive side, the variety and pace of the workshop kept participants interested and engaged.

A complicating factor for the expressive arts study was that the investigator was the on-going group leader for all participants. This complication had both a negative and positive impact. This dual role raised questions of objectivity and a potential halo effect where participants might answer in a way they perceived would be helpful to the group leader. Since group members depended on the empathy and support of the investigator, participants could have hesitated to report reactions critical of the Expressive Arts Workshop experience. On the other hand, since the investigator had an intimate relationship with participants, she was able to observe changes that might have been missed by a stranger. For example, when one group member was expressing anger through her drawing and talking about feeling angry, the investigator recognized this as a new insight for the participant. In addition, the investigator and the group knew a lot about each person’s story, so there was a history of freely discussing very personal information that increased the extent to which participants were willing to disclose.
The test instruments took about thirty minutes to complete. For some group members this was an inordinate amount of time; they grew restless with having to stay and fill out forms. As a result of the attention span problems, some of the open-ended questions were filled out with the least possible effort and some questions were left unanswered. Another contributing factor for this lack of detailed response may have been that participants were from low socio-economic and educational backgrounds and did not read and write easily. Many women were former drug and alcohol abusers, victims of domestic violence, and single parents who were not used to spending time reflecting and writing down their thoughts and ideas. Finally, although directions to fill out the questionnaires were kept brief and explained verbally, some subjects misunderstood how to mark their answers and needed individual help to understand the directions.

A powerful dichotomy emerged in the aftermath of this experiment. The Expressive Arts Workshop succeeded, in part, because it provided a mechanism of expression that was neither verbal nor written, thus allowing participants to circumvent the don’t tell injunction (Classen, 1995). This opportunity at unbridled expression resulted in extremely positive quantitative results. However, the investigator was disappointed in the qualitative responses to the open-ended questions. These responses contained very little detail from which deeper insights might have been gleaned. The investigator had conceptualized this study from the vantage point that alternative means of expression are highly desirable and even necessary for participants. Thus, to expect articulate verbal responses from subjects who were from poor socio-economic and educational backgrounds as they completed the evaluation instruments was naive. In the final analysis, the lack of elaborate answers to open-ended questions was logically consistent with subjects’ lack of comfort with language.

In summary, the overall response of participants to the person-centered Expressive Arts Workshop was an increase in feelings of psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence. The outcome of this experiment, which included an Expressive Arts Workshop in addition to traditional “talking” psychotherapeutic group work, represents a step toward understanding the impact of using the expressive arts as a therapeutic tool with clients who are incest survivors. The present findings suggest that including expressive arts as an element of on-going group therapy is highly beneficial to the participants.

Summary and Conclusions

In conclusion the Expressive Arts Workshop offered participants the benefit of strengthening their sense of psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence while simultaneously allowing their story to emerge in a facilitative manner. Many participants indicated a desire to continue using the expressive arts as a means to delve into their personal histories and to foretell a future that is hopeful and fulfilling. Several participants reported planning to include various expressive arts activities in their daily living. It is possible that the positive results of this study can be related to a freedom subjects experienced—a nonverbal freedom—which enabled them to explore their story without using words, thus breaking the old injunctions to not tell. This liberation may have been augmented since the subjects were not
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constrained by their lack of written language proficiency in expressing their inner most feelings.

Working with incest survivors has long been identified as one of the most difficult challenges a therapist may encounter. Yet, solely on the basis of participation in a two and one-half hour workshop, all participants experienced a marked improvement in their psychological well-being and intrapersonal congruence. That limited intervention could so demonstrably enhance incest survivor's self-perception should urge us to capitalize on these strategies for all individuals seeking self-understanding and personal growth.

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REFERENCES


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