

EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF POPULAR MUSIC
AND POETRY THERAPY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THERAPEUTIC FACTORS
IN GROUPS WITH AT-RISK ADOLESCENTS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Social Work

by

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December 2009

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ABSTRACT

In this study, music and poetry were combined to form a client-centered therapeutic approach to group psychotherapy with at-risk youth that encourages connection, communication, and self-expression. This specialized poetry therapy intervention utilizes popular music and creative writing activities to facilitate group discussion about feelings, life experiences, goals, and values. The purpose of this research was to examine the impact of such an intervention on group formation and development, with a specific focus on the development of factors, such as self-disclosure, which contribute to therapeutic change over the course of the intervention. A multiple embedded case study approach was utilized to collect qualitative and quantitative data from multiple data sources. Data was collected via videotaped observation of group sessions, the administration of the Most Important Event questionnaire, document collection, and the administration of the modified Therapeutic Factors Inventory-S.

The findings of this research indicate that several factors, including group composition, the activities engaged in during group sessions, and the internalizing or externalizing behavior profiles of group members, influenced the development of self-disclosure in these poetry therapy groups. Additional findings indicate that when all three of the cases are looked at as a whole, self-disclosure is the most frequently referenced factor when the direct responses of group members as collected via the Most Important Event questionnaire are analyzed. However, the results are less clear when the results of the modified Therapeutic Factors Inventory-S were included; these modified TFI-S results varied according to the group from which the data was obtained. The most meaningful finding of this research was that this poetry therapy intervention had a striking impact on engagement and self-disclosure among these three groups of at-risk youth. The evidence gathered via this research indicates that this intervention fostered a group environment in which guarded, difficult to engage at-risk adolescents felt comfortable and connected enough to engage in surprisingly honest and bold self-disclosure.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Music and poetry are essential parts of the human experience. From the longing for home conveyed via Kanye West's "Homecoming" to the sorrow present in Donald Hall's elegiac poem "Last Days"; the rage coursing through Lil Wayne's "Georgia Bush" and the strength evident in Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise", musicians and poets possess the unique ability to encapsulate the human experience. Throughout time, individuals have found these two art forms, music and poetry, to be not only a source of entertainment, but a source of comfort, a vehicle for self-expression, and often, most importantly, a means of sharing and universalizing life experiences.

In this study, music and poetry are combined to form a client-centered therapeutic approach to group psychotherapy with at-risk youth that encourages connection, communication, and self-expression. This specialized poetry therapy intervention utilizes popular music to facilitate group discussion about feelings, life experiences, goals, and values. This discussion is followed by the creative writing portion of the group during which individuals are encouraged to continue the expressive process via the creation and presentation of a poem. The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of such an intervention on group formation and development, with a specific focus on the development of factors, such as self-disclosure, which contribute to therapeutic change over the course of the intervention.

What Is Poetry Therapy?

Poetry therapy is "a creative art therapy modality that employs poetry and other forms of evocative literature to achieve therapeutic goals and personal growth" (Golden, 2000, p. 125). It is important to note the inclusion of the term "other forms of evocative literature" in the aforementioned definition of poetry therapy because while the intervention detailed in this study does involve a creative writing portion in which individuals write poetry, much of the intervention is focused on the discussion of music lyrics, primarily those from the genres of hip-hop and rap, in lieu of what may be traditionally

considered poetry. While the intervention detailed in this study fits the definition of poetry therapy, this particular style of poetry therapy is similar to hip-hop therapy (HHT) as conceptualized by Tyson (2002) or rap therapy as conceptualized by Elligan (2004). Both HHT and rap therapy utilize hip-hop or rap music as a means of promoting a therapeutic dialogue in either a group or individual setting.

Semantics and definitions aside, it is vital to remember that poetry is used as a *tool* during these groups. The primary goal of the group is not to create skilled poets in a traditional sense; the goal is to provide a therapeutic environment in which engagement, self-expression, and self-reflection are encouraged.

Poetry Therapy and At-Risk Youth

Youth who are deemed at-risk often face a future with less than optimal outcomes and are more likely to be “exposed to factors that increase their tendency to engage in problem of delinquent behaviors” (Farnum & Schaffer, 1998, p. 6). The term at-risk refers to youth who are exposed to a variety of negative conditions, or risk factors. According to Farnum and Schaffer (1998), these risk factors can be categorized into four areas:

1. Community: availability of drugs and firearms; absence of community norms against drug use, firearms, and crime; media portrayals of violence; high rates of mobility; low neighborhood attachment; extreme economic deprivation (p. 24)
2. Family: family history of problem behavior; family management problems (such as excessively harsh or inconsistent punishment); family conflict (such as physical abuse); and favorable parental attitudes toward problem behavior (p. 24)
3. School: early and persistent anti-social behavior; early academic failure; absence of commitment to school (p. 24)

4. Peer group and individual constitution: rebelliousness; influence of peers who engage in problem behavior; favorable attitude towards problem behavior; early initiation of the problem behavior; constitutional factors (for example, an impulsive nature) (p. 24)

There are a number of reasons why this type of specialized poetry therapy is suitable as a social work intervention with at-risk youth. First, the intervention has the potential to aid clinicians in the development of a therapeutic alliance with individuals who are often difficult to engage. Once an individual is engaged, the intervention provides participants with a means of self-expression that may feel safer and more familiar than more traditional group psychotherapy approaches. This client-centered poetry therapy intervention is especially appropriate for social workers striving to provide services that are culturally competent and strengths based.

The beginning, or the engagement phase, is often the most difficult part of work with at-risk youth. The use of popular music in a poetry therapy group serves as a “hook”, or a means of encouraging attendance and piquing interest during the first few groups because as Cain (2006) states, “music and lyrics capture adolescents’ attention in ways that other techniques cannot” (p. 22). It has been this author’s experience that youth are much more willing to participate in a group during which they are allowed to listen to “their music”; for example, at one facility, non-group members even tried to sneak into what they deemed the “rap group” after hearing about the group activities from group members.

The intervention detailed in this research also provides the group facilitator with a valuable means of developing a rapport and empathic alliance with clients. According to Kobin and Tyson (2006), the use of hip-hop music increases the likelihood of an individual’s successful early engagement in therapy and increases “client’s perceptions of the therapist’s empathy and relatedness” (p. 344). Elligan (2004) agrees in his statement, “the use of rap music in therapy... can promote a better working relationship” (p. ix). Once these individuals have attended a few groups, oftentimes primarily because

of their interest in and familiarity with the music, it is easier to engage them in the later stages of group process. Research has shown that early engagement in therapy and a strong therapeutic alliance, or working relationship, improve the likelihood that clients will return for additional treatment and that treatment outcomes will be positive (Kobin & Tyson, 2006).

In addition to aiding in the development of rapport and of the therapeutic alliance, the use of popular music as part of a poetry therapy intervention provides the therapist and the client with a common language. Elligan (2004) states that rap music allows therapists to “speak to youth and young adults from an area of familiarity and acceptance of their environmental conditions” and becomes “another source of conversation with youth to help teach and educate them about the many aspects of life” (p. ix). The use of poetry, or music lyrics, in poetry is often thought of as a “springboard to talk about feelings, goals, and values” (Mazza, 1999, p. 19); this statement is echoed in Kobin and Tyson’s (2006) statement that the discussion of rap lyrics in a therapeutic setting allows individuals “to talk about personal information in a projective manner using a familiar language” (p. 346). For example, in a group facilitated by this author, a adolescent male brought in the song “Sky’s the Limit” by Lil’ Wayne that contained the following lyrics: “I’m probably in the sky, flying with the fishes, or maybe in the ocean, swimming with the pigeons, see my world is different”. The group interpreted that the rapper was saying he didn’t feel like he fit in with those around him and discussed what made the rapper different from other rappers. This discussion led to group members sharing their own thoughts about not fitting in with peers and with the society at large. In many cases, at-risk youth are highly invested in presenting a tough façade that is difficult to penetrate. This type of poetry therapy intervention provides youth with an opportunity to safely talk about themselves under the guise of talking about song lyrics. Eventually, group members may feel comfortable enough to talk about themselves without first talking about the lyrics.

This intervention, with its potential as a means of engaging youth in a group psychotherapy setting, is also closely aligned with many core values of social work. For example, the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (NASW) states social workers “should understand culture and its function in human behavior and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures” (NASW, 1999, 1.05a). A poetry therapy intervention that utilizes rap or hip hop utilizes a client’s strength (interest in this particular type of music) and builds upon that strength in order to increase an individual’s ability to express themselves and process life experiences. The NASW Code of Ethics also states that social workers “should have a knowledge base of their clients’ cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients’ cultures and to differences among people and cultural groups” (NASW, 1999, 1.05b). In many instances, the use of rap or hip-hop during the course of a therapeutic intervention with at-risk youth conveys a sense of respect for that youth’s unique experiences and interests, as well as a desire to understand this particular subset of youth culture. Kobin and Tyson (2006) state that a therapist’s “acceptance of rap lyrics as a means of client self-expression could be perceived as genuine interest in client culture” (p. 346).

In addition, the use of a poetry therapy intervention designed specifically for use with urban, at-risk youth is closely aligned with a core social work tenet of client-centered practice, of “starting where the client is”. Many youth already listen to music on a daily basis; therefore, the use of a poetry therapy intervention involving popular music utilizes a pre-existing interest and expands upon that interest in order to explore an individual’s experiences, emotions, and environment. Tyson and Baffour (2004) found that 57% of youth in an acute care psychiatric setting listen to music as a means of coping with stressors and struggles, while 28% of the youth surveyed wrote poetry or music lyrics as a means of coping. An intervention that combines listening to music and writing poetry or lyrics, such as the intervention described in this research, provides social workers a tool to empower youth to express themselves via a method that may be comfortable, familiar, and oftentimes natural.

In recent years, approximately thirty articles detailing poetry therapy interventions with a variety of populations have been published in the scholarly literature. These articles have detailed the use of poetry therapy interventions with severely mentally ill adults (Furman, 2002; Furman, 2003; Meunier, 2003; Edelman, 1996; Smith, 2000; Tamura, 2001), substance abusers (Alschuler, 2000; Opsina-Kammerer, 1999), parents of children who have been sexually abused (Tilly & Caye, 2004), special education students (Hieb, 1997; Kazemak, Wellik, & Zimmerman, 2004; Malekoff, 2002); at-risk youth (Abell, 1998; Holman, 1996); domestic violence counselors (Boone & Castillo, 2008), and families (Baker & Mazza, 2004; Mazza, 2001; Opsina-Kammerer, 1999). While practice wisdom, anecdotal knowledge, and a small body of research indicate that the use of client-centered practices such as poetry therapy have the potential to enhance a social worker's ability to overcome cultural and ethnic differences and form a strong therapeutic alliance, in order to legitimize, and in many cases fund, the use of such an intervention, additional knowledge regarding the processes by which such an intervention works and the outcomes that such an intervention can produce is vital. This is evidenced in the findings of a review of over 600 arts programs for at-risk youth that found "while there was abundant anecdotal evidence of 'success stories'...there was little statistical evidence that these art programs can enhance youth development" (Farnum & Schaffer, 1998, p. 1). According to a leader in the field of poetry therapy research, Nicholas Mazza (1999), arts-based therapies such as poetry therapy are "now past the stage of good intentions and anecdotal reports" (p. 115). The absence, however, of systematic, research-based information has prevented the discipline from moving past the aforementioned good intentions and anecdotal reports to a point where the decision to utilize a poetry therapy intervention is based on a body of research supporting its use. The information gained via this research will be used to strengthen poetry therapy's pre-existing knowledge base and may advance the use of specialized poetry therapy interventions that incorporate popular music and creative writing.

Research Purpose and Questions

The goal of this research is to identify the therapeutic factors present in three poetry therapy groups with at-risk youth and to explore the elements related to the development of one of these therapeutic factors over the course of the groups. Two measures, the modified Therapeutic Factors Inventory-S and the Most Important Event questionnaire, will be used to determine the therapeutic factors present in the poetry therapy groups. A content analysis of group transcripts will be used to provide a more in-depth look at the development of one specific therapeutic factor, self-disclosure. It became apparent early in the coding process that the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure was an integral part of the therapeutic process in these three groups; as a result, a focused content analysis was performed on session transcripts in order to develop an understanding of the elements in the poetry therapy groups that impacted the development of self-disclosure.

This research is guided by two questions. The first, more broadly based question is “what therapeutic factors occur during these poetry therapy groups”? The second, more focused question is “what group processes and characteristics contribute to the development of the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure during these poetry therapy groups”? According to Yalom (1995), the development of therapeutic factors leading to change “is an enormously complex process that occurs through an intricate interplay of human experiences” (p. 1); therefore, a variety of methods, both qualitative and quantitative, and informants will be employed to ensure that the richness and complexity of therapeutic change is fully examined throughout the course of this research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The National Association of Poetry Therapists defines poetry therapy as “a creative art therapy modality that employs poetry and other forms of evocative literature to achieve therapeutic goals and personal growth” (Golden, 2000, p. 125). A leader in the field of modern poetry therapy, Arthur Lerner (1991) defined poetry therapy as “the use of poetry in a therapeutic experience that may involve a one-to-one relationship, a group process, or both” and goes on to add that poetry is an “ancillary tool that can be employed by any school of psychotherapy” (p. 213). One distinguishing factor of poetry therapy, as opposed to poetry in its traditional sense, is a focus on the poet rather than the poem. Schloss (1976) points out a fundamental difference between “formal poetic products” and the work that arises in poetry therapy in his statement that

some poems written as part of therapy have high artistic merit. Many do not. A more important issue from a therapeutic standpoint is how well the poetic work serves the immediate or long range goal of acting as an expression of the client’s emotions or as a psychological catalyst for other therapy group members (p. xiv).

Other terms that are often used interchangeably with poetry therapy include psychopoetry and interactive bibliotherapy (Schloss, 1976; Mazza, 1999; Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 1994).

Historical Influences

The roots of poetry therapy can be traced back to Apollo, the god of medicine and poetry, and Aristotle (Mazza, 1999; Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 1994). Aristotle deemed poetry a cathartic experience that provided an “emotional cure” (Mazza, 1999, p. 5). The idea of poetry as a catharsis and an emotional cure, as well as a therapeutic tool, is one that has continued up until the present time. A variety of influential theorists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have examined the role poetry plays in therapy (Schloss, 1976; Leedy, 1985). Freud believed that poetry was a means of providing insight into the unconscious and subconscious, which in turn provided individuals with a means to put previously unknown thoughts into words (Mazza, 1999). Jung stated that “all people are poets... and can develop a unique meaning system” via the use of poetry (p. 9). While not focused solely on poetry,

D.W. Winnicott contributed a great deal to the idea that the use of art in therapy served as a means of “unblocking the child’s progressive maturation process” (Abell, 1998, p. 46). Theorists from other perspectives, such as Adlerian and Gestalt, have addressed the value of poetry as a vehicle for insight and healing (Schloss, 1976; Mazza, 1999). Most recently, individuals with interest in the areas of narrative and constructivist theories have noted the “importance of language as a means of understanding clients and helping them redefine their situation in a manner that helps them meet their goals” (Mazza, 1999, p. 12). In the words of one of the pioneers in poetry therapy, “we...have the testimony of a long line of poets, philosophers, and physicians from the classical period in Greece and Rome and the intervening centuries to representatives of contemporary psychiatry favoring the historic therapeutic alliance between medicine and poetry” (Leedy, 1985, p. xix).

Types of Poetry Therapy

Mazza (1999) categorizes poetry therapy interventions into three types: receptive/prescriptive, expressive/creative, and symbolic/ceremonial. The receptive/prescriptive (R/P) model is the most common and best-known method (Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 1994; Leedy, 1995; Lubet, 1976). This model involves “the introduction of literature into therapy” (Mazza, 1999, p. 17). In the R/P method, the poem is either read out loud by the therapist or client or read silently by the client. The client’s reactions to the poem are then solicited and explored. Mazza recommends encouraging this exploration via questions such as “what does this mean for you?” or “is there any particular line that reached you or that you could call your own?” (pp. 18-19). The purpose of the R/P method is to provide a forum for clients to “make an emotional identification with the poem” as well as to provide a “springboard for (clients) to talk about feelings, goals, and values” (p. 19).

The first subtype of the receptive/prescriptive model is the receptive method of intervention. In the receptive method, the therapist introduces a poem with an “open-ended” message (Mazza, 1999, p. 19). The receptive method allows clients to engage in “self-exploration” by allowing individuals to

experience and process a “wide range of reactions and conclusions” about the meaning of the poem (p. 19).

The second subtype of the receptive/prescriptive model is the prescriptive method of intervention. The prescriptive method was originally based on a concept adopted from the field of music therapy, the isoprinciple. Leedy (1985) describes the isoprinciple as the idea that “poems that are close in feeling to the mood of the patient” are the most effective for use in poetry therapy (p. 82). He added that the poetry therapist should not choose poems that:

- Offer no hope or that might increase the depth of the depression
- Increase guilt feelings
- Imply that God, father figures or mother figures forsake people, seek vengeance and cannot be relied upon in times of crisis
- Encourage, glorify, or even mention suicide
- Are confused, defeatist, homicidal, vulgar or debasing
- Encourage silence and discourage vocalization, particularly of feelings of hostility
- Are persistently pessimistic with self-destructive love and a fearful hatred of life (p. 83).

While use of the isoprinciple is a common way of choosing a poem for use in poetry therapy, others in the field have stated that choosing a poem with a positive ending may be “counterproductive if the clients perceive the ending as invalidating their feelings or reflecting the clinician’s lack of sensitivity to the depth of client despair” (Mazza, 1999, p. 19). Many authors have offered alternatives to the use of the isoprinciple in the selection of poems for use in poetry therapy. Hynes and Hynes-Berry (1994) developed a set of criteria involving the examination of thematic dimensions and stylistic dimensions when choosing a piece of literature for use in a therapeutic setting. Poems considered appropriate for use include the themes that are powerful, comprehensible, positive, and about universal experiences/emotions. Poems considered not appropriate for use include themes that are personalized,

trite, obscure, and negative. Desired stylistic dimensions are compelling rhythm; striking and/or concrete imagery; simple, precise, and clear language; and succinctness or manageability. Stylistic dimensions that are not desirable include a sing-song or discontinuous rhythm; hackneyed, abstract, or absent imagery; difficult, archaic, or convoluted diction; and a length that is diffuse, rambling or long.

Other perspectives on the process of selecting preexisting poems for use in poetry therapy include the interpersonal poetry dialogue model and the psychodramatic model (Schloss, 1976). In the interpersonal poetry dialogue model, a group format is used in which the facilitator and group members bring poems written by themselves or others to the poetry therapy session. Either the facilitator or a group member starts by reading a poem. If the facilitator starts, the poem may be related to perceived problems or issues in the group. If a client starts, the poem may be related to their current emotional state. The other group members and facilitator may respond to the first poem with either a comment or a poem of their own choosing. Group members essentially communicate in this model with each other via poems or responses to the issues raised in the poems (Schloss, 1976).

The psychodramatic model, like the interpersonal poetry dialogue model, also takes place in a group setting. In the psychodramatic model, poems are used as a “warm-up...or to evoke emotional reactions in the group as a result of reading a poem” (p. 16). Group members are encouraged to utilize present as well as past material and to provide information about that material in the form of specific, concrete interactions and events. The client is then encouraged to “move from a description of a dialogue between himself and another to a dramatic enactment of the interaction with someone else standing in as the missing other” (p. 16).

The expressive/creative model is the second type of poetry therapy intervention. The expressive/creative model “provides a vehicle for the client to express emotions and gain a sense of order and concreteness” (Mazza, 1999, p. 20). Hynes and Hynes-Berry (1994) add to Mazza’s idea in their statement that “the act of writing [in interactive bibliotherapy] involves the steps of recognition,

examination, juxtaposition, and self-application. Then as the written material becomes material for discussion, the emotions and concepts are processed again” (p. 175). Mazza (1999) has identified three types of writing in the expressive/creative model—creative writing (which includes poetry and stories), journal writing, and letter writing. The value of the expressive model of intervention has been strongly supported in several research studies. In a meta-analysis of effect sizes in studies involving written expression, Smyth (1998) stated that “historically and recently, psychologists have cited the expression of emotions as vital for good mental and physical health” and that “expressive writing...has been used to promote good health in a number of controlled studies” (p. 174). The vast majority of research in the area of writing as a therapeutic tool is not focused on the use of creative writing; rather it is focused on journal writing and letter writing.

The creative writing method of intervention is defined by the creation of poems and stories by the client for therapeutic purposes. A semi-structured method of writing is often used to assist individuals in getting started writing poetry in a therapeutic setting. Koch (1970), for example, utilized poetic stems such as “I wish”, “I used to be...but now I am”, and “hello...goodbye” in teaching poetry to children. A simple haiku format, sentence stems, renku, and collaborative poems have also been used by a variety of individuals as a means of providing some structure to the process of writing poetry (Oaklander, 1988; Mazza, 1999; Koch, 1970; Golden, 2000; Tamura, 2001).

Various guidelines have been developed to enhance the use of creative writing in poetry therapy. Oftentimes, due to literacy related problems or individuals’ hesitancy to write freely due to previous criticisms related to grammar and spelling, poems are dictated to the facilitator who then writes out the creation for the client (Oaklander, 1988; Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 1994; Abell, 1998). A variation on that method is to have individuals record their work onto a voice recorder for future transcription (Oaklander, 1988). The use of rhyming as a poetic device is also discouraged because focus on rhyming structure takes away from “free-flowing expression” (p. 97). A unique guideline for use of creative

writing in a therapeutic setting is that the facilitator is often encouraged to become involved in writing his or her own work during the session. Hynes and Hynes-Berry (1994) state that “participants seem to write more comfortably when the bibliotherapist personally takes part in the activity. To have one observe while others write exaggerates the difference between facilitator and participant” (p. 176). However, Hynes and Hynes-Berry caution against the facilitator sharing his or her work stating that “it is best to do so only if group members indicate interest” and if the facilitator is “careful to maintain objectivity about the way in which others are likely to understand the piece” (p. 179).

The symbolic/ceremonial method is the third type of poetry therapy intervention. The symbolic/ceremonial method utilizes metaphors, rituals, and storytelling as tools in the therapeutic process. The most commonly used technique in the symbolic/ceremonial mode of poetry therapy is the use of metaphors. In poetry therapy, the metaphor is defined as “something that stands for something else...metaphors...are symbols or images for emotions, actions, or beliefs” (Mazza, 1999, p. 21). Metaphors are often used to assist clients in explaining emotions and experiences in a new and more descriptive manner. For example, instead of the client saying “I feel sad”, he or she could be encouraged to describe sad as a smell, sound (sad sounds like rain), taste (sad tastes like stale crackers), appearance (sad is the color beige) or touch. Graves’ (1992) statement that metaphors “allow(s) us to avoid the clichés of daily life and see and experience the ordinary afresh” offers support to the idea that metaphors provide an alternate way of describing emotions and experience (p. 61). A variety of authors and clinicians have additional thoughts on the use of metaphors as a therapeutic device. One such author, Leedy (1985), states that “the metaphor has healing power because it can translate a pathological unconscious idea into healthy meaning (p. 198). Mazza (1999) adds that metaphors provide a “connection between internal and external reality” and “reframe problems, break resistance, and enhance the therapeutic relationship” (p. 22).

Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

While the theoretical basis of poetry therapy has yet to be fully explained in the scholarly literature, there are a variety of theories as to why poetry therapy is a valuable tool for use in a therapeutic setting. These include the ideas that poetry therapy increases self-understanding, circumvents “repressive mechanisms”; provides a “reality-correcting experience”; increases group cohesion; provides individuals with consensual validation; redefines situations; “improves the capacity to respond by stimulating and enriching mental images, and organizes experience (Lauer & Goldfield, 1970; Mazza, 1999; Lerner, 1978; Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 1994; Coulter, 2000; Smith, 2000; Abell, 1998). As evidenced by the aforementioned list, the factors that make poetry therapy an effective therapeutic tool are varied, or as stated by Griffin (1978), reflect a “complex phenomenon [*sic*]” (p. 116).

In this section, an attempt will be made to integrate what has been stated in poetry therapy research thus far into a theoretical framework that guides the use of such interventions with children and adolescents. The purpose of this section is to explore the theoretical basis of poetry therapy as a social work intervention with children and adolescents. In this section, an eclectic mix of theoretical material will be integrated in order to explain the reasoning behind the use of poetry therapy as an intervention. Three different broad theoretical orientations will be used to guide this exploration of poetry therapy and theory: human development theory, practice theory, and group theory.

Poetry Therapy and Theories of Human Development

A variety of theories have been developed to explain the process of human development including Freud’s theory of psychosexual development, Piaget’s developmental theory of cognition, Kohlberg’s theory of the development of moral reasoning, and Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development (Lerner, 2002). In this subsection, Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development will be utilized to explain the value of certain activities that occur during poetry therapy interventions.

Erikson's theory was chosen because it compliments a social ecological approach to understanding how an individual adapts, or fails to adapt, as he or she moves through the developmental process. As stated by Lerner (2002), "as the ego develops, new adjustment demands are continually placed on it...the ego must adapt to these new demands if healthy or optimal development is to proceed" (p. 417). A poetry therapy intervention is based on activities that can aid an individual as he or she attempts to adapt to and impact his or her environment. The focus of this research is on the use of a poetry therapy intervention with individuals ages 12 to 21; therefore, Erikson's theories related to the fifth stage of human development, adolescence, are pertinent (Erikson, 1985).

Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development corresponds with puberty and adolescence. According to Erikson (1985), the psychosocial crisis that characterizes this stage is one of identity versus identity confusion. An individual in this stage is seeking to answer the question of "who am I"? (Lerner, 2002, p. 422). A poetry therapist can aid individuals who are struggling to discover who they are by encouraging an exploration of the thoughts and feelings that impact their beliefs, functioning, and choice of roles. Much of the poetry therapy literature is focused on the idea that poetry can serve as a springboard to the inner self (Mazza, 1999), or a means of knowing one's "inner emotional world" (Abell, 1998, p. 46). An early psychoanalytic basis for the use of poetry therapy as a therapeutic intervention was based on the idea that poetry served as a means of bringing the unconscious or subconscious to consciousness, thereby allowing both the client and the clinician to explore the material (Mazza, 1999; Levine, 1999). This process of accessing and processing unconscious material occurs during all three types of poetry therapy practice. For example, a poetry therapist might utilize a receptive/prescriptive activity focused on the exploration of one's identity via a "theme song" (Wells, 1988). In the theme song activity, the adolescent would be asked to choose a piece of popular music that explains "who I am". This activity is effective as a means of encouraging self-exploration both outside of and within the actual therapeutic session. In order to complete the activity, the individual

must first engage in an independent process of self-exploration in order to determine which song best represents who they are; then, after the individual shares the song with the therapist, the collaborative process of exploring the message contained in the song and the positive or negative implications of believing or acting upon that message occurs between the client and the therapist. For example, in a poetry therapy group facilitated by this author, an adolescent boy chose a song entitled “M.O.B” (which translates into “money over bitches”) as his theme. The therapist and the client were then able to explore the ideas present in the song and the impact of these ideas on his life choices. In this case, the client and therapist were able to explore the idea that many of the client’s choices were based on the belief that a “gangsta” life in which interpersonal relationships were not valued was the only realistic means of making money and ensuring a good life; however, upon further reflection, the client revealed that he really wanted to stop getting in trouble so he could do better in school with the hope that he would get accepted into a performing arts magnet high school, graduate, get a job as a music producer, and have a wife and family. This led to a discussion of alternate means of defining a “good life” and brainstorming about the variety of ways one might go about attaining such a life. In this case, the client was clearly engaging in what Erikson deemed “negative identity formation” because he had been unable to reconcile the realities of his impoverished, crime-ridden environment with the more socially acceptable role of a financially independent, interpersonally involved, law-abiding individual (Lerner, 2002, p. 423). One goal of continued therapeutic work with this adolescent would be to encourage him to thoroughly explore the roles available to him and the means of achieving these roles with the hopes that he would choose a role, and subsequently choose to think and behave in a manner, that is both individually fulfilling and socially acceptable. Mazza (1999) describes this process of discussing poetic material as a “mutual sharing of awareness that eventually leads toward a meaningful theme” which can be “developed and ultimately transformed into a new way of thinking or behaving” (p. 11).

The identity exploration process also occurs during the expressive/creative type of poetry therapy. Expressive writing allows individuals to organize and express their past experiences, personal feelings, and beliefs about the world, all factors that impact the development of one's identity. One frequently cited benefit of expressive writing is that it allows feelings to be explored and expressed in an indirect manner that may initially feel more comfortable than direct communication about an issue. According to Buck and Kramer (1974), expressive writing allows individuals to "express thoughts, attitudes, and feelings indirectly...feelings which cannot be expressed openly can be discussed as if they belonged to some other person, situation, or abstract idea" (p. 70). Lauer and Goldfield (1970) lend additional support to the idea that expressive writing provides a valuable means of indirect personal communication via their finding that the creative writing portion of a poetry therapy group with psychiatric patients "facilitated self-understanding... circumvented repressive mechanisms and provided an entryway into the psyche, the unconscious, when problems could not be directly acknowledged and scrutinized" (p. 250). While expressive writing allows individuals to communicate indirectly about their internal states, it also allows for a direct exploration of identity. A poetry therapist utilizing an expressive/creative type poetry therapy intervention could encourage individuals to explore their identities via poetic prompts such as "I am..." and "I am not..." This sort of creative writing activity is directly related to the definition of a personal ideology, an activity which, according to Erikson, is an integral component of determining one's role in life (Lerner, 2002). For example, in a poetry therapy group facilitated by this author, an adolescent female wrote the following lines "I am not going to be mistreated by anyone, I am going to succeed in spite of the burdens of everyday life". These lines could be interpreted as an individual philosophy, or ideology, that embraces empowerment in spite of a past history that was marked by victimization. The therapist and client could then look deeper into the client's current functioning to explore whether or not the choices that the client is making are actually congruent with the positive ideology stated in her poem.

The symbolic/ceremonial component of poetry therapy can also be utilized to aid adolescents in the identity versus identity confusion stage of psychosocial development. A major component of the symbolic/ceremonial component of poetry therapy is the use of metaphor. According to Furman, Downey, Jackson, and Bender (2003), “one effective way of helping clients re-author their lives is through helping them develop alternative metaphors for their lives...people hold core metaphors that represent their images of themselves, their lives and their future” (p. 7). In many instances, the symbolic/ceremonial component of poetry therapy is combined with the expressive/creative component via expressive writing activities in which participants are asked to create metaphors that describe themselves. For example, Harding (1999) uses poetic stems in which participants are asked to compare themselves to an animal and elaborate on why they are like the chosen animal. In a poetry therapy group for adolescents facilitated by this author, Harding’s prompt was used and two of the participants chose “white tiger” as the animal that best represented them; however, the reasons given for this choice were drastically different. The adolescent male stated that he chose a white tiger because they are beautiful, rare, and unique, while the adolescent female stated she chose the white tiger because they are tough and can protect themselves. The response of the latter participant provided both the therapist and the client with insight into how such a worldview impacted the individual’s interpersonal functioning. For example, this adolescent had very few friends because she believed that trusting others was dangerous and her first response to conflict was to engage in physical aggression. A long term therapeutic goal with this individual might be to help the client examine the impact that the white tiger metaphor has on her interpersonal functioning and her ability to achieve her goals, and if appropriate, develop an alternative metaphor that might be more fulfilling.

Poetry Therapy and Large-Scale Practice Theories

A number of large-scale practice theories have been referenced in the poetry therapy literature including existential theory (Lantz & Ahren, 1998; Furman, 2003; Hieb, 1997), narrative theory (Mazza,

1999; Bowman & Halfacre, 1994; Novy, 2003), psychoanalytic theory (Levine, 1999; Abell, 1998; Mazza, 1999), gestalt theory (Mazza, 1999; Levine, 1999), strengths based practice (Furman, Downey, Jackson, & Bender, 2003; Tyson and Balfour, 2004; Kobin & Tyson, 2006), and cognitive theory (Pennebaker, 2004; Collins, Furman, & Langer, 2006); however, no single large-scale practice theory has been consistently and comprehensively applied to the practice of poetry therapy (Pennebaker, 2004). In this section, the relationship between two practice theories, strengths based practice theory and narrative theory, and poetry therapy will be expounded upon. Strengths based practice theory and narrative theory were chosen not because there is a plethora of information available about the relationship between poetry therapy and each specific orientation, it is actually quite the opposite; rather, these two theories were chosen because they are especially well-suited to this author's research interests in poetry therapy with at-risk adolescents.

Strengths based social work practice emphasizes the use of a client's pre-existing capabilities, or strengths, as a means of solving problems (Barker, 1999). According to Tyson and Balfour (2004), strengths can be conceptualized as the "assets, resources, and abilities" inherent in each individual (p. 214). It is well-known that adolescents like to listen to music; therefore, while it seems quite simplistic, a poetry therapy approach that utilizes an adolescents' ability to listen to and enjoy music is considered strengths based. In fact, Tyson and Balfour (2004) found that 77 of the 108 individuals surveyed during their research on the self-identified strengths of adolescents in inpatient psychiatric units reported that they utilized an arts-based strength, such as listening to music or writing poetry, stories, or music lyrics, as a means of coping with problems.

Two especially creative strengths based approaches that have influenced the intervention that is the focus of this research are hip-hop therapy (Tyson, 2002) and rap therapy (Elligan, 2004). In hip-hop therapy, participants listen to and discuss pre-existing rap or hip hop music, as well as create their own rap lyrics. Tyson's (2002) model of hip-hop therapy, involves the following activities:

- (1) Introducing the intervention via a brief history of and discussion about hip-hop and rap music;
- (2) developing group rules and goals;
- (3) listening to part of a rap song;
- (4) discussing group members' reactions, thoughts and feelings about the song lyrics

Hip-hop therapy is strengths based because it uses a resource that clients are already familiar with (rap music) as a means of helping them explore prosocial ideas such as “self-identity, peace, unity, cooperation, and individual and ethnic group progress” and discuss how to apply these ideas to their day-to-day lives (Tyson, 2002, p. 139). In their thematic analysis of hip hop lyrics, Kobin and Tyson (2006) found that a number of hip hop songs contained lyrics that were conducive to an empowering strengths based approach to therapy.

In rap therapy, an individual's interest in popular music is also viewed as a source of strength, as well as a starting point from which the therapist can assess the client's current level of functioning and assist the client in changing maladaptive thoughts and behaviors. Elligan's (2004) model of rap therapy encompasses five steps:

- (1) “assess the person's interest in rap music and hip-hop...and develop a plan for using rap music with the person” (p. 65);
- (2) “build a relationship and alliance with the person through discussing the different types of rap songs to which he or she enjoys listening” (p. 65);
- (3) “challenge the person with the lyrics of his or her rap icons to reevaluate his or her thoughts and behaviors” (p. 65);
- (4) “ask the person to write raps about the desired change you have set up as a goal for him or her” (p. 65);

(5) “monitor and maintain the progress made through continued discussions and feedback” (p. 65).

Elligan states that one of the goals of rap therapy is to “challenge the client to broaden his or her appreciation of rap to include other forms that do not reinforce his or her problem behavior or thoughts” (p. 69).

Furman et al (2003) state that more traditional poetry therapy interventions are also strengths based in that they are focused on accessing the “innate resources and healing power that lie within each individual” (p. 2). Oftentimes, not only are these resources hidden from the client, they are also hidden from the therapist who is working with the client. Edelman (1996) details an instance in which a man with chronic schizophrenia communicated via poetry that he was committed to continue involvement in a program designed to assist him in transitioning from an institutional setting to the community, even though he was unable to convey that sentiment in his daily meetings with his caseworker.

Unfortunately, the staff members were not able to recognize his commitment to independence until after the decision had been made to remove him from the transitional program.

Narrative theory is based on the idea that each individual has created a “story” that helps them make sense of their lives (Kelley, 1996). Certain memories or experiences are “subjugated” and others are “exaggerated” in order to fit the dominant story line (Kelley, 1996, p. 463). Poetry therapy allows individuals the opportunity to re-examine and re-author their personal stories (Mazza, 1999). Two influential theorists in narrative theory, White and Epston (1990), made the following persuasive statement regarding the value of written approaches to psychotherapeutic treatment:

We would like to rest our case for a therapy that incorporates narrative and written means. We have found these means to be of very great service in the introduction of new perspective and to a range of possible worlds, to the privileging of vital aspects of lived experience in the recreation of unfolding states, in enlisting persons in the re-authoring of their lives and relationships (p. 217).

According to Kelley (1996), narrative approaches to treatment involving the deconstruction of an individual's story and the subsequent reconstruction of a new, more authentic story. During the deconstruction phase of narrative therapy, an individual shares his or her story and then works with the therapist to deconstruct the story. In poetry therapy, the creation of a poem is one way to tell one's story, while the discussion of the material presented in the poem is a means of deconstructing that material. For example, an adolescent female who participated in a poetry therapy group facilitated by this author described her life via a poem that contained the following line: "I'm evil at heart". When the therapist inquired about this line, the female stated that she had done a lot of illegal things and physically and emotionally hurt a lot of people during her life; therefore, she was evil. A poetry therapist utilizing a narrative approach may have continued the exploration of the individual's poem by asking questions that help the client and therapist learn more about the client's problem of engaging in illegal activities and hurting others. Kelley (1996) recommends that the therapist explore the problem via a variety of questions during this deconstruction phase including "how did this problem evolve over time", "what events in the past have contributed towards its development", and "how has this problem affected other aspects of...life"? (p. 466). Eventually, the client will assist the client in reframing the issue as a problem rather than an intrinsic part of one's self; this is an especially valuable approach to use in this particular example because the line "I'm evil at heart" seems quite indicative of a belief that this problem is at the core of her being. The externalization of the problem may also aid the client address issues related to self-blame by increasing her understanding of how events outside of her locus of control, such as a history of abuse, may have contributed to the problem.

The second stage of a narrative approach to treatment involves reconstruction or re-storying. According to Kelley (1996), during the reconstruction process the therapist listens for "unique outcomes" or "events or outcomes that cannot be explained by the dominant story" (p. 468). In the aforementioned example of the adolescent female whose story revolved around the idea that she was

evil at heart; unique outcomes were very easy to come by based on her behavior in the poetry therapy group. For example, she was often the first to encourage others to share their poetry and provided positive feedback to individuals regarding the poems that they had created, obviously not actions of an individual who was “evil at heart”. The goal of the reconstruction stage is not to minimize the problem, but to broaden a client’s understanding of the problem, his or her choices regarding how to deal with the problem, and the instances in which he or she has exhibited behaviors that do not fit the original narrative or “story”.

Poetry Therapy and Small Group Theory

Poetry therapy has been used as a group level intervention in a variety of therapeutic settings with a wide range of clinical and developmental populations. For example, group level poetry therapy interventions have been used with elementary students in both special education settings (Malekoff, 2002; Hieb, 1997) and mainstream classrooms (Maki and Mazza, 2004); individuals who are chemically dependent (Howard, 1997; Alschuler, 2000); college students (Blake and Cashwell, 2004; Golden, 2000; Lauer and Goldfield, 1970; Mazza, 1981); adults in inpatient psychiatric units (Buck and Kramer, 1974; Edelman, 1996; Lauer and Goldfield, 1970; Ross, 1977); and older adults (Papadopoulos, Wright, and Harding, 1999).

According to Yalom (1995), there are eleven primary factors that contribute to the therapeutic nature of groups. These eleven factors are as follows: instillation of hope, universality, imparting information, altruism, corrective recapitulation of the primary family group, development of socializing techniques, imitative behaviors, interpersonal learning, group cohesiveness, catharsis, and existential factors (Yalom, 1995, p. 1). In this subsection, four therapeutic factors that appear to be especially applicable to poetry therapy with adolescents will be addressed: universality, altruism, cohesion and self-disclosure.

Universality in group therapy is defined as the perception by one member of the group that other members have experienced similar situations, feelings, and problems (Kivlighan and Holmes, 2004). According to Furman (2003), both pre-existing poetry and client created poetic works increase feelings of universality in poetry therapy groups because the discussion and sharing of poetry allows individuals to learn that “they are not alone with their pains; that they are part of a greater struggle” (p. 2). In their work with a poetry therapy group that combined college students and individuals on an inpatient psychiatric unit, Buck and Kramer (1974) found that universality occurred when similar themes appeared in poems written by both the college students and individuals who had been hospitalized for long periods of time due to severe mental illness. In poetry therapy groups with adolescents facilitated by this author, there were many instances in which universality was fostered. For example, one participant revealed that she felt like the abuse that she had experienced at the hands of her parent was result of her “bad” behavior. Other group members shared that they too had also felt at fault for the abuse they had experienced. The group as a whole was then able to explore feelings related to abuse and victimization and develop alternate reasons for why the abuse may have occurred. According to Lauer and Goldfield (1970) and Mazza (1981), the act of sharing common experiences in a poetry therapy group setting reduces feelings of isolation and alienation and enhances an individual’s ability to realize that he or she is not on their own during their journey through life.

Universality in poetry therapy groups also occurs when the experiences of individuals outside of the group are explored via the receptive/prescriptive component of poetry therapy. The experiences detailed and the emotions conveyed via pre-existing poetry also allows members to realize that other individuals, outside of the immediate group, have experienced situations, thoughts, and feelings similar to those experienced by the individual group members. For example, the poem entitled “The Group Home Before Miss Edna’s House” by Jacqueline Woodson that poignantly describes one adolescent boy’s experience living in a group home was, perhaps not surprisingly, especially well-received in a

poetry therapy group for adolescents living in a group home. The group members were able to share their feelings of frustration related to the group home rules and discussed the difficulties group members had in getting along with fellow residents.

Altruism in a group therapy setting occurs when a “member gains a positive view of himself or herself through extending help to others in group” (Kivlighan and Holmes, 2004, p. 24). The expressive/creative and symbolic/ceremonial portions of poetry therapy are especially effective at increasing the level of altruism present in a group of adolescents. It has been this author’s experience that during the expressive/creative portion of a poetry therapy group; participants assist each other with word selection, spelling, and even encourage non-responsive members to participate in the activity. These altruistic interactions between group members fits with Mazza’s (1999) statement that the creation of poetry is both “an act of personal expression as well as a social act” (p. 11).

Poetry therapy groups often contain a symbolic/ceremonial component in which individuals are encouraged to share the poetry that they have created with fellow group members. The group is then encouraged to provide the individual sharing his or her poetry with appropriate feedback. This process of sharing personal poetry and receiving feedback is also an effective means of developing an altruistic environment in the group. Malekoff (2002) reports that in a poetry therapy group for emotionally disturbed children, a group tradition of snapping fingers and high-fiving developed as a means of providing feedback when a group member shared a poetic creation. Alschuler (2000) reports that participants in a poetry therapy group for adults living in a supportive single room occupancy setting “complimented one another on their writing, encouraged them to continue and applauded after particularly good, or funny, poems were read to the group” (p. 168)

Group cohesion is defined as a “feeling of togetherness provided and experienced by the group” (Kivlighan and Holmes, 2004, p. 24). It can also be described as “feelings of comfort and safety among members of a group” (Golden, 2000, p. 126). Cohesion is often considered one of the most important

components of a group therapy intervention. The importance of cohesion is supported by Yalom's (1995) statement that group cohesiveness "is a necessary precondition for other therapeutic factors to function optimally...(it) creates conditions in which the necessary risk taking, catharsis, and intrapersonal and interpersonal exploration may unfold" (p. 49).

While the empirical based regarding the effectiveness of poetry therapy interventions is generally lacking, much of the evidence that does exist regarding the value of poetry therapy as an intervention is focused on group cohesion. Ross (1977), Mazza (1981), and Golden (2000) have all reported that poetry therapy is an effective means of developing a sense of cohesiveness among group members. Golden (2000) conducted the most rigorous of the three studies and found a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control group post-test scores on the Group Environment Scale (Moos and Hansen, 1974).

Self-disclosure is the act of "making oneself known to others" (Corey, Corey, & Corey, 2006, p. 242). Individuals who engage in self-disclosure share their "current struggles, unresolved personal issues, goals and aspirations, joys and hurts, and strengths and weaknesses" with the group (Corey, 2004, p. 114). As individuals engage in this process of sharing information about themselves with other group members, they are also developing greater levels of insight into their own personal experiences and behaviors. Self-disclosure, and receiving feedback related to that self-disclosure, is especially important among adolescents because it is one means of accomplishing the major developmental task of forming a personal identity (McFerran-Skewes, 2004).

According to Lauer and Goldfield (1970), creative writing in a group setting fosters an environment in which group members are able to hear and communicate "a multitude of thoughts, ideas, and opinions...as well as shared common experiences" (p. 250); in other words, poetry therapy helps create a group setting in which individuals feel comfortable self-disclosing.

Poetry therapy also provides individuals who are reluctant to openly self-disclose with the unique opportunity to make steps towards self-disclosure by talking about the poem, rather than talking about themselves. Eventually, the individual may move from talking about the poem to talking about himself in relation to the poem to finally talking directly about himself.

Current State of Knowledge

Over the course of the past twelve years, a number of articles have been published regarding the use of poetry therapy interventions; however, only eight articles have been published related to poetry therapy that are both research-based and detail the use of a poetry therapy intervention. In the following subsection, a descriptive review of the eight selected articles is provided. Information about research design, sample characteristics, the intervention being tested, data collection, data analysis, and results will be provided for each article. This exploration will be limited to articles published between 1996 and 2008 to ensure that the articles selected reflect the most current research in the discipline of poetry therapy. It is important to note that some of the articles included in this review are less rigorous in design than what might be expected of empirical research; however, because the empirical knowledge base in poetry therapy is so small, exceptions were made to include articles that may not have been included in a state of knowledge review in a field with a more in-depth research base.

Blake and Cashwell (2004) utilized a pre-experimental design to explore a group-level poetry therapy intervention for a non-clinical population of college students. The researchers conducted a series of single-session groups in which poetry was utilized to facilitate communication about diversity. The first group took place at a large university in the southeastern United States; four additional groups were conducted at a mid-sized university in the midwestern United States. Information was not provided regarding the number of participants in each group.

The poetry therapy intervention utilized in this group focused on ethnic diversity and women's issues. During the three-hour group session, up to 15 different poems were introduced by the facilitators

and then discussed within the group. Information was not provided regarding the specific pieces of literature utilized. The poems utilized in the group were selected from three anthologies: *Unsettling America* by Gillan and Gillan, *Cries of the Spirit* by Sewell, and *Claiming the Spirit Within* by Sewell (Blake & Cashwell, 2004). Following the discussion portion of the group, subjects were invited to write poetry and read their creations aloud.

Blake and Cashwell (2004) utilized three measures in their research: the Group Environment Scale, the Inventory for Images of Diversity, and the Group Feedback Form. The Group Environment Scale is a standard measure that has been widely used in research on group-level interventions; however, the researchers designed the latter two measures for the purposes of their project and information was not provided the reliability and validity of the measures. The researchers stated that an improvement was indicated in a majority of subjects; however, the authors did not provide statistical analyses, or any other related information, to indicate the degree to which change occurred.

Boone and Castillo (2008) utilized an experimental design to examine the impact of a poetry therapy intervention on domestic violence counselors who may be experiencing secondary posttraumatic stress disorder (SPTSD). A total of 55 subjects, both males and females, were randomly assigned to either the experimental (n=25) or control (n=28) group.

The intervention detailed in Boone and Castillo did not take place in a traditional face-to-face poetry therapy session, rather it was computerized and participants accessed the study instructions via a website.

Members of the experimental group were asked on three occasions to read a pre-selected poem and spend 15-20 minutes composing a written response to the themes presented in the poem. The three poems utilized in the intervention were *The Armful* by Robert Frost, *Autobiography in Five Short Chapters* by Portia Nelson, and *The Journey* by Mary Oliver. Members of the control group were

instructed to “go about your daily activities as usual, without writing about them, unless writing is part of your normal routine” (Boone & Castillo, 2008, p. 8).

The Impact of Events Scale (IES), a 15-item questionnaire measuring “intrusion and avoidance behaviors associated with SPTSD”, was used to measure symptoms of SPTSD in the domestic violence counselors (Boone & Castillo, 2008, p. 6); while the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP), a 50-item measure, was used to measure five different personality traits. Both measures have been found to be relatively reliable and valid. Boone and Castillo found a statistically significant difference between the pre-test scores and the post-test scores on the IES for those who had participated in the experimental group. No such difference was found for members of the control group. The researchers also found that the demographic variable of gender and the personality traits of agreeableness and openness to experience were significantly related to SPTSD symptoms.

Golden (2000) utilized an experimental design to examine the effect of a group-level poetry therapy intervention on a non-clinical group of college students. A total of 33 subjects, both males and females, were randomly assigned to one of two treatment groups (n=8, n=8) or one of two control groups (n=8, n=9). All subjects participated in six group-level poetry therapy sessions; however, collaborative poetry was utilized in the treatment groups, but not in the control groups.

The poetry therapy intervention was not focused on a predetermined theme. During each one-hour session, the facilitators introduced a poem and encouraged group discussion of the poem. A variety of poems, ranging from *I'm Nobody* by Emily Dickinson to *Harlem* by Langston Hughes, were presented to the group. Following the group discussion of the poem, subjects were provided with a structured poetry writing exercise and encouraged to share their creations with the group. In the treatment group, this structured poetry writing exercise was followed by the creation of a group collaborative poem; however, no such activity took place in the control group.

The Group Environment Scale, a measure with demonstrated reliability and validity, was utilized in this research project. Golden (2000) found that there was a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control group on the Cohesion subscale of the Group Environment Scale.

Howard (1997) utilized a single-system design to compare the effects of a music therapy-based intervention and a poetry therapy-based intervention for individuals with substance abuse-related issues. A total of 20 subjects, both males and females, participated in one of two treatment groups. Group 1 consisted of eight women ranging in age from 30 to 38 years old; Group 2 consisted of twelve adolescents, seven females and five males, ranging in age from 15 to 17 years old. All subjects participated in six sessions. In sessions 1, 3, and 5, music therapy was the primary treatment technique utilized; while in sessions 2, 4, and 6, poetry therapy was the primary treatment technique utilized.

Information was not provided in the article regarding the specific activities, which occurred during the 45-minute sessions; however, the author of the article did state that three songs and five poems were utilized throughout the course of the group.

Howard utilized two measures in this research project, the Goal Attainment Form and an Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire. Information on the reliability and validity of the two measures was not referenced. An observation of on-task versus off-task behaviors was also completed during the group sessions. Howard found that no statistically significant differences were found between groups on the Goal Attainment Form or the Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire. There was also no statistically significant difference between groups related to on-task versus off-task behaviors.

Meunier (1999) utilized a pre-experimental design to examine the impact of a poetry therapy intervention on participants in a vocational department at a community mental health center. A total of ten adults participated in the eight-session group.

The goal of this poetry therapy group was to provide additional supportive programming to subjects already involved in the community mental health system. During each one-hour group session,

participants were encouraged to engage in creative writing and share their creations with fellow group members.

Meunier (1999) utilized an Evaluation Progress Checklist in this research. According to the researcher, the Evaluation Progress Checklist was developed for the purposes of this research and measured the impact of the intervention in the following areas: personal responsibility, individual attention and feedback, accomplishment, choice, and application to the work place.

The Evaluation Progress Checklist was completed by participants following completion of the group. Information on the reliability and validity of this measure were not provided. According to Meunier, the results of the Evaluation Progress Checklist were as follows: 100% of subjects felt that they were treated with dignity during the group; 88% of subjects felt a sense of accomplishment based on participation in the program; 88% of subjects felt that the group was flexible enough to accommodate individual levels of development; 88% of subjects felt that the program improved their current skills and gave them new skills; and 88% felt an improvement in quality of life and self-esteem over the course of the group.

Papadopoulos, Wright, and Harding (1999) utilized a pre-experimental design to explore a group-level poetry therapy intervention for older adults with mental health related issues. A total of six individuals, four females and two males, participated in the six-session group.

The poetry therapy intervention utilized in this group focused on a different pre-determined emotional theme each week; for example, the theme for week two was anger and frustration. Each session involved the introduction of and discussion of literature related to the session's theme.

Information was not provided regarding the specific pieces of literature utilized.

Two measures were utilized in this research, the Beck Hopelessness Scale and the Self-Efficacy Scale. In addition, the researchers conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant. The Beck Hopelessness Scale and the Self-Efficacy Scale are both measures that have been utilized in a number of previous research projects; however, information regarding the reliability and validity of

these two measures was not provided in the article. The researchers found that on the Beck Hopelessness Scale, one subject experienced a decrease in hopelessness, three subjects experienced an increase in hopelessness, and one subject experienced no change in hopelessness. The post-test scores on the Beck Hopelessness Scale were not available for one subject. It was found that on the Self-Efficacy Scale, three subjects experienced an increase, one subject experienced a decrease, and one subject experienced no change. The post-test scores on the Self-Efficacy Scale were not available for one subject. Statistical analyses were not utilized to indicate the overall degree of change experienced by subjects. According to the researchers, an analysis of the interview data gathered revealed that 2 subjects found the group experience to be therapeutic, 2 subjects found the group experience provided respite, and 2 subjects found the group experience to be both therapeutic and a means of providing respite.

Schechtman (1999) utilized an experimental design in his article detailing the use of a group-level poetry therapy intervention with eight-year old boys. A total of 10 subjects, 5 of whom were deemed highly aggressive by their teacher, were randomly assigned to either the treatment group (n=5) or the control group (n=5). Members of the treatment group participated in poetry therapy sessions, while members of the control group did not receive the poetry therapy intervention.

The poetry therapy intervention utilized in this group was focused on aggression. During each 45-minute session the facilitator introduced a poem, story, picture, or film, and encouraged group discussion regarding the material presented. The materials utilized ranged from a poem by entitled *Moods* to a film entitled *Madi*. The facilitators' also engaged participants in a variety of activities related to the material presented, including role-plays and drawing.

Schechtman (1999) utilized the self-report and teacher-report forms of the Child Behavior Checklist in this research. The Child Behavior Checklist is a measure of demonstrated reliability and validity, specifics of which were referenced in Schechtman's report. An analysis of session transcripts

was also completed in this research. According to the researcher, the average group score on Child Behavior Checklist (self-report) decreased for treatment group (62 to 29); no such change was found in the control group. The average group score on Child Behavior Checklist (teacher report) decreased for treatment group (36 to 26); once again, no such change was found in control group. Statistical analyses were not utilized to indicate the overall degree of change experienced by subjects on either measure. The session transcript analyses indicated that there was a decrease in within-group aggressive behaviors and an increase in within-group constructive behaviors through the course of the group.

Tyson (2002) also utilized an experimental design in his research on a group-level poetry therapy intervention entitled Hip Hop Therapy (HHT). Tyson defines HHT as “an innovative synergy of rap music, bibliotherapy, and music therapy” (p. 131). The HHT group was conducted at a residential facility for at-risk youth. A total of 11 subjects, both males and females, were randomly assigned to either the treatment group (n=5) or the control group (n=6). The mean age of the individuals in the treatment group was 15.4 years, while the mean age of the individuals in the control group was 16.2 years. A variety of ethnic groups were represented in the sample. All subjects participated in twelve group sessions over the course of four weeks; however, those in the treatment group received the HHT intervention, while those in the control group received a non-HHT intervention focused on self-concept enhancement and improved peer relations.

The focus of the HHT group was the use of the use of a culturally appropriate medium, in this case, rap music, to address issues related to “self-identity, peace, unity, cooperation, and individual and (ethnic) group progress” (Tyson, 2002, p. 139). During each session, the facilitator would introduce a rap song and encourage a discussion of the song’s lyrics. Rap songs utilized ranged from *Dear Mama* by 2Pac to *Free* by Goodie Mob.

Tyson utilized two well-known measures, the Self-Concept Scale for Children and the

Index of Peer Relations, in this research. The reliability and validity of both measures has been demonstrated and was referenced in Tyson's article. A statistical analysis of the data collected via these two measures indicated that there was not a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control group on either measure.

Summary of the Current State of Knowledge

A total of eight articles in which a systematic review of a poetry therapy intervention was conducted have been published since 1996. The lack of empirically based research on poetry therapy intervention is not, however, indicative of a lack of published information about poetry therapy interventions in general. A number of articles have been published that are information and offer a wealth of valuable practice wisdom; but in order for poetry therapy as a discipline to continue to grow, it is imperative that researchers develop an empirical base that, combined with anecdotal reports and practice wisdom, support the use of poetry therapy as an intervention. This is reflected in Mazza's (1999) statement, "unless there is evidence that particular poetic interventions work with particular clients, problems, or situations, it will be difficult to gain increased acceptance in the professional arena" (p. 115). In future research on poetry therapy interventions, a mixed methods approach that explores and measure the intangible or difficult-to-quantify benefits of poetry therapy as an intervention, while also confirming the effectiveness of poetry therapy interventions by quantifying and measuring the more tangible benefits of the interventions, such as group cohesion, would be of tremendous benefit.

The issue of quantifying the more intangible aspects of a poetry therapy intervention seems to be key in the development of a strong poetry therapy research base. For example, the purpose of the intervention described in one of the aforementioned articles, Papadopoulus et al. (1999), is four-fold: (a) build bridges of understanding (via learning from own and other's experiences), (b) encourage a sense of community by providing a supportive environment, (c) increase member's well-being and self-esteem, and (d) encourage members' personal empowerment (p. 30). In the present form, these four outcomes

are difficult to measure; however, these outcomes can be transformed into variables that are more easily measured. For example, item (b) could easily be transformed into a variable related to group cohesion and measured via the Cohesion subscale on the Group Environment Scale (Moos and Hansen, 1974) or the Therapeutic Factors Inventory-S (MacNair-Semands, Ogrudniczuk, Joyce, & Lese-Fowler, 2007); while item (a) fits the definition of vicarious learning from the Classification of Therapeutic Factors Manual (Bloch, Reibstein, Crouch, Holroyd, & Themen, 1979) and the frequency of its occurrence during a session could be measured via content analysis. An additional systematic measure, Hynes and Hynes-Berry's (1994) *Responsive Patterns in Bibliotherapy* record has already been tailored for used with poetry therapy; however, no published accounts of research utilizing this measure have been published thus far. Finally, Blake's (2003) use of qualitative matrices and Tyson's (2006) *Rap-music Attitude and Perception Scale*, could prove valuable in future poetry therapy research.

While the current body of literature regarding the assessment of poetry therapy interventions via empirical methods is minimal, there is no shortage of non-empirical reports detailing the use of poetry therapy interventions. It is imperative that those interested in bringing poetry therapy into the realm of empirically validated therapeutic techniques, augment the wisdom gathered via years of poetry therapy practice with systematically collected, methodologically sound poetry therapy research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Research Design

This research is explanatory in nature. A research design has been selected that allows one to begin to explain which of the therapeutic factors posited by a number of influential theorists in group psychotherapy, including Yalom (1995) and Bloch and Crouch (1985), occur during this particular type of poetry therapy intervention. Prior to undertaking the explanatory phase of this research, three exploratory pilot studies were conducted to identify both appropriate in-group activities and format, as well as to narrow down the theoretical explanations regarding how and why this type of poetry group impacts participants.

This research is guided by Yin's (1984) conceptualization of the case study method as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). The case study approach allows the researcher to mix both qualitative and quantitative methods to develop a better understanding of a phenomenon as a whole. The specific design used in this research is a multiple embedded case study. This type of case study allows the researcher to collect data from multiple units of analysis, in this case from individuals and from each of the three groups, and then return to the group, or case, level to make inferences based on the data collected.

In this study, three separate cases are examined (treatment groups are considered cases: Alternative School Group One, Transitional Living Program Group Two, and Alternative School Group Three), and data collection will occur at both individual (group participants) and group levels. The two levels of data, individual and group, will be analyzed to determine case-level findings for research question one; the case-level findings will then be compared and contrasted via a cross-case analysis.

After analyzing the data at the case-level, meta-inferences regarding research questions one and two will be posited. Table 1 outlines the research process.

Table 1
Research Process

Cases	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Case-Level Inferences	Meta-Inference
Group One	Most Important Event	Content analysis via Classification of Therapeutic Factors manual (CTF)	Combine data analysis results to answer research question one <u>for each group (case)</u> :	Combine results from all analyses to form one meta-inference related to both research questions
Group Two	Questionnaire (subject responses)		(1) What therapeutic factors occur during these poetry therapy groups?	
Group Three	Observation via videotape	Transcript analysis via CTF	(2) What group processes and characteristics contribute to the development of the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure during these poetry therapy groups?	
	Modified TFI-S	Descriptive statistics		
	Demographic information	Descriptive statistics		
	Document collection (i.e. poems)	Thematic content analysis		

The main unit of analysis, or case, in this research is the poetry therapy group. A total of three poetry therapy groups, each consisting of three to six members, will be analyzed during the course of this research. The individual level data will be collected from group members in the form of the Therapeutic Factors Inventory-S (TFI-S) (MacNair-Semands, Ogrudniczuk, Joyce, & Lese-Fowler, 2007) and the Most Important Event questionnaire. A total of nine to eighteen individuals will serve as informants during the course of this research. The group level data will be collected from each group in the form of videotaped observations of the group sessions. The total sample consists of three groups.

Sample

The purpose of this research is to conduct an in-depth case study examination of the presence and development of therapeutic factors within a poetry therapy group intervention. A purposive sampling approach was utilized to select cases for inclusion in this research. Anastas (1999) defines a purposive sample as “a nonrandom sample selected on the basis of the specific characteristics of sample members that qualify them to be the most useful informants for a specific study” (p. 562). The particular poetry therapy intervention examined during the course of this research was specifically designed to address the unique concerns and life experiences of an at-risk adolescent population; as a result, participants in the research were selected from two facilities, an alternative school and a transitional living program (TLP), designed to meet the needs of individuals between the ages 12 to 21 who have been deemed at-risk. Both facilities are located in the same urban area in the southern United States. The TLP is a program for runaway and homeless individuals ages 16 to 20. This program provides housing and supportive services, including case management and group therapy, to its participants. The alternative school serves individuals aged 12 to 17 who have been expelled from public schools due to behavior problems. The alternative school is designed to educate students, as well as to address behavioral issues that have impacted the students’ ability to function in a traditional public school setting.

Residents at both facilities meet at least one, and in most cases, several, of the criteria for at-risk. As mentioned earlier, the term at-risk refers to youth who are exposed to a variety of negative conditions, or risk factors, that can be categorized into four areas:

1. Community: availability of drugs and firearms; absence of community norms against drug use, firearms, and crime; media portrayals of violence; high rates of mobility; low neighborhood attachment; extreme economic deprivation (p. 24)

2. Family: family history of problem behavior; family management problems (such as excessively harsh or inconsistent punishment); family conflict (such as physical abuse); and favorable parental attitudes toward problem behavior (p. 24)
3. School: early and persistent anti-social behavior; early academic failure; absence of commitment to school (p. 24)
4. Peer group and individual constitution: rebelliousness; influence of peers who engage in problem behavior; favorable attitude towards problem behavior; early initiation of the problem behavior; constitutional factors (for example, an impulsive nature) (Farnum and Schaffer, 1998, p. 24)

The case workers at each facility selected up to six individuals for each group from the larger population of at-risk youth. The caseworkers were instructed to select youth that might benefit from participation in a creative arts-based group therapy intervention. The individuals selected by the caseworkers were informed of the purpose of the group and asked if they would like to participate. If the individual verbally agreed to participate, written informed consent was obtained from the individual if they were over 18 years of age; if the individual was less than 18 years of age, individual assent was obtained from the potential group participant and informed consent was obtained from the parent or guardian.

Yin's concept of replication, rather than sampling, logic in multiple-case studies informs the sampling strategy used in this research. According to Yin (1993), two or more cases should be included within the same study precisely because the investigator "predicts that similar results (replications) will be found...if such replications are indeed found for several cases, you can have more confidence in the overall results" (p. 34).

Cases were selected for inclusion in the study based on topical relevance (Yin, 1993), that is, risk level and relative age. The cases were also selected based on the logic of literal replication, or the idea

that each case is selected because it is similar to the other cases; therefore, application of the intervention will provide comparable results across all cases (Yin, 1984).

A total of three groups were facilitated for the purposes of this research. The scope of this study was determined to a great degree by the limited availability of resources. Each group consisted of three to six members and one facilitator (the author); the three-group sample was comprised of 19 individual group members. As mentioned earlier, replication logic guides the sampling strategy used in this research. The goal of this research is not to generalize the impact of a group-level poetry therapy intervention to the population of at-risk adolescents as a whole; rather it is to examine the development of therapeutic factors in these three poetry therapy groups with at-risk adolescents. These three cases were chosen, as stated by Yin (1993), “in hopes of replicating a certain finding”; meaning it is expected that the data gathered from each group will be similar enough to allow for interpretation about the impact of the intervention on the development of therapeutic factors in these three poetry therapy groups with at-risk youth (p. 34).

Data Collection

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected via multiple data sources and multiple methods. According to Yin (1994) and Patton (1980), triangulation, be it at the data, investigator, theoretical, or methodological level, is an important means of strengthening the findings of a study. The data collection techniques used were observation via videotape, administration of an open-ended questionnaire, document collection, and the administration of a standardized instrument. Data were collected at both the group and individual levels.

Group-Level Data Collection

The group-level data were collected for each group session via video camera; the videos were used for the purposes of observation and transcription. Verbatim transcripts were created for 27 of the 30 group sessions (the final session of each group was not transcribed because the majority of the

activity during that termination session was informal and included eating treats brought by the facilitator, listening to music, and reading aloud favorite poems created during the group).

Krippendorff's conceptualization of content analysis guided the analysis performed on each transcript in order to determine the presence of and possible changes in therapeutic factors over the course of the intervention. According to Krippendorff (2004), content analysis is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from text (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p. 18).

It was originally proposed that the data gathered via the observation and transcription of videotapes of the first nine group sessions for each of the three groups would be coded using the therapeutic factors set forth in the coding manual developed by Bloch et al (1979); however, after applying the original coding system to three transcripts, changes were made to the coding manual and coding procedures. After coding the initial transcripts, it became evident that the majority of codes were applied to the dialogue that occurred during the receptive/prescriptive portion of the group. It was also apparent that the majority of the dialogue that occurred was representative of the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure. As a result, the coding manual was amended to reflect a narrower focus on one code, self-disclosure, applied during the receptive/prescriptive portion of the sessions (see Appendix C for complete coding manual). The coding manual was adapted to reflect the narrower focus of the observation data prior to the training of the second coder; therefore, the second coder was trained as originally proposed, but coded only the receptive/prescriptive portion of nine sessions using the amended coding system.

All videotapes of group sessions were coded by this author; nine of the transcripts (33%) were coded by an additional coder in order to strengthen findings and determine inter-rater reliability. The second coder was a graduate student in social work who was masked to the both purpose and research questions of this study. The training process consisted of an initial meeting to discuss the original

coding manual, as well as the addendum to the manual. After the initial training meeting, both coders practiced coding a transcript from an early session of the group. The coders then met to review the transcript and made necessary clarifications to increase the accuracy of the coding process. Once the coding manual and process was finalized, the second coder was provided nine additional transcripts to code. The codes applied to those nine transcripts by the second coder were compared to the codes applied by the primary coder to determine the inter-rater reliability of the coding manual. The Kappa values for each coder were .75 for group one, .72 for group two, and .92 for group three. The final level of agreement for the two coders across all nine transcripts was .80.

Individual-Level Data Collection

Two measures, the modified TFI-S (MacNair-Semands et al., 2007) and the Most Important Event (Bloch et al, 1979) questionnaire were used to collect data from individual group members.

A modified version of the TFI-S was used to collect group participants' perceptions regarding their experiences in the poetry therapy group. The original version of the Therapeutic Factors Inventory (TFI) is a "comprehensive, empirically based measure used to determine the perceived presence or absence of therapeutic factors in a particular group" (MacNair-Semands & Lese, 2000, pp. 162-163). The TFI is based on Yalom's conceptualization of eleven therapeutic factors that occur in a group psychotherapy setting. As mentioned earlier, Yalom's therapeutic factors are altruism, catharsis, the corrective recapitulation of the primary family group, development of socializing techniques, existential factors, group cohesiveness, imitative behavior, imparting information, instillation of hope, interpersonal learning, and universality.

The original TFI is composed of 99 items, each scored on a 7-point Likert scale. The internal consistency of the TFI-S subscales ranges from .83 to .94 and the test-retest reliability ranges from .72 to .93. The internal consistency scores and test-retest reliabilities were obtained via administration of the

measure to a sample of undergraduate and graduate students. The majority of individuals in the sample were Caucasian females; the mean age was 25.50 (MacNair-Semands & Lese, 2000).

The originators of the TFI developed a short form of the measure entitled the Therapeutic Factors Inventory-S (TFI-S). The TFI-S is a 44-item questionnaire that utilizes a selection of questions from the original 99-item TFI. According to one of the originators of the scale, psychometric data are currently being collected on the TFI (personal communication, K. Lese-Fowler, March 12, 2008). The measure used in this research is based on the TFI-S; however, questions pertaining to two of the therapeutic factors, existential factors and the corrective reenactment of the primary family group were omitted. These two therapeutic factors will not be examined during the course of this research because the coding manual used during this research, Bloch et al. (1979) does not address these two factors. The modified version of the TFI-S used in this research is simply the TFI-S minus eight questions, four questions addressing existential factors and four questions addressing the corrective reenactment of the primary family group. The remaining 36 questions form the modified TFI-S. The modified TFI-S will be administered to individual group members immediately after the first session of the poetry therapy group and immediately following the final session of the group. Information is not available regarding the impact of the modification to the TFI-S on the measure's validity; however, the decision to shorten the TFI-S by removing non-applicable questions was made to increase the likelihood that the at-risk youth would thoughtfully complete the questionnaire. It was this researcher's experience that even the modified version of the TFI-S required more time than group members were willing to spend thoughtfully addressing the questions posed on the measure. The results of each individual's modified TFI-S will be analyzed by calculating simple change scores for the scale as a whole and for each sub-scale. The small sample size within each group precludes the use of inferential statistics to analyze the scores.

The Most Important Event questionnaire will be used to elicit group members' perceptions of events that were most important to them during the poetry therapy group. In addition, the Most Important Event Questionnaire will be used to elicit the co-facilitator's perceptions regarding important group events. The questionnaire reads as follows:

Of the events that occurred in the last three meetings, which one do you feel was the most important for you personally? Describe the event: what actually took place, the group members involved, and your own reaction. Why was it so important for you? (Bloch et al., 1979, p. 258).

According to Bloch et al. (1979), the face validity of the questionnaire was established by ensuring the raters understood the task and the manual used to guide the coding, as well as ensuring that the definitions and criteria set for each of the factors were clear. Bloch et al. did not provide additional information regarding the validity of the Most Important Event questionnaire; however, the inter-rater reliability of the questionnaire was determined via the Kappa coefficient. According to Bloch et al., the Kappa coefficients for each pair of judges were 0.62 ($p < .001$), 0.52 ($p < .001$), and 0.60 ($p < .001$) (p. 260).

The *Most Important Event* questionnaire will be administered following the third, sixth, and tenth meeting. According to Bloch et al. (1979), administration at three-week intervals allows enough time for a therapeutic event to occur, while also ensuring that group members and the co-facilitator would be able "to recall reasonably well the events of the three meetings" (p. 258). The poetry therapy intervention will be facilitated over the course of ten sessions; therefore, a slight modification of the Bloch et al. procedure will be made in order to collect potentially valuable information about therapeutic elements present in the final termination session. As a result, the wording of the questionnaire will be changed slightly to "of the events which occurred in the last four meetings..." for the administration following the tenth meeting.

The group facilitator will administer the questionnaire by reading the text aloud and asking group members to individually write their responses to each portion of the questionnaire. These responses will

then be turned into the group facilitator prior to dismissal from the group session. Care will be taken to ensure that collaboration does not occur between group members when composing responses to the Most Important Event questionnaire.

The responses to the Most Important Event Questionnaire were coded by this author. The coding manual created by Bloch et al. (1979) was utilized to code the responses; however, in some instances, participants' responses did not fit any of the categories set forth by Bloch and colleagues. As a result, an additional code, activity (ACT) was added to categorize these responses that referenced a specific activity that occurred during group rather than an incident that could be connected to a specific therapeutic factor code. In instances that the activity code is applied, a sub-code is also applied to indicate the specific activity that was cited as most important. These sub-codes are R (indicating the receptive/prescriptive portion of the group, i.e. listening to the song); E, which indicates that the expressive/creative component of the group was most important (i.e. writing a poem); and S, which indicates that the symbolic/ceremonial component of the group was most important (i.e. sharing poem with the group).

Additional Data Collection

Additional data gathering will occur via document collection and acquisition of basic demographic information on each participant. These data sources will be utilized to provide a richer description of each group of participants.

The writings created during the course of the intervention will be collected from each individual and examined during the data analysis process. Group members were given the opportunity to create a poem or other type of creative writing during seven of the ten group sessions. Participants were able to write individually or collaboratively using a poetic stem or prompt, or they could choose to write about a topic of their choosing. In most instances, group members chose to write poems; however, a few

individuals created prose pieces or rap lyrics. These documents are categorized both as individual-level data and group-level data, because both individual poems and collaborative poems will be collected.

The poetic material was analyzed using an inductive approach. The inductive approach used to analyze the poetic works differs significantly from the deductive approach used to guide the content analysis of session transcripts. According to Patton (1980), the term inductive analysis refers to a process via which the “patterns, themes, and categories of analysis...emerge out of the data” (p. 306). The researcher began the analysis process by reading each poem several times and making notes and comments regarding themes present in a poem. For example, a poem by H.D. in group one contained the line “the animal inside of me is a bear because I fight for what I want”; this stanza was notated as “violence/aggression”. The notation “violence/aggression” represents what Patton refers to as an analyst-constructed typology. An analyst-constructed typology is one in which the researcher labels a phenomena as opposed to an indigenous typology in which the terminology used by group members is used to label a phenomenon (Patton, 1980). After all of the poems were examined and initial notations were made to categorize the poems, a second-level of coding was performed to identify notations that could be grouped together in categories. For example, the notations “striving to improve”, “perseverance” and “fighting for a better life” were combined to form a category labeled “resiliency”. After categories were developed that encompass most of the notations, the three most frequently occurring categories for each group were identified. The purpose of the analysis of the poetic material is to describe the themes present in the poems of each group.

Demographic data will also be collected from each group member during the first group session. The demographic data collected will include age, race/ethnicity, and gender. Data will also be collected regarding number of sessions attended by each individual.

Variables

This research is focused on one independent variable and one main dependent variable. The independent variable is the poetry therapy intervention. The dependent variable is the concept of a therapeutic factor. There are nine therapeutic factors: altruism, cohesion, guidance, instillation of hope, interpersonal interaction, interpersonal learning, self-disclosure, universality, and vicarious learning.

Independent Variable

The poetry therapy group curriculum is based on Maki and Mazza's (2004) R.E.S. (Receptive/Prescriptive, Expressive/Creative, and Symbolic/Ceremonial) model. The R.E.S. model contains the following three components:

- The receptive/prescriptive component involving the introduction of literature (e.g. poem, story, song lyrics) in a clinical, education, or community activity.
- The expressive creative component involving the use of written expression (e.g. poem, story, letter, journal) by the client or student.
- The symbolic/ceremonial component involving the use of metaphors, rituals, and storytelling in a clinical, educational, or community activity (p. 75).

The curriculum used in this research was developed over the course of three pilot projects in which the intervention was facilitated, feedback was collected, and changes were made to the in-group activities when deemed appropriate (Olson-McBride & Page, 2006). Over the course of the three pilots, the intervention moved from a more conventional poetry therapy intervention in which traditional pre-existing poetry was used during the receptive/prescriptive component of the group to one in which song lyrics, along with more traditional forms of pre-existing poetry, were used during the receptive/prescriptive component of the research. The intervention model used in this research focuses primarily on the use of popular music, primarily from the rap and R&B genres, during the receptive/prescriptive component of the session. In many of the sessions, the music was chosen by the

group facilitator; however, in at least two sessions, group members were asked to select a piece of music for the receptive/prescriptive portion of the session. During the expressive/creative component of the intervention, group members created a collaborative poem, a structured individual poem, or an unstructured individual poem. The symbolic/ceremonial component of the session involved group members reading the poems created during the session aloud to the group and soliciting appropriate feedback. The poetry therapy group-level intervention involved ten sessions. Each group session lasted 45 to 60 minutes.

The group curriculum used in this research was initially going to be identical across all three ten-session groups; however, upon meeting with the students in the third group, it became apparent that their musical interests leaned towards local rap artists and slightly more hardcore styles of rap music. According to a caseworker at the alternative school, the student population became more violent and hardened during the time that elapsed between the start of the first group and the start of the third group; and the change in the characteristics of the larger school population was reflected in the attitudes, behaviors, and life experiences of members of group three. As a result, the curriculum used in the first alternative school group (group one) and the transitional living program group (group two) are identical; however, the curriculum used with the second alternative school group (group three) differs primarily in terms of music selection. In the following section, details are provided via the specific activities which took place in each group. The group activities are listed according to session; variations on in-session activities are indicated by the addition of a sub-section detailing any differences by group.

Session one for groups one and two

In the first session of group one, the group facilitator introduced herself, discussed the expectations for behavior during the group, and provided an overview of the activities that would occur during group time. The focus of group one was encouraging group members to share information about themselves with the group. Group members listened to and discussed the song, “I Am Not My Hair” by

India.Arie. During the creative writing portion of the group, group members created a poem using the poetic stems “I am...” and “I am not...” Following the creative writing portion of the group, each group member was encouraged to read their poem aloud to the group.

Session one for group three

The first session of group three at the alternative school was on encouraging group members to share information about themselves and their life experiences with the group. The group session opened with a very brief introduction regarding the group activities and expectations. Following the introduction, group members listened to and discussed the song “Live Your Life” by T.I. and Rihanna. During the creative writing portion of the group, group members created poems based on the following stems:

My life smells like...

My life tastes like...

My life feels like...

My life sounds like...

My life looks like...

Following the creative writing portion of the group, each group member was encouraged to read their poem aloud to the group.

Session two for groups one, two, and three

The second session of group one focused on the exploration of group members’ perceptions of self. In the second session, group members listened to and discussed the song “Everything I Am” by Kanye West. During the creative writing portion of the group, group members created a poem using five prompts (Dillard, 1991). The prompts are as follows:

Real name...

Nickname or what you should be called...

Imagine there is an animal inside of you. What is it? Explain its significance...

Imagine there is an object inside your heart. What is it? Explain its significance...

Imagine there is a word written on your forehead. What is it? Explain its significance...

Following the creative writing activity, group members were encouraged to recite their poem to the group

Sessions three and four for groups one, two, and three

The third and fourth sessions were focused on exploring the life experiences of group members. During the third and fourth sessions, group members shared their “theme songs” with the group. Prior to the third session, each group member provided the facilitator with the name of the song that best described his/her life. The facilitator then obtained an MP3 version of the song and a copy of the lyrics. The third and fourth sessions of the group did not contain a creative writing portion.

The theme songs for group one were “Cry” by Rihanna (selected by J.L.), “So Many Tears” by Tupac (selected by J.H.), and “Sky’s the Limit” by Lil Wayne (selected by C.W.). Several of the group members stated that they would bring in their own songs and did not; therefore, three of the group members did not have songs to share during the theme song groups.

The theme songs for group two were “Superwoman” by Alicia Keys (selected by R.R.), “No Air” by Jordin Sparks (selected by J.H.), “Homecoming” by Kanye West (selected by D.R.), “Crying Out for Me” by Mario (selected by S.G.), and “Bleeding Love” by Leona Lewis (selected by L.R.).

The theme songs for group three were “Goin’ Thru Some Thangs” by Lil Boosie (selected by J.H.), “I Wanna Get High” by ABN (selected by K.T.), “Changes” by Tupac (selected by P.D.), and “Lil Boyz” by Juvenile (selected by A.V.).

Session five for groups one, two, and three

The focus of the fifth session was on familial relationships. The groups listened to and discussed two songs, “Cleaning Out My Closet” by Eminem and “Dear Mama” by Tupac, during the fifth session.

During the creative writing portion of the group, each group member was encouraged to write a poem about his or her mother or primary caregiver. Following the creative writing activity, group members were encouraged to recite their poem to the group. The primary difference between the activities of group three and the activities of groups one and two during this session occurred during the creative writing portion of the group. The three group members in attendance from group three created two collaborative poems, one about their mothers and one about their fathers. One member of the group also created an individual poem about his mother.

Session six for groups one and two.

The focus of the sixth session was encouraging group members to describe their lives. The song, “Book of Life” by Common was played and discussed during the first portion of group. Each group member created a sensory poem during the creative writing portion of the group. The prompts for the sensory poem are as follows:

My life smells like...

My life tastes like...

My life feels like...

My life sounds like...

My life looks like...

Following the creative writing portion of the group, each group member was encouraged to read their poem aloud to the group.

Session six for group three

Group three listened to the song “Dead and Gone” by Justin Timberlake and T.I. during the sixth session. The focus of the sixth session for this group was on examining past decisions and planning for the future. The creative writing segment of the group was based on the poetic stem “I used to be...but now I am...”

Session seven for groups one and two

The focus of the seventh session was on the community in which each group member lived. The group listened to and discussed the song “Get By” by Talib Kweli. During the creative writing portion of the group, the group members worked collaboratively to create a poem based on the stem, “if I was in charge of the world...” The group members recited the poem via a choral reading.

Session seven for group three

The seventh session of group three was also focused on community, albeit the larger community of the United States, rather than the local community focus that occurred during session seven of groups one and three. The group members listened to the song “Black President” by Nas. The group discussed the implications of having an African American President and were encouraged to share their thoughts on what they would do if President of the United States. Each group member was then asked to write a poem based on the poetic prompt “If I was in charge of the world...”

The amount of participation among group members during this session was significantly less than earlier group sessions and all of the group members stated that they did not like the song “Black President”. As a result, the facilitator asked for suggestions regarding songs and writing activities for the final three sessions of the group. Group members enthusiastically proposed a number of songs and asked if they could work together to create and perform a rap song. The final three sessions of the group incorporated group members’ suggestions.

Session eight for groups one and two

The eighth session was focused on the exploration of each group members’ life experiences. The group listened to and discussed the song “Walk in My Shoes” by Emily King. The creative writing portion of the group was centered on creating a collaborative poem that described how it felt to figuratively “walk in the shoes” of each group member. Group members chose to write the poem collaboratively. The activities that occurred during the eighth session of group two were the same as the

activities that occurred during the eighth session of group one; however, the group members chose to create individual, rather than collaborative, poems using the prompt “If you walked in my shoes...”

Session eight for group three

The song, “F*** the World” by Lil Wayne, utilized in the eighth session of group three was selected from a list of songs suggested by group participants. This particular song was selected because of its emphasis on the life experiences of the rapper performing the song. The facilitator directed the group discussion about the song towards each member sharing experiences from their lives. During the creative writing portion of the group, group members worked collaboratively on a rap song entitled “My Life”.

Session nine for groups one and two

The ninth session was focused on group members’ goals and dreams for the future. The group listened to and discussed the song “Dreamer” by Chris Brown. The poetic stems used during the creative writing portion of the group are as follows:

I used to be...

But now I am...

In the future, I will be...

Following the creative writing portion of the group, each group member shared his or her poem with the group.

Session nine for group three

The ninth session of group three began with the creative writing activity. The facilitator chose to start the group with writing, rather than listening to the selected song, because it was evident that the group members were very excited about sharing the work that they had done on the rap and would have most likely had a difficult time focusing on the listening and discussion portions of the group. After working for a period of time on the collaborative rap entitled “My Life”, group members listened to and

discussed “Until the End of Time” by Tupac. This song, like the song used in session eight of group three, was selected from a list of songs suggested by group members. The discussion portion of the group was focused on sharing and processing life experiences.

Session ten for groups one and two

During the tenth and final session, group members reviewed what they had accomplished during the course of the group. Each group member received a CD containing all the songs that were listened to and discussed during the group, as well as a book containing the poems written by each group member over the course of the group. In group one, a copy of the book and CD were also sent to the two group members, J.H. and J.L., who had graduated from school prior to the termination of the group. In group two, an additional copy of the CD and book of poems for one of the group members who was unable to attend was left with the director of the transitional living program.

Session ten for group three

During the tenth session of group three, the group members performed the collaborative rap that they had created. The staff of the alternative school offered to allow the group to perform the rap during a school-wide meeting; however, after much discussion, the group members decided that they were not comfortable performing in front of the whole school. After performing the collaborative rap and several other individually created raps, each group member received a CD containing all the songs that were listened to and discussed during the group, as well as a book containing the poems written by each group member over the course of the group. One group member who had been discharged from the school after successfully completing the program returned to group for the final session.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in research questions one and two is the concept of a therapeutic factor. The definition of the term “therapeutic factor” varies across authors. For example, two of the best-known authors in the area of therapeutic factors in group psychotherapy, Bloch and Crouch (1985) and

Yalom (1995), differ in their definitions of the concept of therapeutic factors. According to Bloch and Crouch, a therapeutic factor is “an element of group therapy that contributes to improvement in a patient’s condition and is a function of the actions of the group therapist, the other group members, and the patient himself” (p. 4); while Yalom states that therapeutic factors are “the actual mechanisms for effecting change in the patient” (p. xii). Bloch, Crouch, and Yalom also differ in their delineation and definitions of individual therapeutic factors. Bloch and Crouch state that there are ten therapeutic factors: acceptance, altruism, catharsis, guidance, instillation of hope, learning from interpersonal action, self-disclosure, self-understanding, universality, and vicarious learning; while Yalom states that there are eleven therapeutic factors: altruism, catharsis, the corrective recapitulation of the primary family group, development of socializing techniques, existential factors, group cohesiveness, imitative behavior, imparting information, instillation of hope, interpersonal learning, and universality.

In this research, nine therapeutic factors will be examined: altruism, cohesion, guidance, instillation of hope, interpersonal interaction, interpersonal learning, self-disclosure, universality, and vicarious learning (see detailed discussion of measures below). These nine factors are derived from combining, and in some cases, eliminating therapeutic factors from the lists delineated by Bloch and Crouch (1985) and Yalom (1995). The combination and elimination of factors leaves a set of nine therapeutic factors that can be measured directly via the Therapeutic Factors Inventory-S (TFI-S) (MacNair-Semands et al., 2007) and indirectly via the Classification of Therapeutic Factors Manual (Bloch et al., 1979). The two Yalom factors that were eliminated are existential factors and the corrective recapitulation of primary family group. These two factors were eliminated because the indirect method of measurement used in this research, the Bloch et al. Classification of Therapeutic Factors Manual does not provide guidelines for coding these factors. Two therapeutic factors from Bloch and Crouch’s list, catharsis and self-disclosure, were combined to form one therapeutic factor, catharsis. These two factors were combined to allow for direct measurement via the TFI-S. Two factors

from Yalom’s list, interpersonal learning-input and interpersonal learning-output, were also combined to form one therapeutic factor, interpersonal learning for the purpose of measurement via the TFI-S.

The nine remaining factors were combined, and in some cases renamed, to form the dependent variables that will be examined via this research. Table 2 below lists the original terminology used by Yalom (1995) and Bloch and Crouch (1995), as well as the actual terminology that will be used to name each therapeutic factor for the purposes of this research.

Table 2
Therapeutic Factors

Terminology Used in this Research	Bloch and Crouch’s terminology	Yalom’s terminology
Altruism*		
Cohesion	Cohesiveness	Acceptance
Guidance	Guidance	Imparting information
Instillation of hope*		
Interpersonal interaction	Learning from interpersonal interaction	Development of socializing techniques
Interpersonal learning	Self-understanding	Interpersonal learning-input
		Interpersonal learning-output
Self-disclosure	Self-disclosure	Catharsis
	Catharsis	
Universality*		
Vicarious learning	Vicarious learning	Imitative behavior

*Indicates no differences in terminology across authors

The first therapeutic element that will be explored via this research is altruism. According to Bloch et al. (1979), altruism occurs when a group member “can feel better about himself, and/or learn something positive about himself, through helping other group members” (p. 262). Yalom defines altruism in a similar manner, stating that altruism occurs when a group member “gains a positive view of himself or herself through extending help to others in group” (DeLucia-Waack, Gerrity, Kalodner, & Riva, 2004, p. 24).

In this research, each therapeutic factor will be measured via direct and indirect methods of measurement. The therapeutic factor of altruism will be measured directly via a modified version of the TFI-S. The questions on the TFI-S that address altruism are the following:

- (Q4) Helping others in group makes me feel better about myself
- (Q12) I am helping other group members with my feedback and support
- (Q22) When I share experiences I often help another group member
- (Q29) It touches me that people in group are caring of each other.

The therapeutic factors of altruism will be measured indirectly via the Most Important Event questionnaire and via an analysis of group transcripts. According to the coding manual, altruism is present when a group member “offers support reassurance, suggestions or comments to help other group members”; “shares similar problems for the purpose of helping other group members”; “feels needed and helpful”; “can forget about himself in favor of another group member”; and/or “recognizes that he wants to do something for another group member” (Bloch et al., 1979, p. 262).

Cohesion is the second therapeutic factor that will be examined via this research. According to Bloch and Crouch (1985), the therapeutic factor of cohesion, which they refer to as acceptance, is present when a group member “feels a sense of belonging and being valued” (p. 246). Yalom defines cohesion as a “feeling of togetherness provided and experienced by the group” (DeLucia-Waack et al., 2004, p. 24).

The questions on the TFI-S that address cohesiveness are the following:

- (Q8) The members distrust each other
- (Q17) The members feel a sense of belonging in this group
- (Q26) Group members don't express caring for one another
- (Q34) Even though we have differences, our group feels secure to me

According to the coding manual, cohesiveness is present when a group member “feels a sense of belonging, warmth, friendliness and comfort in the group”; “feels valued by other group members”; “values the support that the group offers to him”; “feels cared for, supported, understood and accepted by other group members”; and/or “feels unconditionally accepted and supported even when he reveals something about himself which he has previously regarded as unacceptable” (Bloch et al., 1979, p. 262).

This research will also focus on the therapeutic factor of guidance. Bloch and Crouch (1985) states that this therapeutic factor is present when a group member “receives useful information in the form of advice, suggestions, explanation, and instruction” (p. 246). Yalom, who uses the term “imparting information” in his discussion of this therapeutic factor, defines it as “advice-giving by therapist or fellow members” (DeLucia-Waack et al., 2004, p. 24).

The questions on the TFI-S that address guidance are the following:

- (Q5) My group gives me suggestions on how to solve problems
- (Q13) In group, members tell me what I should do about difficult situations and life decisions
- (Q21) In group, I get “how-to’s” on improving my life situation
- (Q30) Nobody gives much advice in my group

According to the coding manual, guidance is present when the group member “receives useful information and instruction from the therapist about mental health, mental illness or general (not personal) psychodynamics” or “receives explicit advice, suggestions, guidance about his problems from either the therapist or the other patients” (Bloch et al., 1979, p. 263).

The fourth therapeutic factor is the instillation of hope. According to Bloch and Crouch (1985), the instillation of hope occurs when a group member “gains a sense of optimism about his potential to benefit from treatment” (p. 246). Yalom (1995) states that the instillation of hope occurs when a group

member “recognizes other members’ improvement and that group can be helpful” and “the member develops optimism for his or her own improvement” (p. 24).

The questions on the TFI-S that address the instillation of hope are the following:

- (Q1) Seeing others change in my group gives me hope for myself
- (Q10) Things seem more hopeful since joining group
- (Q19) Group helps me feel more positive about my future
- (Q28) This group inspires me about the future

According to the coding manual, the instillation of hope is occurring in a group when a group member “sees that other group members have improved or are improving”; “sees that the group can be of help to its members in working towards their goals”; and/or “feels optimistic about the group’s potential for help” (Bloch et al., 1979, p. 263).

The therapeutic factor of interpersonal interaction will also be examined via this research. Bloch et al. (1979) utilized the term “learning from interpersonal actions” to describe this therapeutic factor and defined it as “the attempt to relate constructively and adaptively within the group, either by initiating some behavior or responding to other group members” (p. 262). Yalom refers to interpersonal interaction as the “development of socializing techniques” and states that this therapeutic factor occurs when the “group provides members with an environment that allows the members to interact in a more adaptive manner” (DeLucia-Waack et al., 2004, p. 24).

The questions on the TFI-S that address interpersonal interaction are the following:

- (Q3) Group doesn’t teach me anything about how to have good relationships
- (Q14) Nobody teaches me anything new about how to understand and deal with other people in my group
- (Q23) In group I can practice ways of interacting with other people
- (Q31) In group I learn better ways of dealing with other people

According to the coding manual, interpersonal interaction occurs in a group when a group member “tries out new, potentially positive ways of initiating behavior with other group members” and/or “tries out new, potentially positive ways of responding to other group members” (Bloch et al., 1979, p. 262).

Bloch et al. (1979) utilizes the term “self-understanding” to describe the therapeutic factor that will be referred to in this research as “interpersonal learning”. Bloch et al. state that this therapeutic factor occurs when “the patient learns something important about himself” (p. 263). The process of gaining insight occurs via the provision of direct and indirect feedback from fellow group members, as well as from the group facilitator. Yalom describes a similar concept but utilizes two separate terms to describe the therapeutic factor, “interpersonal learning-input” and “interpersonal learning-output”. Interpersonal learning-input is defined as a group member gaining “personal insight through other members’ sharing his or her perception of the member”, while interpersonal learning-output occurs when the “group provides members with an environment that allows the member to interact in a more adaptive manner” (DeLucia-Waack et al., 2004, p. 24).

The questions on the TFI-S that address interpersonal learning are the following:

- (Q7) Learning how to express myself to others in group has deepened my relationships
- (Q15) My group is kind of like a little piece of the larger world I live in: I see the same patterns, and working them out in group helps me work them out in my outside life
- (Q24) Group has shown me the importance of other people in my life
- (Q33) By getting honest feedback from members and facilitators, I’ve learned a lot about my impact on other people

According to the coding manual, interpersonal learning occurs in a group when a group member “learns something about himself”, “learns how he comes across to the group”, “learns more clearly

about the nature of his problem”, and/or “learns why he behaves the way he does and how he got to be the way he is” (Bloch et al., 1979, p. 263).

In this research, the seventh therapeutic factor, self-disclosure, combines two of Bloch et al’s (1979) therapeutic factors, self-disclosure and catharsis. According to Bloch and Crouch (1985), self-disclosure occurs when a group member “reveals highly personal information to the group and thus ‘gets it off his chest’”, while catharsis involves the “release of intense feelings which brings him a sense of relief” (p. 246). Yalom also uses the term “catharsis” when describing the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure, but does not list self-disclosure as a separate therapeutic factor. Yalom states that this therapeutic factor occurs when a “member releases feelings about past or here-and-now experiences; this release leads to the member feeling better” (DeLucia-Waack et al., 2004, p. 24).

The questions on the TFI-S that address self-disclosure are the following:

- (Q9) Even though being upset is hard, we try to let out our feelings in group
- (Q18) It’s okay for me to be angry in group
- (Q35) I get to vent my feelings in group
- (Q36) I can “let it all out” in my group

For the purposes of this research, the coding information for catharsis and for self-disclosure will be combined to form the code for self-disclosure. According to the coding manual, self-disclosure occurs in a group when a group member “reveals information, about either his life outside the group or his past, or his feared, embarrassing, or worrisome problems, or his fantasies, which he regards as private and personal”, “reveals and shares personal information even though such revealing and sharing may be difficult or painful”, while catharsis is occurring when a group member “releases feelings (leading to relief) with the group, either of past or here-and-now material”, and/or “expresses feelings, such as anger, affection, sorrow, and grief, (leading to relief) which have been previously difficult or impossible to release” (Bloch et al., 1979, p. 262).

Universality is also a therapeutic factor that will be explored via this research. Yalom (1995) and Bloch and Crouch (1985) define universality in a similar manner. According to Yalom, universality occurs when a “member perceives that other members share similar feelings” (DeLucia-Waack et al., 2004, p. 24); while Bloch and Crouch state that universality occurs when the group member “discovers that he is not unique with his problems” (p. 246).

The questions on the TFI-S that address universality are the following:

- (Q2) Because I’ve got a lot in common with other group members, I’m starting to think I may have something in common with people outside group too.
- (Q11) In group I’ve learned that I have more similarities with others than I would have guessed
- (Q20) This group help me recognize how much I have in common with other people
- (Q27) In group, members are more alike than different from each other

According to the coding manual, universality is operating in the group setting when a group member “recognizes that his problems are not unique to him”, “perceives that other group members have similar problems and feelings and this reduces his sense of uniqueness”, and/or “experiences the sense that he is not alone with his feelings and problems” (Bloch et al., 1979, p. 262).

The final therapeutic factor that will be examined via this research is vicarious learning. Bloch et al. (1979) state that vicarious learning occurs when the group member “experiences something of value for himself through the observation of other group members, including the therapist” (p. 263). Yalom utilizes the term “imitative behavior” to label the therapeutic factor of vicarious learning and states that this factor occurs when a group member “learns through the observation of others’ learning experiences” (De Lucia-Waack et al., 2004, p. 24).

The questions on the TFI-S that address vicarious learning are the following:

- (Q6) I have gotten some good ideas about how to interact by doing the same thing someone in my group has done
- (Q16) In group, sometimes I learn by watching and later imitating what happens
- (Q25) I pay attention to how others handle difficult situations in my group so I can apply these strategies in my own life
- (Q32) Since joining group, sometimes I've caught myself saying things like others in my group might say

According to the coding manual, vicarious learning is operating in the group setting when a group member “benefits from observing the therapy experience of another patient”; “identifies with another group member to the extent that the patient benefits himself from the other member’s therapy experiences”; “recognizes some positive aspect of the behavior of the therapist, or of other patients, to imitate”; and/or “can find models in the positive behavior of other group members (including the therapist) toward which he can strive” (Bloch et al., 1979, p. 263).

Reliability and Validity

Information on the internal consistency, test-retest reliability, face validity, and inter-rater reliability for two of the measurement tools used in this research was provided earlier in this section. In addition to considerations regarding the reliability and validity of the measures used during this study, steps were taken to ensure that the overall design of the study was sound in terms of construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability.

According to Yin (1984), determining construct validity involves “establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied” (p. 36). Evidence will be gathered via multiple sources including the modified Therapeutic Factors Inventory-S, the Most Important Event questionnaire, and observation to increase the construct validity of the research. In addition, the works of several well-known authors in the area of group psychotherapy, including Kivlighan and Holmes

(2004), Yalom (1995), and Bloch and Crouch (1985), were utilized to inform the process of formulating the definition of the dependent variable, therapeutic factors, used in this research.

The purpose of this research is not to demonstrate causality; however, in order to ensure that some degree of internal validity exists within this research, pattern-matching logic will be used. The case-level data gathered via observation, questionnaire, and the TFI-S will be compared to the pre-existing theoretical framework regarding therapeutic factors in group psychotherapy to determine if the data collected during this research match this pre-determined theoretical framework.

The issue of external validity is addressed via the use of multiple cases selected according to replication logic. The findings from each case are then compared to the theoretical base on which the research was built to determine if the findings fit with the existing knowledge base. Since there are multiple cases in this collective case study, the findings will be compared to the pre-existing theoretical base multiple times. In addition, every effort has been made to provide description of the research participants and intervention that is rich enough to allow readers to determine whether the findings of this research are applicable for use with the groups of youth with whom the readers work.

Several steps have been taken to enhance the reliability of this research. First, efforts were made to ensure that the case study protocols used by the researcher were explained thoroughly. Second, a repository of material including videos and transcripts of group sessions, the poetic works of group members, and the questionnaires and surveys of group members have been kept to form a record of the research. Finally, a second individual, blind to the research purpose, was used to code 33% of the transcripts to determine the inter-rater reliability of the coding system.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the development of therapeutic factors over the course of a ten-week poetry therapy intervention with three groups of at-risk youth. In this chapter, demographic characteristics and other descriptive material are provided first regarding the individuals and groups that participated in the study. The individual level data, gathered via the TFI-S and the Most Important Event Questionnaire, as well as the group level data, gathered via observation of videotapes of each session, are also presented for each group. All of the data are grouped according to case.

Alternative School Group One

Group one consisted of individuals from an alternative school in an urban area of Louisiana. This alternative school was designed to serve youth, ages nine to eighteen, who are involved with the juvenile justice system. The students who attend this school have had significant difficulties in the traditional educational system due to behavioral problems.

Demographic Information and Impressions

A total of seven individuals, two females and five males, participated in group one. Six of the seven participants were African American, one participant was Caucasian. Group members ranged in age from 13 to 16, the average age of the group was 14.85 years.

Throughout the course of the ten session group, additional information was gathered, albeit informally, about the life experiences and circumstances of group members. All of the group members resided in single-parent or grandparent, female-headed households. According to staff, several of the group members had difficulties related to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, including one individual who was permanently removed from the group after the first session because of a marked inability to focus on the group activity. Several group members reported a history of substance use, primarily marijuana and alcohol. One group member had participated in an inpatient rehabilitation program due to substance abuse issues. All of the group members lived in impoverished neighborhoods

with high crime rates. Group members reported high levels of violence, including homicide, in their neighborhoods. Inferences were made throughout the course of the group to personal participation in activities including physical assault and weapons possession. One group member had significant difficulties reading and writing; it appeared as if he could only write his name and a few other basic words.

Observation Data

The results of the content analysis are presented on a session by session basis to allow for an examination of the impact of session content and attendance on the frequency of statements coded as self-disclosure. These data will be presented both as number of statements coded as self-disclosure per session, as well as the percentage of total statements made during the receptive/prescriptive component of the session that were coded as self-disclosure.

During the receptive/prescriptive component of session one, group members listened to and discussed the song, “I Am Not My Hair” by India.Arie. This song was selected to encourage group members to share information about themselves with the group. A total of six individuals attended session one.

Eight out of sixty-seven, or 11.94 %, of the statements made during the receptive/prescriptive component of the group were coded as self-disclosure. Many of the self-disclosing statements were related to the topic of being judged by other people because of external appearances. For example, one male group member stated that he felt like a teacher judged him negatively because of his dreadlocks, while several group members stated that the only judgment that is worth considering is God’s judgment.

The song “Everything I Am” by Kanye West was the focus of the receptive/prescriptive component of session two of group one. This song was also selected to encourage group members to share information during this early phase of group development. A total of four individuals attended session two.

Self-disclosure was present in 17.46 %, or 11 of 63, of statements made during the receptive/prescriptive component of this session. A large number of self-disclosing statements were concentrated in the following segment of discussion:

JH: I ain't no club type dude, I am chillin'. I am smart as a mother. Give me any kind of plan, I will get through it....

Facilitator: How about you?

JL: I ain't no good boy, I am a hood boy, I'm gonna knock you off your hood boy.

Facilitator: Is that what you want to be?

JL: That's what God made me....

CW: I ain't quiet, but I don't get real mad....

Facilitator: So you don't have a bad temper.

CW: You gotta put your hands on me for me and you to fight....

HD: I am not prejudiced. I am smart, I might not apply myself and I am might not seem like it, but I am.

The third session and fourth sessions were focused on theme songs. Each group was instructed to select the song that best represented their life experiences and share this song with the group. The theme songs were "Cry" by Rihanna (selected by J.L.), "So Many Tears" by Tupac (selected by J.H.), and "Sky's the Limit" by Lil Wayne (selected by C.W.). Three of the group members did not present theme songs to the group; two group members were unable to acquire copies of their songs to share with the group and one group member was not in attendance during the session in which his song was to be shared. A total of five individuals attended session three; three individuals attended session four.

During the third session, 65 of the 238 statements, or 27.31%, were coded as self-disclosure; during the fourth session, 54 of 300, or 18%, were deemed self-disclosure. Several of the group

members shared personal information about trust and love in relationships while discussing the J.L.'s theme song "Cry":

KR: I am the same way. I don't like the love thing....

HD: Yeah. I don't know, I guess you could say I don't leave my heart open to nobody.

Facilitator: Does that go the same way for romance, people you might date, and friends and family?

HD: Everybody, I don't trust anybody, so it is like just everybody....

JL: Yeah. That is why I pull away from girls when I start falling in love. You got to, before you get too deep, you heard me?

A particular line, "why do I cry so many tears?" in the theme song, "So Many Tears, also encouraged self-disclosure among group members about the trying circumstances of their lives:

JL: Shit, I be asking that all the time. I don't give a fuck about life. I am like 'why me'?

Facilitator: What do you mean by that?

JL: All the shit I have been going through, I just be like why do I have to go through this.

CW: I been thought a lot of stuff, shoot outs and everything.

Facilitator: Do you guys all feel like 'why me'?

HD: Yes.

CW: Police running through the house and stuff.

The fifth session of group one was designed to encourage discussion about the relationships between group members and their families. Two songs, "Dear Mama" by Tupac and "Cleaning Out My Closet" by Eminem, were played during group. Each song illustrates a different type of relationship with one's parent; the first song portrays a positive parent-child relationship, while the second portrays a troubled parent-child relationship. Group members were encouraged to select the song that best

represented the relationship between them and their primary parent figure. Five individuals attended session five.

Slightly more than 20%, or 20, of the comments made during the receptive/prescriptive component of session five were categorized as self-disclosure. All five of the group members in attendance shared personal information in response to the facilitator's question "If I asked your mama to tell me about you, what would she say?" Excerpts illustrating self-disclosure from this conversation are as follows:

KR: My mom would say I am mean.

Facilitator: So your mom would think you were bad?

HD: A horrible bitch.

KR: She would call you a bitch?

Facilitator: How about you?

JL: She would be like, he is smart, but he is terrible....

Facilitator: Smart but terrible.

JL: JH, what would your mother say?

JH: I don't know. I don't really talk to her because I be getting mad because I don't even know what to say....she would probably get all emotional, crying and stuff. She would say he is a good kid and all. I don't know what she would say.

Facilitator: I can picture that, a mom being asked about her kid and getting all emotional.

HD: My mom would get mad.

Facilitator: How about you, CW?

CW: She would say I am going good now....but I am on probation.

HD: My mom wouldn't even know where I was, if I was doing good.

The song “Book of Life” by Common was utilized during the receptive/prescriptive portion of session six. The song was selected to encourage group members to reflect upon and communicate about their life experiences. A total of four individuals attended session six.

Twenty statements, or slightly less than twenty percent of statements, made during the sixth session of group one were coded as self-disclosure. Many of these statements were in response to the following lyric: “I don’t think I will ever be happy until I rest in peace”. One group member, JL, responded to a fellow group member who asked why a person couldn’t “just be happy” with this powerful personal statement:

JL: Because life is so f*** up....he is living in the slum. That n***** don’t got nothing to be happy about, crack addicts leaning outside. Mom gotta be working two jobs to fucking feed me, momma, feed me, I’m hungry.

The sixth session was the final session attended by two group members, J.H. and J.L. Both individuals had completed the program at the alternative school and were returning to the public school system.

The music selected for use in the seventh session was “Get By” by Talib Kweli. The lyrics to “Get By” detail living conditions in an impoverished neighborhood and were utilized in this session to encourage group members to discuss the environments in which they lived. The song, however, did not elicit much of a reaction from group members; only 8 of 103 statements, or 7.77 percent, were coded as self-disclosure. A total of four group members attended session seven.

The song selected for use in the eighth session was “Walk in My Shoes” by Emily King. “Walk in my Shoes” was selected to encourage individuals to discuss their current situation and what it feels like to figuratively “walk in their shoes”. Two members attended group eight.

Thirty-five percent, or 42, of the statements made during session eight were coded as self-disclosure. During the discussion portion of the group, group members quickly moved from discussing

their current lives to discussing how they want to improve themselves so they can provide a better life for any children they may have in the future. An excerpt from this portion of the discussion is as follows:

HD: I am going to have a better life for them.

CW: They are not going to smoke because I am going to show them, yeah, I would just tell them that this is bad for you and this is bad for you.

HD: I would just tell them what I have been through and say do you really want to go through that? I have had so many people come talk to me....I was watching what my mom and dad did, they never told me anything, but like hypocrites, they were doing it in front of me. They say don't do it, but they're doing it....

CW: I am not trying to have children like me. I want them to be better than me. I don't want to have them go to no school like this. I want them to go to college and stuff.

The ninth session of group one was designed to encourage group members to discuss their dreams and future plans. The group listened to the song "Dreamer" by Chris Brown during the first segment of group. A total of four group members attended session nine.

The total number of statements coded as self-disclosure during this session of group was quite low with only 11%, or 15, statements coded as self-disclosure.

Summary of Observation Results

The content analysis indicated that the highest rates of self-disclosure occurred during sessions eight and three, while the lowest rate of self-disclosure occurred during session seven and nine. A summary of the results of the content analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Summary of Observation Results for Group One

Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
# of statements coded SD	8	11	65	54	25	20	8	42	15
% of statements coded SD	11.94	17.46	27.31	18	20.83	19.23	7.77	35	11.03

Most Important Event Questionnaire

Participant responses to the Most Important Event Questionnaire were coded according to Bloch et al.'s Classification of Therapeutic Factors manual (1979). In some instances, a participant's response reflected that the most important portion of group was a specific activity and nothing in the response fit within the definition of a therapeutic factor. In these cases, the response was coded as activity, or ACT. If a response referenced both a specific activity and a therapeutic factor, the response was coded as the relevant therapeutic factor rather than activity.

Five individuals' responses were collected from the first administration of the questionnaire; while four individuals' responses were collected from the second and third administrations of the questionnaire. The number of responses collected was dependent on the number of individuals attending the session of the group in which the questionnaire was administered.

Participant responses to the first questionnaire included two responses that were coded as representative of the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure, two responses that were representative of the therapeutic factor of cohesion, and one response was not deemed to be representative of a particular therapeutic factor. The latter response was categorized as a statement related to the specific activities that occurred during the group, rather than therapeutic factors. Participant responses to the questionnaire administered after the sixth session of the group included one response that was related to a specific activity that occurred during the group, while one of the responses referenced the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure, and two responses that referenced the therapeutic factor of universality. Responses to

the final questionnaire included one response that referenced specific activities that occurred during the group, one reference to the therapeutic factor of cohesion, one reference to the therapeutic factor of universality, and one reference to the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure.

A total of 13 responses to the Most Important Event questionnaire were provided over the course of the intervention. Four of those responses were coded as self-disclosure; three were coded as cohesion, and three as universality. In addition, three responses were coded as not referencing a specific therapeutic factor; rather these responses referenced a specific activity in the group and were coded as ACT or activity. The complete responses to each questionnaire are listed in Table 4.

Table 4
Responses to Most Important Event Questionnaire for Group One

Administration	Session Identified as Most Important	Actual Response	Code
1	S1	I liked it when I first came because I got to meet the producer and my classmates. It was very important to me because I like the music.	CO
1	*	When we write poems that is the most important thing to me because I got to see myself and everybody else perform.	ACT
1	S3	Most important event was when we had to pick a song we could relate to. Everybody was involved. It was important to let people know about me.	SD
1	S1	The first group. My feelings because I wrote a poem. Because I had to express my feelings.	SD
1	S3	I like it when we all get on the conversation about music. We listen to music, about how it describes us. Today I liked what we talked about.	CO
2	S1**	The first time we perform our writings. We listen to a group of songs, talk about them, then write poems based on the songs. So I could improve my writings and comprehension of music.	ACT
2	S5	Group 5. Pick out of two songs which one fits me best with the relationship I have with my mother. Cause I was able to express my feelings about family and family is important to me.	SD

(Table 4 continued)

2	S5	Eminem and Tupac group. They spit some real stuff about their mom, the truth. Real stuff about loving mama and stuff. Makes me feel the same way about my mama.	UN
2	S5	Group 5, Eminem. Some of the people talked about how some of the Eminem song revolves around them and others talked about how Dear Mama revolved around them. The song just revolved around my life and what it was about.	UN
3	S7	Group 7. I liked the beat. I don't really remember. I liked the beat of the song.	ACT
3	S8	Session 8. Walk in My Shoes. If I was in charge of the world, we all got into it and I liked the point I made because we can all change the world in our own special ways.	CO
3	S8 S9	The Chris Brown song and Walk in My Shoes. I understand the idea of walking in my shoes. I liked the Chris Brown group because I have dreams. I feel like if someone walked in my shoes they wouldn't feel the same.	UN
3	S8	Group 9. We had to write a poem (I used to be...) and read the poem out loud. Made me express how I used to be.	SD

* indicates that a specific session was not referenced, nor could it be inferred

**indicates that the response was counted but the participant selected a session that was not within the range of the sessions under consideration for that particular administration of the questionnaire or the participant selected more than one session

Modified Therapeutic Factors Inventory-S

A total of four members of group one completed the pre-test and the post-test version of the modified TFI-S. The pre-test scores and post-test scores for each individual are listed in table five.

Table 5
Modified TFI-S Pre-test and Post-Test Scores for Group One

	AL	CO	GU	IH	II	IL	SD	UN	VL	Sum										
CW	18	11	17	14	16	16	32	14	16	15	17	19	13	14	8	19	12	14	133	136
JL	18	19	14	24	14	21	11	22	17	28	5	20	11	26	13	17	8	20	117	197
HD	18	17	20	22	17	15	37	25	15	18	19	20	12	23	16	25	19	20	161	185
KR	11	10	16	11	13	14	31	13	18	12	12	9	14	9	12	15	9	10	116	103

Note: The pre-test and post-test scores are listed for each therapeutic factor. The first score for each individual is the pre-test; the second score is the post-test.

The small number of matched pairs precludes the use of inferential statistics analyze the TFI-S data; however, an examination of the means indicates that the post-test scores were higher than the pre-test scores on the Universality and Vicarious Learning subscales for all four of the participants. The post-test scores were higher than the pre-test scores on the Self-disclosure subscale for three of the participants. The scores on the measure as a whole were higher on the post-test for three of the four participants.

Document Analysis

Members of group one wrote 23 poetic works during the course of the ten-session group; two of those poetic works were collaborative, meaning that more than one group member contributed to the poem.

Three primary themes were present in the writings of group one. The first theme was aggression and violence. Four of the poems contained poems that referenced aggressive or violent acts. For example, a poem written by C.W. contained the following lines: “the animal inside of me is a dog, because I like to fight”. A tremendously violent poem written by M.T. after a disagreement with his probation officer included the lines “I told y’all last time, watch me catch ‘em from behind, do something to break his spine”.

Several of the poetic works also contained references to loneliness. In a poem written by H.D. during the second session of group, she stated “the word written on my forehead is ‘mistaken’ because sometimes things so wrong, I feel like I don’t belong”. J.H. also wrote a poem during the second session of group that referenced loneliness; however, this reference appeared to be directed at being alone for self-protection. A line from this poem is as follows: “The word written on my forehead is ‘keep out’ because I’d rather be alone, only friends I got is God and my kin folks back home”. In session eight, a collaborative poem written by C.W. and H.D. overtly referenced loneliness in the following line: “if you walked in my shoes, you would know I need a friend because I feel so lonely”.

While violence, aggression, and loneliness were present in several of the poems written by group members, a sense that the youth were striving for a better life was also evident in their writings. The theme of striving to improve is evident in the following poem by J.H.:

I'm not my skin
I ain't this crack
although I hustle
my mind on track
was born behind
watch me shake back
and I ain't ashamed
that my skin is black

A poem by H.D. also echoed this desire to improve:

I used to be a drug addict
But now I am clean and sober
In the future I will stay drug free and live a normal life
I used to be an ignorant and ugly person
But now I am a smart, beautiful young lady
In the future I will be intelligent and I will have success

Despite the feelings of loneliness and reliance on aggression and violence as a means of addressing problems, a poem written by J.L. provides an accurate summary of the resilient nature of the youth in group one:

The animal inside of me is a lion
'cause I'm destined to be the kind of this jungle...
The word written on my forehead is 'built-to-last'

because I was made to survive through whatever

Summary of Group One

Group one consisted of individuals from an alternative school in an urban area of Louisiana. A total of seven individuals were members of group one; one individual was removed from the group after the first session, as a result, there were six individuals who attended group regularly. Six of the seven participants were African American, one participant was Caucasian, and the average age of the group was 14.85 years.

A total of 13 responses to the Most Important Event questionnaire were collected; the sessions most frequently cited as important to group members were sessions one, five, and eight; each of those sessions garnered three mentions on the Most Important Event questionnaire. The therapeutic factor most frequently referenced as important on the Most Important Event questionnaire was self-disclosure, with four references; followed by cohesion and universality, each with three references.

Four individuals completed both the pre-test and the post-test forms of the modified TFI-S; the highest gains were found on the universality subscale, with an increase of 27 points; the self-disclosure subscale, with an increase of 22 points; and the vicarious learning subscale with an increase of 16 points. The total gain score for the four matched pairs on the scale as a whole was 94 points.

The rate of self-disclosure as measured by the amended coding manual was highest in session 8 at 35%. The second highest rate of self-disclosure occurred during session 3 with 27.31%; the third highest rate was found in session 5 with a rate of 20.83% statements coded as self-disclosure.

Three themes emerged most frequently in the patterns of the poetic works written during group one. These themes are aggression/violence, loneliness, and resiliency.

Transitional Living Program Group Two

Group two consisted of individuals residing in a transitional living program in an urban area of Louisiana. The residents of this transitional living program are provided housing and other supportive

services, including case management. The individuals participating in this transitional living program were either homeless or at risk of being homeless prior to entering the program.

Demographic Information and Impressions

A total of seven individuals, six females and one male, participated in group two. All seven of the participants were African American. Group members ranged in age from 17 to 18, the average age of the group was 17.29 years.

Throughout the course of the ten session group, group members shared additional information about their life experiences. All of the group members had been, or were presently in the foster care system. The reasons given for entering the foster care system varied, including two group members reporting a history of being sexually abused and one group member reporting that she had entered the foster care system because her mother was mentally ill and unable to care for her children. Two members of the group were mothers. Their children, both infants under the age of one, also resided in the transitional living program and were occasionally present during group. Several of the group members reported significant losses, including three group members whose parents had died and one group member whose child was stillborn. None of the group members referenced any involvement with the justice system; however, one group member stated that the father of her child was in jail. Occasional reference was made to the casual use of substances, primarily alcohol. Five of the seven group members were actively employed, attending high school, or working towards obtaining a GED.

Observation Data

The results of the content analysis will be examined on a session by session basis to allow for an examination of the impact of session content and attendance on the frequency of statements coded as self-disclosure. These data will be presented both as number of statements coded as self-disclosure per session, as well as the percentage of total statements made during the receptive/prescriptive component of the session that were coded as self-disclosure.

The song selected for use in session one was “I Am Not My Hair” by India.Arie. This song was selected to encourage group members to share information about themselves with the group. A total of four individuals attended session one. In addition, two individuals, D.R. and S.G., brought their infant sons to group. The addition of two infants to the group was distracting to the mothers of the children, the facilitator, and other group members; however, accommodating the children during the group time ensured that their mothers, who oftentimes had difficulty accessing reliable childcare, could attend.

Twenty-three percent, or 18 of 78 statements, made during the first session of group two were coded as self-disclosure. Much of the self-disclosure in session one was focused on the lyric “because it was time to change my life, to become the woman that I am inside”. Self-disclosing comments related to this lyric include J.W.’s statement:

“I wouldn’t want to start all over, I would just want to change one thing. I wouldn’t be where I was at. I just want to change that my dad is dead. There is just stuff I would like to change in my life. I know most people want to start all over because they have made bad mistakes in their life”.

The focus of the receptive/prescriptive component of session two was “Everything I Am” by Kanye West. This song was also selected to encourage group members to share information during this early phase of group development. A total of four individuals attended session two.

The rate of self-disclosure, 27.75% or 25 of 83 statements, during this session was the second highest of all sessions that occurred during group two. The following discussion involving self-disclosure stemmed from a lyric in the song “Everything I Am” that referenced needing someone with whom to talk and a place to stay:

JW: I have always had somewhere to go if I really needed to go somewhere. I could go home if I wanted to. I have been at the point where I haven’t had anybody to talk to though. My daddy, he died, and that point in life I didn’t talk to nobody or do nothing.

Facilitator: It also sounds like when you first came here you didn't talk to anybody.

JW: I wasn't talking to nobody. I just did what I did and went back upstairs.

Facilitator: How about you? Have you ever felt like you had no one to talk to or no place to go?

LR: I have at times felt like I had no place to go. I be feeling like that, I have my moments.

Facilitator: Feeling like you don't have anyone to talk to?

LR: Yeah, it is just a whole bunch of stuff that doesn't have to do with anybody else, nobody, nowhere. When people are walking around here, there are days when people are just figments of my imagination. I know they are here but they are not here....yeah, sometimes I feel like there is nobody.

The third and fourth sessions were focused on theme songs. Each group was instructed to select the song that best represented their life experiences and share this song with the group. The theme songs were "Superwoman" by Alicia Keys (selected by R.R.), "Homecoming" by Kanye West (selected by D.R.), "No Air" by Jordin Sparks (selected by J.W.), "Crying Out for Me" by Mario, and "Bleeding Love" by Leona Lewis (selected by L.R.). Four individuals attended session three, while five individuals attended session four.

During the third session, 48 of 173 or 27.75% of statements made during group were coded as self-disclosure; during the fourth session, 30 of 202 or 14.85% of statements were coded as self-disclosure. Several group members responded to song "No Air" with its theme of feeling "smothered" or restricted by personal relationships. The following is an excerpt from the discussion about feeling restricted in personal relationships:

JW: I picked the song because sometimes I feel like when I am in relationships, people won't let me breathe. There are a lot of people telling me what to do. I know there are rules in the world but I feel like I need to make my own decisions. I need to do what I got to do for myself instead of everybody telling me what to do....

Facilitator: How about you?

RR: Yes, my sister. They just want to control if I am dating anyone. They wouldn't let him come see me or they wouldn't let me talk on the phone of such and such. If I made a mistake, they were like, they just wouldn't approve of it. I want to make my own mistakes....

Facilitator: D.R., do you have anyone telling you what to do?

DR: People tell me what to do, but I am just headstrong. Really headstrong...I like to learn from my own mistakes.

The fifth session was designed to encourage discussion about the relationships between group members and their families. Two songs, "Dear Mama" by Tupac and "Cleaning Out My Closet" by Eminem, were played during group. Group members were asked to identify which of the two songs best portrayed the relationship that they have with their parental figure. Three individuals attended the fifth session of group; one of the attendees was a new group member. Although the facilitator's stated policy was to not allow individuals to enter the group mid-way, this individual's enthusiasm and commitment to group attendance allowed for a change in policy.

Session five marked the highest self-disclosure rates for group two with 27 of 72 statements, or 37.5% of the discussion, coded as self-disclosing in nature. A large portion of the discussion in session five was focused on verbalizing feelings about parental figures. The following segment illustrates group members sharing different opinions about parents:

LR: I couldn't imagine feeling that about my mother. It ain't your dad that got you here, it is your mama who got you here. Both of them made you, but mama is the one who had to carry you for nine months. Mama could have flushed you.

PR: Sometimes mama's do things that make you angry.

JW: Yeah, his mama did some stuff to him.

PR: I hate her more than I love her. I still hate her, but I love her at the same time. I wouldn't let anybody sit and diss my mama, I would sit there and diss her...My mama let her boyfriends rape me, she sold me for drugs, she left me in the house with no food or water. I just look back on it and think now I can go through anything. Anybody can make me feel so low, but it won't do anything to me because I have been through all types of stuff....

LR: I didn't like my mama. You never know how much you love that parent until that parent is gone. I thought that since she didn't raise me, I would be like, oh, she died, I am going to cry but I am not going to think about her being dead. But you know, I think about her...she did stuff but I wouldn't say I hated her for it, but at a point I was coming to hate her...I don't hate her because I can't ask her for forgiveness anyway.

Facilitator: She can't ask you for forgiveness.

LR: She didn't do nothing to me. I don't blame her nothing....You can't be mad at your mama, you got to be mad at the drug addiction. The addiction is what made her do it.

The song "Book of Life" by Common was utilized during the receptive/prescriptive portion of session six. The song was selected to encourage group members to reflect upon and communicate about their life experiences. A total of five individuals attended this group, including one additional new member. As referenced earlier, the original plan was not to add members to the group mid-session; however, as the group gained in popularity within the transitional living program, other youth were quite committed to being a part of the activities.

The level of self-disclosure in session six was relatively low at 12.2%, or 15 of 123 statements. Three of the group members were engaged in a conflict outside of group, so much of the group time was spent addressing the verbal and non-verbal hostility that was present during the session.

The music selected for use in the seventh session was “Get By” by Talib Kweli. The song addressed the conditions in impoverished neighborhoods similar to the neighborhoods in which several group members were raised. Three group members attended the session.

A total of 13.91%, or 16 of 115 statements made during this session were coded as self-disclosure. The bulk of self-disclosing statements occurred while the group was discussing their belief that little could be done to improve the conditions in some neighborhoods because individuals keep choosing to commit crimes. The following is an excerpt from this portion of the group:

JS: I don't think it would make a difference. You can lock them all up, there are always jail cells, but that ain't going to be any better because they choose, it is up to them. It is not ever going to get any better.

Facilitator: Do you think it is hopeless?

JS: Yes, because we all have our own minds. We all make decisions and choices on our own. It is like, if I am going to do this, ain't no one going to stop me....

JW: I don't think that will never change. People are always in someone else's business....If someone shoot my sister or something, I am going to shoot you, or your little girl or something. I am not going to have any pity on you because you didn't have any pity on my sister. I don't think it is ever going to stop.

The song “Walk in My Shoes” was the focus of the eighth session of group two. The song was selected to encourage individuals to discuss what it feels like to figuratively “walk in their shoes”. Three members attended group eight.

The level of self-disclosure in this session of the group was at 11.76 percent. Only six of the fifty-one statements uttered during group were coded as self-disclosure and all but one of those statements was attributed to a single group member.

The final transcribed session of group two was session nine. The group listened to and discussed the song “Dreamer” by Chris Brown during this session. The song was selected to encourage discussion about group member’s future goals. A total of four individuals attended this session of the group.

The level of self-disclosure during this group was exceptionally low, 1.96%, with only one of fifty-one statements coded as self-disclosure. Two of the four group members stated that they did not understand the song; as a result, much of the group was spent interpreting and debating the meaning of the song lyrics as opposed to engaging in discussion about group members’ dreams for the future.

Summary of Observation Results

The content analysis indicated that the highest rates of self-disclosure occurred during sessions five and two, while the lowest rates of self-disclosure occurred during sessions eight and nine. A summary of the results of the content analysis is presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Summary of Observation Results for Group Two

Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
# of statements coded SD	18	25	48	30	27	15	16	6	1
% of statements coded SD	23.08	30.12	27.75	14.85	37.5	12.2	13.91	11.76	1.96

Most Important Event Questionnaire

Participant responses to the Most Important Event Questionnaire were coded according to Bloch et al.’s (1979) Classification of Therapeutic Factors manual. In some instances, a participant’s response reflected that the most important portion of group was a specific activity and nothing in the response fit within the definition of a therapeutic factor. In these cases, the response was coded as activity, or ACT. If a response referenced both a specific activity and a therapeutic factor, the response was coded as the relevant therapeutic factor rather than activity.

Five individuals' responses were collected from the first and second administrations of the questionnaire; while four individuals' responses were collected from the third administration of the questionnaire. The number of responses collected was dependent on the number of individuals attending the session of the group in which the questionnaire was administered.

Participant responses to the first questionnaire included four responses that were coded as representative of the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure and one response coded as cohesion. Participant responses to the questionnaire administered after the sixth session of the group included one response that was related to a specific activity that occurred during the group, while three of the responses referenced the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure. One response was not appropriate for coding. Responses to the final questionnaire included two references to specific activities that occurred during the group, one reference to the therapeutic factor of cohesion, and one reference to the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure. The actual responses to the Most Important Event questionnaire are listed in Table 7.

Table 7
Responses to Most Important Event Questionnaire for Group Two

Administration	Session Identified as Most Important	Actual Response	Code
1	S2	The second one because I shared with everybody who I trust and how I feel. L.R. and I discussed who we trust and how we feel. Because to know who you trust.	SD
1	S3	The meeting today because we were able to pick our own songs and we were able to express how we felt in life or in the past. Talking. Because a lot of things we talked about really had something to do with us in life.	SD
1	S3	The theme song because it expresses how I feel. I thought that the songs was very understanding. So I can see how people actually feel.	SD
1	S2	Out of the last three meetings, I felt as if the first meeting was the most personal. We were able to see how group was going to be like. Because I like to know what I am going to be doing.	CO

(Table 7 continued)			
1	**	I think all three groups were personal. The group setting and my friend. Because we are all sharing personal feelings and things.	SD
2	S5	The one where I wrote about Ms. C.K. We talk and discussed our problems. To let people know how much I care about C.K. and how they sheltered and took care of me.	SD
2	S5	The one when we talked about our parents. It was about how we felt about our mom's and dad and who influenced us the most. It was me, L.R., and J.W. I was really feeling how they felt. Because I haven't talked about how my mom made me feel in the past and how I feel now.	SD
2	*	None. N/A. It was not important.	None
2	S6	When I expressed how my life is. We talked about our life. Because I never really felt able to talk about my life until now.	SD
2	S6	I like the song, Book of Life. Not everyone was nice but the poems was wonderful. I wouldn't say it was important to me but it was okay.	ACT
3	S8	When me, L.R., and P.R. was here discussing our life. Great group! We talked about our parents and how we were treated growing up. I feel that people I live with are crazy but I love some of them. L.R. is my best friend and I wonder if she will ever be bad. I hope this helped her. But this was great. This was important because I shared my feelings and the way I feel. Sometimes I didn't want to talk because I hate some people here but now I know life isn't fair and you should live your own life.	SD
3	S8	Walk in my Shoes.	ACT
3	S9	Last group about dreams. When we were able to talk about group. Because I like talking about dreams.	ACT
3	S9	Dreamer. I liked it because no one understood it but me so I feel it was made only for me. Everyone got along with each other. That is a very hard thing when dwelling with people in TLP.	CO

* indicates that a specific session was not referenced, nor could it be inferred

**indicates that the response was counted but the participant selected a session that was not within the range of the sessions under consideration for that particular administration of the questionnaire or the participant selected more than one session

Modified Therapeutic Factors Inventory-S

A total of three members of group two completed the both the pre-test and the post-test of the TFI-S. The pre-test scores and post-test scores for each individual are listed in Table 7.

Table 8
Modified TFI-S Pre-test and Post-Test Scores for Group Two

	AL		CO		GU		IH		II		IL		SD		UN		VL		Sum	
JW	24	27	20	24	16	23	35	25	19	24	17	23	19	24	14	12	16	15	163	197
LR	22	25	23	14	15	15	37	22	21	18	26	21	24	13	18	21	22	20	193	169
DR	25	28	19	28	23	28	18	28	26	28	24	27	23	28	24	22	23	26	211	243

Note: The pre-test and post-test scores are listed for each therapeutic factor. The first score for each individual is the pre-test; the second score is the post-test.

The sample size was too small to analyze via inferential statistics. however, an examination of the means indicates that the post-test scores were higher than the pre-test scores on the Altruism subscale for all three of the participants. The post-test scores were higher than the pre-test scores on the Cohesion, Guidance, Interpersonal Interaction, Interpersonal Learning, Self-Disclosure, and Vicarious Learning subscales for two of the participants. The scores for the measure as a whole were higher on the post-test for two of the three participants.

Document Analysis

Members of group two wrote 23 poetic works over the course of the intervention; one of those poems was written collaboratively. Three primary themes that emerged via an analysis of the writings were: (1) a positive view of self, (2) the integration of positive and negative experiences, and (3) resiliency.

Several of the poems written by group members were very positive in their tone and reflected that the individual viewed themselves in a favorable manner. For example, L.R. wrote a poem that contained the following lines:

The animal inside of me

is a panther because I am

a strong black female

Inside my heart

is a rock

because I am solid

A poem created in session six by D.R. echoed a similarly positive view of life in the lines: "...I am looking up and I see the sun, it's so bright and beautiful I don't have to run. That sun is now mine, so it's my time to shine".

While several of the poems created in group two contained positive themes, others referenced more negative life experiences and images of self; however, the most striking aspect of the poems as a whole was the integration of both positive and negative images within the same text. A poem by P.R. demonstrates this integration of both positive and negative images:

My life smells like roses and sunflowers

My life tastes like candy and cake and strawberries

My life sounds like a lot of chaos

My life looks beautiful and sunny sometimes

My life feels like pain and love mixed together.

A poem written by D.R. using the same poetic stem also combines positive and negative images:

My life smells like honeydew melons

My life tastes like brown sugar

My life sounds like the screams of a million felons

My life looks like the inside of a dry booger

My life feels like cotton

This is my life

The poems of many group members also illustrated the resiliency that helped them overcome many of the negative experiences in their lives and the desire to improve their present situations. For example, J.W. wrote the following:

If you walked in my shoes
You would have it all good at first
And then you would find out that you have to be
Independent
And grow up
And do what you do
To survive

The same group member also wrote “my biggest goal here on earth is to be greater than what I am today, that means trying to do everything that I do the best I can”. This resiliency and desire to improve are evident in a poem by D.R.:

I used to be unhappy and sad,
no goal, no dreams,
I was always mad.
But now I am free,
no chains, no locks,
I can just be me
One day I will be bright,
no clouds, no shadows
only my dreams and goals in sight.

Summary of Group Two

Group two consisted of individuals residing in a transitional living program in an urban area of Louisiana. A total of seven individuals were members of this group; two of those individuals joined the group nearer the mid-way point of the ten session group. All seven of the participants were African American and the average age of the group was 17.29 years.

A total of 14 responses to the Most Important Event questionnaire were collected; no one session emerged as the most frequently cited as important, rather six sessions (S2, S3, S5, S6, S8, and S9) were each referenced twice. The therapeutic factor most frequently referenced as important on the Most Important Event questionnaire was self-disclosure, with eight references; followed by cohesion with two references.

Three individuals completed both the pre-test and the post-test forms of the modified TFI-S; the highest gains were found on the guidance subscale, with an increase of 12 points across the group as a whole; the instillation of hope subscale, with an increase of 11 points; and the altruism subscale with an increase of 9 points. The total gain score for the three matched pairs on the scale as a whole was 42 points.

The rate of self-disclosure as measured by the amended coding manual was highest in session 5 at 37.5%. The second highest rate of self-disclosure occurred during session 2 with 30.12%; the third highest rate was found in session 3 with a rate of 27.75% statements coded as self-disclosure.

Three themes emerged most frequently in the patterns of the poetic works written during group two. These themes are a positive view of self, the ability to integrate negative and positive references within one poem, and resiliency.

Alternative School Group Three

Group three consisted of individuals from the alternative school referenced in group one. As mentioned earlier, this alternative school was designed to serve youth, ages nine to eighteen, who are

involved with the juvenile justice system. The students who attend this school have had significant difficulties in the traditional educational system due to behavioral problems.

Demographic Information and Impressions

A total of five individuals, all males, participated in group three. All five of the participants were African American. Group members ranged in age from 13 to 18, the average age of the group was 15.00 years.

Throughout the course of the ten session group, additional information was gathered, albeit informally, about the life experiences and circumstances of group members. All of the group members resided in single-parent, female-headed households. Several group members reported histories of substance use, primarily marijuana and alcohol. All of the group members lived in impoverished neighborhoods with high crime rates. According to staff, one of the group members resided in one of the most dangerous housing complexes in the metro area. Group members reported high levels of violence, including homicide, in their neighborhoods. During the course of the group, a wave of violence occurred, in response to the murder of a local rap artist, which impacted many of the neighborhoods in which group members resided. Inferences were made throughout the course of the group to personal participation in activities including homicide, physical assault, robbery, and weapons possession. One of the group members was very limited in his ability to read and write.

Observation Data

The results of the content analysis will be examined on a session by session basis to allow for an examination of the impact of session content and attendance on the frequency of statements coded as self-disclosure. These data will be presented both as number of statements coded as self-disclosure per session, as well as the percentage of total statements made during the receptive/prescriptive component of the session that were coded as self-disclosure.

The song selected for use during the receptive/prescriptive component of session one was “Live Your Life” by T.I. “Live Your Life” was selected to encourage group discussion on group members’ lives and experiences. Three individuals attended session one.

Slightly less than twelve percent of statements of the 66 statements made during the discussion portion of group were coded as self-disclosure. Many of the self-disclosing statements made in the first session were related to group members’ feelings about their neighborhoods. The following is an excerpt from session one:

Facilitator: How about this part, “I am Westside anyway, even if I left and stayed away.” Do you guys want to leave where you live now, is that a goal of yours, or do you want to stay?”

AV: Stay in the hood.

Facilitator: You want to stay.

AV: Build me a house in the hood, ground up.

ER: Cause if you move out, it is going to seem like, ‘he just move out of the hood’.

AV: You don’t help anybody else in the hood.

ER: You don’t get no respect.

Group members listened to and discussed the song “Everything I Am” by Kanye West during session two. The song was selected to foster group discussion about each group member’s personal characteristics. A total of five individuals attended this session.

Data on the rate of self-disclosure is not available for session two due to an error that occurred during the videotaping process.

The focus on sessions three and four was on listening to and discussing the theme songs that each group member shared with the group. The theme songs selected by group members were “Goin’ Thru Some Thangs” by Lil Boosie (selected by J.H.), “I Wanna Get High” by ABN (selected by K.T.),

“Changes” by Tupac (selected by P.D.), and “Lil Boyz” by Juvenile (selected by A.V.). Three individuals attended sessions three and four.

During the third session of the group three, the rate of self-disclosure peaked at 19.3% or 33 out of 171 statements. Slightly less than 13% of the 202 statements made during the receptive/prescriptive component of the fourth session were coded as self-disclosure. Much of the self-disclosure in session three was related to not having anyone to trust, a theme referenced in “Goin’ Thru Some Thangs”. The following is an excerpt from this discussion:

Facilitator: Who do you trust?

KT: I don’t trust nobody.

Facilitator: Not even your mom or grandma? If you had a big problem, who would you tell?

KT: I wouldn’t tell nobody.

Facilitator: How about you?

AV: I keep it to myself.

JH: I would tell a chick. My ex-girlfriend. We are still cool. She is my ex.

Facilitator: So even though she is your ex, you can still talk to her. Do you trust her?

JH: She is my baby’s mama. Yeah, I trust her a little bit. She trusts me. She has got bookoo trust in me.

Facilitator: So she would be your first choice to talk to?

JH: I would talk to my mama before anybody because she is going to tell me what is real. My mom, my grandma, and then my ex-girlfriend. I would talk to my dog....

AV: I would tell my older sister.

KT: I would tell my brother....

Facilitator: Sounds like you guys have some people in your life that are trustworthy. How about any staff?

KT: I don't trust teachers.

In the fourth session of group, several individuals engaged in a discussion related to the theme song, "Lil Boyz". "Lil Boyz" revolves around the idea that youth get in trouble because they follow their friends and engage in negative activities. This excerpt illustrates some of the group members' thoughts on this phenomenon:

PD: People wanna be cool, do things that make them look cool. They wanna be down. They wanna be loved. They see their boys doing it and they love those boys so much, and they hate seeing their boys doing this....

Facilitator: So you want to help him?

PD: All that too, I want to help him, so I do what he does.

AV: You don't have to kill somebody to get your name on the street....You don't have to. You are taking an innocent person's life.

Facilitator: What are other things you can do to get your name known?

AV: Go to school. Be somebody.

KT: Be a rapper, you don't need to kill anybody.

The fifth session of group one was designed to encourage discussion about the relationships between group members and their families. Two songs, "Dear Mama" by Tupac and "Cleaning Out My Closet" by Eminem, were played during group. Each song illustrates a different type of relationship with one's parent; the first song portrays a positive parent-child relationship, while the second portrays a troubled parent-child relationship. Group members were encouraged to select the song that best represented the relationship between them and their primary parent figure. Three individuals attended session five.

Data on the rate of self-disclosure is not available for session two due to an error that occurred during the videotaping process.

The focus of the discussion section of session six was the song “Dead and Gone” by TI. The primary theme of “Dead and Gone” is starting over and taking a new path as reflected in the lyric “the old me is dead and gone”. The rate of self-disclosure in this session was 8.4%; 11 of 131 statements were coded as self-disclosure. A total of four individuals attended session six.

Several group members talked about catalysts for people changing their behaviors. The consensus among group members was that no one event, such as going to jail, would cause someone to change their behavior; rather, it was a matter of the individual deciding, on their own, that it was time to change. A portion of this discussion includes the following:

Facilitator: Do you think going to jail changes people for better or for worse?

JH: It’s both. It makes some people worse, it makes some people better.

EG: It’s both at the same time. Some people they be in their cells so long they be crazy. Some people are like when I get out of here I am going to go and do the same things. Some people are like, man, it’s for the better. They are going to go out there and make something of my life....

KT: I changed on the third time....

EG: I ain’t change a bit.

Facilitator: Have you been in jail before? Does it change you at all?

JH: It changes me for a period of time.

Facilitator: What happens then?

KT: Make another mistake.

JH: I turn back to the old me. I don’t be trying to do it.

The song “Black President” by Nas was played during the receptive/prescriptive component of group. Session seven was designed to allow group members to share their thoughts on current events and the macro-environment; however, the rate of self-disclosure was at its lowest point with only

slightly more than 5% of statements made during session seven of group three coded as self-disclosure. Five group members were in attendance for this session.

The song utilized in session eight, “F*** the World”, was selected by the facilitator from a list of songs suggested by group members. A total of five group members attended the eighth session and 18.57%, or 26 of 140 statements made during the receptive/prescriptive portion of the group were coded as self-disclosure. The song details the personal challenges of the rapper who wrote the song, including scrutiny from law enforcement offices, the death of a parent, and substance use. The travails of being on probation detailed in the lyrics were familiar to many of the group members as evidenced in the following excerpt from the group’s discussion:

Facilitator: So, are there lines in there that are worth talking about? That are true?

JH: All of it.

Facilitator: All of it?

EG: The line ‘because I lost my father, plus I got an order and I’m on probation’...I am going through the same thing....

Facilitator: What is it like to be on probation?

KT: Everybody in here on probation.

AV: I just got off....

PD: For me, it’s a trap....They know you ain’t going to be home at six o’clock. They know you ain’t going to stop smoking for six months. I ain’t going to say that you can’t but, you know.

The lyric about “my mama’s tripping trying to get me to be in church” also elicited several instances of self-disclosure as evidenced in the following statements:

JH: You ain’t got to go to church to go to heaven.

EG: You could kill a million people and still go to heaven.

PD: I just need to start going to church instead of just going when I get in trouble. I be going to church when I get in trouble, like when trying to get assistance or something. I try to go to church. I need to go to thank him rather than go to have him save my back all the time.

EG: God, forgive me, I go for the honeys....Some people think church is janking people, you be giving up all that money, you know. ...

PD: The church I go to, some people wanna go there to compete with somebody else....That's what I be seeing.

AV: I just see a bunch of hypocrites.

A song selected from a list of songs generated by group members was also utilized during the discussion portion of session nine. "Until the End of Time" by Tupac deals with the lyricist's regrets regarding his chosen lifestyle. One group member, P.D. was drawn to the line "please forgive me for my life of sin, I seem to scare all my sisters kids', that's why I don't hang around the house much" as evidenced by the following statement: "I be having that too. I be going around my house and like my cousin, I try to touch him, my other brothers and sisters play with him, but I try to touch him and he cries".

The discussion portion of the session was shortened because group members were collaborating on a group rap that they were to perform at the next session; therefore, only 89 statements were made during the discussion portion of group. Ten of those statements, or 11.24%, were coded as self-disclosure.

Summary of Observation Results

The content analysis indicated that the highest rates of self-disclosure occurred during sessions three and eight, while the lowest rate of self-disclosure occurred during session seven and six; however, a significant gap in the data exists due to the lack of transcripts for sessions two and five. As referenced

earlier, an error on the part of the facilitator led to those sessions not being recorded. A summary of the results of the content analysis is presented in Table 9.

Table 9
Summary of Observation Results for Group Three

Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
# of statements coded SD	6		33	26		11	6	26	10
% of statements coded SD	9.91		19.3	12.87		8.4	5.04	18.57	11.24

Most Important Event Questionnaire

Participant responses to the Most Important Event Questionnaire were coded according to Bloch et al.'s Classification of Therapeutic Factors manual (1979). Four individuals' responses were collected from the first administration of the questionnaire, three individuals' responses were collected via the second administration of the questionnaire, and five responses were collected during the third administration.

Participant responses to the first questionnaire included two responses that were coded as representative of the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure, one response coded as cohesion, and one response coded as universality. Participant responses to the questionnaire administered after the sixth session of the group included two responses related to a specific activity that occurred during the group and one response related to self-disclosure. Responses to the final questionnaire included three references to specific activities that occurred during the group, one reference to the therapeutic factor of cohesion, and one reference to the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure. The actual responses to the Most Important Event questionnaire are listed in Table 10.

Table 10
Responses to Most Important Event Questionnaire for Group Three

Administration	Session Identified as Most Important	Actual Response	Code
1	S3	I liked the Boosie song. It showed how you live day by day. I struggle to get back on the right track.	UN

(Table 10 continued)			
1	S3	Group two because I told her how I feel about the Boosie song. I like that we ate and I got to listen to favorite song. Because I love it.	SD
1	S3	The third group. I like the music they played, the song "I Want to Get High" because it reminded me of my cousin.	SD
1	S1	The best group was group one. Every time I come to group I get happy. It makes me happy.	CO
2	S4	Group 4. We brought our own music. Because I like the songs.	ACT
2	S4	All of them are important to me because I'm in it. Theme song group also. Because I'm in a group where I could express my feelings.	SD
2	S5	The Tupac group because he talks about his mother. I like the song. Because we had fun.	ACT
3	S8	Group eight because we was getting down in there. We was going great the whole day. Because I love poetry.	CO
3	S9	Tupac group because he talks about life. He the best rapper alive now and the biggest.	ACT
3	S8	The Lil Wayne group. The song. Because I like listening to Lil Wayne.	ACT
3	*	All of the group mean a lot of me because you got to express how you feel. Because this is my passion, to rap.	SD
3	*	Music. Recording music. It showed me I really can do it, write music.	ACT

* indicates that a specific session was not referenced, nor could it be inferred

Modified Therapeutic Factors Inventory-S

All five participants in group three completed both the pre-test and the post-test of the modified TFI-S. The pre-test scores and post-test scores for each individual are listed in Table 11.

Table 11
Modified TFI-S Pre-test and Post-Test Scores for Group Three

	AL	CO	GU	IH	II	IL	SD	UN	VL	Sum										
EG	14	24	16	23	12	15	30	23	11	15	10	18	12	22	15	21	14	22	127	183
PD	28	28	15	13	22	22	30	28	20	15	25	26	19	28	22	22	22	28	192	210
AV	17	14	21	15	11	9	18	20	17	10	15	13	4	10	22	19	21	19	148	129

(Table 11 continued)

JH	6	12	11	19	13	15	4	18	17	17	8	16	7	19	9	18	15	17	90	151
KT	11	12	14	17	11	4	12	13	14	4	11	4	4	9	12	10	13	10	108	83

Note: The pre-test and post-test scores are listed for each therapeutic factor. The first score for each individual is the pre-test; the second score is the post-test.

The small number of matched pairs precludes the use of inferential statistics to analyze the TFI-S data; however, an examination of the means indicates that the post-test scores were higher than the pre-test scores on the Self-disclosure subscale for all five of the participants. The post-test scores were higher than the pre-test scores on the Altruism, Cohesion, Instillation of Hope, Interpersonal Learning, and Vicarious Learning subscales for two of the participants. The pre-test scores for the measure as a whole were higher on the post-test for three of the five participants.

Document Analysis

Members of group three composed 17 poetic works; 15 of these were written by individual group members while two poems were collaborative efforts. In addition to these writings, group members also worked collaboratively to create a group rap that was performed during the final session of group.

Three primary themes were present in the writings of group three. Several of the poems referenced pent-up aggression. An example of this is found in a poem by K.T. in which he states “the animal inside of me is a gorilla, because make me mad and I’ll smash you”. E.G. also references this pent-up feeling in his statements “the animal inside of me is a beast because I got some pressure built up”. Another group member, J.H. also used the image of a beast in describing himself as “mean”.

The importance of material items to group members was also evident in the writings created during the expressive/creative segment of group. For example, when asked to write about what he would do if he was put in charge of the world, A.V. wrote “If I was in charge of the world, I would put money in my hood. If I was in charge of the world, I would have a lot of cars”. The same individual referenced material items in a poem he wrote during the first session of group in which he stated “My

life feels like I'm trying to get money back to back, staying on the grind all day". An additional reference to material good was made by P.D. during his poem about his mother:

now we have a house,
living in a 4 bedroom house,
2 bathrooms,
big backyard and front yard.
She come a long way

The final theme evident in several of the poems of group members was related to group members striving to improve themselves and their life situations. One group member, E.G., references the difficulty of moving forward in a positive direction when he writes: "my life feels like I just want to do myself something but I can't, but sometimes I want to think about the steps ahead". K.T. subtly mentions others' feelings about you as an obstacle to improving oneself in the fifth and sixth lines of his poem:

I used to be gangsta
But now I am nice
I used to be wrong
But now I am nice
I used to be loved
But now I am hated
I used to be a follower
But now I am a leader

E.G. aptly summarizes the resiliency and quest for self-improvement that was evident in the poems of several members of group three in the following poem:

I used to be a gangsta because that's who I am

But now I am grimy to the bone grizzle

I used to be drugs gone crazy

But now I am free to be

I used to be smart and shady

But now I am slow and cautious

I used to be wrong to myself

But now I am right in mind

Summary of Group Three

Group three consisted of individuals from an alternative school in an urban area of Louisiana. A total of five individuals were members of this group. All five of the participants were African American and the average age of the group was 15.00 years.

A total of 12 responses to the Most Important Event questionnaire were collected; the session most frequently cited as important was session three with three citations. Sessions four and eight both received two citations as most important. The therapeutic factor most frequently referenced as important on the Most Important Event questionnaire was self-disclosure, with four references; followed by cohesion with two references and universality with one reference.

All five individuals completed both the pre-test and the post-test forms of the modified TFI-S; the highest gains were found on the self-disclosure subscale, with an increase of 42 points; the instillation of hope subscale, with an increase of 17 points; and the altruism subscale with an increase of 14 points. The total gain score for the three matched pairs on the scale as a whole was 91 points.

The rate of self-disclosure as measured by the amended coding manual was highest in session 3 at 19.3%. The second highest rate of self-disclosure occurred during session 8 with 18.57%; the third highest rate was found in session 4 with a rate of 12.87% statements coded as self-disclosure.

Three themes emerged most frequently in the patterns of the poetic works written during group three. These themes are aggression/violence, loneliness, and resiliency.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to examine the impact of a group-level poetry therapy intervention on the development of therapeutic factors among three groups of at-risk youth. The research process as a whole was guided by the following two questions:

1. What therapeutic factors occur during these poetry therapy groups?
2. What group processes and characteristics contribute to the development of the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure during these poetry therapy groups?

In this section, the first research question will be addressed both on a case-by-case level and via cross-case analysis; however, the complex nature of the second question is better suited to a cross-case analysis. In this section, responses to both research questions will be provided. The response to question one is much more clear-cut and can be provided via an examination of the frequencies with which each therapeutic factor was referenced on the Most Important Event questionnaire and on the modified TFI-S. The response to question two is more multifaceted; therefore, the response to question two will draw upon all sources of data collected throughout this research.

Research Question 1: What therapeutic factors occur during these poetry therapy groups?

The therapeutic factors present in the poetry therapy group varied according to case and according to data collection technique. In group one, results of the Most Important Event questionnaire indicate that self-disclosure was the therapeutic factor most frequently referenced on the Most Important Event questionnaire, while cohesion and universality were the second most frequently referenced therapeutic factors. The largest change scores on the modified TFI-S occurred on the universality subscale and the self-disclosure subscale. In group two, results of the Most Important Event questionnaire also indicated that self-disclosure was the therapeutic factor most frequently referenced on the Most Important Event questionnaire, while cohesion was the second most frequently referenced therapeutic factor. The largest change scores on the modified TFI-S occurred on the guidance and

instillation of hope subscales. In group three, the therapeutic factor most frequently referenced as most important was self-disclosure, followed by cohesion. The largest change scores on the modified TFI-S for group three were on the self-disclosure subscale and the instillation of hope subscale.

When the results for all three of the cases are looked at as a whole, self-disclosure is the most frequently referenced factor when the direct responses of group members as collected via the Most Important Event questionnaire are analyzed. However, the results are less clear when the results of the TFI-S are included. The scores on the TFI-S for group one indicate that universality is the subscale with the highest point increase while self-disclosure is the second highest. The therapeutic factors of guidance and instillation of hope increase at the highest rates on the TFI-S for group two. For group three, the highest scores were found for the self-disclosure sub-scale and second highest for the instillation of hope subscale.

Research Question 2: What group processes and characteristics contribute to the development of the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure during these poetry therapy groups?

It became evident during the data analysis process that an examination of the data from all three groups was necessary in order to thoroughly address research question two. The analysis of data indicates that four factors impacted the development of therapeutic factors during this intervention: group composition, especially in terms of gender; the types of behaviors exhibited by group members, specifically the more internalizing issues exhibited by members of group two versus the more externalizing issues exhibited by members of groups one and three; the internal, as well as external, environment of the group; and the activities that occurred during the group session.

Group Composition

The gender of group members may have impacted the development of therapeutic factors. For example, the two groups with females reported the highest levels of self-disclosure. This is especially notable in group one, since the vast majority of students at the alternative school were males and the facilitator's expectation was that the female students would be unlikely to self-disclose in a group

setting, especially since the facilitator noted that these two females were regularly harassed by other male students while walking to and from group. Even during the group sessions, the facilitator consistently needed to redirect the male students when they made inappropriate comments toward the two female members. For example, during session four, some of the males in group were making it very difficult for a female member to state her future goals because they kept interjecting “she is going to be my wife, she is going to raise my kids”. In group two, all but one of the group members were female. The females were much more likely to self-disclose during the discussion portions of the group; the lone male group member would appropriately participate, but much of the time the facilitator needed to directly ask him a question to encourage his participation. The third group was composed entirely of males and as indicated by the self-disclosure rates obtained via the transcript analysis, the level of self-disclosure was lower than in the previous two groups. Members of the third group reported feeling more comfortable discussing music and writing poems and less comfortable discussing their personal experiences. This is evidenced in the finding that eight of the responses to the Most Important Event questionnaire reference a specific group activity (i.e. “I liked the Boosie song”, “I like listening to Lil Wayne”, “I really can...write music”).

Throughout the planning and initial implementation stages of these three groups, the facilitator was concerned about the impact of the difference in the race of group members, all of whom were African-American with the exception of one, and the race of the facilitator, who is Caucasian. This was especially concerning since nearly all of the music used in the intervention has traditionally “belonged” to urban, African-American youth. However, it seemed that much of the discomfort was solely on the part of the facilitator, with the exception of one interaction during session six of group two in which the following conversation occurred regarding a series of retaliatory acts that had occurred as a result of a murder in the community in which the group was located:

Facilitator: How about this idea of making mistakes and it impacting your family?

KT: I ain't trying to be racist, but that's what a white person would do.

JH: You can't say that, you should say certain white people.

EG: Yeah, certain white people.

While race differences did not appear to impact the development of therapeutic factors, differences in vocabulary made interaction between the group facilitator and the members more difficult. In groups one and three, participants utilized a variety of slang terms that were unfamiliar to the facilitator. This was evident in the first session of group one, after multiple failed attempts on the part of the facilitator to understand group members' patterns of speech, a group member said to the group "You are confusing the lady. You gotta talk slow, bro". Another instance occurred during a conversation in group one about dating and relationships, when group members repeatedly utilized the term "bust-it-baby" when describing female partners. The facilitator assumed that this term meant "girlfriend" and continued facilitating the group discussion about male-female relationships; however, it became evident that group members were talking about something different from a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship. Finally, the facilitator inquired as to the meaning of "bust-it baby" and learned that it was a derogatory term for a female with whom you had sex, but with whom you did not engage in a committed relationship. When that distinction was clarified, the group was able to move into a much more meaningful conversation about male-female relationships and respect for females. More importantly, once the facilitator moved from the position of expert and requested that group members share their expertise on music and terminology on a regular basis, group members became more engaged and interested in helping the facilitator.

The members of group two generally did not speak in a manner that was unfamiliar to the facilitator; therefore, misunderstandings related to verbiage did not impact the development of therapeutic factors.

Internalizing versus Externalizing Behaviors

A specific measure was not utilized to determine if group members behavioral difficulties were related more to internalizing or externalizing behavior; however, the facilitator's impressions of the participants, which were based on information provided by staff at the host agencies, the self-reports of group members, and observations of and interactions with the individuals over the ten session group, were that members of groups one and three exhibited more externalizing behaviors while members of group two exhibited more internalizing behaviors.

Individuals who exhibit externalizing behaviors are often described as acting-out and engage in "aggressive, impulsive, coercive, and non-compliant" behaviors (Smith, 2007, p. 238). The externalizing nature of the behaviors of individuals in group three was apparent in that all of the group members were on or had very recently been on probation and engaged in non-compliant behaviors such as truancy and curfew violations. In addition, multiple references were made to regular engagement in physical altercations with peers and neighbors in the first and third group. For example, one member of the group three stated he had "been thugging all his life", while another member of group three implied he engaged in a lot of fights via his statement that he was good at "nothing but scrapping". This aggressive nature was also evident in the poetry created by members of groups one and three. For example, two group members referred to themselves as "a beast" in poems and several of the poems contained lines such as "make me mad and I'll smash you", "I used to be a thug in the streets", and "the animal inside of me is a bear because I fight for what I want".

Individuals exhibiting internalizing behaviors are often described as "withdrawn, lonely, depressed, and anxious" (Smith, 2007, p. 238). This was evident in the behavior of members of group two. For example, when arriving for group, the facilitator would oftentimes find a group member sitting alone in the dark on the community room couch and more often than not had to go wake up group members mid-day because according to the staff at the facility, the individuals slept for the majority of

each day. Group members also reported feeling isolated as evidenced by statements made during group such as “I am feeling like nobody wants to talk to me and so I am going to go inside and not think about those people and then it would be like no one knows...I realize that there is nobody around me” and “I was in little ball all to myself”. The poetry written by members of group two also contained references related to depressed feelings, such as “but looking at the sky, I am waiting for the rain” and “the tears of my eyes are the tears of your cries, the days of your life end with my pain and my cries”.

This differentiation between internalizing behaviors and externalizing behaviors may have contributed to the development of therapeutic factors during the intervention. For example, while members of group two initially appeared more withdrawn, they were also much easier to engage, especially when asked to describe their personalities and their lives. For example, sessions one and two were identical in terms of activity, but members of group two displayed much higher levels of self-disclosure during the first two sessions than members of group one (11.94% and 17.46% in group one versus 23.08% and 30.12% in group two). However, when the topic of conversation was subjects less personal, such as the conditions of their communities, the level of self-disclosure among the internalizing group dropped to 12.22% and rose to 19.23% in the externalizing group.

The lower levels of self-disclosure among the more externalizing groups may be related to the amount of effort and energy these individuals direct towards protecting both their physical selves and their emotional selves. This was evident in the following group discussion in which group members were talking about protecting themselves from physical harm:

JL: I just think about the n*** I be beefing with, I think about them killing me. It helps you though, if you think about them killing you, you don't slip. I be ready, I know what to do....

Facilitator: So you don't ever forget that someone is after you, you are always ready?

JH: May, you ain't supposed to forget, if you forget, you deserve to get burned.

JL: I don't never feel safe.

JH: It depends on where you at. If you go to a neighborhood, and guys in the neighborhood got a beef with you, you gotta watch the whole time.

JL: I got a big window right there....

JH: Yeah, sometimes you just get paranoid and you can't sleep, waking up.

Even in the school setting, members of the alternative school groups needed to be on guard. For example, physical fights occurred in the hallway outside of the group meeting room during two sessions of group three and the local SWAT team was called to school earlier in the day because of a serious physical fight a few hours before one of the meetings of group three. It is logical, even healthy to some degree, that the dangerous nature of the external environments of members of groups one and three would foster a sense of self-protection that makes self-disclosure less common.

Environment

The internal and external environments of the groups also seemed to impact the development of therapeutic factors. In this section, the term "internal environment" is used to refer the "mood" or "vibe" of the group, or the manner in which the individual states of group members combine to form a group disposition that varies from session to session. The term "external environment" refers to the actual physical environment of the group and the area immediately surrounding the group meeting room.

In group two, the internal environment of the group was often negatively impacted because one group member was upset or angry about something that happened outside of group and participated very minimally during group. The mood of this one individual seemed to permeate the group as the session progressed, until very few participants were participating without significant prompting. For example, in session eight, a group member was not engaging in the group much beyond yes or no answers despite the facilitator's attempts to address the individual's mood and behavior directly. During this session, the rate of self-disclosure steadily decreased and the total rate of self-disclosure was the second lowest of the group at 11.76%. A particularly negative mood on the part of members of groups one and three did

not appear to significantly impact the participation of the group as a whole. In most cases, the group member who was not interested in participating would sit off to the side, even after attempts were made to bring him or her into the circle, and other group members would make a few joking attempts to interact with the individual and then continue with group. For example, in session eight of group one, a group member sat at the far side of the room and did not speak for the entire session and, despite multiple attempts to engage him, alternated between laying his head on the desk and staring at nothing in particular. However, the level of self-disclosure of the remaining members of the group was at a group high of 35.00%. In short, the mood of one individual did not appear to impact the mood of groups one and three as a whole, in contrast to what occurred in group two.

While in most cases the internal environment of the group had limited impact on the functioning of groups one and three, conditions of the external environment at the alternative school did appear to have an effect on the development of therapeutic factors in these groups. For example, groups one and three met in three different classrooms over the course of the group. One classroom was adjacent to the gymnasium and the sound of students playing was a near constant, plus oftentimes students in the gym would look into the group room through the windows on the doors. The other two classrooms were much quieter and secluded. In the instances that the group met in the classroom adjacent to the gymnasium, participation and levels of self-disclosure were quite low. For example, session seven of group three was held next to the gym and the level of self-disclosure was at the lowest point for the group at 5.04%. It seemed that a combination of the external distractions and scrutiny from those outside the group hampered participation.

The external environment did not have much of an impact on participants in group two. In fact, the group met in the community area of the transitional living program. Staff and residents were constantly coming in and out of the room to go to the main office or use the kitchen; in some instances, these non-group members were curious as to what the group was doing and would linger, apparently to

find out. These constant distractions and threats to privacy did not appear to impact the level of participation and engagement of members of group one; the nature of the group discussions did not change when non-group members entered the room and in most cases, group members did not stop what they were doing to interact with those moving in and out of the group room.

Group Activities

The specific activities that occurred during group sessions also impacted the development of therapeutic factors during the intervention. The Most Important Event questionnaire directly solicited participant's thoughts on significant events during the group sessions. The responses to this questionnaire reflected that members of groups one and three overwhelmingly identified listening to music as the most influential part of group; while members of group two most frequently mentioned the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings as the most important part of group. For example, seven of the twelve responses on the questionnaire from group three directly referenced the music played in group in statements such as: "I liked the Boosie song"; "I like the music they played, the song "I Want to Get High"; "...I like listening to Lil Wayne"; and "Group 4 because we brought our own music"; while members of group two were more likely to reference opening up to other group members as reflected in statements such as: "when me, L.R. and P.R. was here discussing our life"; "I shared with everybody who I trust and how I feel"; and "we talk and discuss our problems".

While differences existed in the events deemed most important by group members, it was evident from the session-by-session rates of self-disclosure that allowing group members to select the music played during group was tremendously meaningful and likely very therapeutic. The theme song groups consistently garnered very high levels of self-disclosure and were the most often referred to sessions on the Most Important Event questionnaire. The facilitator was initially concerned that the music selected by group members would be inappropriate in terms of content; however, her fears were

quickly relieved when she listened to theme songs and realized the degree of thought each group member put into his or her selection.

Group three proved to be a particularly difficult group to keep focused and involved in appropriate activities; however, essentially revisiting the theme song activity and allowing group members to guide the content of the group by selecting the music for the receptive/prescriptive component of sessions proved helpful as a means keeping members of this group interested and engaged. For example, after the facilitator noticed decreasing rates of participation in sessions six and seven of group three, she allowed group members to provide input on the songs used in groups eight and nine. After switching to songs selected by the participants, levels of participation and engagement increased. In addition, the music selected by group members was very appropriate and contained tremendously powerful messages. The facilitator also altered the expressive/creative component of the latter sessions of group three to keep participants engaged. Throughout the course of the group, several members referenced that they enjoyed writing and performing raps; one of the group members even regularly went to a recording studio to record his raps. The facilitator chose to work with this interest in writing and performing raps and allowed the group to work collaboratively on a rap describing their lives during the creative writing portion of the last three groups. Not only did this keep group members engaged in appropriate group activities, it also increased the degree to which group members communicated and interacted with each other in a pro-social manner.

While it is evident that listening and discussing music during the receptive/prescriptive component of the group had the largest impact on the development of therapeutic factors, the expressive/creative component of group was also an important facet of the intervention. A few of the group members referenced the creative writing activities directly via the Most Important Event questionnaire, as evidenced by statements such as “when we write poems that is the most important thing to me” and “I really can do it, write music”; however, more striking was the time and thought that

group members put into creating their poetic works. In many instances, during writing time, it was striking to observe the time, energy, and emotion group members put into creating a poem. The facilitator's initial expectations were low since staff at both agencies reported that they didn't think many of the group members would be willing to write poetry, but after the first session it was evident that members of all three groups possessed the ability and the will to express themselves through their writings. Participants in the three groups wrote a total of 75 pieces of poetry or prose over the course of the groups. Some of the most powerful pieces of poetry described the relationship between child and parent. One example of a poem written by a member of group one for his mother is as follows:

Just me and you,
I have no father
We been thru so much,
Why do you bother?
Had tough times,
Rough times,
I can barely explain
It's been like this for a while
So I stop looking' for change.

Another member of group one wrote the following poem to describe her mother, with whom she had a very troubled relationship:

Hated—by few
Loved—by many
Ugly—in the inside
Beautiful—on the outside
Selfish—you left me all alone in the world

Mistaken—in life

In group two, one of the group members shared the following poem about being sexually abused by men with whom her mother was in a relationship:

You never said

“I am sorry, I never meant to hurt you”

I cried every night

And held my pillows so tight

I don't know how to forgive you...

You never cried throughout the years,

No remorse or tears,

Not even “I love you dear”

I was just a kid, I shouldn't have to live in fear.

The descriptive abilities, or “way with words”, of some of the group members was also remarkable. For example, a member of group three described himself in the following line “inside my heart is a skeleton with a million dollars swinging from a chain because I feel skinless and loose”, while a member of group one described himself as “a phantom, because I'm quiet but could be deadly, inside my heart is a little voice that keeps me calm and steady”.

There were very few instances in which a group member would overtly refuse to participate in the writing activity; if an individual was hesitant to write, the facilitator would provide a few prompts or some extra instruction and more often than not, the individual would start writing. There were two individuals who were nearly illiterate; however, once the facilitator realized that they were not being resistant, rather they just couldn't write, the individuals were able to create poems by dictating to the facilitator.

The symbolic/ceremonial portion of group, during which group members were asked to read their works aloud and the group as a whole was encouraged to provide appropriate feedback on the work, seemed to have the least impact on the development of therapeutic factors. In fact, the symbolic/ceremonial segment of group was only referenced twice on the Most Important Event questionnaire, and both references were made by the same individual. The facilitator envisioned this portion of group as one in which the therapeutic factor of altruism could develop because group members could provide the individual presenting the poem with encouragement and praise; however, group members very rarely chose to give feedback, especially in groups one and three. In the early sessions of group, the facilitator put a lot of effort into encouraging group members to provide feedback after an individual recited their poem, but in most instances, the feedback was quite forced and insincere. As a result, the group members continued to have the opportunity to read their poems aloud for the group, but the facilitator did not force the issue of feedback.

Limitations

There are opportunities to improve upon the design and implementation of this study. The limitations of this research, specifically those related to data collection and data analysis, will be detailed in this section.

One significant limitation is the lack of videotaped record of two sessions of group three. The absence of videotapes for sessions two and five is due solely to a recording error on the part of the facilitator. It is especially disappointing to not have group three's data from session five because in groups one and two, a large amount of self-disclosure occurred during this group in which familial relationships were discussed. A finding that high levels of self-disclosure occurred during session five would have strengthened the argument that a family-oriented group theme was related to higher levels of self-disclosure, or conversely weakened the argument that sessions focused on family were one way to

increase self-disclosure. In addition, the presence of both videotapes would have increased the number of data points for group three from seven to nine.

Another potential limitation of this research is related to the researcher's decision to focus primarily on occurrences of the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure during the receptive/prescriptive component of each session. The decision to focus on both self-disclosure and the receptive/prescriptive component of the sessions was made after transcribing and coding three complete transcripts of session one. While coding these three sessions, it was discovered that the bulk of activity occurred during the receptive/prescriptive component of group and very little verbal activity took place during the expressive/creative and symbolic/ceremonial portions of group. In addition, it was found that by far the most frequently occurring therapeutic factor during the receptive/prescriptive component of group was self-disclosure. The decision to narrow the focus of the observation analysis was made based on the appropriate desire to simplify what had become a very unwieldy coding procedure; however, coding all of the transcripts with all nine of the codes would have provided a tremendously rich source of observation data, especially data related to other therapeutic factors.

Several of the limitations of this research are related to the coding process. For example, one improvement that could be made to the coding procedures in this study is to shorten the coding unit used during the transcript analysis. The coding unit for the transcript analysis was defined as "utterances between turns of talk"; however, especially in group two, an utterance between turns of talk was oftentimes very lengthy and contained multiple instances of self-disclosure. As a result, the number of instances of self-disclosure that actually occurred during the groups may be higher than indicated in the results.

The coding procedure used during the document analysis portion of this research could also be improved. This author developed the typologies and utilized the coding system to analyze the poetic works of group members. The trustworthiness of both the typologies and the application of the

typologies to the data would increase if others, especially members of the three groups, had been consulted to ensure that the analyst-constructed typologies were accurate.

A change in the administration of the Most Important Event questionnaire would also have strengthened the quality of the data. The questionnaire reads as follows:

Of the events that occurred in the last three meetings, which one do you feel was the most important for you personally? Describe the event: what actually took place, the group members involved, and your own reaction. Why was it so important for you? (Bloch et al., 1979, p. 258).

The multi-part nature of this question was both confusing to participants; in addition, it was difficult to apply one code to the response because a different therapeutic factor may have been referenced in the first part of the question, “of the events that occurred in the last three meetings, which one do you feel was the most important for you personally?” and the third part of the question “why was it so important for you?” Since the coding procedure called for one code to be applied to the entire response, the researcher had to make judgments regarding which one code was the most applicable to the response.

The lack of information on the reliability and validity of the modified version of the TFI-S used in this study is another limitation. The internal consistency and test-retest reliability of the TFI has been demonstrated; however, data on the reliability and validity of the short form of the TFI (referred to as the TFI-S) is not yet available because, according to the author of the measure, it is still being collected. Furthermore, additional alterations were made to the TFI-S to create a measure (referred to as the modified TFI-S) focused solely on the nine therapeutic factors on which this research is focused. The quality of the actual data collected via the modified TFI-S is also questionable. In some instances, especially during the administration of the measure to groups one and three, it appeared as if group members were not responding to the questionnaire in a thoughtful manner, rather they were moving rapidly through the measure in order to finish it as quickly as possible. This limitation may point to a deeper difficulty related to the use of questionnaires with populations, such as youth with externalizing behavioral issues, who are unwilling or unable to devote time and attention to completing the measure in

a thoughtful and accurate manner. During the course of this research, it became evident that data gathered via observation was a more meaningful and possibly more accurate means of examining the process by which this poetry therapy intervention impacted group members.

A final limitation of this research is the differences that emerged between groups one and three and group two. The intent of the research was to select three groups of at-risk adolescent youth with the assumption that these groups would be relatively similar; however, the average age of the second group was 17.29, while the average age of the first group was 14.85 and the average age of the third group was 15. In addition, the third group consisted solely of males, while the first and second group had two female members and one female member, respectively. The age and gender differences in the composition of the groups may have impacted the findings. In addition, members of group two lived in the same apartment building; therefore, the connections that they may have formed outside of group may have contributed to their within-group behavior.

Directions for Future Research

The field of poetry therapy is in need of rigorous, richly detailed and systematically obtained evidence as to attest to its usefulness as an intervention. One aim of this research was to obtain information about a specific type of poetry therapy intervention in order to contribute to the existing body of knowledge; however, as with any research pursuit, questions were left unanswered and new questions came to light.

It would be valuable for future research related to poetry therapy interventions to focus not only on outcomes, such as increases in levels of group cohesion or meaningful changes in behavior, but also on process. Much of the research in poetry therapy is summative; however, additional, more formative information is needed regarding the interactions that take place during an intervention as a result of poetry therapy techniques. In this research, it appeared as if the receptive/prescriptive component was an effective tool for use when attempting to engage participants and encourage self-disclosure; however,

more information on the impact of the receptive/prescriptive type of poetry therapy, as well as information on the impact of the expressive/creative and symbolic/ceremonial elements of poetry therapy would be valuable.

This research indicates that there was some difference between groups one and three and group two in terms of response to the intervention. This author attributed some of that difference to the assumptions made about the internalizing versus externalizing nature of the behaviors exhibited by group members. In future research it would be valuable to utilize a specific measure that categorizes individuals according to an internalizing versus externalizing behavior profile in order to better categorize individual according to behavior type. It would also be interesting to replicate this research to further explore differences and similarities between the reactions to poetry therapy of individuals with externalizing symptomatology versus the reactions to poetry therapy of individuals with internalizing symptomatology.

New questions came to light during this research about what this author deemed the “self-to-song” phenomenon. In the future, more in-depth studies are needed to ascertain if individuals are more likely to make direct connections between the content of a song lyric and their personal lives in the certain instances; for example, it might be hypothesized that “self-to-song” references increase when the music utilized during the intervention was selected by participants instead of by the facilitator.

Summary

The absence of research-based information on the impact of poetry therapy interventions has been a major obstacle to the full utilization of the intervention. This research, despite its limitations, adds to the poetry therapy knowledge base and highlights several promising aspects of poetry therapy interventions that combine popular music and creative writing.

The intervention uses a medium, specifically rap and hip hop, which is a comfortable and enjoyable part of group members’ everyday lives. The individuals in the group listen to music on their

way to school, during free time in the school gymnasium, while sitting in their rooms or spending time with friends. Prior to the start of each group session and in some cases during group, many of the participants would be singing rap lyrics under their breath or tapping out beats with their pencils. The language of the youth in the group was full of quotes from the worlds of rap and hip-hop, such as “it was just a dream” and “sometimes it makes me wonder how I keep from going under”, and they all had a voluminous body of knowledge about the lives and backgrounds of favorite rap artists. These youth were rap and hip hop experts and this intervention allowed them to utilize their expertise in a pro-social manner. The intervention allowed the facilitator to honor their expertise and learn about the way that the youth viewed their world.

A shared appreciation and fondness for this culturally relevant medium also aided in bridging the very deep class and cultural divide that existed between the facilitator, who is a middle-class, Caucasian female from a small rural town in the Upper Midwest, with the group participants, primarily African American adolescents from an impoverished urban area in the Deep South. The change in group members’ perceptions of the facilitator was evident at the alternative school when, as time progressed, the “title” of the facilitator changed from “the white lady” to “the rap lady”.

This intervention also empowered the group members by providing opportunities for them to contribute to the direction of the group. This was most evident in the theme song groups. During theme song groups, participants were able to impact the focus of the group discussion by selecting a theme song that contained a theme that was important to them. For example, one group member selected a song about the travails of dating and romantic love; as a result, the discussion during that group revolved around a topic that was important both to the individual who selected to song and many of the other group members. Group three was especially empowered by the opportunity to contribute to the direction of the group. In that particular group it became evident after session seven that the facilitator’s ideas about what was important to discuss were not compatible with group members’ ideas about what

was important. As a result, the facilitator of the group encouraged group members to select the songs and activities for the remaining groups. The level of investment by group members seemed to increase when opportunities to contribute to the direction of the group increased. In addition, group members decided to write and perform a collaborative rap during the creative writing segments of the remaining groups. This activity, which the group facilitator had not even thought about doing during the intervention, allowed a wonderful opportunity for group members to work together as a team to accomplish an enjoyable task.

The findings of this research also support Mazza's (1999) idea that poetry, or in the case of this research, song lyrics, serves as a "springboard...to talk about feelings, goals, and values" (p. 19). The use of a lyric as a springboard to self-expression and self-disclosure was evident throughout the transcripts. This author deemed episodes of self-disclosure that occurred in response to a specific lyric a "self-to-song" statement. These type of statements occurred throughout all three groups. For example, a member of group one stated the following while pointing to a sheet of paper containing the lyrics to the song "Cry" by Rihanna: "This is just me...For real, man, do you hear me...I don't like to fall in love. I stray from love. I did fall in love and got my heart broken". One example of a self-to-song statement that occurred during group two was prompted by Talib Kweli's song, "Get By". The group member connected the lyrics about the rapper's neighborhood to the conditions of her own neighborhood via her statement "The line that jumped out at me was the one about selling drugs out the back of our homes...I picked that because where I used to stay was by crack houses...he saying that they do whatever they do to get money...whatever they need to get by". In group three, a participant responding to the lyric "been thugging all my life" disclosure to the group that "I have just been thugging all my life and now it is time to choose". Perhaps the most apt statement regarding the powerful nature of the music used in this intervention was made by a member of group two: "some songs...is like something that has happened in your own life".

Perhaps the most meaningful finding of this research is that this poetry therapy intervention had a striking impact on engagement and self-disclosure among these three groups of at-risk youth. The task of engaging resistant and reluctant adolescents who have had countless interactions, some positive and some tremendously negative, with helping professionals of all sorts, is monumental. The evidence gathered via this research indicates that this intervention fostered a group environment in which guarded, difficult to engage at-risk adolescents felt comfortable and connected enough to engage in surprisingly honest and bold self-disclosure.

Self-disclosure, or “the process of making the self known to others”, is an essential component in the therapeutic change process (Jourard & Lakasow, 1958, p. 91). The therapeutic factor of self-disclosure has been deemed one of the most helpful aspects of group therapy by individuals in a variety of settings and has been found to be positively correlated with the success of treatment (Tschuscheke & Dies, 1994). According to Yalom (1975), “self-disclosure is a prerequisite for the formation of meaningful interpersonal relationships...in a group situation” (p. 360).

During the course of these three poetry therapy groups, group members made themselves known to others by sharing both positive and negative aspects of their past, present, and future selves. For example, members of all three groups felt safe enough in the group environment to disclose information about interactions with their parents. These interactions, which ranged from the horrible recollections of sexual and physical abuse, to the sorrowful recollections about the difficulty of having a parent who is unable to adequately care for their child due to mental illness or substance abuse. It has been noted that self-disclosure on the part of one individual benefits not only the individual, but the group because it often leads to meaningful self-disclosure on the part of other group members (Jourard, 1968; Yalom, 1975). This was evident in these groups, it often seemed that a chain reaction of self-disclosing occurred as a result of a song lyric or an item shared during discussion or during the presentation of the creative writings. For example, a group member disclosed that she had witnessed her mother using

drugs after hearing a lyric from a song by Eminem in which he stated his mother was “popping prescription pills in the kitchen, bitchin’, someone’s always going through the purse and shits missing”. This disclosure, triggered by the song lyric, led another group member to add that he also had a similar experience in his statement “my mama be doing that too”. These chain reactions of self-disclosure allowed for the universalizing of certain experiences and helped group members know that they were not alone in their experiences. These acts of self-disclosure also helped group members form meaningful relationships with others in the group, who in many instances have felt it necessary to both emotionally and physically distance themselves for self-preservation purposes. According to Corey et al (2006), there is a connection between learning about a person via self-disclosure and forming a prosocial relationship; this connection is aptly summarized in the statement that “genuine concern comes from knowledge of a person” (Corey et al, 2006, p. 243).

Self-disclosure is not only a means of making the self known to others; it also is a means of the self known to self. The process of self-disclosing in a group setting is a first step towards therapeutic change; continuing the process of knowing oneself is also an important step in creating lasting therapeutic change. It appears as if the creative writing component of this intervention aids individuals in the ongoing process of engaging in self-disclosure and becoming more self-aware outside of the group room. For example, a group member stated “ I used to write a long time ago...last night I thought I would start writing again, because I could get all the worries out of my mind, so I just started jotting it down. It sounds pretty good....it was just coming out. I had a lot of stuff on my mind”. This statement indicates that the process of self-disclosure started during the expressive/creative portion of these groups has the potential to spark continued reflection outside of the group environment.

The intervention detailed in this research is based on core social work values, especially those related to recognizing and honoring the strengths that exist in all cultures and empowering individuals to utilize and build upon those strengths. The intervention allowed the facilitator and group participants to

connect around a shared respect and mutual admiration for the culturally relevant art form of rap music. This connection provided the facilitator a window into the lives of the nineteen youth who participated in the groups, and more importantly, allowed the youth to share their thoughts about life and the seemingly insurmountable challenges they face. As Lupe Fiasco says in the aptly titled song “Hip Hop Saved My Life”: I write what I see, I write to make it right, don't like what I be, I'd like to make it like the sights on TV, quite the great life, so nice and easy...

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APPENDIX A: MODIFIED THERAPEUTIC FACTORS INVENTORY-S

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

1=Strongly Disagree to 7=Strongly Agree

1. Seeing others change in my group gives me hope for myself.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. Because I've got a lot in common with other group members, I'm starting to think that I may have something in common with people outside group too.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. Group doesn't teach me anything about how to have good relationships.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. Helping others in group makes me feel better about myself.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. My group gives me suggestions on how to solve problems.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. I have gotten some good ideas about how to interact by doing the same thing someone in my group has done.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. Learning how to express myself to others in group has deepened my relationships.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. The members distrust each other.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. Even though being upset is hard, we try to let out our feelings in group.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. Things seem more hopeful since joining group.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. In group I've learned that I have more similarities with others than I would have guessed.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. I am helping other group members with my feedback and support.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. In group, members tell me what I should do about difficult situations and life decisions.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. Nobody teaches me anything new about how to understand and deal with other people in my group.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. My group is kind of like a little piece of the larger world I live in: I see the same patterns, and working them out in group helps me work them out in my outside life.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16. In group sometimes I learn by watching and later imitating what happens.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17. I feel a sense of belonging in this group.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18. It's okay for me to be angry in group.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19. Group helps me feel more positive about my future.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20. This group helps me recognize how much I have in common with other people

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

21. In group I get "how-to's" on improving my life situation.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

22. When I share experiences I often help another group member.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

23. In group I can practice ways of interacting with other people.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

24. Group has shown me the importance of other people in my life.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

25. I pay attention to how others handle difficult situations in my group so I can apply these strategies in my own life.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

26. Group members don't express caring for one another.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

27. In group, the members are more alike than different from each other.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

28. This group inspires me about the future.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

29. It touches me that people in group are caring of each other.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

30. Nobody gives much advice in my group.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

31. In group I learn better ways of dealing with other people.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

32. Since joining group, sometimes I've caught myself saying things like others in my group might say.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

33. By getting honest feedback from members and facilitators, I've learned a lot about my impact on other people.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

34. Even though we have differences, our group feels secure to me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

35. I get to vent my feelings in group.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

36. I can “let it all out” in my group.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

APPENDIX B: MOST IMPORTANT EVENT QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Of the events that occurred in the last three group meetings, which one do you feel was the most important for you personally? Describe the event: what actually took place, the group members involved, and your own reaction. Why was it so important for you?

APPENDIX C: CODING MANUAL

The goal of the coding process for this research is to identify instances when members of the poetry therapy group move from talking about the poem (i.e. song lyrics) to talking about themselves. Mazza (1999) states that in poetry therapy, the poem serves as a “springboard”, or means of helping individuals transition from talking about an outside object (the poem) to talking about themselves (p. 19). This movement from talking about the poem to talking about personal issues indicates the presence of the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure.

Dual Coding Guidelines

First, become familiar with the coding manual and application of the coding system by practice coding transcripts for BRMI 1-Session 1 and BRMI 1-Session 6. After discussing the transcripts that have been practice coded, do the final coding on a total of nine transcripts. The transcripts are as follows: BRMI 1- Session 2, BRMI 1- Session 5, BRMI 1- Session 8; BRMI 2- Session 2, BRMI 2- Session 5, BRMI 2- Session 8; and YO 1- Session 2, YO 1- Session 5, YO 1- Session 8.

Sampling Unit

The sampling unit for this content analysis is the receptive/prescriptive portion of each poetry therapy session. This encompasses the portion of the group that occurs after the first (or only) song has been played until a transition statement is made that moves the group to the expressive/creative portion of the group. The coding unit encompasses the “utterances between turns of talk”; with the exception of utterances made by the group facilitator. This unit of analysis is based on a syntactical distinction common in conversation analysis.

Coding Process

This portion of the coding process is two-fold. First, identify instances when group members discuss song lyrics or engage in a discussion that is related to poetry therapy group; then determine if the discussion involves self-disclosure.

Step one:

The first step of the coding process involves identifying instances when group members discuss song lyrics or the discussion evolves into something that is directly tied to the original discussion about the song. Two examples of instances in which group members discuss song lyrics are as follows:

Facilitator: In this song, what does it seem like they are talking about the whole time?

(facilitator is referencing the song “I Am Not My Hair” by India.Arie)

Group member D: Hair.

Facilitator: So you have more of a positive relationship with your mom like the Tupac song?

Group member: I mean like it ain’t like super good, but I know she is going to be there for me.

Step two:

The second step of the coding process involves determining if the group member is engaging in self-disclosure while discussing the song lyrics. According to Bloch et al (1979), self-disclosure “is the act of revealing personal information to the group” (p. 262). Bloch et al add that the therapeutic factor of self-disclosure also occurs when a group member does the following:

- vents feelings, either positive or negative, about either life events or other group members.
- reveals information, about either his life outside the group or his past, or his feared, embarrassing, or worrisome problems, or his fantasies which he regard as private and personal
- reveals and shares personal information even though such revealing and sharing may be difficult or painful
- releases feelings within the group either of past or here-and-now material
- expresses feelings, such as anger, affection, sorrow, and grief, which have been previously difficult or impossible to release

Three examples of instances in which group members engage in self-disclosure while engaging in a song lyric-related discussion are as follows:

Facilitator: Have you ever been in love?

Group member: Everybody falls in love one time. That's what's made me feel like how I feel. What he feels was just like me. I started to get scared, man. I was young man, I don't never told her I loved her, but she called me and told me she loved me. Truth was I was in love. I was young and scared of commitment and didn't want that at that time.

Facilitator: How about you?

Group member: I was engaged once, but I am not getting married. I thought about a lot of stuff that was before I went to rehab.

Facilitator: Were you happy?

Group members: Shit, no.

Additional Information

Do not code the following:

- Yes or no answers
- Statements of "I don't know"
- Material that is not relevant to the group discussion about the song (i.e. side talk)
- Statements such as "uhh", "hmmm", etc.
- Questions
- Statements about other people in the group unless they are relevant to the song
- Any utterance that contains italicized text that reads *unintelligible*

Coding Opinion Statements

It is helpful to think of opinion statements as existing on a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum, there are opinions that contain little or no personal information. For example, "I like LSU football" is a personal opinion, but it does not contain any information that is particularly emotion-laden, insightful, or potentially embarrassing. At the other end of the spectrum, there are opinions that are quite personal in nature. Sharing this type of opinion in a group setting often involves some degree of risk and self-disclosure. For example, the statement "I respect prostitutes, if you got the strength and heart to go out

there and hustle, I don't look at them no different, they are just getting money" is a more personal statement that involves a degree of self-disclosure.

APPENDIX D: POEMS

Group One

Session 1

I'm not my skin
I ain't this crack
although I hustle
my mind on track
was born behind
watch me shake back
and I ain't ashamed
that my skin is black

by J.H.

Session 2

The animal inside of me is a dog
because inside my heart is good
The animal inside of me is a dog
because I like to fight

by C.W.

The animal inside of me is a bear
because I fight for what I want
Inside my heart is a fire,
it's burning and shining
The word written on my forehead is "mistaken"
because sometimes when things go wrong,
I feel like I don't belong

By H.D.

The animal inside of me is a phantom
because I'm quiet but could be deadly
Inside my heart is a little voice
because it keeps me calm and steady
The word written on my forehead is "keep out"
because I'd rather be alone,
only friends I got is God and my
kin folks back at home

By J.H.

The animal inside of me is a lion
'cause I'm destined to be the king of this jungle
Inside my heart is a lock and chain
because I show no love,
love will get you killed
The word written on my forehead is "built-to-last"
because I was made to survive through whatever

By J.L.

Session 5

Wonderful
because she gives me what I need
Careful
because she is always there
Snitch
Loving
Ghetto
because she is loud talkin'
& just don't give a f**k
The best
because nobody could do what she done
Honest

By J.L.

Just me and you,
I have no father
We been thru so much,
why do you bother?
Had tough times,
rough times,
I can barely explain
It's been like this for a while
so I stop lookin' for change
It was so many times you caught me late night creepin' off
In all black wit' a sack steady reachin' to be da boss

By J.H.

Hated-- by few
Loved-- by many

Ugly-- in the inside
Beautiful-- on the outside
Selfish-- you left me all alone in the world
Mistaken-- in life

By H.D.

Dear Mom
I really appreciate you.
I remember when I used to leave home for about a month and didn't call home
I remember when I went to jail
and you never came to visit me,
but every time I had a bond
you came and got me.

By K.R.

Session 6

My life
My life smells like me
My life tastes like cake and honey
My life sounds like a dog
My life looks like a dollar bill
My life feels good
This is my life

By C.W.

My life
My life smells like ashes
My life tastes like dust
My life sounds like a horror movie
My life looks like 13 Gates
My life feels like a brillo pad
This is my life

By J.H.

My life
My life smells like smoke—
it's cloudy
My life tastes like chocolate—
it's sweet but other times it's harsh
My life sounds like a siren—

it's loud and aggravating
My life looks like a roller coaster—
it's all over the place
My life feels like a rock—
it's rough and hard
This is my life

By H.D.

My life
My life smells like s***
because things I go through are foul
My life tastes like lemons
because things are sour
My life sounds like traffic
because I been going through so much
My life looks like an ocean view
because it's only beautiful when the wind blows
My life feels like mud
because sometimes it's hard, sometimes it's soft,
and either I go under or I won't
This is my life

By J.L.

Session 7

If I was in charge of the world,
everybody would have money and
everybody would be situated
If I was in charge of the world,
I would increase people's payroll
If I was in charge of the world,
I would legalize marijuana because everybody would be happy
If I was in charge of the world,
I would have no jails
If I was in charge of the world,
I would have many things—a thousand cars—
and lots of people working for me
If I was in charge of the world,
I would make everybody happy—there would be no evil
If I was in charge of the world,
There wouldn't be any ugly people

By H.D., K.R., C.W., and M.T.

Session 8

If you walked in my shoes...
you would see a whole new future because
some people haven't been through the stuff I been through
If you walked in my shoes...
you would see hell because
it's rough, hard, and disturbing
If you walked in my shoes...
you would feel pain because
that's how my life has been, nothing but pain
If you walked in my shoes...
you would feel loved and hated because
at times I feel loved and at times I feel hated
If you walked in my shoes...
you would know danger because
I've been picturing some evil things I could do, but I don't because it's wrong and I think about the
consequences
If you walked in my shoes...
you would know I need a friend because
I feel so lonely

By H.D. and C.W.

Session 9

I used to be bad
because I used to run away from home for a long time
and get put out of school all the time
But now I stay at home all the time
or if I leave I come right back
and now I am in school
and I am doing well
In the future,
I want to be an RN because I want to be a nurse
and they make good money
and that is what I choose to do
I used to be mean
and I used to fight a lot
and steal out of the store
But now I am nice
and I got money so I don't have to steal
In the future,
I want to be a teacher
I used to be a gold-digger
but I stopped

Now I am not
because I got my own job and money
In the future,
I want to get married
and get me a big house
and have me some children.

By K.R.

I used to be bad,
I used to get in boo-koo trouble
But now I am good,
I can be big enough to walk away from fights,
I don't need to show anybody I can fight
In the future,
I will be living good—
big house, a fast BMW 745, some children, and a bust-it-baby
I used to be getting in a lot of trouble,
I never used to go to school,
I kept getting kicked out and going by girls' houses
But now I still go by girls' houses,
but I am just chillin',
keeping it cool,
waiting to get off probation
In the future,
I want to be a businessman,
own my own car lot,
have my own company
and lots and lots of money
so I don't have to ask anybody for nothing.

By C.W.

I used to be a drug addict
But now I am clean and sober
In the future I will stay drug free and live a normal life
I used to be an ignorant and ugly person
But now I am a smart, beautiful young lady
In the future I will be intelligent and I will have success
I used to be selfish
But now I am open-minded
In the future I will be someone who doesn't always worry about themselves

By H.D.

Group Two

Session 1

I am myself
I am not rude
I am a leader
I am not a follower
I am cool
I am not mean
I am above
I am not below
I am a challenge
I am not difficult.

By L.R.

I was born in N***, Mississippi in June. I lived in N*** for a while, then I moved to Louisiana. We lived in J*** with my dad. It was great until he died. I was nine years old. I like to play video games, basketball, and hang out and play around. I think about my mom and sister. I worry about how they will end up. I also think about my brother and what he will be doing.

By J.W.

The Sun
My life has changed
like the seasons
I have been through it all now,
but with no reason.
But looking at sky
I am waiting for the rain,
I feel like taking off,
running faster than a train.
I don't want to run away,
it's just taking too long
waiting for that day.
Now I am looking up
and I see the sun,
it's so bright and beautiful
I don't have to run.
That sun is now mine
So it's my time to shine

By D.R.

Session 2

The animal inside of me is a snake
because I am sneaky,
I watch and learn about people
Inside my heart I am lost
because I don't know where I am
and what I am doing in life
The words written on my forehead are
funny and hilarious
because I do crazy things to cheer up people.

By J.W.

The animal inside of me
is a panther because I am
a strong black female
Inside my heart
is a rock
because I am solid
The word written on my forehead is sincere
because out of anger
I am still the word on my forehead

By L.R.

The animal in his heart is
a guinea pig
because he runs around and is greedy
In his heart is
an angel
because he came from the Lord above
The word on his forehead is
amazing
because he makes your day so good.

By S.G.

Session 5

Cindy K. is a person who helped me to become better. She helped me out by showing me how to love Jesus Christ and also how to love my mom. She made me realize how the world treats you. No matter how hard I tried to break her, she stayed by my side.

By J.W.

You never said
"I am sorry, I never meant to hurt you"
I cried every night
and held my pillows so tight
I don't know how to forgive you
because u knew what I was going through
All the beating, the punches, the slaps, and kicks
People held me down and
raped me over and over again
You never cried throughout the years,
no remorse or tears,
not even "I love you dear"
I was just a kid,
I shouldn't have to live in fear

By P.R.

Your smile is my smile.
Your pain equals my strive,
my strive to go many of miles
and end all our cries.
The tears of my eyes
are the tears of your cries.
The days of your life end
with my pain and cries

By L.R.
Session 6

My life smells like
honeydew melons
My life tastes like
brown sugar
My life sounds like
the screams of a million felons
My life looks like
the inside of a dry booger
My life feels like
cotton
This is my life

By D.R.

My life smells like

cherries that have sat out over time
My life tastes like
stale bread
My life sounds like
noisy animals
My life looks like
a messed up painting
My life feels like
money on the outside
but sand on the inside
This is my life

By J.W.

My life sounds like the real thing but I'm ready to go
My life feels like a bumpy road that is sometimes cold
My life looks like heaven but it is really nothing
My life tastes like a box of chocolate that can go bad at any time
My life

By J.S.

My life smells like
nothing
My life tastes like
a bowl of cherries
My life sounds like
a bad bitch
My life looks like
a pile of garbage
My life feels like
a toilet of s***
This is my life

By L.R.

My life smells like
roses and sunflowers
My life tastes like
candy and cake and strawberries
My life sounds like
a lot of chaos
My life looks
beautiful and sunny sometimes
My life feels like

pain and love mixed together
This is my life

By P.R.

My life's a bitch sometimes
Mostly when people don't mind their business
and they are always in mine
Sometimes my life makes me wanna cry.
Sometimes I wanna wave goodbye
to all the bad times that pass me by.
My life's a storm,
in my life I can't even find
a lil' bit of warmth.
Sometimes I just want to hide
and swallow all my pride.
My life is a gangster just like me.
I am gangster to the end
and that's just me
and my life.

By P.R.

Session 7

If I was in charge of the world...
I would send money and food to "Save the Children"
I would try to make peace with other countries
I would create a raffle to help people with cancer
I would help people in need
I would build homeless shelters
I would help people get better jobs
If I was in charge of the world

By J.W., J.S., and P.R.

Session 8

If you walked in my shoes...
you would have it all good at first
and then you would find out that you have to be
independent
and grow up
and do what you do

to survive

By J.W.

If you walked in my shoes...
you would feel the pain and hurt I once felt
If you walked in my shoes...
you would see all the things I saw
If you walked in my shoes...
you would know why I am the way I am today and why I act this way
If you walked in my shoes...
then you could judge me
but until you walk in my shoes...
please don't judge me

By P.R.

Session 9

I used to be someone
But now I am something
I am loving, caring, and smart.
A person who will become a cosmetologist.
I have a dream

By J.S.

I used to be unhappy and sad,
No goal, no dreams,
I was always mad
But now I am free,
No chains, no locks,
I can just be me
One day I will be bright,
No clouds, no shadows,
only my dreams and goals in sight

By D.R.

My biggest goal here on earth
is to be greater than what I am today
That means trying to do everything
that I do the best I can

By J.W.

I used to not care about anything because I just didn't give a f*%k
Now I care about every single thing I do in my life
I will be in the Air Force and I will be a hero

By P.R.

I dream that one day I will be in the Air Force and have a happy and loving family with enough money to enjoy life with a two story house, a Porsche car, an underground pool in the backyard, and a garden in the front yard!

By P.R.

Group Three

Session 1

My life smells like money
because when I grow up I want to be a football player or a rapper—it was a dream
My life tastes fantastic
because you gotta put it step by step to put it where you wanna go,
stay in school so you can learn to read contracts
My life sounds like a crowd of people chanting my name,
chanting me to do better
My life looks great
I feel like going to the future
My life feels like I'm trying to get money back to back
staying on the grind all day

By A.V.

My life smells like money
but the money comes in cautious ways
My life tastes good
but you got to watch what you eat
My life sounds like police knocking down the door
and asking me where it is at
My life looks like it is falling to pieces,
crumbling down to where the devil came from
My life feels like I just want to do myself something but I can't,
but sometimes I want to think about the steps ahead
This is my life

By E.G.

My life smells like strawberry
My life tastes like nachos
My life sounds like music
My life looks like money
My life feels good
This is my life

By K.T.

Session 2

The animal inside of me is a pit
Because when I go,
I go hard
Inside my heart is no fear
Because I have no fear
for nobody
By A.V.

The animal inside of me is a beast
because I got some pressure built up
Inside my heart is a skeleton with a million dollars swinging from a chain
because I feel skinless and loose
The word written on my forehead is "be myself"
because I got to be all I can be

By E.G.

The animal inside of me is a BEAST
because I could be mean at times
but be nice at times
Inside my heart is a door
because if I like you, you could come in,
if I don't you stay out
The word written on my forehead is BEWARE
don't judge me by my cover

By J.H.

The animal inside of me is a gorilla
because make me mad and I'll smash you
The word written on my forehead is Peanut

because I have a hard head

By K.T.

Inside of me is an angel sent from heaven
because when I talk to the ones that's younger than me
and that probably need a role model, a big brother, or big cousin,
I'm willing to be there for them.
I'm always influencing them to do good.
Inside my heart is music
because I always hear my music.
The word written on my forehead is confused,
I just can't explain.

By P.D.

Session 5

Thoughts about MOM
Strong-- because she raised four boys and one girl
Trustworthy-- because she was raised like that
Respectful-- because she ain't gonna disrespect nobody
Someone who looks up to her elders-- because she is not disobedient
On the job—she is hardworking

By P.D., A.V., and K.T.

Thoughts about DAD
Never comes around, never shows up,
never checks to see how you are doing
Irresponsible, he doesn't take responsibility for his actions
Generous
Loser

By P.D., A.V., and K.T.

My Mother
My mother is strong
because she had it hard
when she was growing up,
with 4 kids living ghetto to
ghetto trying to make sure
we have the best.
Now we have a house,
living in a 4 bedroom house, 2 bathrooms,

big backyard, and front yard.
She came a long way,
she made it out the struggle.
That's why my mother is a
black strong woman!

By P.D.

Session 6

I used to be a drug addict
but now I am not
I used to be a thug
but now I am a lil' boy
I used to be a school boy
but now I am not a school boy
I used to be dumb
but now I am not

By A.V.

I used to be a gangsta because that's who I am
but now I am grimy to the bone grizzle
I used to be drugs gone crazy
but now I am free to be
I used to be smart and shady
but now I am slow and cautious
I used to be wrong to myself
but now I am right in mind

By E.G.

I used to be a thug in the streets
But now I am a young man in the street
I used to be wrong to my family
But now I am right to my family
I used to be ugly back in the days
But now I am pretty in these days

By J.H.

I used to be gangsta
But now I am nice
I used to be wrong

But now I am right
I used to be loved
But now I am hated
I used to be a follower
But now I am a leader

By K.T.

Session 7

If I was in charge of the world...
I would put money in my hood
If I was in charge of the world...
I would have a lot of cars
If I was in charge of the world...
I would help a lot of people out.

By A.V.

If I was in charge of the world...
All the money, no 20's, straight 100's
All rabbits, no bunnies
If I was in charge of the world...
I'll have a whole island,
Me and my dogs wiling
While all of my money flying
If I was in charge of the world...
I'll treat my whole family
And tell them everything on me
And see if they got love for me
If I was in charge of the world...
Everything that goes around
Wouldn't even come around
And this world would be round.

By J.H.

VITA

Leah Olson-McBride was born in Westby, Wisconsin. She received her Bachelor of Social Work degree from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire in 1999. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, she went on to earn her Master of Social Work degree from Loyola University Chicago in 2001. Leah and her spouse, Eric McBride, live in Eau Claire, Wisconsin with their three children, Tyler, Sam, and Sophia. Leah is an assistant professor in the Department of Social Work at her alma mater, the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.