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The Use of Role Theory to Build Identity in Adolescents

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

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Expressive Art Therapy

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Abstract

This paper discusses how role theory introduced through the arts can aide adolescents in understanding the many parts of their own identity. The research focuses on the idea that through strengths based identity building, teens can increase their self-knowledge and self-esteem which will in turn decrease the chances for each individual developing symptoms of anxiety and depression. Relevant literature and research were used in order to develop evidence based expressive art therapy interventions to further explore identity using a strengths based approach. The intervention was introduced to an adolescent client who has a diagnosis of adjustment disorder with anxiety and depressed mood. The session focused on building identity by utilizing music, visual art, and creative writing through the lens of drama therapy's role theory and expressive art therapy's crystallization theory.

The Use of Role Theory to Build Identity in Adolescents

Introduction

I have worked with the adolescent population within the mental health field for the last seven years. I have counseled teenagers in high schools, day programs, inpatient hospital settings and individual outpatient therapy. The clients I have spent time working with have varied immensely in cultural background, cognitive ability, and diagnosis. While every teen was unique in their own way, they had one major commonality. Each and every client had an innate drive to answer the age old question *who am I?* In other words, each adolescent I worked with was searching to find their own individual identity.

The word identity connects to many different complex ideas in our society today. Within my research and implementation of the concept of identity building, I use the word identity to explain the understanding of the authentic self. Within the developmental stage of adolescences, teens shift from one label to the next unable to connect to their authentic self. They find themselves stuck between childhood and adulthood, unsure of where they stand, who they are or where they are going. They conform to different social constructs, striving to fit in while secretly hoping to stand out. While this is a process everyone goes through, this state of personal confusion can lead to high levels of scholastic and social stress that has the potential to be detrimental to mental health (Schrobsdorff, 2016).

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, within the United States roughly twenty percent of teenagers are diagnosed with major depressive disorder and twenty-five percent of teenagers are diagnosed with an anxiety disorder (Schrobsdorff, 2016). Not only is this data staggering, the numbers only pertain to those who have the means to gain a diagnosis. Many children under the age of eighteen go through life unaware and untreated

(Schrobsdorff, 2016). With symptoms on the rise and suicide rates in youth increasing, research psychologists and practicing mental health clinicians are striving to find new ways to work with adolescent clients in order to decrease these statistics.

Several authors who have focused their research on identity development in adolescence grounded their research in the notion that a large portion of mental health symptoms that affect teenagers today arise through a lack of personal self-knowledge. These authors and their research helped to support me in designing an arts-based intervention for adolescent clients with a focus on the idea that learning about oneself can create self-compassion (a love of oneself) and in turn will increase self-esteem (worth in oneself) and alleviate mental health symptoms. While each article brought forth important information, there remained a consistent challenge. I found that measuring an abstract concept such as identity, self-concept or self-esteem led to low scores in reliability. The word identity and its meaning may differ from person to person, and each study I discovered did not have a communal definition for the concept. That is why I not only have focused my energy on researching how identity formation improves self-esteem, but also have created an evidence-based expressive art therapy intervention utilizing drama therapy's role theory. I found that in order for adolescent clients to fully understand the meaning of identity, I had to create a concrete and visual representation of the concept of individual identity. Through using this specific theory, which breaks individual identity up into the specific roles we play in life, the intricate idea of identity lost its abstract qualities, making it easier for adolescent clients to comprehend (Landy, 1991).

Not only did I utilize relevant research to support this concept, but I also created and implemented an evidence-based expressive arts therapy intervention with an adolescent client. This intervention focused on utilizing the arts and role theory in order to crystallize the

teenager's view of their own identity. The intervention was completed within an individual outpatient therapy session with a sixteen-year-old male client. This paper explains the importance of identity building in adolescence through both the review of recent research on the subject and first-hand experience with the process.

Literature Review

Adolescents and Identity

Within this section, I will be looking at research that is focused specifically on the developmental stage of adolescence and the importance of identity building. Developmental psychology is the study of the development of the human race throughout the lifespan. While there are many developmental psychologists and theorists, very few discuss the ups and downs of adolescence quite like Erik Erikson. Erikson believed that adolescents are searching for identity factors that will create purpose in life. Within his theory of psychosocial stages of development, Erikson named the adolescent stage "Identity Cohesion versus Role Confusion." He explained that during this time, teens are focused on finding meaning in their everyday lives while also striving to fit into a group. Erikson believes that this is due to the complex transition from childhood to adulthood (Broderick & Blewitt, 2010). He believes that their personal identity is built through the exploration of their beliefs, values and goals. The theory explains that these are found through different experiences and influences that each individual goes through over the course of puberty (Broderick & Blewitt, 2010).

When entering early adolescence, each individual's concept of the world has been molded by their parents or guardians. According to Erikson, being a child to a caregiver is the earliest role that a youth undertakes, and from that role most individuals take on a belief system that gives them an understanding of themselves and the world around them. While these beliefs

start the groundwork of identity, with puberty comes questioning and limit testing. Teens begin to branch out, forming new relationships, bonds and roles that continue to build their individuality. While some of these roles taken on by adolescents stay with them throughout their lives, the research done by Andrik Becht and his team stated that a large amount of the labels teens cling to during their high school years they shed by the time they hit young adulthood (Becht, et al. 2016).

Developmental psychologists Becht et al. focused their research on day-to-day identity formation in adolescents. The research team utilized Erikson's theory in order to examine their idea that experiencing uncertainty in identity at this stage of development is common. They expressed that while "an important developmental task of adolescence is the formation of a certain identity" that individuals must "try on identities" in order to find ones that work for them (Becht, et al. 2016). Over the span of this five-year longitudinal study, the writers were able to conclude that identity crisis is actually a key factor to identity development. The study found that those who connect solely to one identity factor without exploring others show higher levels of anxiety and aggression. While this information supports Erikson's theory, it is more difficult to put into practice. The authors explained that through a series of interviews and surveys over a five-year span, they found that it is common that once a teen finds a label that works for them, they cling tightly to the identifier, nervous to explore other roles (Becht, et al. 2016).

The authors explained that when an individual finds a group that accepts them, many adolescents tend to stay stagnant and no longer search for new friends or social outlets. There is safety in numbers, and there is comfort in feeling a sense of belonging. This, according to Becht (2016), is detrimental to identity development because they are only connecting to one new role. This new role teaches each teen ways to act within the world that may differ from what they

learned from their parents or guardians. As they begin to connect to these new social groups, they begin to formulate new parts of their identity. If they only find themselves in one new role, their identity development has the potential to suffer (Becht, et al. 2016).

Identity and Self-Esteem

Within this section I will discuss research that shows a correlation between identity knowledge, self-esteem and coping with distressing situations. Due to the importance of identity building in adolescence, those that research adolescent development began to look more into the benefit of finding multiple social identifiers during this stage of growth. Maya Benish-Weisman (2015) and her fellow researchers focused their research on the correlation between social groups and self-esteem in teens. They believe that teenagers who connect to numerous interests or hobbies have a better chance of increasing their self-esteem over those who cling to one label. The article explained that these “social identifications” consist of sports, clubs, friend groups and cultural bonds. Benish-Weisman et al. (2015) hoped that through this year long quantitative study they could explore the idea that “Identity composed of multiple factors enhances feelings of meaning and security acting as a buffer to threats to the self” meaning that by increasing each individual’s identity through extra-curricular activities it decreases their susceptibility to negative thinking patterns and bullying from others. The authors explained that while being a part of one social group can positively affect self-esteem, their findings suggest that connecting to several identifiers greatly increases confidence and a sense of self-worth (Benish-Weisman, et al. 2015). While they were able to connect higher self-esteem to activity within several different social groups, they only made the assertion that building a teenagers confidence level may decrease suicide risk but were unable to directly correlate the two.

Benish-Weisman (2015) made this correlation due to information found in several research articles focused on increased self-esteem and coping ability. As I stated in the introduction, suicide risk within the teenage population has increased drastically over the last decade. According to Sharama Hinduja (2010) and her research into suicide risk in adolescents, this increase is due to the large correlation between bullying and suicidal ideation in today's youth. While bullying has been present in adolescence for decades, social media and technology have allowed a new platform for emotional abuse between peers. Hinduja (2010) and many others within the field are working to understand ways in which we can monitor and eliminate this peer abuse.

While completely abolishing bullying would be the ultimate solution, it is not a viable option. Human nature will always breed bullies; the real solution may be taking away the target. Bullying may decrease if there becomes a larger focus on aiding teens in becoming comfortable with who they are. While this is a difficult feat for anyone to conquer, those who have researched the subject suggest that in order to see significant changes, self-love is something that counselors should begin to encourage more within youth. According to research done by Erika Koch (2004) and her team, when individuals understand the intricacies of their identity, it can increase their ability to handle distressing situations such as bullying and can help individuals cope with difficult emotions. Koch (2004) and fellow researchers focused their studies on self-complexity and coping. Within their study they worked to show that by increasing self-knowledge, individuals are able to better handle personal hardship. Koch explained self-complexity as being a "number of overlapping self-aspects such as traits, roles and behaviors" and shared that through gaining insight around these parts of the self, one can increase their ability to cope "in response to stress and negative events" (Koch, et al. 2004) While their research only showed

moderate positivity between self-complexity and coping ability, similar research continues to back the hypothesis presented by Koch (2004).

Mahender Sarsani (2007) complements the research of Koch (2004) in her research on self-concept and adjustment by focusing on and studying how self-knowledge can lead to a stronger ability to adjust to challenging circumstances. Sarani (2007) explained that “self-concept seems to play a significant role in the growth and development of a person” and continued by explaining that “personality development is a continuous process of interaction with environment.” (Sarsani, 2007) Through her research, Sarsani (2007) was looking to find a correlation between student’s reports of self-concept and their ability to adjust and cope during major life changes. Information for Sarsani’s (2007) study was gathered through a simple survey of 120 randomly selected students in a small rural community.

Similarly to the research done by Koch (2004), this study showed moderately positive correlation between self-concept and adolescent adjustment. (Sarsani, 2007) Both studies lacked enough specificity around their core idea, which was self-complexity and self-concept. These ideas are abstract which makes them difficult to measure, they are intangible and neither study presented a concrete way of explaining their main concepts. This is why in my intervention I utilized role theory in order to give a stricter outline to the idea of self-knowledge through the use of role understanding and development. This understanding can then help each individual understand and connect with their identity, which in turn will increase their self-esteem.

Role Theory

Within this section I will discuss how role theory can be used to further understand the importance of multiple identity factors in adolescent development. The basis of role theory has a sociology background, which means that it is influenced by the study of human beings and their

behaviors. While that idea seems simple enough, the question must then look at where human behaviors stem from. The basic nature of the idea of role theory suggests that each individual plays numerous roles within society (Harris, et al. 2015). Through these roles, each person gains different skills and traits that help them to manage that specific role. These skills help to dictate how each person will behave in specific situations. In other words, roles create and build an individual's identity.

The sociological version of role theory was adapted by psychiatrist and psychodrama founder Jacob Levy Moreno in order to develop drama therapy's role theory, which introduces the role model and the role system. Moreno took the concept a step further and began to look into the idea that each role that is played is unconsciously within the individual, and that these roles come forward when they are needed. This idea stems from the concept that humans are inherently role takers, and that each individual's identity is a complex system of different roles that are played throughout life (Emunah, et al. 2009). Moreno believed that these roles affect how each individual handles specific situations.

Within Moreno's concept of role theory, these roles make up what he explained as the role system (Landy, 1991). Within this system, roles coincide with one another and when one role is taking the stage, the others step aside. It is explained that "in its present form, role is persona rather than person, character rather than full-blown human being, part rather than whole" (Landy, 1991, p. 29). Landy (1991) explained that when a behavior comes forward it takes over but it does not mean other roles are not still available or present, the current role is simply a part of the system. For example, in a moment of high stress when in the role of student, the student may take on the identity factor of "control taker" in order to help complete what needs to get done in a timely manner. When the work is completed and the individual takes on a new role

within the system different parts of their identity come forward. Each role that is played in life helps to build up identity and remains dormant until it is needed.

Through examining the research, I have developed a correlation between identity factors and role theory. It is through each role that individuals build their identity. Through the role of being an older sibling, an individual may take on the identity factor of “the responsible one” and “the loving one.” Through being a part of a sports team that role allows an individual to take on the identity of “team player” and “good sport.” Each role that is played in life adds another identity factor that helps build up individuality, creating a well-rounded teenager. Within adolescence, these roles are developing through a series of trial and error (Becht, et al. 2016). Each time a teenager gets involved in a new relationship or becomes a part of a new club they continue to add on to or fine-tune their roles, which in turn helps to grown their identity.

Through this theory, it is explained that the different roles that are played in life help to create identity (Emunah, 2017). Through the research discussing identity, self-knowledge and coping it is explained that the stronger an individual’s identity is, the easier it is to cope with difficult situations. With this information, the next step is looking at how a counselor can work with an adolescent on understanding the multiple roles within them and their own identity. There are several ways, but I believe that utilizing the arts within the therapeutic space can help to drive the idea home.

Crystallization

Within this section I will discuss the use of expressive art therapy and the concept of crystallization theory in order to create the opportunity to discuss role theory with an adolescent client. Expressive art therapy is a therapeutic approach that utilizes all art modalities together in order to illicit creative imagination. Author and art therapist Pat B. Allen said it best in her novel

Art is a Way of Knowing “Imagination is the deepest voice of the soul and can be heard clearly only through cultivation and careful attention. A relationship with our imagination is a relationship with our deepest self” (Allen, 1994, p.3). When utilizing an expressive art therapy approach, the therapist moves from one art modality to the next, utilizing visual art, music, movement, drama and writing, integrating them together fluidly. The movement from one creative intervention to the next is known as the intermodal transfer and it is done in order to bring forth “emotional clarity” which is also known as crystallization (Halprin, 2003 p.75).

Crystallization theory was first developed by intermodal art therapy pioneer, Paolo Knill. Knill was an art therapist who believed in integrating several creative mediums into the therapeutic space. Knill explained that “in an environment ‘saturated’ with artistic imagination, a small creative act, seen as a ‘seed,’ will grow.” (Knill, et al. 2005, p. 123) Within this explanation, Knill was referring to the process that he named crystallization. This process works to explain the phenomenon that occurs when things become crystal clear for the client after utilizing many artistic modalities in the therapeutic space.

Knill’s work stood upon the basic idea that through exploring a concept by fluidly moving from art form to art form, the client is able to enter the imaginative realm. He believed that this allows clients to dig deeper into their unconscious and that each individual is then able to gain a firmer understanding of and connection to the emotions that may be arising. He explained that crystallization theory “attempts to provide optimal conditions for emerging images to come to their potential through the use of different art disciplines” (Knill, et al. 2005, p. 123).

Through intermodal transfer, expressive art therapy theorists who have studied Knill’s work suggest that it becomes “possible to see things differently, to have a new outlook on the

world, a new perception and experience of ourselves” (Levine, 2017, p. 79) When working to understand the correlation between role theory, identity building and self-esteem one key factor is gaining self-knowledge and self-understanding. I created an intervention based on the idea that through the use of fluid intermodal transfer between several different art modalities, adolescents can begin to uncover new connections that may not come forward when using other therapeutic methods.

Methods

Within this section I will discuss the methods I utilized when implementing role theory and expressive art therapy techniques in order to identify roles and identity factors in a 16-year-old male client within an outpatient setting. My notion was first investigated through researching and reviewing literature that supports educating adolescents on the value of identity building through the use of role theory and expressive arts therapy. Once finished researching this hypothesis, I implemented it into practice. The research I looked through was put into theory by introducing several expressive art therapy interventions to an adolescent client. This client began attending weekly individual outpatient therapy six months ago and was given the diagnosis of adjustment disorder with anxiety and depressed mood.

This specific diagnosis alludes to the idea that the client is having a difficult time adjusting to a new obstacle within his life and this situation has created an onset of symptoms of anxiety and depression. Adjustment disorders are seen as a short-term diagnosis, as mental health professionals believe that in supporting the client’s ability to adjust, they can overcome their symptoms. If they continue to experience symptoms after six months of treatment, the client will then gain a new and more permanent diagnosis. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) This made this particular client an ideal candidate for this intervention because he has yet to be given

a long-term diagnosis. The interventions that will be discussed below were completed within the context of individual outpatient treatment over a series of sessions.

I chose to work with this specific client not only due to his diagnosis, but also due to the struggles he expressed having with his self-esteem and his difficulty maintaining a social life outside of school or his immediate family. He shared that he had a difficult time feeling like he fit in, and that he was having trouble connecting with others and feeling good about himself. After several sessions, I came to the conclusion that his lack of confidence when socializing correlated strongly to his low self-esteem. In working closely with the client and utilizing intermodal therapy techniques I helped him understand all of the roles that he plays in his life, and supported him in finding confidence through understanding how those specific roles have influenced his identity.

The interventions that were used with this client were chosen not only to address the client's specific therapeutic needs, but also to help him fully understand the concept of identity. In order to aid the client in completely grasping the idea, I utilized a specific intervention called "Identity Pie" in order to make the concept of identity and roles clear. This clarity on the meaning of identity, as explained within the identity section of the literature review, is something that was missing when researching self-knowledge in the past. Research discussed in the literature review that looked into the importance of self-understanding lost validity due to a lack of continuity in the measurement of an individual's ability to know themselves.

In order to create a clear and concrete idea of role theory, I began by utilizing a tool used regularly in the social work field, which is called "Identity Pie." This intervention uses a pie chart in order to brainstorm all of the roles the individual plays and how much of their time they spend in these roles. This was not only used in order to support the client in thinking of all of the

many sections of his life and their importance, but it also helps to explain and focus the idea behind the theory. Through the use of a visual aid, I find that it is easier for adolescents to fully comprehend the concept behind the intervention. Also, by including the client in the underlying reasoning for each intervention, the facilitator can take a more collaborative approach, which allows the teen to feel a sense of empowerment in their treatment.

Once the roles were solidified, we picked three of the roles that took up the largest amount of space on the chart. For a series of weeks, we spent our hour together exploring each of these three roles through different art forms alongside talk therapy. While each role was important in its own way, I wanted to focus on a part of his identity that I knew was important, but rarely discussed. For this paper, I will specifically focus on the interventions used when discussing the client's experience of playing the role of son to his three parents.

The expressive art therapy interventions used to discuss the client's relationship with his parents utilized music, visual art and writing. I utilized these three art forms in order to utilize Knill's (2005) crystallization theory. The client was asked to think of a song to represent each of his parents between sessions. This means a song for his stepfather, his biological father and his mother. I specifically began with having the client pick out a song because he enjoys listening to music and it was a comfortable art form to slowly introduce him to utilizing creativity in therapy. The client then came into the session and while listening to each song he created a piece of art that depicted the relationship he has with that specific parental figure.

When the song finished, he was then asked to free write about the experience. Once he was finished with writing freely, he then was asked to look back through what had emerged on the page, and pick out specific words that stood out to him by circling or underlining them. After discussing what emerged the client was then asked to come up with parts of his identity that he

thinks may have been formed due to each specific relationship. The client was then asked to create an “I am...” poem in order to complete the experiential. An “I am...” poem is a piece of poetry that is utilized in therapy in order to focus on the many different parts that make up who the individual is. This intervention was chosen to end the experiential in order to create a concrete correlation between the roles the client plays in his day-to-day life and his identity.

This specific series of interventions was chosen in order to take each individual parent and look at how they helped to make the client who he is today. Even if the client views his relationship with specific caregivers as negative, it showed how important the specific role of son is to his development. This experiential was utilized due to the support that was found when researching the subjects of adolescent development, identity building, crystallization through the use of intermodal art therapy and the prevalence of anxiety and depression within teens.

Results

Within this section I will discuss the results of the expressive art therapy intervention that was utilized with a 16-year-old male client in an outpatient setting in order to explore the roles the client has played within his life and the correlation of these roles to his individual identity. The first intervention that was used was titled Identity Pie. This intervention brings in the idea of a pie chart, a concept that many high school age clients will easily understand and uses it to discuss identity. The Identity Pie was utilized to warm the client up to the concept of multiple roles that make up individual identity. Beginning with this warm up is not only crucial to help the client understand and become comfortable with the concept, but it also helped in organizing a structure for our sessions. Alongside this, the chart also allowed for a visual representation of the concept, which can be useful for client's who have different learning styles.

To begin this intervention I had the client brainstorm all of the roles that he plays within his life. These roles consisted of the part he plays as a son, older brother, younger brother, student, friend, best friend, animal lover, food fanatic, music lover and a gamer. Once he was able to create the list of all of his roles, he then created a pie chart. This chart indicated which roles he played most often in his day-to-day life. Student, son and older brother took up the majority of the chart. This then created a discussion around the difference in how he acts when in school with teachers and friends versus when he is with his younger siblings or his parents.

Throughout the process of aiding the client in understanding the depths of personality and the roles he plays, several interventions were introduced. Each intervention stemmed from the expressive art therapy concept of crystallization, which was introduced by Paulo Knill (2005). As discussed within the literature review, this idea explains that through the use of several different art mediums the participant truly delves into their imaginative realm while also better understanding the topic at hand. Through experiencing an intermodal approach, the client was able to explore what was emerging and create a clearer image of the intricacies' of his own identity. While this was done with several of the roles that the client identified with, one specific series of arts based activities stands out as being impactful.

For several weeks we utilized hour session to explore each parental figure. The client has three adults that would fall into the role of parent. He has his mother, who he is very close with, his biological father who is deceased, and his stepfather who has left and re-entered the family several times. Every week the client was asked to bring in a song that he felt related to each of these caregivers. This was the first creative intervention due to the client's love of and comfort with music. The first week using this series of interventions, we both decided to focus on the role

he plays as the son of his now deceased biological father, who passed away when he was just five years old.

The song he chose to represent his relationship to his father was an acoustic song with a female vocalist. The lyrics from the song chosen depicted a relationship that the artist never got to have, and explains that she is the person she is today because of that specific person. While listening to these songs together, I asked him to create visual art while thinking about that specific caregiver. He created an image of what he believes his father would look like now if he were still alive. Once he was finished creating the art, I then had him free write about the experience for five minutes. He was then asked to pick out any words that stood out to him from what he had written and to circle them.

My reasoning for implementing this expressive art therapy experiential was to help him really delve into the role he plays as a son, and how each relationship has impacted the person that he is today. While we may have been able to discuss this concept without the use of any art form, by implementing music, visual arts and writing the client was able to uncover new connections that he had not been able to in the past. (Knill, 2005)

Once he was finished with this section of the experiential, the client was very quiet, and put his head in his hands for a moment. He looked up with a few tears in his eyes and joked by saying “I just have something in my eye I swear” while laughing. He then shared that he has not thought about his father in a very long time, and that he was feeling very vulnerable which was uncomfortable for him. In utilizing several art forms simultaneously he was able to truly connect to emotions that he had buried but never dealt with. I gave the client a moment, and we discussed how growth stems from vulnerability.

Once we had allowed time for the client to decompress, I asked if he would be willing to share the words he had chosen that stood out within his writing. The words that stood out to the client were “Disappointing, love, faith, trying, and proud.” We discussed why these words stood out, and we worked to connect them back to who he is today. The client explained that he worried about disappointing his father, and that a large amount of who he is today is connected to the longing he has to make his now deceased father proud.

After this, we took each word and worked to uncover characteristics that he has due to his role as a son of his three parents. One large identity factor that we came to was responsibility. He explained that the reason he feels so much pressure to fall into the parental role when his stepfather leaves is that he believes that his biological father would want him to take care of his mother and siblings. This underlying idea helped to create the role he takes on as “the responsible big brother” when it comes to his family dynamics.

After coming up with several personality traits, I had planned to have the client create an “I am” poem using each word. This intervention would have been used in order to connect the concept of the role he plays with the parts of his identity. While each role is important to understanding his unique personality, it is more of an introduction into embracing his individuality. We did not have time to conclude with this intervention due to the time spent discussing feelings of vulnerability that emerged during the first part of the experiential.

This intervention was utilized due to the support that was found when researching the subject of adolescent development, identity building, self-esteem, and anxiety and depression. Within my research I found several articles and studies that focused their energy on demonstrating that the chance of developing symptoms related to anxiety or mood disorders lessens when adolescents increase their self-esteem. Further research showed that when

adolescents are encouraged to explore their individuality, they develop higher self-esteem. While these studies came up short due to lack of specification, I believe that incorporating the specific interventions dictated above with numerous clients could help to support their hypothesis.

Discussion

When creating this intervention, I never imagined how much emotion it would illicit within the client. I had hoped to utilize the experiential in order to encourage the client to look at himself and see all of the pieces that create the whole. Throughout my experience as an individual and group based therapist working with teens, I have always been intrigued by how quickly adolescents connect to a specific identifier and allow it to dictate how they interact within the world.

While running group therapy in both inpatient and outpatient settings with teenage clients, I quickly learned that many of the patients found their way into the programs due to suicidal ideation. After getting to know them, it became apparent to me that a large amount of these thoughts or actions began after they lost what they claimed to be their identity. There were clients who had consistently achieved in school, and when they failed a course they began to question their purpose. There were clients who found themselves in and out of mental health programs because they had been diagnosed with depression and it became their whole identity. Some clients struggled because they entered into a new school, and had yet to find a group to connect to.

Each story had several similarities, every client was an adolescent, was experiencing suicidal thoughts and had only one identity factor that they outwardly connected to. I have always worked through a strengths based lens, and my focus when working with clients has been building up their self-esteem. In the past, when trying to build self-esteem I would focus on

positive affirmations and accepting compliments, but I slowly began to realize that was not enough to make a legitimate impact.

I realized that the lack of self-esteem was a much deeper and more developmental issue. This is what led me to look into finding ways to increase self-esteem through increasing self-knowledge. As I said in the introduction, it is difficult for anyone to love themselves fully when they do not know who they are. This led me to my interest in identity building, which was reinforced by Erikson's psychosocial stages of development.

Through my research, I realized that the concept of identity and self-knowledge is extremely vague and nearly impossible to measure. The use of role theory allowed for a more concrete view of identity, explaining that our identity is made up of the roles that we play within life. By dissecting these roles, it was natural to then create a discussion around the traits that come forward when playing these parts.

This is how I came to the idea of using the identity pie intervention to introduce the idea. When I first was explaining the concept of playing multiple roles in life to my client, I was simply explaining it through metaphor. I explained each role as a box, and was trying to share that each box holds parts of your identity. I then tried to further my explanation by exclaiming when you open a specific box those parts come forward. I could tell that the client was having a difficult time understanding the concept. He would urge that he understood what I was saying, but I did not think that it was sinking in. I then realized that if I wanted him to truly understand, I should use something more visual. This is why I introduced the identity pie intervention into the session. This visual not only worked well for beginning to explain the concept, but it also kept us on track week to week.

When completing this portion of the intervention, I was impressed with how quickly the client was able to think of the different roles he plays in his life. Roles came forward that I did not know about. We spent so much of our session discussing his home life and his schoolwork that we rarely dug into other parts of himself. He shared that he loves music, specifically classical music and that he really loves anime and videogames. These are things that had never come up within the sessions because he focused so heavily on things that were not going well in his life. This made me realize that even if the intervention had stopped there, and we had not gone deeper into each role, it would have been successful. The identity pie allowed him to open up and share parts of himself with me that he did not realize were important.

The rest of the intervention that I wrote about above happened a few weeks later. The client I was working with rarely utilizes art within sessions, so I wanted to warm him up to the idea. The first week following the making of the identity pie, we discussed his role as an older brother, and we were able to link parts of his identity that have developed due to that role. This was done completely through conversation. At the end of the session I asked the client if next week he would be interested in trying an art based intervention. This not only allowed the client to take ownership of our upcoming session, it also allowed me to give him a little bit of homework, which was asking him finding a song that reminded him of his father.

I find that when implementing expressive art therapy into sessions, especially with teens, it is important to make them feel like part of it was their idea. In my experience, I have found that when working with adolescents in anyway a counselor may come face to face with a large amount of resistance. That resistance escalates when art based interventions are utilized.

Originally, I had hoped to do a drama therapy and movement therapy activity with the client in

order to discuss role theory. I had hoped to have the client embody the different roles he plays, taking on a position and saying a word or phrase when thinking of the different parts of himself.

Through working with the client, I realized that these two artistic methods were modalities that he was not fully ready to embrace. In trying to use drama or movement, I may have been met with much more resistance. I purposefully used music, visual art, and writing because those are mediums he agreed to use and appeared to be comfortable with. For me, the client being comfortable is very important. I hope to bring ease and trust into each session, which is one thing that was challenged when administering this intervention.

I was impressed, surprised and a bit underprepared when it came to how much the crystallization through fluid art making affected the client. While I have always believed in the power of solidifying emotion and self-understanding through the creative arts, I had not prepared myself to handle the vulnerability that it created in the client. Our sessions last for one hour. As I stated above the expressive art therapy intervention I chose to write about was done within one session and was supposed to utilize music, visual art, free writing and poetry writing. Due to the impact of the experiential, the session went fifteen minutes over our scheduled meeting time and we were unable to finish the exercise with the poem.

This was due to the emotional reaction from the client. He was brought to tears after reading the free write he had written about his father who had passed away. Not only was it emotional for the client, but it was emotional for me as well. I was unsure of what to say or do in the moment. I have had client's cry in sessions before, but this felt much different. Since I had asked him to do the exercise, I felt a level of guilt for making him feel so vulnerable. It felt almost manipulative, especially since I was using the session in my thesis.

Once he felt ready to talk again, we were able to discuss what had come up for him. He shared that he had never grieved for his father since he passed when he was so young. He explained that while feeling vulnerable was uncomfortable for him, it was something he felt he needed to do. We then were able to talk about some of the words that had come up for him during the free-write. Some of the words we focused on were proud, hope, and tough. As I explained in the results section, he was able to connect that due to the role he plays as a child to his now deceased father, he feels a strong need to make him proud and to stay strong for his family.

While we were able to tie the exercise into the topic of role and identity, I still felt that perhaps the exercise was too much to try to complete in one session. The use of the arts in therapy is extremely powerful, and I do not think either one of us was ready for what it brought out. I believe I was very lucky that the particular client I chose to do this intervention with was so open and resilient, and was able to find immense value in his ability to share his emotions with me in that moment.

Now that I have completed the intervention, I believe the use of poetry after the free-write would have been too much. While utilizing several art-forms within the therapeutic space can be transformative, it is important as the counselor to know when the intervention may be pushing too much or going too far. I was proud of my ability to notice that in the moment, and that I did not urge the client to write the poem. If I had forced the closing of the intervention, it may have affected the level of trust that I have forged with the client. Without the poem we were still able to connect the dots in order to crystallize the concept for the client.

While I am very happy with the interventions I chose to utilize with the client, there are different variations I could have done had he been comfortable with them. For the first

intervention, the identity pie, I could have introduced several different interventions. One specific experiential that could have been used could have been visual art. If I were to use this modality I would have had the client draw out each part of his identity, creating an image of himself playing each role. While I think that would be a great intervention for someone who is more comfortable with visual art, I believe it would have been a daunting task for this specific client. Using this intervention first may have tainted his view of the experiential before it could even truly start.

Another option to replace the identity pie is one that I already stated above. In lieu of the identity pie activity I could have utilized movement therapy and drama therapy in order to discuss the different roles the client plays in his day-to-day life. I would have still started with the brainstorm, having him write down each identity. After that, however, I would have asked the client to embody each identity, giving each role a movement, voice and phrase. This would be effective if the client was more comfortable with movement and drama, but again I think it would have been met with a large amount of resistance.

In order to explain the concept of role theory, and allow the client to dig into the roles he plays in his day-to-day life I could have also used music. I could have utilized percussion instruments, and had the client create a beat for each role he plays. The client does enjoy music and I do think utilizing percussion would be doable with him. While I do believe he would benefit from working with music, I would not start the process of this intervention with percussion. I do not think that it would solidify the idea enough if it were not introduced with a visual component as well. I was able to implement music later on in the intervention, and was satisfied with how it complimented the other modalities that were introduced.

When working with the client on his relationship with each of his parents, and how that role has affected him I could have used a few different modalities. One that came up for me was the empty chair technique, an intervention that was derived from psychodrama. This technique uses an empty chair, and the client is able to visualize anyone or anything sitting in that chair (Emunah et al. 2009). I could have used this intervention to have the client talk to his father. While this technique can be powerful and transformative, I personally believe it can also be traumatic if it is not executed correctly. While this could be an option when working with this client, I think it would be more harmful than helpful and would take away from the core concept that we were trying to focus on.

While there are many different variations that could have helped guide the same conversation regarding identity, I am very happy with the one that I ended up doing. While I was not able to fully complete the planned intervention, I feel that it was a success. Not only was I able to use expressive art therapy to crystallize the concept, but I also believe that I will continue to see a change in the client's overall mood as time goes on. While I did not do a longitudinal study for this particular topic, I do believe that his self-esteem has increased due to his ability to understand himself on a deeper level.

It is my hope that the counseling field will continue to research the importance of identity building and self-discovery in adolescents. Perhaps with enough measureable data, schools will begin to formulate curriculum around these topics in order to support each individual through the hardships of the teenage years. While this goal can potentially be achieved through therapy, why not start before that is needed? We can discuss the suicide rate and statistics around adolescent depression for the next ten years, but until we begin to make real systematic changes the data will remain the same.

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