

Individual Clinical Paper

Poetry in Therapy: An example of group bibliotherapy and therapeutic creative writing with clients with eating disorders

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Purpose: In this paper, the author will describe her experience of setting up a poetry therapy group for inpatient and day patient clients as part of a group therapy programme for clients with eating disorders. In doing so, the paper will provide an example of a creative, novel and interesting area of practice for counselling psychologists, with a range of applications.

Background: After noting the need for more research into the use of literature and creative writing in therapy, the paper will sketch out the history of poetry therapy in the US and the UK. In doing so, the paper will argue for the therapeutic advantages to be gained by harnessing clients' creative verbal capacities and by bringing literature to clients in distress.

Key points: The paper will describe the group's development and the existential and phenomenological principles which guide the group's facilitation. The poetry therapy group's place in the overall day care programme for eating disorder clients will also be considered. Interwoven throughout the paper will be extracts from written feedback from past group members, given with permission, examples of the poems they have produced, as well as some of the author's own poetry. Attendees will also be given the opportunity to create their own group poem, in order to demonstrate how creative exercises can be used to facilitate group cohesion and, in an eating disorder setting, challenge perfectionism.

Conclusion: This paper will provide attendees with an historical overview and experiential introduction to the use of poetry therapy.