



Comparing the effectiveness of art therapy on depression and locus of control of male and female inmates

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ABSTRACT

Ongoing studies have revealed the positive effects of art therapy with prison inmates. The most recent publication presented the effectiveness of art therapy with male and female prisoners [Author. (in press). The effects of art therapy on male and female inmates: Advancing the research base. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*]; specifically, the results demonstrated significant, positive change with both the male and female prison population in mood and locus of control. However, one interesting trend that seemed to emerge as the study progressed was an apparent difference in the effectiveness and response to the art therapy between the male and female inmate populations. Along with qualitative evaluation, additional statistical calculations were applied to determine if the numbers indicated any significant difference between the men and women in changes of depression and locus of control for those that received art therapy services. The results indicated a trend towards significance in a greater improvement in mood and internal locus of control in female inmates than the male inmates did. This article concludes with a brief discussion on possible reasons for these differences, and with a reevaluation of past theoretical concepts of the advantages of art therapy with prison inmates, contending that not all of these advantages apply to the female inmate population.

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Ongoing studies have revealed the positive effects of art therapy with prison inmates. The most recent publication presented the effectiveness of art therapy with male and female prisoners (Gussak, 2009). Using several measurement tools, the study's goal was to determine if art therapy influenced participants' mood, locus of control (LOC), and behavior. The overall results demonstrated significant, positive change with both the male and female prison population in mood and locus of control. However, one trend that seemed to emerge as the study progressed was an apparent difference in the effectiveness and response to the art therapy between the male and female inmate populations. It was determined that this deserved further analysis.

Along with qualitative evaluation, additional statistical calculations were applied to determine if the results indicated any significant difference between the men and women in changes of depression and locus of control for those that received art therapy services. This report will present an overview of theoretical perspectives on differences between male and female inmates, description of the methods used, and an overview of the statistical results. After concluding that there was some statistical support for differences between the male and female populations' response

to art therapy in mood and locus of control, this report will conclude with speculations on possible reasons for these differences.

Literature review

Evaluating the similarities and differences between male and female inmates is fairly new. Because of the discrepancy between the numbers of male inmates as compared to female inmates, most studies focused on the men. Over the years, however, the numbers of incarcerated women have substantially increased. The number of women in prison jumped from 7% in 1993 to 12% in 2004; during the same period, the female jail population increased by 468% (Elias, 2007). As the numbers of incarcerated women increased, so did interest in studying them—including the understanding that the two genders may face different criminal, incarceration, and rehabilitation issues (Chesney-Lind, 2006; Elias, 2007; Sydney, 2005; Whitaker, 2000).

Although initially there was a common societal belief that the female inmate was similar in disposition and criminal rationale to the male inmate (Chesney-Lind, 2006) these beliefs have since changed, and now there is a general acceptance that the rationale behind the women's illegal and criminal actions are quite different. It is more likely that women offend after being provoked through domestic or sexual abuse, because of trauma or a dependence on drugs (Bloom, 2000; Chesney-Lind, 2000; Whitaker, 2000). As

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Chesney-Lind (2006) surmised, it may be that the women are simply responding to feeling disenfranchised.

Equally important is the understanding that once incarcerated, the female inmate differs from the male inmate. This was understood as early as 1974 when Panton evaluated and compared personality differences between male and female prison inmates using the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. What he discovered was that:

...males [demonstrated] a greater trend towards employing defenses characterized by over concern with physical functioning, poor morale, voiced pessimism, emotional immaturity, and irritability. The females were [overly subjective and sensitive, and had a] greater inclination to avoid establishing meaningful social relationships...males [were more] associated with overt conflict with authority, and the females scoring more frequently on those items associated with feelings of isolation and lack of personal pleasure derived from social intercourse (1974, p. 337).

Overall, Panton concluded that men were more prone towards alcohol abuse and prior criminality, whereas the women were considerably more asocial and had difficulty adjusting emotionally to imprisonment. Although this study is long out of date, it does demonstrate the escalating awareness of differences that may exist between the sexes in prison.

Blitz, Wolff, Pan, and Pogorzelski (2005) indicated that some of the differences in mental health difficulties between the sexes may be because “problems that underpin depression or addiction behavior, such as past physical or sexual trauma, will go undiagnosed and untreated, even though they confound treatment for other diagnosed problems” (p. 1745). Female inmates were more likely to have experienced such trauma. Thus, although men are susceptible to mental illness, such as depression, female inmates are considered more prone towards it than male inmates (Butterfield, 2003). According to statistics from the Bureau of Justice, 16% of the men’s population and 20% of the women’s population have been treated for a mental illness (Blitz et al., 2005).

While men and women in prison experience some of the same stressors that may exacerbate poor mental health, some have argued that female inmates may be even more disposed towards stress-related illnesses than the men. This may be due to “the struggle to maintain intact families, the effort to sustain the parental role and care for children, and the need to deal with unresolved conflictual marriages or relationships...all from the confines of prison” (Negy, Woods, & Carlson, 1997, p. 225). How they respond to the prison system also differs significantly; their socialization patterns may “influence their reaction to the prison experience—traditional values, especially stemming from being a mother” (Harris, 1993, p. 50). This may influence the types of mental illnesses the two genders may develop (Lindquist, 2000). While men “have higher active rates of anti-social personality disorder...women are more likely to have active disorders of somatization, depression, generalized anxiety, panic and phobia.” (Blitz et al., 2005, p. 1741). They are more likely to experience addiction problems as well (McClellan, Farrabee, & Crouch, 1997).

How the two sexes are treated in prisons also differ, causing distinction in their development and treatment. Prison staff members have a tendency to infantilize the female inmate more than male inmates, as they are seen as more dependent and emotional (Harris, 1993). They are perceived as only able to handle lower levels of “freedom” as compared to their male counterparts within the confines of correctional institutions; “prison staff treat them as such, limiting their opportunity to control their own conduct” (p. 52). Thus, the perception by both correctional staff and the female inmates is that the prison experience is more problematic for women than men; this is compounded even more so as female

inmates have to contend with losing their children during the time of their incarceration.

However, it has been noted that women in prison have been more effective in developing support systems within the prison, much more so than the men. Zingraff (1980) indicated that “for females... the priority placed upon fellow inmates for support, reference group identification, status etc., reduce the impact of confinement...[and] the degree to which inmates are able to create and maintain interpersonal relationships within the institution has a positive effect upon females but not affect upon males” (pp. 286–287). Even in art therapy, it was recognized that women in prison provided a more supportive environment for group work than their male counterparts (Day & Onorato, 1997), and female inmates are likely to create familial-like structures within prison to cope with the loss of outside affiliation.

Along with mental illness, both genders have exhibited difficulties with locus of control. Locus of control is the term assigned to the degree of control that someone feels he or she has over his or her environment. External LOC indicates more of a tendency to believe that outside forces controls one’s behavior, whereas internal LOC indicates a sense that one can control his or her own destiny (Bayse, Allgood, & van Wyk, 1992). In general, it is believed that prison inmates have more of a tendency towards external LOC than an internal LOC (Griffith, Pennington-Averett, & Bryan, 1981; Hunter, 1994; Love, 1991). A strong internal LOC is a deterrent to criminal behavior, and indicates an acceptance of one’s responsibility for his or her actions. However, it is also noted that LOC may vary depending on the gender of the inmate (Griffith et al., 1981), and that male inmates are deemed to have more of an internal LOC than female inmates (DeWolfe, Jackson, & Winterberger, 1988).

Some art therapy literature indicates that response and behavior differences in their clients are due to gender. Mayerson (1997) found in her study on the effectiveness of bilingual group therapy on Spanish-speaking immigrant children discovered that the boys showed more involvement in their drawings and reported more group stability and a stronger connection to the therapist than the girls did. When using the Draw-a-Story art therapy assessment, Earwood, Fedorko, Holzman, Montanari, and Silver (2004) discovered that boys scored much higher than girls did for risks of aggressive behaviors. A couple of studies (Boutin, Buchwald, Robinson, & Collier, 2000; Risberg et al., 2004) revealed that women preferred complementary and alternative therapies—of which art therapy was included—more than the men. These are just a few examples of some of the art therapy literature that address gender differences. However, until recently, no studies have been conducted to evaluate the differences between male and female correctional populations and their response to art therapy.

Based on previous theories that indicated that art therapy enabled participants to increase their sense of control, problem-solving, and socialization skills (Gussak, 1997; Gussak & Cohen-Liebman, 2001), recent art therapy studies indicated positive change in behavior and depression for those inmates who participated (Author, 2004, 2006, 2007). The most recent study revealed significant change in depression and locus of control in both male and female inmates who participated in art therapy (Gussak, 2009). The data obtained from the most recent study was reexamined to determine if there were any differences between incarcerated men and women in their response to art therapy.

Method

For this study, a control group pre-test/post-test design was implemented. The following hypothesis was developed.

- Although both male and female inmates will exhibit marked improvement, the male inmates will exhibit different responses

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