

# Benefits of Poetry in Therapy

Chavis, G. (2011) *Poetry and story therapy: the healing power of creative expression*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

**In Geri Chavis' Poetry and Story Therapy** book, poetry in therapy is explored as a way to allow clients to have creative expression through reading or writing their own poems or stories in ways that can be incredibly transforming. The book's section on poetry as a vehicle for healing highlights how poetry and poems have begun to be incorporated into the business world for trainings and educational programs, and have begun to be utilized by social workers, psychologists, and other helping professionals in therapy with clients to help with client's self-exploration in a more unique and creative intervention style. Poems can be used to help calm a client down, or even used in a mindfulness-practice because of the rhythm and beat of words that can be used to help a client focus on their breathing, heartbeat, or on the repetition of words. Writing poetry can also stimulate client's own creativity, and having them come up with their own words to create verbal imagery to help them work through aspects of their lives that they want to improve on or events that they may need to work through. Chavis' book also highlights the selection process for poems, and the items that social workers and helping professionals should consider with poem selections such as group or individual goals, the developmental stage of the client, diversity and cultural backgrounds, and the issues that are presented in treatment.

McPherson, J., & Mazza, N. (2014) Using arts activism and poetry to catalyze human rights engagement and reflection. *Social Work Education*, (7), 944-958. Retrieved from:

<http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.memphis.edu/eds/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=e9211328-5536-40cf-8c8b-4ca7d3bbd6a8%40sessionmgr4008&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2l0ZQ%3d%3d#AN=97626846&db=ssf>

**Florida State University** released a paper on *using arts activism and poetry to catalyze human rights* and how undergraduate social work students were able to use art and poetry as a way to promote human rights. In conjunction with an arts program, students in this study responded to two poems on discrimination by two African-American women, and were able to express emotional and behavioral responses in a group setting to process the themes that were discussed. Students then also utilized poetry to write a collaborative poem on their experiences during an art installation, which showed themes of community collaboration, difficulties in engaging strangers, and promote their own reflections. The poem writing and then reading also fostered collaboration and understanding among the students in the study, which showed the effects that poetry can have on both helping students/individuals understand human rights struggles as well as helping individuals process those themes on a personal and peer level.

Conclusions from this report showed that the use of poetry for combining language, symbolism, and ceremony into helping individuals process trauma or intense human tragedy can also foster healing and recovery for individuals. Poetry therapy was shown in this report to be effective when coupled with arts activism in promoting engagement and reflection for human rights issues to promote in students which can translate to the greater population.

Furman, R., & LeConte, D. (2012). Poetry therapy, men and masculinities. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, Vol. 39, 102-106. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4849890/pdf/nihms604934.pdf>

**The Arts in Psychotherapy Journal** published a study on the use of *poetry in therapy with men in regards to masculinity*. Poetry has been explored by therapists for use with at risk men, but because of

systemic gender roles conflicting with how poetry is perceived as not being masculine, there is some initial resistance from male clients. However, this article aimed to refute some of the stereotypes regarding masculinity and poetry, and how by understanding those misconceptions are perceived, poetry can be used in a positive therapeutic intervention style for men. Poetry can be used in therapy with men by highlighting poetry written by men and discussing how the authors were able to highlight and discuss their vulnerability without having their sense of masculinity jeopardized. Poetry can also help support men in their journey to feel more comfortable with themselves and their successes and failures in life through strengths perspective, where themes such as strength, capacity, hope, dreams, and successes are emphasized in the poetry used which in turn helps men be able to process their own life experiences more.

Findings from this article showed there are a variety of positive ways that poetry can be included in work with men in therapy, and that work in this context helps to further effective therapeutic interventions used with varying genders and gender roles. Utilizing classic poetry by strong men can also help to break stereotypes surrounding femininity of poetry, and can help men to learn how to overcome failures or issues surrounding vulnerability in a creative and empowering way.

Mazza, N., & Hayton, C. (2012). Poetry therapy: an investigation of a multidimensional clinical model. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 40, 53-60. Retrieved from:

<https://www.sciencedirect-com.ezproxy.memphis.edu/science/article/pii/S0197455612001505?>

**The Arts of Psychotherapy** published a study that looked at *the investigation of a multidimensional clinical model* to collect empirical evidence on poetry therapy which is highly regarded throughout various interdisciplinary areas as a viable and well used tool in creative interventions. This study collected data from practitioners who used poetry in therapy and found positive results or who felt poetry was a positive tool and analyzed the input given by these practitioners. Using an RES model for language arts-based methods used by therapists, this study showed that data fit logically into this model and suggests that data collected was in support of poetry therapy having a meaningful impact on clients. This model proposed, as well as the integration of other creative therapies assessed, showed that poetry in therapy can be seen as a viable intervention style, and is able to be integrated into other interventions styles as well, such as music or bibliotherapy, and supports poetry therapy being diverse and adaptable.

Alvarez, N., & Mearns, J. (2012). The benefits of writing and performing in the spoken word poetry community. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, Vol. 41, 263-268. Retrieved: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0197455614000318>

**California State University** published a study exploring *the impacts of writing and performing in the spoken word community* and how spoken word poetry can help individuals be a part of a shared experience that can combat some of the general mental health diagnosis that are increasingly found in traditional creative writers. Traditional poetry writing and other similar creative writing can be very isolating, however spoken word poetry allows individuals to put their work on a public platform that results in the individual and the general public they are performing with in a shared experience. This study looked at ten poets from different spoken word venues and looked at the motivations and experiences these poets had while writing and performing their poems.

Findings from this study showed that spoken word poetry can help individuals find community and find others that can help them feel heard and supported. Findings also showed that when individuals performed their poetry, they also felt an emotional connection with the material which helped them to be able to reach emotional resolutions in areas in their lives they needed to improve.