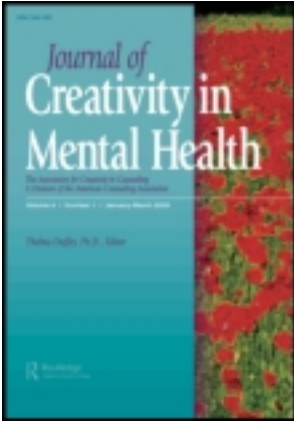


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### Art Therapy, Research, and Evidence-Based Practice, by Gilroy, A.

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## BOOK REVIEW: CREATIVITY AND LITERATURE

**Gilroy, A. (2006). *Art Therapy, Research, and Evidence-Based Practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Paperback. 177 pp. ISBN: 0-7619-4114-2. \$40.00.**

*Art Therapy, Research, and Evidence-Based Practice* presents an array of information about art therapy and advocates the need to incorporate evidence-based practice into both the research and practice of art therapy. Gilroy makes arguments and presents detailed suggestions for incorporating art therapy and evidence-based practice to make art therapy more scientific and thus more widely accepted and valued by the scientific community. Edwards (1999) and Pounsett, Parker, Hawtin, and Collins (2006) attest to the increasing pressure placed on art therapists to incorporate research and clinical effectiveness outcomes into their practice. Therefore, Gilroy's book serves as a valuable contribution to the art therapy field.

Gilroy has authored other publications on art therapy including *Art Therapy: A Handbook* (1992) and *Pictures at an Exhibition: Selected Essays on Art and Art Therapy* (1989). Gilroy is also the co-editor of *Art and Music Therapy and Research* (1994) and *The Changing Shape of Art Therapy: New Developments in Theory and Practice* (2000). Gilroy became an art therapist in the 1970s as a result of her background and interests in visual art, research, and psychology.

Art therapy is a process for awakening creativity and is a means for accessing hidden resources to express internal conflicts and find solutions to current problems (Synder, 1997). It focuses on nonverbal communication and the facilitation of a trusting safe environment where individuals can express strong emotion (Harden, Rosales, & Greenfield, 2004). Since the 1940s, formal efforts have been made to combine art therapy with psychotherapy, and art therapy has been a part of psychotherapeutic and psychiatric therapy (Crawford & Patterson, 2007; Waller, 1991). The psychological effects of creative expression, such as that expressed with art therapy, include a) positive mood, b) a sense of confidence and self-efficacy, c) enhanced ability to self-express, d) promoted self-awareness and self-acceptance, e) improved insight, f) lessened anxiety, g) enhanced

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general psychological well-being, h) more complex cognition that helps with greater problem-solving ability by diverse ways of interpretation of material, and i) an enhanced ability to shape oneself and one's world actively, which are contrary to feelings of helplessness and depression (Crawford & Patterson, 2007; Field & Kruger, 2008; Wood, 2007).

As noted above, Gilroy advocates the need to incorporate evidence-based practice into both the research and practice of art therapy. The increasing need to incorporate a strong evidence base into art therapy practice is essential for art therapy to gain acceptance in today's scientific community (Pounsett et al., 2006). Thus, her first chapter presents a general overview of evidence-based practice. The third, fourth, and fifth chapters provide detailed suggestions and procedures for gathering evidence for best practices, establishing a protocol for art therapy, and auditing client records, procedures, and outcomes in an art therapy setting. These chapters are useful and practical because they provide readers a basis to establish a more credible, evidence-based environment for the art therapist. These chapters are informative for all clinicians—not just art therapists—who desire to update their work environment with evidence-based operating procedures. The sixth and seventh chapters describe research methods from multiple forms of quantitative and qualitative research to generate evidences for best practice, with examples specific to art therapy. Finally, the eighth and ninth chapters describe the evidence base for art therapy work with adults, adolescents, and children.

For those readers specifically interested in art therapy and its use with specific populations, the eighth and ninth chapters will be most useful. In these chapters, Gilroy provides a comprehensive and thorough presentation of numerous research studies and results, in which art therapy is useful in addressing specific psychological difficulties. Art therapy is useful to address difficulties often described by a loss or lack of control, such as eating disorders, abuse and trauma, addictions, dementia, learning difficulties, offenders, palliative care, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, and child sexual abuse (Nesbitt & Tabatt-Hausmann, 2008). The research suggests that engaging in art therapy can prove particularly useful in these situations, as the creation of artwork offers a sense of control through mastering the art material to counteract life situations that are often out of one's control (Nesbitt & Tabatt-Hausmann, 2008).

Gilroy also provides information on how art therapy is useful in treating mental illness including depression, psychotic and related disorders, and personality disorders. Richardson, Jones, Evans, Stevens, and Rowe (2007) concluded that clients diagnosed with psychotic disorders can especially benefit from art therapy because psychosis makes trusting and communicating with therapists difficult. Richardson et al. (2007) showed art therapy produces a significant positive effect on negative symptoms in clients diagnosed with schizophrenia, and clients are better able to learn and understand

their behavior patterns that cause stress and anxiety. Gilroy even includes a section on autistic spectrum disorders. Osborne (2003) found that art therapy can be particularly useful for children with autism because these children usually have a poorly developed sense of symbolic understanding and internal versus external reality.

Gilroy includes initial and critical appraisal checklists in the appendices of the book for literature review. She provides detailed questions for the reader to use in considering the strengths and weaknesses of sources. These checklists would be useful to therapists conducting a review of empirical research studies in assessing the reliability and validity of found sources for art therapy and in determining the credibility and authority of the information. In addition, the checklists would be a valuable resource for beginner researchers, therapists, clinicians, or people unfamiliar with the literature review process for empirical research studies.

Another strength is that Gilroy pointed out that art therapists resist notions of uniformity although evidence-based practice requires certain levels of uniformity of practice and precision about goals and outcomes for specific populations, which can put art therapy in an invidious and anxiety-provoking situation. Further, Reynolds, Nabors, and Quinlan (2000) expressed concern regarding the lack of standardization of different art therapy studies and the lack, in most studies, of detailed description of goals and procedures used during each art therapy session.

A weakness of this book deals with the inclusion of extensive advanced research-oriented rhetoric that may be unclear to a person interested in art therapy but unfamiliar with research terminology, and thus, readers without a significant amount of background research knowledge may become confused or not understand the text. It is interesting, however, that Gilroy argues that evidence-based practice and research should not scare away art therapists who tend to shy away from research, when in fact this book may do just that. Too much detailed research jargon may scare away readers, and more specifically art therapists, who are the book's primary target audience.

As another possible disadvantage, the book may cause readers to develop a negative attitude toward evidence-based practice as the text offers up the juxtaposition of the extremely objective and structured elements of evidence-based practice with the unique, subjective, and sometimes unstructured qualities of art therapy. Even though art therapy and evidence-based practice may seem at odds with each other, evidence-based practice has proven an effective and scientific approach in the medical and psychological community. As Barlow (2005) notes, "Health care policymakers and governments around the world have decided that health care practices, including behavioral health care practices, should be based on evidence" (p. 308). Clearly, outcomes based on evidence are the new frontier in research and practice, and perhaps Gilroy's tone toward evidence-based practice biases the reader to view evidence-based practice as too authoritative.

Another helpful suggestion is the inclusion of more information on assessments to measure various outcomes of art therapy. Eitel, Szkura, Pokorny, and Von Wietersheim (2008) expressed concern that there are no instruments that can evaluate pictures created during art therapy in a reliable and valid manner, and most are still based on intuition and the experience of the individual art therapist. Thus, providing more information on assessments would make art therapy more scientific.

Another helpful suggestion to Gilroy might be the inclusion of more information and research on the future of art therapy. This would help make the book stronger. As Barlow (2005) indicates, truly sophisticated evidence-based assessments go beyond procedures and outcomes by also looking at future directions and vulnerabilities to prevent relapse.

A final suggestion for improving the strength of the text would be the inclusion of research and methodologies of art therapy in related areas such as family counseling, as the text neglects to mention using art therapy with family interventions. Expanding the audience may help disseminate the use of and encouragement for art with evidence-based practice even further in the mental health field.

The book would be useful for art therapists, researchers, psychologists, school counselors, social workers, or other mental health professionals who are interested in research, evidence-based practice, and art therapy. Practitioners will find a vast amount of information on evidence-based practice in general as well as more specific research findings on art therapy in the last two chapters. However, it should be made clear that this book is not a guide or manual to art therapy theory or techniques but rather an in-depth look at research and evidence-based practice and how art therapists may gear their practice and research toward evidence-based practice. Gilroy highlights the importance of embracing the scientific aspects of evidence-based practice without abandoning the qualitative, artistic, and expressive characteristics of art therapy. Riley (2001) states that art is an appealing alternative communication form because imagery accesses the mind's primitive ways of knowing and reacting to the external world. Art therapy plays an important role in the mental health community and may serve as a welcomed alternative or supplement to traditional verbal psychotherapy.

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