Systematic analysis of art therapy research published in *Art Therapy: Journal of AATA* between 1987 and 2004

Einat S. Metzl, MA, ATR-BC, MFT

*Loyola Marymount University/Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32303, United States*

**Abstract**

This paper presents a systematic analysis of methodologies used in research published in *Art Therapy: Journal of AATA* between the years 1987 and 2004. The context of epistemological paradigm shifts affecting research in general and art therapy research in particular is examined. Quantitative inquiry supports hypotheses that the number of publications has continued to grow over the years and that author demographics differ from general demographic of art therapists. A qualitative analysis identified eight methods common to art therapy research: clinical case studies, self studies, survey research, interviews, art therapy tests, historiography/anthropological research, behavioral observations, and exploration of clients’ artworks. Thematic exploration of each method and integration of findings suggest indicators of methods’ maturation and shifts in how and when methods are utilized, field-specific challenges, and emergence of art therapy research norms.

© 2007 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

**Keywords:** Art therapy; Research methodology; Gender differences; Research trends

Art therapists, as ambassadors of a relatively new field, are frequently confronted with a question most mental health professionals no longer face: But what exactly is art therapy? Indeed, not an easy question to answer; art therapy is an interdisciplinary, unique field. It combines artistic, scientific, mental health, and educational components but does not seem to fit completely into any single mould. Art therapy research endeavors might reflect this evolving identity and promote development accordingly. This article, therefore, presents a systematic analysis of research published in the American Art Therapy Association (AATA) journal over a decade and a half in an attempt to identify what art therapy research brings to the field within the context of general research debate and what image of art therapy is reflected through such research.

First, theoretical underpinnings of research methodology and general developments in research perceptions are explored through presenting (1) the broader context of epistemological paradigms underlying the theories of valued knowledge, (2) current conceptual methodology debates within the social sciences, and (3) an overview of research dialogue within the art therapy field.

Next, the methodology used for examining art therapy research over the years is brought forth. The systematic analysis utilizes mixed methodology with the assumption that quantitative or qualitative methods are complimentary and their combination offers more comprehensive findings possible than through the limited scope of either form of inquiry alone. Findings regarding art therapy research trends then lead a discussion of possible implications for the field’s advancement endeavors.

---

1 This paper is based on my work as Prof. Linesch’s research assistant at Loyola Marymount University and my final research project.

* Tel.: +1 310 980 0736.

E-mail address: emetzl@yahoo.com.

0197-4556/$ – see front matter © 2007 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/j.aip.2007.09.003

Epistemological paradigms and conceptual debates

Kuhn (1970) describes the way in which scientific thinking has changed throughout the ages as determined by shifts in paradigms. The term paradigm seems to have several meanings, based on a broad definition culminating “the entire collection of beliefs, values, and techniques shared by members of a given community” (Kuhn, 1970, p. 175). Thus, scientific method could be understood as a technique as well as a manifestation of values and beliefs. As Sprung and Sprung (1996) state, “it is in the area of application and development of new methods that the goals and the requirements of a society set upon a science. To that extent methods indicate the stage of historical development of a science” (p. 138).

Current debate about scientific inquiry tends to focus on two paradigms—modernism and postmodernism. Often, these terms are used interchangeably with others. Modernistic inquiry, for example, is frequently termed “positivist,” “traditional,” “quantitative,” or “mainstream” research, or simply regarded as synonymous with “scientific.” Postmodern inquiry is frequently interchanged with “constructionist,” “post-positivist,” “phenomenological,” “qualitative,” or “humanistic” inquiry (McGuire, 1983; O’Neill, 2002).

Postmodernism proposes that all knowledge is socially constructed, based on language, and immersed in specific contexts. Therefore, it is impossible to gain objective knowledge, understanding all concepts as relative, including “reality,” “truth,” and “scientific proof” (Smith, 2001). From a relativistic standpoint, these concepts are meaningful only as part of their cultural scientific community. These are core disagreements with modern science, which assumes objectivity and the existence of a knowledgeable truth, attainable through hypothesis testing (Smith, 2001).

While many researchers believe that moderate positions of postmodernism could be taken into account and support the development of science, others view them as a real threat for scientific inquiry and its achievements thus far (Smith, 2001).

Shifting paradigms within the social sciences

Many researchers and theoreticians (Lykes & Stewart, 1986; Rennie, Watson, & Monteiro, 2002; Rogers, 2000) claim social science’s methodology has been strongly affected by re-examination of what constitutes science and knowledge. The use of methodologies within the social science, and specifically the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods, correspond with the discussion of modern and post-modern paradigms (O’Neill, 2002). For example, Creswell (1994) emphasizes that the implications of methodological choices go far beyond practical considerations and directly relate to researchers’ philosophical stance. Methodology choices thus indicate philosophy of research, goals, and perception of knowledge deemed desirable or relevant to the social sciences (Rennie et al., 2002).

Psychological research is often seen as spearheading social science’s research agenda (Rogers, 2000), and often determines what is considered “legitimate” or “worthy” inquiry for mental health (Lykes & Stewart, 1986). Since art therapy is frequently perceived as a modality of mental health, the standards set by psychological research might be especially pertinent to its advancement (Kaplan, 1998).

Proponents of advancing qualitative psychological inquiry suggest it as a way of making psychological research more personal and contextual, and more coherent with feminist criticism of mainstream scientific establishments (Rogers, 2000; Smith, 2001). These goals of qualitative inquiry, sometimes called “Big Q research” (O’Neill, 2002), differ from typical mainstream research goals that aim at objective findings that can be generalized to different people, times, and places.

Rogers (2000) and Lykes and Stewart (1986) refer to opponents of qualitative inquiry as “gate keepers” who are preserving the present power structure through giving legitimacy to traditional, quantitative research, while dismissing other types of knowledge and meaning.

Opposite claims are heard from mainstream quantitative researchers arguing that their achievements should be assessed in light of the intended goals, rather than having findings scrutinized for not presenting aspects they were not intended for (Smith, 2001). Mainstream researchers also express worries that qualitative methods undermine valuable achievements available through traditional inquiry due to postmodern opposition to such concepts as “truth,” “validity,” “reliability,” “proof,” and “causality” (Haig, 2002).

Currently the majority of researchers and institutions seem to hold quantitative methods as more valid and legitimate; most research that is undertaken and published is based on traditional quantitative practices (Lykes & Stewart, 1986).
Most research institutions, scientific organizations, and funding sources are dismissing the importance of qualitative research (Rogers, 2000). Nevertheless, Rennie et al. (2002) suggest that an increased general interest in qualitative methods is reflected by growing numbers of publications, graduate students’ research papers, and qualitative research courses offered.

Thus, while the majority of researchers, publishers, and psychological institutions remain resistant to the use of qualitative methodology, an increasing number of clinicians welcome the paradigm (Rogers, 2000; Woolfe, Dryden, & Strawbridge, 2003). Some see qualitative inquiry as a “unique paradigm of research that calls for a re-consideration of all research practices” (Rogers, 2000, p. 76), and many others perceive qualitative methods as complementary or adjacent to quantitative (Woolfe et al., 2003).

Debating about research within the art therapy field

The debate about identity and methodology within the field of art therapy is perhaps best understood within the wider context of epistemological discourse presented above. A need for research, broadly defined as systemic inquiry (Wadeson, 1992), was recognized as essential to art therapy development since the late 1970s (Kwiatkowska, 1978). Initially, art therapy leaders seemed to focus on the need for and feasibility of research (Edwards, 1993; Franklin & Politsky, 1992; Linesch, 1992). As years passed, the discussion about research widened, covering aspects of professional identity, types of research conducted, relatedness to paradigms from other fields, and practical implications of gaps in art therapy research (Anderson, 2001; Deaver, 2002; Kaplan, 1998, 2001; Rosal, 1989, 1998).

Many art therapists who write about research seem to focus on the purpose of research for scientists (Saunders & Saunders, 2000), clinicians (i.e., Linesch, 1994), and artists (i.e., McNiff, 1998). The debate often starts with a seemingly agreed-upon premise that research of some kind is essential for the field. However, the fact that “most art therapists are reluctant to engage in research” (Deaver, 2002, p. 23) despite continuous calls for research is troubling. It is hard to estimate whether the target audience has been affected by this discussion in their approach or practices; the majority of art therapists were only directly given a voice in a few studies (Betts & Laloge, 2000; Linesch, 1992, 1995; Lusebrink, Rosal, & Campanelli, 1993; Mills & Goodwin, 1991).

More art therapists are pursuing doctoral degrees than in the past (Lusebrink et al., 1993), but the percentage is still small in comparison to the number of art therapists, and there are no data on how many have intention of engaging in research. While many of the aforementioned articles explained possible reasons for this lack of involvement and proposed different solutions, little substantial change was observed for the majority of art therapy practitioners as evidenced by the authors’ perceptions throughout the years (for example, Deaver, 2001; Julliard, 1998; Wadeson, 1978) or by the number of researchers involved (Malchiodi, 1995; Tibbetts, 1995). In fact, a survey conducted by Betts and Laloge (2000) stated, “The results of this preliminary survey suggest that there is reason to be concerned about the lack of involvement in research” (p. 295).

The field of art therapy aspires to be a convergence point for liberal arts and social science, areas that are often perceived to have opposing paradigms for knowledge and inquiry (Junge & Linesch, 1993; Kapitan, 1998). Based on the present discussion, this debate of art therapists could be understood as a part of a greater paradigm shift or as the reflection of this young field’s struggle to maintain its unique identity while obtaining validation within at least three communities (scientific, clinical, and artistic).

Methodology

This exploration follows a pragmatic approach proposed by Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), in which research questions take center stage, followed by methodological choices. Under the assumption that qualitative and quantitative methods are complimentary, this exploration moves between deductive and inductive inquiry, incorporating findings from specific hypothesis testing regarding demographic of authors and number of publications with thematic exploration of the research published.

Sampling

The selection of Art Therapy: Journal of AATA as the source of data was based on the fact that AATA is the main professional organization of art therapists in the US. Accordingly, the association’s publication is assumed to
mirror changes and trends in the field of art therapy more accurately than other publications. The study examines co-variability of research trends with paradigm shifts related to the influence of different journal editors, since the impact of leaders in the field as representatives of trends and creators thereof are likely of significance. Specific hypotheses tested change in number of published research over the years and demographic attributes (education, gender) of researchers in comparison to the art therapy membership demographic. The timeframe for research was defined as the last decade and a half, including papers published between 1987 and 2004, to allow for data breadth in which changes and trends could be assessed.

Data gathering

Articles published in Art Therapy: Journal of AATA between the years 1987 and 2004 were systematically examined. A wide definition of research was used as the inclusion criteria; that is, if the intention of the paper was referred to as a research, study, exploration, examination, questioning, test, presentation of findings, systematic inspection, or other terms considered synonymous to research (Schaverien, 1995) the paper was included in the data. This wide definition allows for an examination of what is prevalent in the field, beyond “acceptable research criteria” set by other fields. Editorial explorations and interviews (with leading art therapists, for example) were excluded, unless interviewers clearly presented these tools as part of their named research methodology.

The reason for inclusion is noted as well as the title of article, the year of publication, researcher(s), gender of researcher(s), education and philosophy of researcher (if noted), journal edition and editor, methodology used, and characteristics of published paper (i.e., language, inclusion of artwork, tables, structure of paper).

Procedure

The information gathered was analyzed through mixed methodology, creating the research cycle designed to answer questions through dialectic methodology (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), moving back and forth between methodologies and complimentary findings. Specifically, the analysis started with quantitative, deductive process of testing hypotheses regarding the number of papers published per year and demographics of published researchers in art therapy in terms of education and gender. The first hypothesis was that the number of published papers per year increased throughout the years and that the different editors would affect that number. The second hypothesis assumed that there would be a significant difference in gender representation of researchers published in Art Therapy: Journal of AATA relative to the male-to-female ratio in the field, and that education would also correlate highly with gender differences.

In addition to this deductive inquiry, an inductive process of qualitative analysis followed. The first stage of data reduction was conducted during data collection as papers published in Art Therapy were broken into units of information for categorizing (Miles & Huberman, 1994), in which common methodologies were identified and a coding sheet was developed including eight sub-categories (case studies, self studies, questionnaires, interviews, art therapy tests, scholarly reviews, observations, exploration of artwork) that became the basis of further exploration (see Appendix A). Quantitizing techniques (Miles & Huberman, 1994), describing qualitative trends visually through quantitative tools, were used to further organize and display the eight categories which emerged as common methodologies: case studies, self studies, questionnaires, interviews, art therapy tests, scholarly reviews, observations, and exploration of artwork. Later, themes that emerged via comparisons within each category and between the eight categories were developed. Finally, general characteristics of art therapy research in regards to participants, analysis, and orientation of research were analyzed. While the author was the only coder/rater, both procedure and results were under constant supervision of Dr. Linesch operating as a research mentor. A synthesis of findings from the different analyses follows.

1 A sample of coded data is available for interested readers. Please contact author.
Findings of quantitative inquiry

Number of research papers

The correlation between the number of research publications and publication year was tested with a two tailed Pearson correlation and found significant \( (N = 18), r = 0.545, p < 0.05 \) (Fig. 1). Thus, in support of the first hypothesis, it appears that the number of research papers published in *Art Therapy: Journal of AATA* have increased with time. Although it was not tested for statistical significance, the changes in number of research papers seem to correlate with the different journal editors between the years 1987 and 2004. Figs. 2 and 3 illustrate the relationship between number of research papers per year and the editors thereof. Some years had two different editors, for example, Susan Spaniol and Cathy Malchiodi shared editorial responsibilities during 1997 and 2000, and Frances E. Anderson and Frances F. Kaplan shared the editor’s position during 2002.

In general, the Cathy Malchiodi’s years as an editor seem the most prolific as to the overall number of research papers published and the number of papers published per year. She served as the journal’s editor for 9 years, with a total of 216 research papers published under her guidance. The number of papers per year during that time doubled, and sometimes tripled the previous baseline set by Gary Barlow during the years 1987–1991. Susan Spaniol seemingly had assumed the editorial position as a temporary replacement for specific volumes. In the latest years explored in this study (2001–2004), it appears that Frances E. Anderson and Frances F. Kaplan have stabilized the number of research papers published in *Art Therapy: Journal of the Art Therapy Association* at around 20 per year.

Demographic of art therapy researchers

Findings also suggest a significant difference in gender representation between AATA members and published authors. According to the AATA’s membership survey report of 2001–2002, 91.3% of respondents were female, 6.2% were male, and the remaining 2.5% were unspecified. In comparison, 80.7% of the first authors of published research explored in this study were female and 19.3% were male. Thus, it would appear that there was a disproportionately large number of men published during these years as compared to the number of women. A chi-square test \( \chi^2 (1) = 143.239, p < 0.05 \) was found significant, thus providing support to the hypothesis that these differences are unlikely an outcome of chance in light of the expected ratio according to membership gender demographics. This finding seems important in understanding the possible gap between art therapy researchers and the general population of art therapists and its implication are discussed later.

Interactions between the educational background and gender of published researchers were found to be statistically significant in two categories: There seem to be a higher representation of male authors with doctoral level education
year * editor Crosstabulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Gary Barlow</th>
<th>Cathy Malchiodi</th>
<th>Susan Spaniol</th>
<th>Frances E. Anderson</th>
<th>Frances F. Kaplan</th>
<th>other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 2. Number of papers per year, clustered by different editors.

Fig. 3. Bar chart of publications per year and editor.
without an art therapy specialization than expected by general ratio of male authors ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 37.944, p < 0.05$) and a higher representation of female authors with a masters level education registered as art therapists than expected by general ratio ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 4.132, p < 0.05$) (Figs. 4 and 5).

**Findings of qualitative exploration**

*Eight common research methods in art therapy research*

The qualitative exploration identified eight common research methods in art therapy research published in *Art Therapy: Journal of AATA* between the years 1987 and 2004. These eight categories were titled case studies, self-studies, questionnaires, interviews, theoretical explorations, art therapy assessments/tests, observations, and explorations of collected artwork. Thematic exploration was used to examine popularity of use of each of these methods over the years and speculation about possible meanings of these changes. These are shown in Figs. 6–8, and are divided into three categories (1987–1992, 1993–1998, and 1999–2004) to allow for comparable 5-year time segments for visual exploration of trends.
Case studies

The popularity of case studies decreased over the years, although they still seem quite common. A shift in terminology from “case studies” to “case examples” and “case vignettes” was identified. Replacing the term “study” with case “examples” or “vignettes” might suggest a move from an in-depth investigation of a case (or several cases), to using segments of cases for illustration of theoretical or practical experience. Common themes of inquiry using case materials focus on unique clinical cases (specific diagnosis, situation, or art therapy intervention).

Self-studies

Studying one’s own experiences and processes was identified as a constant methodology throughout the years, averaging around 8% of all studies. Seemingly, the need for self-expression was recognized and a specific section of Art Therapy: Journal of AATA called “viewpoint” (initiated 1992–1993) was devoted to artistic/personal expression. Another type of common self-inquiry promotes reflections of professional experience via a dialogue of several therapists’ personal accounts. This second type is often more systemized and, unlike the first type, it is normally presented as a paper in the general section of the journal.
Questionnaires
The relative use of questionnaires decreased slightly over the years, averaging a little over 8% of all published research explored in this study. Most surveys focused on development of the art therapy field and sampled art therapists, or evaluating art therapy process through pre- and post-self reports of clients. In addition, the AATA membership survey focuses on members’ demographics and report of professional activities. All in all, the great majority of questionnaire-based research was based on art therapists’ reports rather than the clients’ or general population’s reports.

Interviews
Interviews and narrative-based tools (studies using dialogues, stories, and verbal associations) are the least frequent research method identified in this paper. However, the use of narrative-based research tools increased in recent years. Also, the number of interviews might be downplayed by interviews that were not included in the data due to the inclusion rationale (were not defined as systemized inquiry).

Art therapy tests/assessments
The interest in art therapy assessment measures has slightly decreased over time and focus on specific tools shifted. The trend shows a shift away from DDS (Cohen, Hammer, & Singer, 1988) studies and mandala studies, whereas an increase in PPAT/FEATS (Gantt & Tabone, 1998) research was found. In addition to using different tools, the manner in which assessments were used also shifted. For example, an increased use of triangulation of methods replaced the use of art therapy tests as an established, stand-alone research measure. Some psychological tests such as the HTP (Buck, 1966), DAP (Goodenough, 1926) and art-based assessment tools such as the KFD (Burns & Kaufman, 1972) and scribble drawings seem to be used inconsistently throughout the years while few researchers dedicate their research to one single tool with the goal of increasing its validity and reliability. A consistent example of such attempt would be Silver’s SDT (Silver, 1983).

Theoretical explorations
Four general themes have been identified as common to art therapy scholarly exploration: art therapy history (explorations of art therapy founders, historical perceptions of field development processes), art therapy philosophical constructs (such as art, creativity, healing, culture), art therapy theory formation (theory based art therapy interventions, for example), and use of art in other cultures, communities, or artistic traditions.

Observations
The use of observational methods, such as behavioral measures, increased in recent years (1999–2004) and is currently the leading method of research. Observations are most commonly used in conjunction with other methods.

Please cite this article in press as: Metzl, E. S., Systematic analysis of art therapy research published in Art Therapy: Journal of AATA between 1987 and 2004, Arts Psychother (2007), doi:10.1016/j.aip.2007.09.003

Fig. 8. Common methodology tools used 1999–2004.
For example, clinical and behavioral measures of observations seem to be used to triangulate art-based findings or illustrate effectiveness of art therapy interventions.

**Explorations of artwork**

Exploration of collected artwork, for example from a group of clients with similar treatment or symptoms, is often utilized in conjunction with standardized tools to ground theoretical, behavioral, and clinical findings regarding effectiveness of art therapy interventions. The rise in popularity of exploration of artwork as a research method seems to parallel the decreased use of case studies and increased popularity of case vignettes instead.

**General attributes of art therapy research**

Beyond findings regarding these eight common approaches to research, general attributes of art therapy research were noted with respect to data gathering, common research analyses, and reporting styles. Art therapists and art therapy clients are the most common sample pools for art therapy research. Sampled groups seem to be small in comparison to social science standards. A sample population size of at least 30 is generally required in order for statistical analysis to be worthwhile. Although a direct analysis of the mean sample size among the studies examined was not statistically explored, many of the studies explored a considerably smaller sample size (using fewer than 20 cases). Most commonly, qualitative methods of analyses are used either solely or in conjunction with quantitative measures.

As for reporting style, most papers use formal clinical format (APA style) for presentation of case material or scholarly liberal art style reporting for position papers based on theoretical, historical, or professional experiences. Scientific style reporting, which includes an abstract, description of the research design, participants, findings, and a consequent discussion, is less common. Many studies seem un-systemized and do not follow structured research design; many are reported in first-person, embracing researcher’s subjectivity and personal reporting style.

**Discussion of findings and possible meanings**

As examined in the literature review, the context of changing research paradigms in social sciences (O’Neill, 2002; Smith, 2001) and the field’s unique position between liberal art and social science (Carolan, 2001; Kaplan, 2001) places art therapy research methodology in a unique position. Therefore, exploring art therapy research methodology might be an indicator of what art therapy is and what it could evolve to be.

**Challenges of a multi-disciplinary field**

The development of art therapy research might be understood as an outcome of great tensions pulling in different directions, moving between different disciplines—from the clinical to the art, then to science, and back again. Throughout the years, researchers have attempted to utilize methodologies that are structured and flexible enough “to represent the concept of art therapy that is both deep and wide” (Vick, 2001, p. 133). Holding on to both artistic and clinical realms in a manner that is accepted within academic standards is challenging, especially when “art therapists do not have the time, the mentoring, or incentives to publish or present their work” (Anderson, 2001, p. 138). Even those willing to engage in research often work within systems that promote types of research for which most art therapists are not trained or in which they lack interest (Kaplan, 2001).

Responses to these tensions within the art therapy vary; some call for an invention of a new type of research unique to art therapy (i.e., Wadeson, 1992); others focus on the creation of meaningful research that is in accord with social sciences and managed care requirements (Gantt, 1998; Julliard, 1998; Kaplan, 2001); still others wish to embrace the artistic process and product as the core of any investigation (McNiff, 1998) or advocate utilizing the subjective experience of the researcher within post-modern research models (Bloomgarden & Netzer, 1998; Linesch, 1995; Spaniol, 1998). Another response to these tensions, and possibly the most common response for the average art therapist, is avoidance. Deaver (2001, p. 81) states, “the majority of art therapists are reluctant to engage in research.” In addition, the finding regarding the demographic of researchers suggests that the voices of the majority of art therapists (women with an MA degree) is downplayed and their professional experiences are less likely to translate into the field, contributing to the field’s knowledge base through conducting and publishing research.
These responses seem indicative of how difficult it is to maintain a multi-disciplinary vision in the context of increasing specialization (Von Eye, 2000). Such attempts to “grow in all directions” are likely to clash with set standards of established fields linked to specific epistemological paradigms. Another expected challenge is training researchers that are capable and willing to promote all aspects of the profession.

**Indicators of growth and maturation**

While art therapy research might not develop linearly, the findings of this study suggest growth in the number of published papers throughout the years and application of more elaborate research methods. Also, the findings suggest that various norms have been formulized around publication of research in *Art Therapy: Journal of AATA* over the years. For example, after a peak number of publications during the mid ‘90s the number of research papers published per year stabilized, suggesting a creation of sustainable norm: Typically four volumes of the journal are issued, presenting approximately five research papers in each. The format of publication has also become more structured: At least one paper follows a more positivist design (reported as brief-report) and one carries a more personal narrative style (under viewpoint). Also, some norms seem to have been created around educational qualifications of authors, possibly due to greater standardization of art therapy education.

**Indicators of identity formation**

The findings of this study suggest a shift towards more systemized research. For example, moving away from case studies might be an indication that the field is shifting toward more generalized illustrations of clinical work. The decrease in philosophical and historical explorations might also be understood as a product of a professional identity, shifting more to the social sciences and away from liberal arts traditions.

While art therapy research might be moving beyond individual clinical experience, it is still highly involved in defining its identity. Self-studies (studying experiences of art therapists and art therapy students) seem to be a constant methodology, which has slightly increased over the years. Perhaps self-expression and self-exploration are inherent to the art therapist’s way of knowing, as Bloomgarden and Netzer (1998) suggest. The engagement in “self-search” might also be a developmental stage or a pragmatic resolution of art therapy researchers to a lack of available participants. However, such focus on self-sampling and self-reports together with “the lack of sound study designs” (Reynolds, Nabors, & Quinlan, 2000, p. 212) might limit art therapy research development and hamper research collaboration with other fields.

**Multiple methods in art therapy research**

The findings suggest that typical art therapy research, which currently finds its way to *Art Therapy: Journal of AATA*, utilizes a collaboration of different methods. For example, the use of case vignettes is commonly triangulated with other methods of research such as questionnaires or scholarly review of phenomena. Common triangulation of research methods might serve as a way to pull together social science traditions (observational measures, case examples, and interviews) with liberal art traditions (exploration of artwork, historical and philosophical expressions), and serve as a way to negotiate the field’s multi-disciplinary nature. Also, the increase in papers utilizing interviews and explorations of artwork might be influenced by narrative therapy and post-modern thinking (Linesch, 1994), while the increase in observational methods as indicators of treatment effectiveness might be influenced by managed care systems and social science research.

**Is there an art therapy style of research?**

While a cohesive style of art therapy research might not exist, several characteristics of typical art therapy research were identified in this study. Current art therapy research typically utilizes collaborative research methods and is often highly qualitative with some quantitative aspects. It is commonly reported in APA format but does not follow a standardized research design. It tends to focus more on personal voice of the researcher than in most published research in either liberal arts or social science. And, although most art therapy researchers are women, there is a significantly higher proportion of male authors in comparison to their ratio in the art therapy community.
Study limitations

This study attempted to present a systematic inquiry of trends through mixed methodology. Naturally, however, it has limitations that are important to note. Although under direct instruction and mentoring of Prof. Linesch throughout this endeavor, the author was effectively the sole coder of data. In addition, the sampling of *Art Therapy: Journal of AATA* might limit the findings. The journal is one of three journals that typically publish art therapy research, and art therapist researchers might publish research in many other journals as well. Therefore, conclusive findings regarding art therapy research would need to include these publications. Also, the inclusion rational was limiting in some ways (i.e., editorial inquiries and interviews were excluded unless they specified research intent), but used a very broad definition of research, which may limit the ability to identify research accepted by other disciplines.

Conclusions

This study explored the use of research methodology in papers published in *Art Therapy: Journal of AATA* between the years 1987 and 2004, within the context of greater debate of epistemological research paradigms. The research utilized quantitative deductive inquiry and qualitative inductive exploration. Two quantitative hypotheses were statistically supported, suggesting that the number of published research papers increased and that gender proportions of researchers differed from the general art therapy population. The qualitative section named eight common research methods and explored themes and characteristics of each. A synthesis of findings offered indicators of change in published research over the years.

Future studies of art therapy research could broaden the investigation to other expressive therapy publications, explore effects of gender and education within a chosen research method, or explore attempts to measure the quality of published research in comparison to other fields.\(^2\)

Appendix A. Inclusion criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data/participants</th>
<th>Tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clients (individuals/groups)</td>
<td>1. Case studies/case examples/case vignettes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapists</td>
<td>2. Self studies (heuristic inquiries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT students/professors</td>
<td>3. Questioners/surveys/polls (self-rating or observer’s rating)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AATA members</td>
<td>4. Interviews (semi structured/open/closed/dialogue between teacher + AT students, between clients (and therapist), etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of findings (literature)</td>
<td>5. Art Therapy tests (assessment tools such as PPAT, SDT, KFD, MARI cards, HTP, DAP, BND)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artworks</td>
<td>6. Philosophical/historical/Anthropological exploration/Review of findings thus far (literature review/experience based)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical and current trends in the AT world/use of AT techniques or approach</td>
<td>7. Observations (behavioral, clinical, measures of effect on community (such as drop out rate), educational tools, using video recordings, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer databases</td>
<td>8. Exploration of collected artworks/verbal associations to imagery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art therapy techniques/interventions (presentation and development)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control/condition groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2\) References of reviewed publications included in study data will be provided by author upon request.
Appendix A (Continued)

Analysis
- ANOVA/quantitative tools (t-tests, chi-square, etc)
- Correlations (between assessment, between raters/pre-post tests/AB single case research/control group or baseline vs. condition group)
- Comparisons (with other fields/between clients/between dx/between tasks or tools/cross cultural inquiries)
- Thematic exploration
- Formal elements (FEATS), symbols and archetypes in artworks, graphic indicators
- Analysis of scores (psych. inventories, FEATS, SDT, behavioral measures)
- Academic philosophical/historical/legal/practical synthesis
- Content analysis

Reporting style/orientation
- Personal/informal
- Formal clinical paper (APA)
- Scholarly (liberal art style) position paper
- Post modern/narrative/expressive (viewpoint?)
- Collaborative research (with other fields/mixed approach and methodologies)

References


