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A National survey of bibliotherapy preparation and practices of professional counselors

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A National Survey of Bibliotherapy Preparation and Practices of Professional Counselors

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Abstract

A national survey of “Bibliotherapy Practices in Counseling” was conducted in 2008. This project was partially supported by an Association of Creativity in Counseling Research Award. Little research exists regarding preparation of professional counselors and their specific use of bibliotherapy interventions. Using Dillman’s electronic survey protocol, invitations and survey requests were sent to a random sample of current members of the American Counseling Association. Respondent data indicates counselors do use bibliotherapy in their practice; however, this is largely limited to using informational, workbook and self-help materials. An analysis of counselors’ theoretical orientations, client populations, and practice settings is presented. Implications for counselors and counselor educators and recommendations for future research are offered.

KEYWORDS: Bibliotherapy, books, counselors, literature, survey

A National Survey of Bibliotherapy Preparation and Practices of Professional Counselors

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As most good research projects begin, so did this one; casually and without great note, a question was posed. In the fall of 1999, two assistant professors were sharing a pot of tea and discussing the present state of research regarding mental health and counselor education. As they sipped they chatted and one asked, “Do you ever wonder how mental health therapists actually select the books they use with clients?” ... and so the Bibliotherapy Education Project was born.

According to studies conducted over the past 30 years, mental health providers often employ literature in their clinical work with clients (Adams & Pitre, 2000; Atwater & Smith, 1982; Quackenbush, 1991; Smith & Burkhalter, 1987; Starker, 1986; Warner; 1991). Although many allied professions have been studied, no surveys have examined the specific practices of professional counselors regarding their utilization of bibliotherapy. In this study, we sought to examine the demographics, the practices, and the preparation of professional counselors who utilize literature in their counseling work with clients (Pehrsson & McMillen, 2009; Pehrsson & McMillen, 2008). We found some surprising results.

Simply put, bibliotherapy is the use of literature to promote healing. Nearly 100 years ago, Samuel Crothers first coined the term ‘bibliotherapy’ (1916) which is literally defined as treatment through books. Bibliotherapy can also include the guided reading of written materials to help the reader grow in self awareness (Harris & Hodges, 1995). Caroline Shrodes (1950) developed a psychodynamic model as part of her pioneering research; she defined bibliotherapy as the “process of dynamic interaction between the personality of the reader and literature”, this process occurs under the guidance of a trained helper (p. 32). Many of today’s clinical and

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developmental bibliotherapy strategies draw from her seminal work. Developmental approaches deal with life transition issues and are often used by educators and other lay helpers. Clinical bibliotherapy, on the other hand, deals more with specifically diagnosed or identified mental health concerns; within this context, mental health professionals incorporate bibliotherapy into treatment goals.

We have discovered through our years of both clinical and educational experience and research that many counselors and counseling interns use books with clients (Pehrsson & McMillen, 2009; Pehrsson & McMillen, 2008). Bibliotherapy has grown in popularity because books are readily available, making it a convenient and cost effective intervention strategy for counselors to employ with a wide range of clients and issues.

Reviews of the literature (Pehrsson & McMillen, 2007; Pehrsson & McMillen, 2006) suggest that numerous positive outcomes may result from bibliotherapy, including but not limited to the following: increasing self-awareness; enhancing empathetic understanding and knowledge of other cultures; fostering appreciation of one's own ethnic/cultural identity; clarifying emerging values; stimulating discussion of feelings, thoughts and behaviors; improving coping skills and generating ideas for problem solving; and alleviating negative emotions such as stress, anxiety and loneliness (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1998).

Rationale

Counselor identity and promotion of best practices has reached a critical stage in our profession's development (Gale & Austin, 2003). From an educational standpoint, counselor educators prepare students by employing best practices as evidenced by research. Understanding the scope and applications of this particular therapeutic approach—bibliotherapy—within the

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American Counseling Association (ACA) professional community allows educators to determine practice benchmarks, which in turn informs current and future educational curricula. We sought to investigate bibliotherapeutic practices of those who affiliate with and identify as professional counselors for this had not previously been done. Further, upon investigation, we found no standardized programs for preparing future or practicing counselors to become proficient in using bibliotherapy. This finding generated the question of how professional counselors prepare to do clinical work using books. Therapeutic disciplines that employ creative arts, such as music therapy, art therapy, dance therapy and poetry therapy offer specific educational and practice curricula. There is no national certification in bibliotherapy per se; although, the National Association of Poetry Therapy claims to extend their certification to cover bibliotherapy. Further, we determined that previous surveys of bibliotherapy use were limited in scope or scale and we intended to address these concerns by undertaking a more comprehensive investigation.

Literature Review

The earliest survey of bibliotherapy practice was conducted by Atwater and Smith (1982). They sampled members of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies International to identify books or audio-visual materials they considered “most helpful” in dealing with “problems in living” (p.230). Included among fifteen targeted issues were self-concept, parenting, finances, aging, assertiveness, and guilt. Respondents were also invited to identify additional issues and queried regarding which Christian books and authors had been most influential in their practice. Ninety-nine respondents suggested titles which were compiled into an annotated reading list, composed primarily of non-fiction, self-help, or inspirational books. Among their tentative conclusions, the researchers stated, “it is not a priority of Christian

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professionals to stay abreast of the helping literature and to critically review the material that is available” (p.234). They called for further research and greater responsibility in evaluating literature to avoid recommending materials of “inferior quality” (p.234).

A number of surveys conducted in the late 1980's and early 1990's examined very different populations. Smith and Burkhalter's (1987) survey received responses from 158 members of the American Academy of Psychotherapists. They sought to determine who the primary users of bibliotherapy were, for which issues bibliotherapy was most useful, and what specific materials were utilized. Fifty-one percent of responding practitioners, across a wide variety of therapeutic orientations reported using bibliotherapy with their clients. Interestingly, the likelihood of using bibliotherapy increased with the therapist's number of years working with individual clients, although this relationship did not hold for those working with families and groups. The authors postulated this might have been because matching individual needs with particular books for bibliotherapy was seen as most productive. Respondents found bibliotherapy particularly effective when working with parenting skills, and least effective with weight control issues. Books identified in survey results were uniformly non-fiction and categorized according to relevant problems. They advocated for additional research that would investigate individual therapists and assess their clinical use of books with clients.

Psychologist Steven Starker conducted a series of surveys addressing utilization of self-help books. The first survey received responses from 186 consumers, 105 psychologists, 97 psychiatrists and 63 internists in the Seattle area (Starker, 1986). He found nearly 65% of respondents reported having read/used a self-help book and found it beneficial. A substantial percentage of practitioners (89% of psychologists, 59% of psychiatrists, and 86% of internists) actually prescribed books to patients as a treatment supplement. To follow up on the high

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“prescription” rate of psychologists, Starker (1988a) repeated his survey with psychologists in two other metropolitan areas, San Diego and Boston. Over 60% of his 121 respondents acknowledged prescribing books as an adjunct to therapy, most commonly in the areas of assertiveness, sexuality and stress. Two statistically significant differences emerged.

Psychologists in the San Diego area were more likely to prescribe self-help books (69% vs. 51%) and those espousing a dynamic/analytic theoretical orientation were least likely to prescribe self-help books. Starker conjectured that the higher concentration of psychodynamically oriented theorists in the Boston area might explain the regional difference. He suggested the rising prominence of cognitive behavioral therapies aligns with the explosion of self-help literature. Starker conducted a third survey (1988b), sampling nationally, and received responses from 123 practicing psychologists in 36 states (also National Register of Health Service Provider members). He asked participants to respond to a list of 20 commonly prescribed titles (identified through previous surveys), to indicate whether they used them and to rank them for helpfulness. Overwhelmingly, respondents saw self-help books as useful adjuncts to therapy.

Warner (1991) compared book prescription practices of Canadian psychologists to those of Americans, using Starker's (1988b) results as the American benchmark. His interest was to determine if Canadians prescribed books in similar numbers and whether similar self-help titles were recommended. The Canadian Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology was sampled, with 263 usable returns. Over 63% indicated they recommended self-help books to clients/patients. Although this level of use is considerably below the 95% utilization rate in Starker's national survey, it does approximate his previous regional studies (Starker, 1988a). Four of the ten most commonly prescribed books in Warner's survey results were also among the top ten books prescribed in Starker's study (1988b).

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Quackenbush (1991) surveyed university counseling center personnel to determine which self-help resources they found most useful for addressing 27 common presenting problems of university students. No data were provided regarding the qualifications of respondents beyond identifying them as directors of counseling centers and “experienced psychologists” (p.671). Forty-seven surveys were returned, resulting in a 271 item bibliography of “exemplary... bibliotherapy tools” (p.672). The resultant list of self-help books was organized by problem area and ranked by number of recommendations.

Matthews and Lonsdale (1991, 1992) conducted a two-part investigation into the provision of “reading services” to child hospital inpatients. They initially sent a 15-question survey to 413 United Kingdom hospitals that provided services to children; their intention was to determine if bibliotherapy services were provided to in-patient children. Results suggested that, although reading materials for children were widely available, provision of reading related services lagged behind. Approximately, 49% of the hospitals had separate library collections for children. These collections served three main needs: educational/school, entertainment, and therapeutic use. Only 19% of respondents claimed to offer “reading therapy” for children. Play therapists, rather than hospital librarians or medical personnel, were the largest group to employ books (Matthews & Lonsdale, 1991).

Matthews and Lonsdale’s follow up study (1992) interviewed play therapists to determine how reading therapy/bibliotherapy was defined, how books were used within therapy, what materials were used, how effectiveness of bibliotherapy was evaluated, and what training was given to those practicing reading therapy. Several key findings emerged from their interviews. Knowing the patient and developing a good relationship were critical to successful implementation of reading therapy. Listening to the child and following the child’s lead in

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processing the materials was strongly recommended. Therapists relied largely on their own experience with materials in deciding whether to use a certain book; they indicated a desire for more formal training but felt options were lacking. They agreed books are underutilized but are only one of many “tools” they employed. With regard to evaluation, they were uniformly convinced that the use of books was effective in reducing negative emotions and behaviors, but advocated for more formalized assessment in the future.

The most contemporary survey located in the literature focused on a small community in northern Ontario (Canada). Adams and Pitre (2000) attempted to survey all mental health practitioners in the area. Of the 62 respondents, 68% claimed to use books as therapeutic tools, primarily to support self-help. As in the earlier study by Smith and Burkhalter (1987), Adams and Pitre found a significant positive relationship between years of practice and utilization of bibliotherapy. Their major concerns focused on the continued and extensive use of self-help literature that relied primarily upon publishers' promotional statements.

There are several limitations in studies conducted to date; we sought to address these with our survey. With the exception of the Matthews and Lonsdale studies (1991, 1992), all of the surveys focused on self-help/non-fiction literature. We were particularly interested in opening up possible response options to all types of literature including imaginative, literature, fiction and non-fictional stories and poetry. The practitioner populations sampled have been varied, but no one, to date, has investigated professional counselors in the United States on a national level with the exception of Starker who did survey health service psychologists (1988b). Our goal was to investigate professionals affiliated with the ACA, since this is the primary body of peers that counselors look to for practice guidelines. Another major limitation has been the limited inquiry into practitioner preparation, how practitioners evaluate materials for clinical application and

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implementation, and how they assess the utility and effectiveness of bibliotherapy. These were all questions addressed in the current survey.

Method

This survey was based upon an extensive review of the literature on bibliotherapy and related clinical practices using literature. Our clinical and educational practices also informed the research process and subsequent questionnaire development. Broadly, these questions fell into two categories: demographics of the respondents and their practices; and the specific preparation and implementation strategies for bibliotherapy. Our initial set of questions was reviewed by experts at the Survey Research Center at Oregon State University (OSU) and revised with their input. This pilot survey was then reviewed by six counselor educators and practicing counselors, who gave feedback on clarity of wording and clinical content. The final version was also reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at OSU as part of the approval process for the research project.

Utilizing an online survey tool (Survey Monkey: <http://www.surveymonkey.com>), we began the survey with five questions on personal/practice demographics for all respondents. Taking advantage of the tool's functionality, those who did not use bibliotherapy with their clients were able to bypass questions related to bibliotherapy and move directly to answering questions on their professional preparation and affiliations (14 additional questions). There were a total of 32 questions, predominantly categorical with open response options as appropriate (for 16 items).

With the aid of two small grants, one from the Association for Creativity in Counseling (ACC) and the other from OSU's College of Education, a randomly generated list of 1,500 ACA

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members was purchased. Incomplete e-mail addresses and spam filters required a fair amount of clean up, hand massaging, and, unfortunately, resulted in some loss of potential respondents. Based on sending a pre-survey invitation, it was determined that approximately 387 of the names did not have a usable address. Using the Dillman (2005) protocol for electronic survey research, an invitation to participate was sent prior to sending the e-mail which contained the informed consent document and the link to the survey itself. Reminders were sent to non-respondents eight days after the initial survey and again 11 days later. Those who wished to decline participation could indicate they wanted to be removed from the list of recipients; approximately 20 individuals were removed as a result. A total of 315 people initially responded to the survey and 283 completed it. The survey software allowed for computation of descriptive statistics on all categorical questions and listed the narrative responses submitted.

Results

The single largest group of respondents were between 51 and 60 years of age (43 %), 20% were 41 to 50 years old, 17% were 31 to 40 years of age, and approximately 10% of the sample fell into both the youngest (21 to 30 years old) and oldest groups (over 60). Females accounted for 79% and males for 21 % of the respondents. Nearly four fifths of respondents (79%) identified as European-American, 3.6% African-American/Black, 3.6% Multi-Ethnic, 2.5% Latino/a/Hispanic, 1.1% Asian/Pacific-American, 1.1% Middle Eastern-American, 0.7% International, and 8.2% Other. No respondents self identified as Native-Americans.

With regard to their geographic location of practice, central and eastern regions of the United States predominated (Central = 24%, Northeast =24%, Southeast =27%). Respondents from the Southwest (13%), Northwest (7%), Alaska and Hawaii (2%), International (.4%) and

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Other (6%) revealed a reasonable geographic sampling for this survey. Population size of respondents' practice region was almost evenly distributed across large, medium and small: 38% served population areas greater than 250 thousand, 34% were in areas between 50 -250 thousand, and those serving areas under 50 thousand comprised 28% of the total.

We were also interested in our respondents' professional experience and development. Participants were questioned regarding the number of years they have worked within the profession; this sample had an excellent representation from all levels of experience. The largest group was comprised of the newest professionals; 34% of our respondents have been working fewer than five years as counselors, even though only 28% were less than 41 years old. Twenty-two percent have been in practice between six and ten years. Just over 23% report 11-20 years experience, and a respectable 21% have been practicing more than 21 years. Seventy-five percent earned a master's degree, and 20% held doctorates. Professional licensure was held by 81%, with roughly 63% of the sample specifying Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC). Another 13% hold advanced LPC credentials, and 17% claimed they were school counseling licensed. Many of our respondents also held certification at the national level through the National Board of Certified Counselors, with over 61% having the National Certified Counselor (NCC) credential and just over 31% reporting school counseling certification or registration.

Information concerning counselor theoretical orientation was also captured. The majority of counselors (53%) utilize cognitive behavioral approaches. Since we didn't limit respondents to a single choice, the numbers for " primary therapeutic orientation" considerably exceed 100%. Thirty-six percent utilize solution focused, 30% family/systems, 29% client centered, 23% synthetic/eclectic, 21% brief therapy, 15% behavioral, 12% psychodynamic, and 8% existential approaches. Counselor respondents work with clients from across the lifespan; although only

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about 18% report working with the youngest (age 2-7 years) and oldest (over 60 years) clients. There was a wide range of clinical practice settings identified, with the majority working in private or group practices (49%), community agencies or outpatient mental health (24%), K-12 schools (22%), or higher education (17%). Additional practice settings included hospitals, psychiatric facilities, residential treatment, eldercare, and other (e.g. churches, correctional facilities). The diversity of settings is mirrored in the client populations with whom respondents report working: individuals (80.3%), mental health (54%), couples/families (47.9%), students (46.7%), groups (31.7%), and rehabilitation (10.5%).

Of the overall sample, 79% (n=248) report using bibliotherapy in their counseling work with clients. Subsequent descriptions of bibliotherapy practices are drawn from this sub-group of respondents. We asked counselors about their preparation for use of bibliotherapy within counseling contexts; respondents could select more than one option. Half of the sample had taught themselves about bibliotherapy, and nearly half (48%) had received some bibliotherapy in a formal counselor training program. Professional development opportunities (e.g., conferences, workshops) were cited by 44% and 29% had utilized more informal peer training. A small group said they held some type of certification (6%); whereas, nearly four percent claimed to have had no training at all.

When asked about book selection for bibliotherapy, counselors utilized several strategies from the following: 98% read the book themselves, 73% relied on peer recommendations, and another 43% utilized client recommendations. Book reviews were helpful for 37% of respondents and 29% indicated that their intuition assisted them in book selection. Surprisingly, only 3% drew upon librarians for recommendations. The clear majority (74%), however, believed that the most valuable strategy for choosing materials was reading it themselves.

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Of counselors who employ bibliotherapy, 36% use it with 20 - 40% of their clients, 17% claim to use bibliotherapy with 40 - 60% of clients, 15% use it with 60-80% of clients, and 13% use it with 80-100 % of their client populations. We also looked more specifically at bibliotherapy use within client age groups. One of the initially surprising findings was that 33% do not use bibliotherapy at all with their youngest clients (age 2-7); the explanation for this will become clear when we look at the types of materials used by most counselors. Of the counselors working with this age group, another third use bibliotherapy with less than 20% of their clients, while 16% use it with almost all their young clients, i.e.,80-100% of the time. There is more frequent use with 8-12 year olds, although 24% never use bibliotherapy and 33% use it rarely (less than 20% of the time). Use of bibliotherapy is fairly common with clients in the adult age ranges except for those 61years of age and above. Another surprising finding was that 70% did not use bibliotherapy at all with clients over the age of 80.

We analyzed the issues for which bibliotherapy was most commonly employed with clients. Looking at those who are using bibliotherapy with more than 40% of their clients, the issues that were most aided by bibliotherapy were: family/couples issues (51%); grief/loss concerns, social/life skills, and trauma (all at 49%); specific clinical diagnoses (44%); substance abuse (40%); career issues (31%); and academic issues (26%).

In addition to gaining information regarding specific populations and critical issues to which counselors applied bibliotherapy, we were also interested in understanding specific interventions. Bibliotherapy can be variously defined and this means that mental health professionals may use different types of written materials in particular ways with their clients. We asked counselors about how frequently they utilized various formats. The most commonly identified (i.e., based on using the material type in more than 20% of their bibliotherapy

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activities) were self-help materials (78%), workbooks (77%), and information pamphlets (65%). Less commonly employed formats were picture books (39%), poetry (22%), easy readers (37%), fiction (33%), non-fiction (49%), and audio books (29%). Special formats to accommodate disabilities (e.g., Braille or large print) were rarely used (5%). Although the format might seem dictated by the age group(s) with which counselors work, we know that materials traditionally associated with children, such as picture books, can also be very engaging for teens, adults, older clients, and non-native speakers. Easy readers can help bridge language gaps with second language learners or those with learning disabilities; hence, the possibilities are really only limited by the counselor's imagination and the client's interests.

Counselors were also asked to identify all of the strategies they used to implement bibliotherapy with clients. They indicated that they use the following approaches with at least some of their clients: 96% assigned independent reading, 92% read to or with clients, 48% conducted classroom/guidance units, 61% used group therapy reading, 59% used reading with accompanying art activities, 83% accompanied reading with writing; 38% employed drama activities in conjunction with reading, and 55% had clients read to them.

When counselors were questioned regarding how they assess the effectiveness of bibliotherapy, 84% of respondents rely upon client progress towards treatment goals, followed closely by 78% who draw on client reports of improvement. Clinical assessment was reportedly used 14% of the time.

A final question in the practice section of the survey invited respondents to name up to three books that they preferred to use with clients. Consistent with the findings from the earlier question, titles were predominantly non-fiction (workbooks, self-help, advice books, etc.) Some of the books that received multiple (5 or more) endorsements are:

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- *Anxiety and Phobia Workbook* (Bourne, 4th ed., 2005)
- *Boundaries* (Cloud & Townsend, 2001)
- *Codependent No More* (Beattie, 1992)
- *Courage to Heal* (Bass & Davis, 4th ed., 2008)
- *Dance of Anger* (Lerner, orig. 1985)
- *Feeling Good* (Burns, orig. 1980)
- *Five Love Languages* (Chapman, 1992)
- *Road Less Traveled* (Peck, orig. 1988)

Of the fictional/imaginative titles provided, only one received five or more citations: *Dinosaurs Divorce* (Brown & Brown, 1988). This is somewhat unfortunate from a number of perspectives. This book, published over 20 years ago, is obviously still popular, and yet, as we pointed out in a review of divorce books for pre-adolescents (McMillen & Pehrsson, in press), the images are problematic--offering up negative stereotypes of women as being less capable of coping and also showing the young male character engaging in destructive acts to deal with his anger. There are certainly excellent books for all ages dealing with divorce, including some that offer greater representation of diversity. *Sahara Special* by Esmé Raji Codell (2003) or *How Tía Lola Came to Visit Stay* by Julia Alvarez (2001) are good examples of culturally sensitive fiction dealing with divorce.

Discussion

As researchers interested in creative interventions to counseling practices, we were initially surprised at the limited use of imaginative literature, such as poetry, picture books and fiction. However this finding made sense when we noted that the primary theoretical constructs of respondents were cognitive behavioral and solution focused.

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The limited use of bibliotherapy or books used in conjunction with classroom guidance was initially unexpected as this would appear to be such a natural fit; books are generally available in school libraries and many of these books are appropriate for bibliotherapy. However, less than 22% of our sample reports working in K-12 settings. The counselors from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) were not surveyed; a follow-up study would be valuable to note differences between the ACA general population of counselors and school specialists. Another unanticipated finding was how little books were reportedly used with children and elder clients, both of whom are developmentally appropriate for the use of story. Informational and self-help materials were reportedly utilized most often by counselors. Perhaps, the idea of story work and use of imaginative literature for healing is not being taught in universities as prominently as step-by-step treatment interventions that are information based (like workbooks and treatment manuals).

Finally, the limited use of librarians as recommenders for materials came as a disappointment, given their knowledge base about books and literature. This professional resource is available in most school and community libraries. Promoting the use of low-cost and easy access resources like libraries was part of the mission when the authors created the Bibliotherapy Education Project (BEP©) and launched the website in 2000 (<http://www.library.unlv.edu/faculty/research/bibliotherapy/>). Additionally, we wanted to provide educational materials and tools for the ethical and effective use of bibliotherapy by graduate counseling students, professional counselors, and clients. Most of the books in this database can be freely obtained from local libraries. It seems that both libraries and librarians remain undiscovered therapeutic allies and an undiscovered treasure to many.

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There were several limitations of the study, which became clearer as we started to analyze the results. Although we purchased a sizable e-mail list (n=1,500) for our sample, the number of inactive/inaccurate e-mail addresses (eventually over 400), in combination with a low response rate produced a disappointing 30% return. Our absolute number of respondents still exceeds those found in similar surveys of other mental health professionals (Adams & Pitre, 2000; Atwater & Smith, 1982; Quackenbush, 1991; Smith & Burkhalter, 1987; Starker, 1986, 1988a, 1988b; Warner, 1991;). We chose to survey the general population of ACA members out of a desire to assess the status of bibliotherapy use for the profession as a whole. Perhaps investigating practices of counselors in specific divisions like ACC or mental health and school counselors would have yielded a higher response rate than our attempt to query the overall membership of ACA, which includes a substantial number of counselors who practice in other arenas (such as education, universities, career and employment centers, and administration) . Another possible reason for the low response rate is that so many surveys are being conducted on the web that many are experiencing survey fatigue. Like any web-based survey, our pool consists of self-selected respondents; we cannot know why some survey recipients selected out of the survey and what information was lost as a result. Social desirability is always a possible response bias; although our results are so varied that this seems less likely. Categories may have overlapped for certain questions, creating a possibility for duplicate reporting.

Recommendations

It seems that many counselors do employ bibliotherapy in their professional practices. As a result, we suggest that a specific bibliotherapy education unit be included in counselor preparation curricula. At the minimum, a bibliotherapy unit should include historical practices of

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bibliotherapy, research on effectiveness of bibliotherapy, client assessment and treatment planning, intervention options and strategies, analysis and selection strategies for appropriate literature, assessment of client progress, ethical considerations, and practice cautions. For those counselors already in practice, familiarity with the above information would also be very useful. Additionally, by developing alliances with community and school librarians counselors can become informed about new materials and find older resources that remain valuable for bibliotherapeutic work with clients. Peer consultation and supervision will assist counselors in expanding their clinical resources and intervention strategies for using bibliotherapy, both non-fiction and imaginative. We understand that counselors often rely upon themselves for book selection. However, we recommend counselors share their book 'finds' through the BEP database and collaborate on various techniques that employ bibliotherapy. Fostering professional relationships and belonging to specific associations that cultivate continued research and professional practice in bibliotherapy will help advance and support this valuable set of practices that are already widely used by both seasoned and neophyte counselors.

Summary

Counselors do use various bibliotherapy practices; however these are largely applied using informational, workbook and self-help materials and approaches. Some of the most potentially beneficial formats like poetry, song, fiction, biography and other narrative forms are neglected by most counselors that we surveyed. Our random survey sample was reflective of the general ACA membership and in alignment with current membership statistics, although our survey sample was somewhat weighted towards those with less than five years of experience (34%). This is potentially at variance with the findings of two other surveys which found the use

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of bibliotherapy increased with years in practice (Adams & Pitre, 2000; Smith & Burkhalter, 1987). The counselors who were in our sample work mostly with individual clients, relying largely on cognitive-behavioral (53%) and solution-focused (36%) theoretical frameworks. Counselors prepare themselves for bibliotherapy work primarily through self-teaching (50%) and secondarily, through formal training programs (48%). The overwhelming majority of respondents (98%) reported that they select appropriate materials by pre-reading (98%), but also utilize peer (73%) and client recommendations (43%). Counselors assess effectiveness of bibliotherapy by progress towards treatment goals (84%) and client report of improvement (78%). Since counselors use bibliotherapy, they need adequate preparation and ongoing supervision with this useful and cost effective set of therapeutic interventions.

In the summer of 2010, two colleagues, one now a full professor and the other an associate, shared another pot of tea. They pondered new questions about bibliotherapy, this time regarding counselors and mental health therapists from specialty areas. Their Bibliotherapy Education Project and subsequent investigations continue to provide answers. This ten year adventure, no longer an idea, offers a comprehensive website with resources, research and tools for evaluating literature for bibliotherapeutic endeavors.

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