Play Therapy: Positive Outcomes for Youth with Anger Problems

A Summary and Recommendation Paper

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Abstract

There are too many kids with anger issues in society and this is proving to show difficulty in school, with peers, and in the home. A variety of behaviors are occurring, such as acting out, bullying, fighting, angry outbursts, destruction of objects, and harming self. Various forms of behavior often portrayed are: attention seeking, power, control, and revenge. This thesis will examine multiple types of anger and aggression, as well as play therapy techniques such as clay therapy, drawing and game play, role-play, and mutual storytelling that are useful to identify where anger stems from.
Dedications

To my Mom, Dad, Sister, and Brother, thank you for being my support system through out my entire graduate school career. Your love, dedication, and encouragement have molded me into the person I am today.
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Play Therapy: Positive Outcomes for Youth with Anger Problems

Introduction to the Problem

There are too many kids with anger issues in society and this is proving to show difficulty in school, with peers, and in the home. A variety of behaviors are occurring, such as acting out, bullying, fighting, angry outbursts, destruction of objects, and harming self. Each of these is forms of attention seeking, power, control, and revenge. They are problems that should be studied since they continue to negatively and interpersonally affect children to the point where it interferes with school, peers, and in the home.

Background of the Study

This writer’s interest in children and identified anger problems began when working in a group home for children who were Autistic, non-verbal, and had extremely aggressive behaviors. When clients continually became upset and angry whether it is for environmental or interpersonal reasons, this writer’s interest spiked to find out and understand what types of factors led to feelings of anger and aggression. It became apparent that a common soothing mechanism to their anger was by using common ways of communicating, and play therapy was often a useful technique. This led to a broader view of anger in general in youth. This writer’s view is that anger is not useful in communicating with others because it doesn’t help the individual reach their goals in having an understandable discussion.

Statement of the Problem

There are various forms of anger that include but are not limited to, self-inflicted anger, passive anger and retaliated anger. Among these three forms lies a common problem. Anger can lead to violence, increase in gangs, lack of education, alcoholism, drugs, and an increase in child/teenage pregnancies. Possible motives in using anger to express one’s self can be correlated
to parents neglecting their child’s emotional needs. This can also be that parents possibly have no knowledge of positive parenting styles, or parents simply work too much and see too little of their children.

A process that can alleviate negative coping mechanisms associated with anger is to bring in teen or young adult mentors. These individuals are not randomly selected but are specifically identified individuals who are presently or have formally lived in the indicated city where the youth are presently living. Mentors are looking to seek change to prevent future outcomes among children with anger problems.

**Research Question**

Does play therapy create positive outcomes in inner city youth with anger problems?

**Significance of the Study**

By studying this approach, it will be significant by showing individuals with anger issues alternative ways to deal with their anger. In doing so, they become positive healthy contributing members in society. This writer sees play therapy contributing to reduction of anger issues by using techniques that are child/ youth friendly, rather than using traditional anger management skills which are commonly specified for adults. These specific play therapy techniques are expected to lead to positive growth, maturity, and appropriate behaviors.

**Assumptions**

- It is this writer’s assumption there are not a lot of role models for youth.
- It is this writer’s assumption that many youth do not learn how to properly deal with anger and emotions.
- It is this writer’s assumption that children would benefit from more structured set of behavioral guidelines.
Limitations

Limited to a quantity of thirty research journals within contemporary academic journals only.

Definition of Terms

Affective arousal/deviation anxiety- Development of the ability to experience discomfort, guilt, and anxiety associated with actual or anticipated wrongdoing

Aggressive- Ready or likely to attack or confront, resulting from aggression

Anger- Anger will be looked at in three different ways: Passive Anger, Retaliated Anger, and Self-inflicted Pain

Assertive discipline- Discipline that is forceful and can be negative

Catharsis- Using aggression to improve one’s state of emotion

Clay manipulation- Looking for different ways an individual uses the object of clay

Control- How the individual uses control related to emotions

Ego- An individual’s understanding of a particular feeling

Emotional expression- Looking at positive emotions, as well as interpersonal emotions

Emotion regulation- Looking at it in terms of keeping emotions inside or externalizing emotions

Emotional stressors- Looking at the development of hostility in terms of parental and/or sibling hostility, peer interactions, school

Guilt- The idea of having done wrong

Interpersonal emotions- Looking at whether the individual holds emotions inside and letting them build up

Loss of self-esteem- Looking at whether self esteem decreases with an increase in anger
Physical expression- For example self-inflicted pain is used as an emotional release

Play therapy- Using clay therapy, drawing, and role-play

Retaliated anger- Expressing anger by reciprocating onto others

Role play- Type of play used to articulate, assimilate, and integrate individuals by using forms of role reversal and acting out

Self-inflicted Pain- Causing physical harm to oneself by using objects or personal limbs to elicit internal emotions

Social competence- Ability to communicate and interact with peers

Symbolic loss- Hostility derives from the need to suffer, driven by guilt from the superego

Symbolic play- Type of play expressed through imagination and fantasy

Unconscious emotions- Suppressed emotions

Verbal abuse- To speak in an offensive way

Verbal emotions- Verbally communicating ones feelings
Play Therapy and Anger: Introduction

Typical psychotherapy is a face-to-face interaction between a therapist and client. The client sits in a chair and shares problematic issues, fears, and concerns in hopes the therapist will have a positive solution. Today, a part of psychotherapy is evolving into a play therapy type environment where the use of art materials or role-playing helps stimulate conversation. Younger clientele may require a more kinesthetic type therapy in which a therapist can help identify problem areas in ways that will not be detrimental to the child’s already injured psyche. The purpose of this thesis is to find out what types of play therapy techniques are effective approaches to address anger among children. Key ideas of research involve explaining ways in which play therapy techniques can be facilitated for children who display physical and/or emotional stressors with anger. The study’s environmental setting takes place in a therapy room or office that is suitable for children. A child friendly environment involves sensory objects including stress balls, stretchable objects, yoga fitness balls, sensory integrated puzzles, paper and markers for drawing, clay material, plus costumes and accessories for role-play.

Interest for pursuing a study on play therapy techniques occurred when this writer worked in a school setting with children who expressed anger in the home, school, or during interaction with peers or adults. During observation it was clear that children communicated more readily when offered to color or play with toys while communicating with a therapist. This sparked personal interest to research play therapy techniques that would benefit children who display angered emotions and behaviors.

This thesis covers four variables and their sub topics. Anger is the independent variable whose sub topics include the creation of anger, self-inflicted pain through anger, retaliated anger, and passive anger. The dependent variable is play therapy techniques and their sub topics include
clay therapy, role-play, drawing & games, and mutual storytelling. The connective variable is child development and the sub topics include development, socialization and temperament, child and parental responses, parental neglect, and familial environment. These topics were chosen to be part of this research because they are useful in order to determine the effectiveness of play therapy for anger among children.

**Anger**

**Self-Inflicted Pain**

Everyone interprets anger in different ways and there are select groups of individuals who respond in an unorthodox manner by inflicting pain onto the self. Research suggests that feelings of rejection and loneliness engender feelings of anger (Leary, Twenge, & Quinlivan, 2006, p. 45). Polman (2011) conducted five studies to determine if anger propels individuals toward self-inflicted pain. Three of these studies are relevant to this research question.

To test their hypothesis, Polman and colleagues’ first study focused on assessing participants’ favorability to painful activities. For example, participants were asked to rate whether their feelings were angry, sad, or emotionally neutral when thinking about getting a speeding ticket, waiting in line at a grocery store, or spilling wine on a new sweater. Results from this study showed that angered participants desired physical sensations such as self-inflicted pain more than sad or emotionally neutral individuals when acknowledging these types of activities (Polman, 2011). By looking at results from Polman’s study it wasn’t yet clear why some individuals became so angry that self-inflicted pain became their best solution. Polman and colleagues looked at findings from DeWall and Baumeister (2006, p. 45) for a possible answer. DeWall and Baumeister (2006) conducted a study testing feelings of anger after individuals were informed they would experience a life of loneliness compared to a life of meaningful and lasting
relationships. Results showed these individuals exerted physical pain to the skin because they felt rejected and lonely (p. 45). This study gave one possible answer as to why self-inflicted pain was the preferred solution in dealing with anger.

This was one explanation as to why some individuals believe physical self-inflicted pain is the best solution. However, it does not answer why angry individuals feel the need to exert physical pain onto the self rather than verbalizing their emotions. Polman (2011) presented a study of ninety-three undergraduate females with a loss, non-gain, or non-loss scenario of buying a book. The participants were told the study had to abruptly end, but were entitled to a complimentary jawbreaker (candy with a painful sounding name) or a gumball (soft sounding candy name). The purpose was to secretly continue the study and to see what type of emotion the participant elicited. In reality both types of candy were the same except for the name. The result was that more participants chose the more painful sounding name of candy than the soft named candy. These participants were under the impression that buying a book was helpful for this study, and when they were told the study needed to abruptly end, it may have elicited feelings of anger because their participation was no longer needed. The jawbreaker served as a therapeutic remedy where anger could be taken out on the jawbreaker rather than on the study’s executor. Overall it appears individuals who are angry may find it more intriguing to behave adventurously and willing to risk breaking their jaws (Polman, 2011, p. 48). This information relates to this writer’s question in that it provides explanations why some angered individuals feel physical self-inflicted pain helps to deal with life’s problems.

The third study relevant to this research question was Polman’s (2011) study in which undergraduates were presented with a packet of questions containing twenty-two items from the SHI (Self-Harm Inventory). Scores that contained self-harm responses were averaged together
with the trait-anger scale, (Spielberger, Jacobs, Russell, & Crane’s, 1983, p. 50) and hypothesized “the more desirable a painful activity is rated on the SHI, the more likely self-inflicted pain is endorsed” (Polman, 2011, p. 50-51). The findings in the third study were found to be weak since it proved insufficient in answering why individuals choose to self-deprecate. The results from this study did not show any original findings for motivated reasoning behind anger and self-deprecation, (p. 50-51).

Polman (2011) later discusses a few possibilities for self-deprecation reasoning. Researchers suggests catharsis, agressing to improve one’s emotional state, such as blowing off steam as being one possibility why individuals choose to self-deprecate (Polman, 2011, p. 52). However, why do individuals feel the need to take out their anger on the self rather than using objects such as a punching bag in dealing with anger? Bushman, Baumeister, and Stack (1999, p. 52) suggest people who take their anger out by hitting punching bags tend to be more aggressive than individuals who self-deprecate. This writer questions how long the relief of self-deprecation will last? The answer finally came to light when Quattrone and Tversky (1984, p. 52) suggested people are willing to endure pain if they are led to believe that doing it is related to their health. This writer’s interpretation of this phenomenon is that some individuals will cause physical pain to themselves if the results will benefit their existing self. This thinking can be seen as positive only in that harm onto the self is not physically harming another individual. A second possibility is that self-inflicted pain is related to the arousal of a positive feeling. Polman (2011, p. 51) suggests that angered people self-deprecate in order to view themselves as tough or in a more positive light, especially since anger is derived from toughness.

Passive Anger

Zeman and Shipman’s (1996, p. 842) research has shown that social context and child
characteristics both had an effect on the types of emotions children chose to display (Fuchs & Thelen, 1988; Hess, 1986, p. 842). The purpose of researching children’s negative expression for this thesis is to understand what drives a child to express emotion intrinsically or extrinsically, and how the child emotionally deals with the ramifications of their decision-making. Zeman and Shipman (1996) noted in their findings through other researchers that “children’s ability to express emotion in culturally appropriate ways is related to their social competence” (Cole, Zahn-Waxler, & Smith, 1994; Field & Walden, 1982; Parke, Cassidy, Burks, Carson, & Boyum, 1992; Taylor & Harris, 1984), and Saarni (1988) added that “in whatever ways the child perceives the appropriate emotional expression is related to healthy psychosocial functioning,” (p. 842). Since it is clear that a child expresses emotion according to their cultural surroundings, this writer inquires as to what type of environmental stressors lead a child to express emotion negatively.

Answers to the above questions can be found by looking at the interactions among youth and their peers. Research shows that youth are aware of interpersonal ramifications for the types of emotions they express when around their peers. According to Zeman and Shipman (1996) it is evident that emotional expression varied depending on how the children expected their peers to respond. In other words, if a child was sad but didn’t want to express sadness in front of peers, the child likely would express a different type of emotion. In Western societies we are expected to react to emotions in a standard manner that depicts us as competent to handle whatever life brings. In an elementary school setting, a child who is being taunted and belittled by a peer is likely to encompass feelings of shame and sadness, but does not want to physically express these internal feelings, fearing his peers will look at him as weak and powerless. As children age into adolescence they begin to express emotion more outwardly than before since they are competent
to use communication. In addition, Saarni (1979) found “older children’s reasons for expressing more emotion was because they were sensitive to contextual cues that alerted them to the appropriateness of directly revealing emotion in specific situations” (p. 842).

Youth’s emotional responses are also a result of parental values and beliefs. Fuchs and Thelen’s (1988) study found “children viewed motherly expressions of sadness as supportive,” (p. 843). It has been shown that positive parental encouragement directly affects how the child learns to emotionally express his or her self. Further, negative parental encouragement shows the child to express themselves in ways that are not emotionally beneficial. Fuchs and Thelen (1988) specifically state the primary goal in the socialization of emotion expressive behavior is to educate children in positive ways for communicating emotional responses. Furthermore, Zeman and Garber (1996) found children in the first, third, and fifth grades expressed negative emotion more to parents than their peers who would likely respond with negative interpersonal emotions. For example, emotional expression such as pain was deemed more acceptable than emotional expression of sadness because expectations of support and sympathy are more present for painful situations (p. 843).

Zeman and Shipman (1996) explored factors that influenced children’s expression of negative emotion by looking at the types of behaviors children use to express anger, sadness, and physical pain to parents and peers. Findings indicated that children do form different sets of expectancies when it came to consequences of expressing negative emotions (p. 846). In other words, a child will express emotions according to what they assume is appropriate for their environmental surroundings, age, gender, and peer relationships. Some individuals go beyond environmental influences and express feelings of anger in hopes they will receive peer or parental recognition. Researchers believe by the age of eight years old some children who
express feelings of anger begin to naturally expect little emotional support from parents or peers. This type of thinking is partly due to the child’s belief that in order to cope with angry feelings, they must resolve the situation that caused the emotion rather than turning to others for support (Zeman & Shipman, 1996, p. 847). According to this writer, children who express anger and defer turning to parents for support may have lacked necessary parental guidance early on in their development. Researchers Dunn, Bretherton, and Munn (1987), Fivush (1989), Malatesta and Haviland (1982) support this theory and suggest that parents tend to socialize and teach their children at a very young age (infant and toddler years) that anger expression is inappropriate, as well as attempt to show children alternative ways to control anger behaviors.

**Retaliated Anger**

Hostility and depression are linked to one another, and the classic work of Sigmund Freud (1916, p. 570) described symptoms of depression to include grief, distress, anger, hostility, loss of self-esteem, guilt, apathy, mental and motor inhibition, and fear. These symptoms may leave an individual to feel lonely which then can manifest into expressions of hostility. This writer believes that individuals who show hostile expressions are demonstrating the result of inhibited repressed feelings from their past. Repressed feelings may occur due to lack of attention to an individual’s feelings received at the time a notable incident occurred. Even the smallest experience could cause symptoms of distress, depression, anger, sadness, etc. When left alone over time these symptoms increase and affect an individual in other ways. For example, a woman adopted a dog after her previous one died five months earlier in an attempt to replace the emotional connection she lost. Although the new dog brings back happiness to her life, she finds it hard to replace regular activities she enjoyed with the previous dog, such as play, going for walks, and giving the new dog the attention and socialization animals need. In addition, the
woman admitted to yelling and screaming at the dog whenever it barked. The woman’s behavior and lack of emotional connection to the new dog represents retaliated emotional aggression. She has not dealt with the repressed feelings of grief and loss from her previous dog’s death and is cathartically taking out her feelings on the new dog.

The following findings show possible explanations for why the woman in the previous scenario treated her new dog in this manner. Freud’s (1916-1968) classic concept of symbolic loss supports this writer beliefs about retaliation and hostility, by suggesting hostility derives from the need to suffer, driven by guilt from the superego. Abraham (1968, p. 570) agrees with most psycho analytics that aggression and hostility are key links leading to depression. Atkinson and Polivy (1976, p. 570) found when comparing males and females, females are just as likely to feel hostile as males, but are more likely to become depressed. This evidence is supported by their hypothesis that responses to an attack, trigger feelings of anger and is accompanied with depression. The second hypothesis suggests that retaliation against the object or living organism reduces feelings of anger and depression.

Atkinson and Polivy also convey Bilbring’s, (1953, p. 573) ideas in their discussion by suggesting the ego recognizes aggression as a “destructive blow” to the self-esteem resulting in depression. However, in reality this type of boost in ego can leave a person to feel powerless and helpless. These findings help explain why the woman in the above case example treated her new dog disrespectfully. She had not dealt with the loss of her previous dog’s death and over time her feelings manifested into depression and she took out her anger on the new dog because its behavioral characteristics were different than her previous dog. The woman’s emotional retaliation onto the new dog was her ego’s way of feeling more powerful than the new dog.
Creating Anger

Three different types of anger have been discussed thus far, and it is crucial to understand how anger is created and how it then leads individuals to seek revenge, power, and attention. Dreikurs believed “individuals fight emotions because emotions seem to hinder us in what we want to do, and/or what we should do, and this is the situation in which emotions seem to become uncontrollable” (1967, p. 208). If emotions have the ability to lead towards uncontrollable actions, this writer questions at what point does the individual first become triggered? Dreikurs suggests that individuals dissociate themselves from their emotions as if they were not responsible for them (p. 208). Adlerians follow the belief that all behavior is purposeful. With this, “emotions have positive and constructive emotions, and when emotions turn negative” and Dreikurs clarifies that, “these emotions are not irrational, rather the rationale emotions are not recognized by the individual.” With this the individual uses his physical and psychological qualities to achieve goals that he has set for himself (Dreikurs, 1967, p. 208).

Deming and Lochman (2008) break down behavioral patterns that involve aggression, acting out, and conduct problems. This writer agrees with other researchers from Deming and Lochman’s research that aggression shows up in a variety of ways through family factors, parenting factors, school, peer, neighborhood, and child factors (Loeber & Farrington, 2000, Hinshaw & Lee, 2003, in Deming & Lochman, 2008, p. 108). Deming and Lochman propose there are two possible pathways to aggressive behavior in children. The first pathway is emotional, impulsive, and automatic processing (Poulin & Boivin, 1999, Dodge, Lochman, Harnish, Bates & Pettit, 1997, Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000, in Deming & Lochman, 2008, p. 108). The second pathway in aggressive behavior is more controlled cognitive processing that includes consciously activated schemas, and it is effected by more automatic processes such as emotions.
Deming and Lochman’s findings showed that anger and impulsivity were positively associated with aggression, and internal locus of control was negatively associated with aggression, all indicating that emotion/impulsivity and cognitive/schema pathways are involved in aggressive behavior, (p. 114). This writer believes that it seems clear one’s internal locus of control would be negatively associated with one’s aggression because individuals who believe they are in control take responsibility for their actions and are less likely to participate in aggressive behaviors. According to Deming and Lochman’s (1997) journal, anger can affect information processing, which then in turn affects aggression in different ways. In addition, anger could be the effect of a variety of factors including a perceived threat or a preexisting mood (Deming & Lochman, 2008, p. 114). These researchers suggest that anger and impulsivity were positively associated with aggression, and internal locus of control was negatively associated with aggression, all indicating that emotion/impulsivity and cognitive/schema pathways are involved in aggressive behavior (Scarpa & Raine, 1997, and Deming & Lochman, 2008, p. 115). This research also affirms how anger leads to revenge, power, control, and inadequacy.

Since an individual does not recognize his rational emotions, he seeks alternative ways to get his point across. Carlson and Slavik (1997, p. 414) agree with Allen (1997) and Dreikurs (1967) that the functions of emotions are complex but emotions provide the energy to move an individual to action. Albert Ellis’ A-B-C- theory of the nature of humans, (Ellis & Harper, 1975), in (Carlson & Slavik, 1997, p. 414), contends that people assume that A- the activating event that he thinks he should perform, leads to B- a behavior occurrence in a person’s life which he thinks
should not happen, then causes C- the emotional consequence. Ellis says that people are not aware that the cause of emotional consequence is not the activating event, rather one’s belief about the activating event, or what one tells oneself about the activating event. To explain this theory further, Ellis suggests that individuals disturb themselves by irrational beliefs in statements they tell themselves about negative things that happen, such as specific spoken or unspoken words like; should, ought, need, must, always, never, and indicate the person’s needs and preferences are going to be distraught when things don’t turn out as they believe they must (Carlson & Slavik, 1997, p. 414).

Now that it is clear that irrational beliefs are a contributing factor that leads to anger, we can continue to understand how anger leads to revenge, power, and attention. Dreikurs says that a person who loses his temper is under the impression that he cannot control it and it drives him to do things which he does not want to do. Along with this, he believes that temper outbursts are used to impress someone into submission, to show power, and/or to overwhelm others” (1967, p. 209). With that said if an individual cannot control his anger, this writer suggests he is insecure and feels inadequate. Next, the individual is having ambivalent feelings about himself, and he uses revenge and power in order to gain security and adequacy.

Summary

Three forms of anger (self-inflicted pain, retaliation, and passive) are closely examined in this thesis by examining how and why people act the way they do when angry. When people have negative affirmations of the self they are likely to feel internal pain, which then poses feelings of anger. Anger and self-deprecation have been linked to catharsis for reasons of blowing off steam. Some suggest that self-inflicted pain causes a peak of arousal, ending with positive feelings of relief. Another possibility is that anger functions to trigger a physiological
process that reduces distressing experiences. A second form of anger is retaliation. Some researchers suggest that depression represents a state of negative feelings such as anger and anxiety. Freud related depression and pain to hostility, according what he termed symbolic loss in which the need to suffer is driven by guilt and then causes a transgression of the superego. Retaliated anger tends to be expressed differently among males and females. Aggression among females tends to be expressed through verbalization, and male aggression tends to be physical. Passive anger contains many forms of expression such as facial, crying, withdrawal, etc. Some suggest the type of emotional response elicited is based on the child’s interpersonal ramifications they expect to receive after disclosing emotion.

The process of catharsis helps explain why individuals physically or emotionally express their feelings through self-inflicted pain, retaliated anger, or passive anger. Whether or not one form of anger is preferred over another, anger is a form of hostile and repressed feelings. Individuals who have difficulty verbally acknowledging emotions, utilize anger as an alternative way to acknowledge and share feelings and emotions. Although catharsis is one possible explanation for why individuals express anger, it is only temporary relief. When an individual uses self-inflicted pain to relieve feelings of emotions, catharsis no longer is a natural way to handle emotions.

Aggression shows up in a variety of ways that include family factors, parenting factors, school, peer, neighborhood, and child factors. It is proposed there are two types of processing pathways in which aggressive behaviors in children develop. The first is emotional, impulsive, and automatic processing. Second, pathways in aggressive behavior are more controlled cognitive processing, which includes consciously activated schemas, and it is affected by more automatic processes such as emotions. Findings showed that anger and impulsivity were
positively associated with aggression, and internal locus of control was negatively associated with aggression, all indicating that emotion/impulsivity and cognitive/schema pathways are involved in aggressive behavior. It is also suggested that anger and impulsivity were positively associated with aggression, and internal locus of control was negatively associated with aggression, all indicating that emotion/impulsivity and cognitive/schema pathways are involved in aggressive behavior.

According to theorists, emotions have positive and constructive emotions, and when emotions turn negative, these emotions are not irrational; rather the individual does not recognize the rational emotions. Researchers suggest that individuals disturb themselves by irrational beliefs in statements they tell themselves about negative things that happen. This indicates the person’s needs and preferences are going to be distraught when things don’t turn out, as they believe they must. This type of thinking is known as irrational beliefs, which are a contributing factor that creates anger and leads to revenge, power, and attention seeking behaviors.

**Play Therapy**

**Clay Therapy**

For many years clay modeling has been a useful technique in therapy settings because clay products can become more refined and differentiated. This writer is interested in finding ways to facilitate play therapy techniques for children who display physical and or emotional stressors with anger. In addition this writer will discover how clay modeling is a useful technique in working with children who display emotions of anger. In Robert Willhite and Merrilee Cole’s book, *The Family Game of Anger- Breaking the Cycle* (1993, p. 1) they discuss the “roots of behavior are in a person’s family experience and in order to understand why we express anger in particular ways, it is important to look at the family background.” Therapeutic settings are one
possible way to look at the family system and dynamics. Therapy traditionally utilizes talking to reveal emotions, however some individuals may find it difficult to make sense of their emotions or to translate emotions into words. Willhite and Cole suggest that some individuals stuff or hold in their feelings, rather than dealing with them appropriately such as defining their anger and negotiating their disagreements (Willhite & Cole, 1993, p. 3). It may take many sessions of talk therapy to help an individual, but techniques such as clay modeling have been suggested as appropriate methods for individuals who demonstrate anger or internalized emotions. According to Sholt and Gavron (1996, p. 67) it allows communication to be expressed in non-verbal ways. These researchers believe clay-work taps into primary modes of communication and expression through the use of touch and can recall past memories and feelings associated through touch and movement (Sholt & Gavron, 1996, p. 67).

Clay sculptures serve as objects of symbolic play because it makes room for imagination and fantasy, which allows fears, anxieties, wishes, and so forth to be construed in healthy manners (Sholt & Gavron, 1996, p. 68). Clay work allows individuals to physically manipulate and configure the chunk of clay to demonstrate how they feel when past or present emotions are triggered. Sholt and Gavron (2006, p. 68) suggest clay work to be an effective technique for individuals who are verbally defensive. Since clay is a material that can be torn apart and put back into its original state, clay is a great medium for individuals to destroy. Sholt and Gavron (2006, p. 68) present a great example of a boy who sculpted clay creatures with two faces, one side showed an aggressive expression, while the other side of the face showed a sad expression. These researchers believe through the use of clay manipulation, the boy was able to discover his conflicting feelings (p. 68). Sholt and Gavron (1996) describe this type of therapeutic process as an alchemy-like process “that transforms pain into meaningful expression” (p. 68). Clay material
is delicate and can show the smallest imprints to be absorbed, symbolizing their marked existence (Heimlich & Mark, 1990, p. 68). This writer believes clay therapy is an important part of therapy because it involves drawing upon all five senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell). Holding a chunk of clay and allowing the hands to mold the clay into objects associated with feelings and emotions provides an individual the opportunity to experience therapeutic benefits.

Clay-work has been utilized for individuals dealing with anger, frustration, and those mourning loss because it allows re-creating an image of what or who was lost. Through the use of clay an individual may sculpt or re-create how they felt during the time they felt most frustrated, angry or sad. During this process the therapist may interact with the client by asking them to create additional images of what a better solution in dealing with emotion would look like. Researchers draw upon the ideas of Horovitz-Darby (1992, p. 69) who suggest there are many ways individuals can communicate and express their feelings while using clay. These include scratching, clasping, stabbing, smashing, and throwing. Clay material can endure attempts at breaking or destroying, which is why clay provides a powerful and healing effect for individuals to create a new image of the missing or lost object (Sholt & Gavron, 2006, p. 69). Combining therapy and clay-work stimulates verbal communication by sharing the symbolic meanings of the clay creation. In doing so, the patient’s emotional experience is heightened.

**Drawing and Game Play**

Play therapy is a technique that individuals of all ages can benefit from because of the unique approaches it has to offer, different than a traditional talk therapy setting. Similar to children, adolescents enjoy fantasy and role-playing, but their form of play is based more on reality, logic, rules, and structure according to Muro and Dinkmeyer (1977) in Breen and
Daigneault’s (1998, p. 28) journal. Board games, card games, and athletic games are other forms of play therapy that interest adolescents and are also effective ways to stimulate communication versus talk therapy. Teenagers are known to internalize their feelings and not share concerns, anxieties, or fears with parents. It is known that internalizing feelings may lead to emotional and/or physical outbursts, and handling the situation or problem incorrectly. This writer suggests drawing therapy as a positive way for individuals to express emotions. A pencil or pen allows the individual to express their feelings and the use of color can differentiate one’s portrayal of anger.

This writer suggests interpreting drawings reveals conscious emotions the artist intended to display. During discussion about the drawing the therapist is likely to ask question why the artist drew it one way versus another. For example, a boy uses the color orange to draw fire and the color red to draw an angry face of his father and the color purple to draw a flower inside the fire. Through conversation with the therapist the boy mentions the fire symbolized how intense his father gets when angry at him. When the therapist questions the boy why there is a flower inside the fire, the boy responds by saying he likes the purple flowers his mother plants in the summer. After further discussion the therapists writes in her personal notes that she believes the flower symbolizes the boy’s unconscious emotions of looking at the purple flowers his mother plants every year helps bring him to a calm state. Drawing provides an emotional outlet to help take internalized emotions and display them on paper. Breen and Daigneault (1998, p. 28) draw upon the ideas of Muro and Kottman (1995) and Sinclair (1997) in which drawing “encourages students to explore who they are, what kind of relationships they have, and how they might like to change themselves and/or their lives.”

**Role-Play**

Therapeutic play draws upon experiences, ideas, affects, and fantasies related to a child’s
life events. Through this the child becomes better aware of the feelings, thoughts, conflicts, and ego-dysfunctions that may arise through problems or disturbed behaviors (Levenson and Herman, 1991, p. 660). During play therapy, Allen (1942, p. 660) suggested the child becomes aware of their identity as an individual, and in addition Moustakas (1953) adds that play therapy was a progression for the child to express feelings (p. 111). A form of play therapy is the technique of role-play that allows the child to interact and work out relationships with other individuals. Levenson and Herman (1991, p. 662) correlate catharsis and role-playing by explaining that it helps integrate pent-up feelings and the child reverses roles or identities that created feelings of helplessness, but now represent a sense of control and completeness.

Role-play has shown great strengths in dealing with anger, peer relationships, and overcoming grief to name a few. Levenson and Herman (1991, p. 661) draw upon the classic work of Erik Erickson (1950) who described role-play as a form of “hallucinatory mastery” deriving from experiences and feelings of anxiety and helplessness. This form of play is unconscious and is the child’s way of working through and making sense by articulating, assimilating, and integrating certain circumstances. When young children play with dolls or action figures for example, imagination is the driving force for communication. This writer suggests imaginative play provides an outlet for children to work through and interpret their own fears and anxieties about life. Role-play also allows a child to switch roles and pretend they are in someone else’s body, which provides the child to have “powers” they do not hold within their present being. For example a child wishes she were part of the popular clique in school because her self-affirmations suggest popular individuals hold a set of standards to follow in order to be cool and hold “power.” The girl decides to use role-reversal to imagine she is popular. In J.L. Herman’s personal writings (1987) it is suggested that role reversal helps to repair hurts and
losses because it allows the child to separate and individuate a sense of mastery and competence (p. 661). The girl from the above example uses role-reversal to repair her desires to be popular and have power that she believes someone of her “lower status” does not have.

Levenson and Herman (1991) draw upon the findings of Kelly (1955), who uses fixed-role therapy techniques to link therapist and client talents (p. 380 in Kelly’s journals, and p. 662 in Levenson and Herman). The client is asked to write a self-descriptive sketch of his own character. Next, the therapist rewrites the client’s role “based upon what the client has said of himself, but in contrasting themes” (p. 662). In other words the therapist writes out a sketch of a new character, which the client will enact for one week. The point is to experiment and encourage the client to utilize the new characteristics, which after a week’s time will provide “one good, rousing, construct-shaking experience” (Kelly, 1955, p. 412). This writer believes fixed-role therapy would be a type of role-play for children in similar situation to the above example of a girl who wished to be popular. Fixed-role therapy would also benefit children who use anger as an outlet for self-expression. When an angered child comes to therapy, the therapist would follow the guidelines by asking the client to write a self-descriptive sketch, and so on. If for example the child described in the sketch that he does not have many friends and on the playground he enjoys making fun of his peers, the therapist is likely to write out a sketch that will allow the boy to see through a new character how his angered actions effect others around him and then can incorporate new behavioral changes.

Levenson and Herman (1991, p. 662) write about the research of Goldstein and Glick (1987, p. 662) who believe in a method of role-play for direct therapeutic intervention for adolescents who are “chronically delinquent” and would benefit from a program for anger control. This program uses role-playing situations that have led to a person’s inappropriate
expression of anger. Levenson and Herman (1991, p. 662) found that “role-playing will guide the participants into understanding their personal cognitive and affective issues that are triggered internally or externally.”

**Mutual Storytelling**

This writer is interested in finding out how children learn new ways of solving problems rather than solving through anger. In order for children to identify their behaviors, it is important for them to understand the purpose for their goals of misbehavior. Rudolf Dreikurs determined there are four goals related to a child’s misbehavior: attention, power, revenge, and inadequacy (1964, p. 57-67). To begin, this writer is further interested understanding what leads children to misbehave? Although there is no simple answer, Bitter (1991) uses Dreikurs’s (1957) explanation that, “the goals of misbehavior are largely non-conscious in children since there is a lack of awareness that facilitates fluidity of action and safeguards the child from having to consciously confront the uselessness of certain behaviors” (p. 210). In other words there are specific reasons that prevent children from realizing they are not behaving accordingly with society’s expectations. This writer suggests one of society’s expectations is that individuals recognize repercussions for their negative behaviors. In Dreikurs’s classic work he habitually states, “a child who misbehaves is discouraged, and his sense of belonging is restricted” (1964, p. 58). When a child is discouraged they find numerous ways to find significance, which can be through verbal and physical communication. It is clear that verbal communication is the best way to gain positive outcomes; however, children often have not learned the difference between both concepts. Without a clear distinction as to whether verbal or physical communication will allow them to reach their goal, a child may ultimately use one or all of the four goals of misbehavior. This writer believes that both verbal and physical communication can lead children to
communicate through the use of anger. Depending on the child’s family atmosphere, he/she learns how to get what they want by acting in ways they know will seek the attention of their caregiver. Since the child is likely an “expert” at knowing his caregiver’s weaknesses, the child may utilize tactics such as anger to gain control and power to obtain their ultimate desire.

According to Adlerian researchers, there are four possible reasons why a child misbehaves. An individual may utilize only one of the forms of misbehavior, or may use all four. The first is the goal for attention. A common way in which a child seeks attention is to find numerous ways for others to continually give him attention. Kottman and Stiles suggest that children believe they only belong when they are noticed (1990, p. 150). The second goal of misbehavior, power, is when children behave as if they only belong when they are refusing to do what others want them to do (Kottman & Stiles, 1990, p. 151). Typically, after a child seeks attention, and their needs are not yet met, the demand for attention steps up and the use of power is declared. For example, power is declared when a child refuses to comply with his parents’ request. Further, this child feels that if he were to comply with parental requests, he would be submitting to a stronger power and therefore loses his sense of personal value (Dreikurs, 1964, p. 61). The third goal of misbehavior is revenge. When a child feels threatened and hurt, their only way to gain significance is to bring others down. Lastly, the fourth goal is inadequacy. After the first three goals were not successful, the child feels completely discouraged and gives up entirely. Their behavior is characterized as withdrawn, and they hide how truly discouraged they feel about life (Kottman & Stiles, 1990, p. 154).

Now that it is clear what motivates children’s goals for misbehavior, this writer is interested in finding out how children can learn alternative ways to problem solve without the use of anger. A useful play-therapy technique is Kottman and Stiles use of The Mutual
Storytelling Technique, which is a concept originally derived from Gardner (1971 and 1986). This technique uses a client’s metaphorical communication about their lifestyles and goals to ultimately begin to understand one’s purpose for their behavior. “The child is asked to tell a self-created story that has a beginning, middle, and an end. As the facilitators listen to the story, he/she analyzes the metaphors and the psychological meaning for the child” (Kottman & Stiles, 1990, p. 149). Next, Kottman and Stiles respond with a similar story that includes the same plot and characters, but the ending changes to represent a healthier resolution than the child’s original ending. This writer suggests the mutual storytelling technique is one that can be extremely effective in showing the child how they can reach their goals through positive behavior.

Comparing the child’s story with the facilitator’s story, the child is able to identify the differences and outcomes, followed by learning to develop positive patterns for interacting in the environment.

**Summary**

Four play therapy techniques were closely examined to better understand which techniques would best serve children who display emotions through anger. Clay modeling was found to be an effective approach when working with children who had difficulty verbalizing emotions in positive ways. In addition, this technique was useful for children who had a difficult time understanding where their angry emotions were coming from. Therapy typically involves face-to-face interaction with verbal communication. This type of setting can make an individual feel as though they are in the spotlight. By allowing a client to hold an object such as clay shifts attention away from the client. Gradually inviting conversation during object play allows feelings of anxiety to slowly diminish. Researchers Sholt and Gavron (1996, p. 68) described clay therapy as being “an alchemy-like process” that transforms pain into meaningful expression.
This process showed to be useful in transforming emotion into words. The combination of therapy and clay-work stimulates verbal communication by physically sharing the symbolic meanings of the clay creation. In doing so, the patient’s emotional experience is heightened.

The second technique explored was role-playing which draws upon experiences, ideas, affects, and fantasies related to a child’s life events. Some researchers have suggested role-playing as being a positive form of communication that allows a child to verbalize emotions and articulate emotions. Many children who use anger to communicate emotions have difficulty putting emotions into words. These types of children would benefit from learning techniques such as role-play to practice how to verbalize emotions.

The third form of play therapy is a more mature technique suited for adolescents who may be uninterested in working with clay or imaginary role-playing. This technique is not much different than the first two since the technique works differently by drawing one’s interest in a different light. This technique differs by focusing more on reality, logic, rules, and structure through the use of drawing. This writer suggests drawing therapy to be a positive way for individuals to express emotions on paper. A pencil or pen may allow the individual to express their feelings, however the use of color can differentiate one’s portrayal of anger. In addition interpreting drawings reveals conscious emotions the artist intended to display. During discussion about the drawing the therapist is likely to ask question why the artist drew it one way versus another.

The fourth technique utilizes a unique type of storytelling to help individuals find alternative ways to problem solve without the use of anger. In doing so, it is important for children to identify their emotions, and to understand the purpose for their goals of misbehavior. Four types of anger related to a child’s misbehavior are closely examined, attention, power,
revenge, and inadequacy (Kottman & Stiles, 1990, p. 150). To explain types of anger associated with one’s misbehavior, some researchers believe there are specific reasons that prevent children from realizing they are not behaving accordingly with society’s expectations. One suggestion is that individuals are expected to recognize repercussion for their negative behaviors. In guiding children towards acknowledging their feelings of anger, a play therapy technique called Mutual Storytelling is utilized for positive outcomes. This technique uses a client’s metaphorical communication about their lifestyles and goals to ultimately begin to understand one’s purpose for their behavior.

**Child Environment**

**Development**

The early years in child and parent relationships are critical in development and socialization. According to Bowlby’s (1969 and 1982) landmark study on attachment theory, children’s emotions signal to caregivers the need for comfort and care. In addition, the parent’s responsiveness to the child’s signals is seen as key in the organization of child attachment (p. 237). Both mother and father parenting styles have a large impact on the child and the family as a whole. The child learns what is right and wrong by observing emotional and physical expression of feelings between his/her parents.

Before a child learns how to fit in and be a part of society, they have the instinctual need and curiosity to explore their relationship with their main caregiver. This type of behavior is what Ainsworth describes as “patterns of attachment” (Crain, 2010, p. 60). This writer is interested in finding out how important attachment is on the parent/child relationship. In Ainsworth’s study she observes how infants use their mothers as a secure base to explore a new environment, as long as the mother shows the child the environment is a safe base. Ainsworth
wanted to see how each child would behave in a “strange situation.” The researcher used two different types of separation methods that each lasted twenty minutes, and the first was introducing the child to a stranger, and the mother then leaving the room. In the second separation the mother left the room and the child was left alone to explore the environment. The results from this study showed that infants form one of the three types of attachments (Crain, 2010, p. 60).

The first pattern suggests babies form a secure attachment to their caregiver. When the mother was removed from the room, the child sometimes became visibly upset and she stopped exploring the environment. Upon the mother’s return the child and mother greeted one another and after a minute the child seemed to feel reassured and left the mother to explore the environment again. Ainsworth believed the results from the securely attached infants implies that on a regular basis mothers were sensitive and responsive to their baby’s cries and other signals, and the mothers had a loving, comforting, and available relationship with their child (Crain, 2010, p. 60-61). This writer suggests that infants who have a secure attachment with their mother will grow up to have friendships and romantic relationships that are positive emotionally and physically. In addition as the child ages he/she is able to deal effectively with difficult situations such as an argument with a peer. A child who had a secure attachment to their caregiver is likely to reasonably handle an argument by remaining calm and socially competent.

Ainsworth’s second pattern is insecure-avoidant infants. Using the same two “strange situations” as before, Ainsworth observed that upon entering the room the child was immediately interested in the toys, and didn’t use the mother as a secure base, except to look up and acknowledge her once in a while. With that said once the mother left the room, the child didn’t become upset, and when the mother returned, the child often ignored and turned their body away
as if they were upset with the mother leaving them (Crain, 2010, p. 61). Ainsworth suggested this type of avoidant behavior was the child showing he had some emotional difficulty from the detachment from the mother because it was a painful separation not being able to rely on the caregiver. This writer suggests that babies who have an insecure-avoidant attachment with their mother may grow up to have friendships and romantic relationships that are insecure or rejecting. Behaviors such as these are one’s innate way of protecting himself from harm or rejection, and which in turn can leave him to have difficulty expressing emotions. An insecure-avoidant child who finds himself or herself in an argument with a peer may likely handle the situation by either ignoring and walking away, or using defense mechanisms. A child who communicates by ignoring and walking away suggests that at some point in the child’s development he/she suffered from some type of rejection with their caregiver. In addition, the child internalizes his feelings for fear his peer will look at him as weak and powerless.

Ainsworth’s third pattern is insecure-ambivalent infants. When the mother left the room the child became extremely upset and refused to explore the environment. Upon the mother’s return the child was very ambivalent towards her. For example, at one moment the child reached out to the mother, and the next moment the child angrily pushed her away (Crain, 2010, p. 62). Ainsworth believes this ambivalent pattern is sometimes called resistance because the child desperately wants to seek contact with the mother but resists it as the same time (Crain, 2010, p. 62). This writer believes that as infants age with insecure ambivalence they are likely to become easily angered and upset even in minor situations. These individuals may become so upset that it becomes difficult to express their emotions, and leads to lack in communication. Individuals who have difficulty putting feelings/emotions into words may find it so difficult to explain themselves that they resort to becoming physically angry resulting in harm to oneself or others. As discussed
earlier self-inflicted pain is linked to a desired physical pain sensation, and allows individuals to elicit feelings of anger. For some individuals verbally communicating feelings and emotions is not cathartically effective. It has shown that feelings of anger elicit the sensation to physically harm others, and is cathartically effective after following through with the behavior.

Barry and Kochanska (2010, p. 238) refer to the research of Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, & Volling (1991), and Brody, Pellegrini, & Sigel (1986), who suggest marital harmony and discord are linked to positive and negative processes in the parent-child relationship. This writer believes a child who experiences or observes negative emotional discord is at higher risk in developing angry thoughts and feelings. A negative environment demonstrates to the child that it is appropriate to deal with emotions through anger. This type of behavior is supported by the spillover hypothesis which states that negative or positive mood and affect expressed in one relationship can easily transfer into another (Repetti, 1987, p. 238). The social learning theory helps explain the emotional spillover by suggesting a child who observes parental behavior will reenact it in interactions with the parent (Easterbrooks & Emde, 1988, p. 238). This theory also supports this writer’s assumption that anger is often influenced by parent-parent relationships or parent-child relationships. The family systems theory suggests that parents who are dissatisfied in their marriage tend to focus on the child’s faults as an attempt to ignore marital tensions (Minuchin, Rosman, & Baker, 1978, p. 238). Family systems theory also supports this writer assumption that parental emotion expression influences the outcome for the development of a child’s behavior.

**Socialization and Temperament**

When children are under the age of one year old they may or may not know the difference between right and wrong, however as they age, difference of perception begins to
evolve. Kochanska (1991) draws upon the findings of Kagan who proposed that by the time a child is eighteen months they are said to have learned and developed their own conscience and guilt because they have shown distress when witnessing or causing a violation of standard (Kagan, 1981, 1984, 1987). A child is likely to witness an argument among parents and can lead a child to have a conscience mark that people disagree. In homes where arguments become verbally abusive is one way in which some children develop the belief this type of communication is appropriate. This writer believes a child who witnesses verbal abuse is much more likely to end up using verbally abusive communication with peers. Children look to parents for guidance and appropriate means of socialization, and whether representation of communication is positive or negative the child is likely to communicate in similar ways as the parent. In addition to parental guidance appropriate boundaries need to be set in place if parents plan to follow through and regulate a child’s behavior. If reinforcement of boundaries is not continually followed, a child is likely to deviate and fall victim to increased temperament.

As the child ages he/she faces consequences of their actions and affective arousal or “deviation anxiety” develops (Dienstbier, Hillman, Leinhoff, Hillman, & Valkenaar, 1975; Emde, Johnson, & Easterbrooks, 1987; Hoffman, 1983; Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, & Chapman, 1983; Zahn-Waxler & Kochanska, 1990). In other words a child who experiences “deviated anxiety” is experiencing guilt and discomfort associated with their minor mishaps. This writer believes a child who exhibits anxiety and guilt associated with prior incidents is less likely to have angry emotions and feelings with peers.

Parental socialization has proven to be an important stride for the development of a child’s conscience. Kochanska (1991, p. 1389) discusses that some children who are prone to anxiety may respond to maternal cues with fearful arousal and discomfort. In addition depending
on the type of parental discipline, a child who experiences high power-assertive discipline may lead to lower levels of conscience development (Kochanska, 1991, p. 1389). This writer agrees with Kochanska’s (1991) research adding it is not surprising that a child who is threatened with negative reinforcement for their actions develops conscience anxiety towards facing maternal cues.

Communication involves understanding verbal emotions as well as physical and facial language expression, which for many individuals is key in deciphering how to respond during communication. Human interaction researchers Maccoby & Martin, (1983), Hoffman (1970a, 1970b, and 1983) have found parental warmth and open expression of emotions as well as minor use of power assertion are both correlated with a child’s internalized feelings of guilt (p. 1380). On the other hand these researchers suggest parents who use restrictive and forceful methods of discipline, and utilize threats and punishments were predicted to interfere with the process of a child’s internalized feelings of guilt (Maccoby & Martin et al., 1983, p. 1380). This writer was interested in understanding why children chose to express anger physically and/or emotionally. It seemed that parents who provided a strong sense of physical presence and demonstrated open expression of emotions in their child’s life had a direct effect on the child. For example, a child who is part of a strong parental presence chose to express anger physically with a peer. The child later had internalized feelings of guilt for not handling his emotions in an appropriate manner in which his parents taught him. It is clear that a child who receives parental expression of warmth and emotion are likely to understand the consequences of their actions. On the other hand a child whose parents enforced restrictive and forceful methods of discipline (Maccoby and Martin et al., 1983.) was likely to not have internalized feelings of guilt participating in actions of wrong doing.
Anger Regulation

Snyder, Stoolmiller, Wilson, and Yamamoto (2003, p. 336) research gives an understanding to the development of emotion and expressions, as well as further investigates why children choose to physically or emotionally display their feelings. This writer plans on further investigating how conflict resolutions affect a child to react physically or emotionally to their feelings.

When faced with a conflict or issue a person will react positively or negatively to the situation depending on the directed goal outcome. Researchers Snyder et al. (2003) found that “emotions differentiate, elaborate, take on more refined social communication functions, and are subject to self-modulation as individuals progress through childhood and adolescence” (Lewis, 2000, p. 336). Emotion development changes as a person’s age progresses, on the contrary, this writer questions why some individuals continue to express anger in negative ways. One finding suggests developmental changes in emotion experience and display are the result of transactional and reciprocal contributions of genetic-maturational programming and social experience, according to Cole, Michel, and Teti (1994), and Davidson, Jackson, & Kalin (2000). This information is similar to that of Kochanska’s (1991, p. 336) findings in which emotion expression is learned through parent and familial actions and through learned experiences in environmental surroundings.

Snyder et al. (2003) suggest there are two types of processes in which emotions may affect mental health; negative emotionality, and emotion regulation. Negative emotionality is broken down into three dimensions. The first is where environmental events trigger negative emotions, second is the intensity of emotions experienced and displayed, and the third is how easily the issue is resolved. Negative emotionality is a dimension of temperament from early
childhood that is considered normal when it appears in moderately stable individuals according to Rothbart and Bates (1998, p. 336). However, children who express emotion through anger may be considered to be deviating from positive expression in emotion. In sum these children are “experiencing higher-level emotions and are believed to pose as a risk to maladjustment because the inability to properly deal with emotions suggests there are externalized problems occurring,” (Snyder et al., 2003, p. 337).

The second concept is known as emotion regulation which suggests that once children mature they are better able to regulate negative emotions due to an increase in attention and inhibitory control systems (Posner & Rothbart, 2000, p. 337). This concept is considered a healthy way to process emotions. A basic fundamental in life is learning how to effectively deal with emotions through life challenges and personal growth. Social learning experiences such as learning to self-sooth, problem solve, labeling emotion, and learning the rules for displaying emotion are ways that children can effectively deal with emotion according to Snyder et al. (2003). Techniques such as clay therapy, role-playing, game-play, and mutual storytelling are ways that help promote conversation about effective ways to problem solve, self-sooth, and learning rules for displaying emotion. This research review has shown there is a strong influence among parental display of emotions and the child’s display of emotion.

The main focus of this thesis was to find out if play therapy techniques were an effective approach to address anger among children. Each area of research was consistent among the researchers in determining the effectiveness of useful play therapy techniques such as clay therapy, role-playing, and so forth. A new type of theory called emotion coaching by Gottman, Fainsilber-Katz, and Hooven (1997) proved to be an new and upcoming technique in which parents can contribute to their child’s therapy sessions by influencing the child’s ability to self-
regulate and positively utilize emotions (p. 337). This writer suggests parent emotion coaching can help individuals understand why children use anger to express emotion since it allows child and parent to relate emotions to one another. In order for this process to be accomplished, Gottman et al. (1997) suggest parents first need to regulate their own negative behavioral and emotional reactions to their child’s negative emotions and problem behavior. The act of realizing one’s own problem area with emotion and behavior helps the child to adjust their own emotion and behavior. In conclusion Gottman et al. (1997) found parental emotion coaching promoted positive child outcomes such as reduced negative emotionality, positive peer relationships, and reduced risk for internalizing and externalizing problems (p. 337).

**Parent Effects**

This writer is interested in finding out if parental behavior patterns observed by a child early in life have an effect on the child’s behavior and interaction with peers. O’Connor, Bureau, McCartney, and Lyons-Ruth (2011, p. 466) found that specific maternal patterns of interaction was correlated with their child’s behavioral attachment. As early as three years old behavioral outcomes and attachment were based on behavioral outcomes and include secure, insecure, disorganized, and controlling. These researchers’ study showed that maternal wellbeing, mother-child interactions, and child social adaptation were strongly linked with secure dyads and displayed the most adaptive patterns in their study. Secondly they found that mothers of children who were disorganized and controlling experienced more depression and displayed the poorest interactions with their children. This was measured by maternal hostility, maternal respect for autonomy, maternal support, mother-child cooperation, and child affection. In addition, these children showed the lowest levels of compliance and the highest levels of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems at thirty-six and fifty-four months old (p. 467). The research of
O’Connor et al. (2011) has evidence that supports this writer’s study by confirming that maternal hostility and lack of maternal support, respect, and cooperation lead to anger and behavior problems in children.

Of the four subtypes of disorganized/controlling attachment, “the behaviorally disorganized subtype was associated more so with patterns of risk and outcomes compared to the care giving and mixed subtypes” (O’Connor et al., 2011, p. 467). What stood out the most about the behaviorally disorganized subtype was that researchers found mothers of these children had significantly worse romantic relationships than did secure, insecure-organized, controlling-care giving, and controlling-punitive children. This research additionally supports this writer’s question by showing that mothers of behaviorally disorganized children were more hostile and less respectful of their children. With that said, the research affirms that secure emotional interaction between parent and child are incredibly essential for a child’s positive behavioral outcome. In addition this research supports that children who develop behaviorally disorganized patterns of behavior from their parents are likely to handle their anger in undeveloped ways. This means that these children did not learn effective approaches to deal with their positive and negative emotions, and if/when they find themselves in a dispute with a peer, they will handle it in ways that are inadequate, revengeful, power seeking, and result in the need for attention.

Parental Neglect

Through this research it is clear that a parent/caregiver has a strong influence on a child’s emotional outcome. This writer believes there is a strong correlation linked to parental influence on a child’s emotional outcome. In regards to this research emotional outcomes refer to how the child chooses to cope with environmental stressors, and whether it is through anger or positive verbal communication. Koenig, Barry, and Kochanska (2010, p. 258) discuss the complexities
among parenting, parents’ personalities, and qualities of children’s temperament. These researchers suggest there are five types of personalities (positive and negative) often seen in various types of parenting styles, and include traits of neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, and openness (Costa & McCrae, 1992, McCrae & Costa, 1987).

A parent whose personality entails neuroticism often tends to lack emotional stability and tends to be anxious, tense, and prone to negative affect (Luster & Okagaki, 1993). Imagine being a young child living in an environment with a neurotic parent. This writer suggests there is a high likelihood that this child presents difficulty in peer-to-peer interactions. The research of Koenig et al. supports this writer’s study in that both believe that “neuroticism has a high potential for interfering with optimal parenting by making it difficult for parents to have positive interactions with their children, and also might limit parents’ ability to respond appropriately and adequately to their child’s signals” (2010, p. 259). In homes where there is a lack in emotion children do not learn how to cope with their feelings. Further, a twosome of young boys who are discussing last night’s football game quickly turns into a dispute. If one of these boys comes from a home with low parental warmth and more negative and forceful parenting he is likely to retreat by using anger to get his point across. Whereas a child who comes from a home with high parental warmth and positive communication is more likely to either walk away from the dispute or not participate in the escalation of the football dispute. This is supported by research findings that propose “neuroticism, irritability, mistrust, hostility, and other forms of negative emotionality are associated with less warm and more negative and forceful parenting, and agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientiousness are linked to more positive and adaptive parenting” (Koenig et al., 2010, p. 259).

Other personality traits that lead to positive parenting styles include high extraversion,
high agreeableness, high levels of conscientiousness, and high openness. Koenig et al. suggests “parents who embody one or all of these four characteristics will encourage their children to engage in active, kind, and warm relationships with others” (2010, p. 259). For example, these researchers explained that parents who are high on conscientiousness are likely to provide a structures and consistent environment (Prinzie et al., 2009, p. 259). This writer agrees with the research of Koenig et al. (2010, p. 259) however, the five traits they utilize in their study only focus on one “negative” personality style. The other four personality styles are seen as positive parental characteristics. This writer would have been interested in finding out other types of parental personality styles that relate to a child responding through anger.

**Summary**

Before a child learns how to fit in and be a part of a society they have the instinctual need and curiosity to explore their relationship with their main caregiver. In other words this type of exploration can be described as attachment. Depending on how attached a child is early in life can have an influence on how they handle emotions associated with anger later on in development. Research showed that infants form a bond with their main caregiver depending on the sensitive nature for the patterns of attachment. Based on the three patterns of attachment infants who have a secure attachment with their mothers are able to deal effectively with difficult situations such as an argument with a peer. A child who has a secure attachment to their caregiver is likely to be able to reasonably handle an argument by remaining calm and socially competent. Children who appeared to have avoidant behavioral patterns have shown to have some emotional difficulty in detaching from the mother. Reasons for this are likely to be due to the painful separation and not being able to rely on the caregiver.

Research has shown that infants who are insecurely ambivalent are likely to become
easily angered and upset even in minor situations. These babies may grow up and find themselves having difficulty putting feelings/emotions into words, and may find it so difficult to explain themselves that they resort to becoming physically angry resulting in harm to oneself or others.

From a very early age children are able to recognize and interpret emotions as being positive or negative. Children learn how to verbally and emotionally communicate by observing how parents conduct themselves. A parent who demonstrates positive communication and sets socially appropriate boundaries reinforces the child to engage with others this way. On the other hand children who experience lack of positive communication and boundaries may develop affective arousal or deviated anxiety due to discomfort with minor mishaps (Dienstbier et al., p. 1379). Research has shown parental warmth and open expression is an important predictor whether a child will develop internalized feelings of guilt when engaging in inappropriate actions. Children who fail to have feelings of guilt after facing consequences of their actions, likely fall victim to lack of parental warmth and open expression.

Research from Snyder et al. (2003) supports the above findings that parental physical and emotional expression is imperative for children to feel a sense of belonging. The concept of negative emotionality suggests children who express emotions through anger are experiencing a higher level of emotions compared to their peers. This could pose risk due to the inability to properly deal with emotions because there are underlying externalized problems occurring (Eisenberg et al. (2000, p. 337).

The second concept, emotion regulation suggests that as children age they are better able to regulate negative emotions due to an increased understanding of how to effectively process and deal with emotions. Children learn these challenges through social experiences such as
problem solving, self-sooth, labeling emotion, and learning from rules, Snyder et al., (2000). For children who have difficulty learning how to express emotions, play therapy can be an effective technique. Researchers developed a theory called ‘emotion coaching’ in which parents are able to contribute to the child’s therapeutic process by influencing the child to self-regulate and incorporate positive emotions into their lifestyle.

Researchers draw upon Bowlby’s (1969/1982, p. 246) landmark study of attachment theory to explain the importance of a parent/child relationship that involves comfort and care. In addition a child who signals physical or emotional attention is seeking for parental response. Lack of parental response to a child’s signal may have a negative impact on the child’s emotional development as it pertains to attachment. At a very young age the child recognizes positive and negative communication styles around them. Those who experience parental disputes more than others suggest to the child it is an appropriate way to deal with emotions and behaviors. This type of behavior is supported by the spillover hypothesis, and indicates expression of negative or positive mood and affect, and this can easily influence another individual (Repetti, 1987, p. 238).

Researchers found that specific maternal patterns of interaction were correlated with their child’s behavioral attachment. Maternal wellbeing, mother-child interactions, and child social adaptation were strongly linked with secure dyads and displayed the most adaptive patterns in their study. Secondly, they found that mothers of children who were disorganized and controlling experienced more depression and displayed the poorest interactions with their children. This study supported this writer’s study by confirming that maternal hostility and lack of maternal support, respect, and cooperation lead to anger and behavior problems in children. In addition it was supported that mothers of behaviorally disorganized children were more hostile and less respectful of their children. Lastly, this research proves that children who develop behaviorally
disorganized patterns of behavior from their parents are likely to handle their anger in undeveloped ways.

Through this research it is clear that a parent/caregiver has a strong influence on a child’s emotional outcome. This writer has shown there is a strong correlation linked to parental influence on a child’s emotional outcome. Researchers have displayed the five types of personalities (positive and negative) often seen in various types of parenting styles which include traits of neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, and openness. It is suggested that a parent whose personality entails neuroticism often tends to lack emotional stability and tend to be anxious, tense, and prone to negative affect. Researchers found that neuroticism had a high potential for interfering with optimal parenting by making it difficult for parents to have positive interactions with their children, which also might limit parents’ ability to respond appropriately and adequately to their child’s signals. A child who grows up in a home with parents who are neurotic may likely present difficulty in peer-to-peer relationships. This is because children who live in homes where there is a lack in emotion do not learn how to cope with their feelings.

**Final Summary**

The purpose of this thesis is to find out what types of play therapy techniques are effective approaches to address anger among children. Key ideas of research involve explaining ways in which play therapy techniques can be facilitated for children who display physical and/or emotional stressors with anger. Key research involves explaining ways in which play therapy techniques can be facilitated for children who display physical and/or emotional stressors with anger.

This writer found that anger and self-inflicted pain have been linked to catharsis for
reasons of blowing off steam. Some researchers suggest self-inflicted pain causes a peak of arousal, ending with positive feelings of relief. Another possibility is that anger functions to trigger a physiological process that reduces distressing experiences. A second form of anger is retaliation. After much review of the research, this writer believes individuals who use self-inflicted pain to release anger are desperately seeking help. This is not suggesting they are seeking out attention, rather they are emotionally drained and inflicting pain onto the self provides a physical form of help. This writer also believes self-inflicted pain provides only temporary relief and once the initial harm onto the self begins to feel natural, an individual may begin to seek out more harmful actions.

Although retaliated anger can be physical or emotional it is just as harmful. This writer believes that individuals who show retaliated and hostile expressions have inhibited repressed feelings from their past. Repressed feelings may occur due to lack of attention an individual received at the time an incident occurred. Even the smallest experience could cause symptoms of distress, depression, anger, and sadness. When untreated over time these symptoms increase and affect an individual in other ways.

Passive anger contains many forms of expression such as facial, crying, and withdrawal. Some suggest the type of emotional response elicited is based on the child’s interpersonal ramifications they expect to receive after disclosing emotion. Children learn how to communicate through peer interaction. During verbal communication, positive and negative responses are likely to occur and this leaves some individuals sensitive to contextual cues. Children look to parents for guidance and appropriate means of socialization and temperament. Naturally, children observe physical and verbal interactions of their caregivers, and whether the communication is positive or negative the child interprets this as ways to behave and
communicate. A child who witnesses verbal abuse among his parents learns that violence and anger are positive communicating styles. This writer believes a child who witnesses verbal abuse is much more likely to end up using verbally abusive communication with peers. This research is related to similar patterns in the research of passive anger, which suggests that a child expresses emotion according to their cultural surroundings. Some individuals go beyond environmental influences and express feelings of anger in hopes they will receive peer or parental recognition. Researchers believe by the age of eight years old some children who express feelings of anger begin to naturally expect little emotional support from parents or peers. In comparing the research of socialization & temperament with passive anger, it is clear that throughout a child’s development it is crucial for the child to observe their caregivers utilizing positive emotional expression. In addition to parental guidance appropriate boundaries need to be set in place if parents plan to follow through and regulate a child’s behavior. If reinforcement of boundaries is not continually followed a child is likely to deviate and fall victim to increased temperament.

Anger is created when emotions are repressed, and the individual seeks revenge, power, and/or attention. During this writer’s research it was found that both the creation of anger and mutual storytelling were linked with one another. Both subtypes identified a child’s misbehavior with the four goals of misbehavior, attention, power, revenge, and inadequacy. Using different works of Dreikurs it was clear that “a child who misbehaves is discouraged, and his sense of belonging is restricted” (1964, p. 58). Dreikurs also suggests that anger can be created when individuals dissociate themselves from their emotions as if they weren’t responsible for them (p. 208). This writer suggests that children dissociate themselves from emotions because they either do not understand the cognitive emotions they personally have, and/or they haven’t learned how to appropriately utilize emotions in a social situation. In Albert Ellis’s A-B-C Theory, he
believes that individuals have irrational beliefs about negative things that happen in life, or the way specific life situations should be by utilizing words/thoughts such as *should*, *ought*, *need*, *must*, *always*, and *never*. This concept is correlated to Kottman and Stiles’s (1990) research that children believe they only belong when they are noticed, and this also known as the second goal of misbehavior known as power. Beliefs like these are also known as irrational beliefs. A child who seeks power and control is demanding attention, and therefore impressing someone into submission.

Retaliated anger is linked to symptoms of depression, distress, hostility, loss of self-esteem, guilt, and fear, to name a few (Freud, 1916, p. 570). This writer believes that individuals who show hostile expressions are demonstrating the result of inhibited repressed feelings from their past. Repressed feelings may occur due to lack of attention to an individual’s feelings received at the time a notable incident occurred. One way to effectively decrease symptoms of retaliated anger is through the use of Clay Therapy. Clay modeling was found to be an effective approach when working with children who had difficulty verbalizing emotions in positive ways. In addition this technique showed to be useful for children who had a difficult time understanding where their angry emotions were coming from. Physically holding an object such as clay shifts attention away from the client by gradually initiating conversation during play allows feelings of anxiety diminish. This writer believes the use of clay modeling in therapy is a useful technique to use with clients since it allows the client to physically elicit positive and negative emotions and thoughts through the use of an indestructible object.

Role-play has shown great success in dealing with anger, peer relationships, and overcoming grief. Some researchers suggested role-playing is a positive form of communication that allows a child to verbalize emotions and articulate emotions. Many children who use anger
to communicate emotions have difficulty putting emotions into words. These types of children would benefit from learning techniques such as role-play to practice how to translate how to verbalize emotions. The process of catharsis helps explain why individuals physically or emotionally express their feelings through self-inflicted anger, retaliated anger, or passive anger. Whether or not one form of anger is preferred over another it is the most obvious way to deal and purge feelings of anger. Although catharsis is one possible explanation for why individuals express anger, it is only temporary relief. When an individual uses self-inflicted pain to relieve feelings of emotions, catharsis no longer is a natural way to handle emotions. Levenson and Herman (1991, p. 662) correlate catharsis and role-playing by explaining that it helps integrate pent-up feelings and the child reverses roles or identities that created feelings of helplessness, and now represent a sense of control and completeness.

Board games, card games, athletic games, and drawing are other forms of play therapy that interests adolescents and are also effective ways to stimulate communication versus talk therapy. This writer suggests the above techniques to be a positive way for individuals to express emotions on paper. A pencil or pen approach allows the individual to express their feelings, and the use of color can differentiate one’s portrayal of anger. In addition interpreting drawings reveals unconscious emotions the artist intended to express.

Research has shown parental warmth and open expression is an important predictor to whether a child will develop internalized feelings of guilt when engaging in inappropriate actions. Children who fail to have feelings of guilt after facing consequences of their actions, were victim to lack of parental warmth and open expression. The concept of negative emotionality suggests children who express emotions through anger are experiencing a higher level of emotion compared to their peers. The second concept, emotion regulation suggests as
children age they are better able to regulate negative emotions due to an increased understanding of how to effectively process and deal with emotions. Children learn these lessons through social experiences such as problem solving, self-sooth, labeling emotion, and learning from rules (Snyder et al., 2003, p. 337). Bowlby’s (1969/1982, p. 246) landmark study of attachment theory explains the importance of a parent/child relationship that involves comfort and care. In addition a child who signals physical or emotional attention is seeking parental response. Lack of parental response to a child’s signal may have a negative impact on the child’s emotional development and attachment.

Children learn and develop emotions within the family system. It has been discussed that the personalities and parenting styles of all parents depend on the outcome of their children’s emotions and temperament. Koenig et al. (2010, p. 259) journal on Parental Neglect suggests parents whose personality entails neuroticism, often tend to lack emotional stability and tend to be anxious, tense, and prone to negative affect (Vondara & Belsky, 1993, p. 259). In addition these researchers found that parents who showed high levels of neuroticism were at a greater risk to have difficulty parenting children with positive interactions. This meant that parents were limited in their ability to respond appropriately and adequately to their child’s signals with emotions. Snyder et al. (2003, p. 336) research found that children who expressed emotion through anger were experiencing an inability to properly deal with emotions, and there could be externalized problems occurring (Snyder et al., 2003, p. 337). Koenig et al. (2010) research suggested that other personality traits that lead to positive parenting styles include high extraversion, high agreeableness, high levels of conscientiousness, and high openness. Koenig et al. (2010) suggests, “parents who embody one or all of these four characteristics will encourage their children to engage in active, kind, and warm relationships with others” (p. 259). This
research is additionally supported by the research of Snyder et al. (2003) concept of anger regulation which suggests that once children mature, they are better able to regulate negative emotions due to an increase in attention and inhibitory control systems (Posner & Rothbart, 2000, p. 337).

Methodology

The methods used to study the research question of this paper were to conduct an in-depth research that answered the following hypothesis: Does play therapy create positive outcomes in inner city youth with anger problems?

In order to answer the hypothesis question numerous journals from the EBSCO website and six outside books were used to find connections that would support this research. It was found that most studies supported that various forms of anger were linked to parental attachment, and disciplining styles. Research also supported the use of play therapy as useful therapeutic approach in effectively working with individuals who present with angry behaviors.

The largest findings were in particular studies such as Polman’s (2011) study in which particular individuals prefer to use self-harm or harm onto others when feeling angry about particular instances. These findings were later correlated to findings in child development, socialization & temperament, and parental neglect. Levenson and Herman’s (1991) study of role-play indicated positive outcomes for individuals who present with angry behaviors. Lastly, Kottman and Stiles (1990) study of the child’s goals of misbehavior were strongly associated with angry patterns that were also linked to the child’s development and relationship with the caregiver.

Conclusions

Emotions and feelings are one of the most authentic ways in which humans connect and
understand one another. Without emotions and feelings humans would be alike with no differences and would lack uniqueness and individuality. Emotions and feelings elicit positive and negative responses with the numerous types of experiences individuals face. Various types of instances can create angry feelings and emotions, and depending on how he/she chooses to react, constitutes either a positive (healthy) or negative (unhealthy) way to handle aggression.

Three different forms of anger (self-inflicted pain, retaliation, and passive) were closely examined in order to understand what leads individuals to react through anger instead of verbally communicating their feelings and emotions. Research showed the process of catharsis helps explain why individuals physically or emotionally express their feelings through self-inflicted pain, retaliated anger, or passive anger. Whether or not one form of anger is preferred over another, anger is a form of hostile and repressed feelings. It was proposed there are two types of processing pathways in which aggressive behaviors in children develop. The first is emotional, impulsive, and automatic processing. Secondly, pathways in aggressive behavior are more controlled cognitive processing, which includes consciously activated schemas, and it is effected by more automatic processes such as emotions. Findings showed that anger and impulsivity were positively associated with aggression, and internal locus of control was negatively associated with aggression. This evidence indicates that emotion/impulsivity and cognitive/schema pathways are involved in aggressive behavior. It is also suggested that anger and impulsivity were positively associated with aggression, and internal locus of control was negatively associated with aggression, and all indicating that emotion/impulsivity and cognitive/schema pathways are involved in aggressive behavior.

Catharsis is the experience of emotions that are associated with meaning from one’s past, and has been repressed or ignored. In other words catharsis triggers positive or negative
emotions and feelings. This writer’s research indicated that catharsis was only one explanation for understanding why some individuals choose to release emotions through anger. When an individual’s anger advances to physically harming others, catharsis is no longer associated.

Problems with anger aggression are not erasable. Play therapy is suggested for individuals to learn positive ways to deal with their negative emotions. Typically play therapy is utilized for children and youth, however it has been usefully implemented for adults as well. Clay modeling was found to be an effective approach when working with children who had difficulty verbalizing emotions in positive ways. In addition this technique was useful for children who had a difficult time understanding where their angry emotions were coming from. Many children who use anger to communicate emotions have difficulty putting emotions into words. These types of children would benefit from learning techniques such as role-play to practice how to verbalize emotions. Research showed that role-play was linked to positively deal with anger, peer relationships, and overcoming grief. The third play therapy technique was drawing and game play therapy, and showed effectiveness in stimulating communication through the use of games and drawing. Although this approach can be effective for some individuals this writer did not find strong evidence that showed drawing and game play to have more of an effect than clay therapy, role-play, and/or storytelling. Lastly, the mutual storytelling technique showed to be useful for the child to identify their goals of misbehavior. By listening for the client’s metaphorical use of communication in their lifestyles and goals, researchers believe this allows us to understand the purpose for their behavior. Comparing the child’s story with the facilitator’s story the child is able to identify the differences and outcomes, followed by learning to develop positive patterns for interacting in the environment. This technique showed to be therapeutically useful.
The early stages of attachment are critical and have an influence on how individuals handle emotions, particularly with anger later on in development. Children typically fall into one of three categories for attachment; secure attachment, secure-ambivalent, and insecure-ambivalent. Based on the forms of attachment and the level of comfort and care received or lack of, a child recognizes early on how to interact with caregiver, followed by how to interact with peers later in life. In addition it is clear that a parent/caregiver has a strong influence on a child’s emotional outcome. This writer has shown there is a strong correlation linked to parental influence on a child’s emotional outcome. A child who did not have a secure attachment with their caregiver is more likely to experience lack of positive communication, and there may be lack of appropriate boundaries. Research indicated that parental warmth and open expression is an important predictor for whether a child will develop internalized feelings of guilt with engaging in inappropriate actions.

Recommendations

Years of research suggests anger can lead to violence, alcoholism, drugs, and problems with relationships. In addition, youth who display problems with anger are at a disadvantage in developing automatic processing styles for emotions/feelings, as well as positive communication styles. Intervening efforts involve play therapy techniques such as clay work, drawing and game play, role-play, and mutual storytelling; which are practical solutions that lead to positive behavioral outcomes for youth.

It is this writer’s recommendation that future research involve further evidence that Adlerian goals of misbehavior has a negative impact on youths’ angry behaviors. Along with this it would be helpful if there were research that connected goals of misbehavior and its negative impact on youths’ angry behaviors with play therapy techniques.
There was limited research connecting inner city youth with anger problems, and Adlerian goals of misbehavior. In order to intervene and prevent inner city youth from dropping out of school and getting involved with negative peer relationships, this writer recommends bringing in mentors. Adolescent or young adult mentors are suggested to be former individuals who lived in the inner city populations. Mentors represent a process that can alleviate negative coping mechanisms associated with anger. Mentors are looking to seek change to prevent future outcomes among children with anger problems.
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