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Individual versus Sequential: The Potential of Comic Creation in Art Therapy

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This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the program chair, has been presented to and accepted by the Department of Art Therapy, at Dominican University of California, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Therapy.

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Individual versus Sequential:
The Potential of Comic Creation in Art Therapy

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A culminating thesis, submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art in Marriage and Family Therapy.

Dominican University of California
San Rafael, CA
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Abstract

This research study explored the potential of comics within an art therapy and narrative therapy framework. The process of depicting a past problem as a single image was compared to the process of depicting the same problem as a comic. This study worked with 15 normally functioning adults to compare the effectiveness of the two formats (comics vs. single image) in processing a past problem or challenge. Participants evaluated these two formats through a survey and a brief verbal interview. The quantitative data from the survey and the qualitative data from the interview were analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the comic format as compared to the single image format. The art-based data collected from participants' single images and comics was also analyzed for unique characteristics the comic format evoked. All interactions with participants took place virtually over Zoom to ensure the safety of participants and the researcher during the COVID-19 pandemic. Analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data indicated that participants responded positively towards the comic format. The comic format seemed especially effective at facilitating the narrative therapy technique of deconstruction. These results support the study's hypothesis that the comic format is as effective or more effective than the single image format in eliciting a narrative from a past problem or challenge. The art-based data suggested that the comic format evokes unique representations of time and movement in participants' narratives. The findings of this study strongly suggest that creating comics or sequential art has potential for use in an art therapy setting, particularly in helping clients process past problems or challenges.

Keywords: art therapy, narrative therapy, comics, sequential art, adults, COVID-19, pandemic, online, virtual

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Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures.....	ix
Chapter I Introduction	1
Narrative Therapy	1
Comics	2
An Art therapy and Narrative Therapy Framework.....	3
Current Study	4
Chapter II Literature Review	7
Narrative Therapy: Theory and Techniques	7
Externalizing.....	8
Deconstructing.....	9
Reauthoring.....	9
Narrative Therapy: Populations	12
Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy	14
Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy: Combining Art and Writing	17
Comics and their Unique Properties	19
Graphic Medicine.....	22
Patient Care.....	22
Training and Support for Medical Staff.....	25
Health Education.....	27
Use of Comics in the Classroom.....	30
The Graphic Narrative	32
Use of Comics in a Therapeutic Setting.....	34
Art Materials	37
Conclusion	38
Chapter III Methodology	40
Participants.....	40
Variables	41
Interview	43
Art Activities.....	44
Instructions.....	44
Rationale for given prompt.....	46
Materials.....	46
Data Collection: Survey.....	47
Data Collection: Verbal Interview	51
Debriefing	53
Data Analysis	54
Survey data.....	54
Interview Data.....	55
Arts-based data.....	55
Chapter IV: Results	58
Demographics	60

Overall Results	60
Quantitative Data	63
Mean scores for each criterion	63
Mean scores for each technique.....	65
Positive percentage ratings for each criterion.....	65
Qualitative Data	68
Question 1: Preference	71
Question 2: Differences	71
Question 3: Difficulty.....	72
Question 4: Overall Impressions of Each Format	72
Question 5: Application of Comics in Therapy.....	75
Question 6: Familiarity.....	76
Question 7: Perceptions	76
Question 8: Exposure to Content.....	76
Art-based Data	77
Word inclusion.....	78
Movement	78
Time.....	78
Panel-to-panel Transitions	80
Panel Shapes	80
Word-picture Combinations.....	81
Chapter V: Discussion	82
Discussion of Hypothesis: Quantitative Data	82
Overall scores	82
Deconstructing.....	82
Externalizing.....	83
Re-authoring.....	84
Discussion of Hypothesis: Qualitative Data	84
Overall responses	84
Significant themes around the comic format	85
Significant themes around the single image format.....	86
Participants' general impressions of comics.....	87
Discussion of Hypothesis: Art-based Data	89
Word inclusion.....	89
Movement	90
Time.....	91
Panel transitions	93
Panel shapes.....	96
Theoretical Implications	100
Implications for Clinical Application	102
Recommendations for Clinical Application.....	103
Strengths	106
Limitations and Threats to Validity	108
Recommendation for Future Research.....	109
Conclusion	110
References	113
Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer	122
Appendix B: Informed Consent Agreement to Participate in Research	123

Appendix C: Comic Templates shown to Participants.....	126
Appendix D: Google Forms Survey.....	124
Appendix E: Verbal Interview Question SheetSession No.: Participant ID.....	131
Appendix F: Debriefing Statement.....	133
Appendix G: List of Referral Services for Participants	135
Appendix H: Forms for Interraters	145

List of Tables

Table 3.1 Survey Questions	49
Table 3.2 Verbal Interview Questions	52
Table 4.1 Themes in participants' responses towards the comic format.	70
Table 4.2 Themes in participants' responses towards the single image format.....	70
Table 4.3 Words and Phrases used to describe the Single Image	73
Table 4.4 Words and Phrases used to describe the Comic	74

List of Figures

Figure 4.1 Average ratings for each criterion	64
Figure 4.2 Average ratings for each Narrative Therapy Technique.	65
Figure 4.3 Positive Percentage Ratings for each criterion	67
Figure 4.4 Participants' Preferences between the Comic and the Single Image.	68
Figure 4.5. Categories of comics mentioned by participants.....	77
Figure 4.6 Word inclusion in comics versus single images.....	79
Figure 4.7 Amount of movement in comics versus single images.	79
Figure 4.8 Panel transitions in participants' comics	80
Figure 5.1 Artwork by P10	90
Figure 5.2 Artwork by P2	91
Figure 5.3 Artwork by P12	93
Figure 5.4 Artwork by P4	95
Figure 5.5 Artwork by P8	96
Figure 5.6 Artwork by P14	98
Figure 5.7 Artwork by P11	99

Chapter 1: Introduction

The aim of this research study was to explore the potential use of comics within an art therapy and narrative therapy framework. To accomplish this, this study compared the process of depicting a past problem as a single image to the process of depicting the same problem as a comic. This study worked with 15 normally functioning adults to compare the effectiveness of the two formats (single image vs. comics) in processing a past challenge or problem that they experienced. For the purpose of this study, normally functioning adults were defined as mentally healthy individuals above the age of 18 with no prior history of psychological disorders.

The central hypothesis of this study was that depicting a past event as a comic has unique benefits over depicting the same event as a single image, specifically in eliciting a narrative from participants and allowing them to deconstruct it through breaking the experience down into panels. A mixed methods approach using interviews and surveys was used to assess how participants viewed these two experiences.

The secondary research question of this study explored how the representation of an event differs from a single image compared to a comic. Participants' artwork were collected and analyzed for differences between the formats and for unique patterns or features in participants' comics. The hypothesis with regard to this particular research question was that there would be a pattern of differences between the two formats, and that the comic format would evoke unique characteristics such as word inclusion as well as the representation of time and movement.

Narrative Therapy

Humans are caught in a perpetual cycle of influencing and being influenced by the stories we experience. This is a perspective proposed by narrative therapy, a theory widely attributed to Michael White and David Epston (Kerr & Hoshino, 2008). Narrative therapy holds that our

identity and experience of the world are shaped by the stories we internalize from the events that we experience. This approach aims to help clients deconstruct unproductive narratives and re-author their identities through externalizing problems, using therapeutic questions, seeking unique outcomes and building alternative preferred stories (Kerr & Hoshino, 2008). According to this theory, examining past experiences and re-authoring preferred events are vital in building a healthy identity and promoting positive change. Narrative therapy is a flexible practice that has been used with a wide variety of populations including children (Gilling, 2016; Ramey et al., 2009), adults (Goodcase & Love, 2017; Vromans & Schweitzer, 2009) and families (Suddeath et al., 2017). Art therapy is an approach that has been used in combination with narrative therapy to help facilitate these processes. Research has demonstrated that art therapy and narrative therapy have, in combination, been effective in reinforcing each other in the therapeutic processes (Becker, 2015; Conner, 2017; Stock & Robinson, 2012, Pratt et al., 2015).

Comics

This study was interested in how comics can be used within a combined art therapy and narrative therapy framework as a means of deconstructing past events and processing internalized narratives. To explore this possibility, the study compared the process of representing an event through a single image to the process of representing the same event through a comic. For the purpose of this study, comics were operationally defined as:

“juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/ or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer”

Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art (McCloud, 1993, p. 9).

Research has suggested the effectiveness of creating comics as a tool to convey narratives, promote literacy (Brenna, 2012; Chase et al., 2014; Griffith, 2010; Hughes et al., 2010), navigate

complex narratives (Ghiso & Low, 2013; Helse, 2017; Hughes et al., 2011) and empower individuals (Haupt et al., 2016). Comics have been shown to have a positive therapeutic effect when used as an intervention (Haupt et al., 2016; Maatman et al., 2020; Malka, 2019; McMullin et al., 2021). To date, however, there appears to be a glaring dearth of studies on the use of comics as an art therapy tool and only one that has explored comics within an art therapy and narrative therapy framework (Khan, 2020), a problem that this study hopes to help remedy.

An Art therapy and Narrative Therapy Framework

This study proposed that comic making has the potential to be an effective art therapy tool especially within a narrative therapy framework. Art therapy and narrative therapy have often gone hand-in-hand, and have been used with a variety of mediums including textiles, paintings, basket weaving, altar making and altered book making (Bermúdez & Bermúdez, 2002; Cobb & Sesen, 2010; Solas, 2015; Garlock, 2016; Garwolińska et al., 2018). Art-making lends itself naturally to the narrative therapy approach as it enables clients to create tangible representations of internalized narratives and offers a means of building alternative narratives in a visual form (Carlson, 1997). Art therapy and narrative therapy have also been shown to be effective in a variety of contexts and with various populations. This includes individuals with brain injuries (Bohanna et al., 2019; Butera-Prinzi et al., 2014), individuals suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Becker, 2015), adolescents living with HIV (Pienaar and Viseer, 2012) and individuals in addiction recovery (Conner, 2017). This approach has also been used cross-culturally with positive outcomes (Stock et al., 2012). This study proposes that comics are an ideal medium for a narrative therapy and art therapy framework. This is so as comics allow for a continuous narrative that can be extended beyond a single image. It also

enables events to be broken down into moments, as represented by panels. Comics can be used to deconstruct unproductive narratives, reframe events and build alternative preferred narratives.

Current Study

This study's primary research question compared the effectiveness of the single image format to the comic format with regard to processing a past problem or challenge. This study recruited normally functioning adults as participants. Normally functioning adults were defined as mentally healthy individuals over the age of 18 with no prior history of psychological disorders. This population was used to establish a baseline of responses towards the comic and single image formats, forming a starting point for research to be conducted with other populations. Working with this population increased accessibility, as participants were able to provide informed consent without requiring the approval of others. Choosing this population also minimized risk, as they are not as vulnerable as other populations such as children or the elderly. This study had relatively low risks, with the main risk being the possibility that participants experienced negative emotions when recalling the past problem or challenge. Possible benefits included the therapeutic benefits associated with art making and insight into past experiences. Participants were fully informed of risks, benefits and the voluntary nature of participation through the informed consent form and verbally by the researcher. Participants were identified through convenience sampling (target sample size: 15-20). This included social media posts, personal connections and publicity in the art therapy community.

Art making was used as an intervention in which participants were asked to process a past problem or challenge in their life and represent it as both a single image and as a comic. This took place over one-hour zoom sessions with each participant. These zoom sessions involved two art activities: making a comic about a past problem or challenge in the participant's

life and making a single image about the same event. Participants were asked to have two pieces of drawing paper and color pencils or markers with at least 8 colors. Each art activity was assigned a maximum of 15 minutes. Participants were instructed to bring to mind a past problem or challenge they had experienced. The researcher clarified that this did not need to be a traumatic or life-altering event. When the participants thought of an event and were ready to begin, they were asked to represent this event as a single image or comic. They were then asked to repeat this process, representing the same event as a comic or single image (whichever was not previously administered). The order in which the single image and comic activities were given was randomly assigned to avoid order becoming a confounding variable. As sessions with participants took place over Zoom, materials were limited by what was available to participants. As far as it was possible, materials used include 11x8.5 white paper, color pencils or markers. Color pencils and markers were suggested as they lie towards the resistive end of the Expressive Therapies Continuum, thus allowing more control and supporting cognitive processes (Green & Drewes, 2014; Hyland-Moon, 2009; Walsh, 2013). These materials were also chosen for familiarity, accessibility and ease of use (as compared to more specialized or costly materials like oil paint or charcoal).

Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered in the form of a survey and interview in order to assess the effectiveness of the comic and single image formats in processing a past problem or challenge. The art activities were followed by a short survey taken online via Google forms. This survey consisted of 18 questions and employed a 5-point Likert scale asking participants to rank the comic making activity and the single image activity for effectiveness based on nine criteria derived from narrative therapy techniques. Completion of this survey took approximately 5-10 minutes. This was followed by a 10-15 minute verbal interview where

participants were asked about their experience creating a single image compared to their experience creating a comic. Participants were also asked about their familiarity with and general impression of comics. Quantitative data gathered from the surveys was analyzed by comparing participants' scoring of the comic making against their scoring of the single image activity. The scores were compared to see which activity scored higher on average and whether there was a statistically significant difference. This was determined via a paired sample t-test. The qualitative data gathered from the interviews conducted was analyzed using coding and thematic analysis. This analysis searched for common themes that participants report in their experience of creating the comic versus creating a single image.

This study's secondary research question explored the differences between the representations of an event in the form of a comic as compared to a single image, and the unique characteristics the comic format evoked. To address this, participants' art was used as data and analyzed for differences that arose between the formats as well as for visual patterns across participants' comics. This analysis examined the use of word inclusion; representation of time and movement; how panel shapes were used; what panel transitions were used, and what word-image combinations were used. Criteria for assessing these factors were based on *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* by Scott McCloud (1993). This study ultimately aimed to explore how comics can be used to elicit narratives from past events, identify the unique characteristics of comics and address the gap in current research on the use of comics in art therapy. In exploring the differences between making a comic and making a single image, this study hopes to show the unique benefits that comics can bring to art therapy and to generate further inquiry into the use of comics as an art therapy tool.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of both narrative therapy as well as the combined approach of narrative therapy and art therapy. Current literature has also shown how both reading and making comics can be used to communicate important information, facilitate self-expression and as a therapeutic intervention. The following literature review discusses the principles of narrative therapy, its techniques and goals, and the populations it has been used with. Research on the combination of narrative therapy and art therapy is reviewed. An explanation of comics and their unique properties is also covered. This is accompanied by an overview of how the consumption and creation of comics have been beneficial in communicating essential information, encouraging literacy and facilitating self-expression and reflection. Research on the various settings in which comics have been used are explored. This includes the medical community, schools and therapeutic settings. Finally, the literature on the properties of various art materials is reviewed, with reference to the Expressive Therapies Continuum. The Expressive Therapies Continuum organizes art materials on a scale that ranges from fluid to resistive. It is used to review the properties of different art materials and will provide a rationale for the choice of materials utilized in this study.

Narrative Therapy: Theory and Techniques

Narrative therapy was developed in the early 1980s by Michael White and David Epston, and has since grown into widespread use (White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990). Narrative therapy holds that identity and views of the world are shaped by the stories internalized from life events. This approach focuses on the externalization of internalized narratives and the creation of preferred alternative stories (Freedman, 2014; Kerr & Hoshino, 2008; White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990). Therapists aim to help clients deconstruct unproductive narratives and reauthor

their identities through externalizing problems, using therapeutic questions, seeking unique outcomes and building alternative preferred stories. The following narrative therapy techniques have the potential for application in the comic making process: externalizing problems, deconstructing narratives and reauthoring preferred narratives.

Externalizing. Externalizing problems is the process of naming, characterizing and objectifying narratives or problems to separate them from the individual. The problem is therefore viewed as an entity that is distinct from the client's identity (Carlson, 1997; Freedman, 2014; Giling, 2016; Goodcase & Love, 2016; Kerr & Hoshino, 2008; Ramey et al., 2009; Ricks et al., 2014, White 2007; White & Epston, 1990). This separation of the problem from the client's identity creates space for the individual to consider new possibilities and solutions that may not have been previously visible. White (2007) outlined several steps that are involved in the process of externalizing. They are as follows (Ramey et al., 2009; White, 2007):

1. Naming, characterizing and defining the problem
2. Describing the effects of the problem on the individual's life
3. Soliciting an evaluation of the problem and its effect from the individual
4. Exploring the thinking behind this evaluation and its relation to other aspects of the individual's life

Externalizing problems helps the client divorce the problem they are experiencing from their own identity. By creating a visual product in the form of a comic, an individual can further separate themselves from their problem. This is so as a comic is a distinct, tangible entity. Through its creation, the individual literally externalizes the internalized narrative. By viewing the problem as separate from the self, the individual, with the support of the therapist, is in a better position to see how the problematic narrative originated and the factors that influenced it.

They can then take steps towards positive change. The process of deconstructing problematic narratives goes hand in hand with externalizing, and is described in the following section.

Deconstructing. Another technique used in narrative therapy that could be applied to comic making is the process of deconstructing narratives. Deconstruction is the process of exploring the effects, origins and actions of problematic narratives on an individual's life (Giling, 2016). This technique can be seen as a subsequent step to the technique of externalizing. Deconstructing problematic narratives reveals how they begun and were built up over time, and provides an opportunity to challenge the assumptions these stories carry (Carlson, 1997; Freedman, 2014; Giling, 2016; Kerr & Hoshino, 2008; Suddeath et al., 2017; Vromans & Schweitzer, 2009). In the process of deconstruction, individuals can also identify and challenge the impact of cultural discourse on the stories they have internalized (Suddeath et al., 2017). The belief and values held by one's culture or society are often accepted as truth, and lead to internalizing negative narratives about one's self. Deconstructing and locating the origin of problematic narratives helps individuals identify and challenge the cultural discourse that has shaped their stories (Suddeath et al.; Madigan, 2011). Deconstructing narratives also allows individuals to see beyond the problem and to other factors that could lead the preferred narratives (Giling, 2016). As such, the problem is further separated from the individual's identity. The process of making a comic literally deconstructs a narrative by dividing it into panels. McCloud observes that, "comic panels fracture both time and space" (*Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, McCloud, 1993, p. 67), separating a story into distinct moments. The process of making a comic lends itself naturally to the narrative therapy technique of deconstruction.

Reauthoring. A final technique that has the potential for use in comic making is the process of reauthoring, which is defined as telling a different, preferred story about oneself

(Carlson, 1997; Gilling 2016; Goodcase & Love, 2016; Kerr & Hoshino, 2008; Ricks et al., 2014; Suddeath et al., 2017). A preferred story is defined as one that encourages healthier functioning (Suddeathe et al., 2017). Michael White, one of the founders of narrative therapy, states that reauthoring involves addressing both the “landscape of action” and the “landscape of identity” (White, 2007, p.99). This is a concept that White expanded based on Jerome Bruner’s writings on the narrative metaphor (Bruner, 1986). According to Bruner’s original definitions, the landscape of action consists of the timeline of events that combine to create the plot and themes of the narrative. The landscape of identity, which Bruner originally termed the landscape of consciousness, consists of the thoughts and reflections the characters within the narrative have on the landscape of action. In adapting these concepts to the field of narrative therapy, White (2007) discussed how clients could create a landscape of action by assembling meaningful incidents in their life into a timeline that reflects a principle that is important to them (e.g., courage, justice, faith etc.). Comics can be useful in accomplishing this as clients can visually represent these events. This tangible timeline can help clients clearly organize meaningful events in their lives. By creating comics over multiple sessions, clients can build a visual landscape of action.

White also discusses how clients can explore their landscape of identity by reflecting on the events from their landscape of action. In using landscape of identity questions, the therapists invites clients to verbalize their thoughts about their identity based on the events they have experienced. Landscape of identity questions could potentially be employed in inviting clients to reflect on the comics they have made. Clients could also be invited to visually respond to landscape of identity questions by creating more comics or other forms of artwork. Comics may be effective in this as they can be used to create superheroes or alter egos that represent aspects of a client’s identity. In his article on the possible use of comics in art therapy, Mulholland

(2004) shared the therapeutic relief he experienced in creating comics to negotiate problems in his life. He created alter egos such as “Super Derf” and “The Fat-Man” in addition to representing himself in his comics. Mulholland (2004) states that through their comic characters, clients can express their desires and resolve conflicts. Creating comics in response to landscape of identity questions can help clients a preferred story or identity for themselves. It may also be less intimidating for clients to represent these goals or stories in a comic character, and may be a stepping-stone towards clients taking full ownership of this preferred narrative.

In addition to exploring the landscape of action and the landscape of identity, reauthoring also invites clients to include stories that may have been neglected or excluded from the dominant narratives of their lives (White, 2007). This often involves identifying unique outcomes and exceptions in which the problem did not take place or in which the individual dealt with the problem in a positive manner (Giling, 2016; Suddeath et al., 2017; White, 2007). These exceptions and unique outcomes can be explored, and used as material in building alternative narratives. Reauthoring can be accomplished through a range of therapeutic interventions, such as photography, movies, artwork, writing and music (Ricks et al., 2014). The reauthoring of preferred stories allows individuals to establish a vision for how they wish to live their lives. This process can facilitate positive change and the living out and witnessing of these preferred stories (Vromas & Schweitzer, 2009; White, 2007). Making comics is a process that can be done repeatedly over a period of time. An individual can choose to reframe and reauthor a previously told story by creating a new comic in which they can represent the desired direction of their future and the actions they hope to accomplish. As McCloud states, in comics, “both past and future are real and visible all around us” (*Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, McCloud,

1993, p. 104). Comics can be used to represent past experiences as well as future goals and hopes. Reauthoring can therefore be another technique that can be used in comic creation.

Narrative Therapy: Populations

Narrative therapy and its techniques have been shown to be effective in multiple contexts and with various populations. The section provides an overview of the different contexts and populations in which narrative therapy has been used. It provides evidence of the strength and versatility of a narrative therapy approach. Narrative therapy has been shown to be adaptable for clients of various ages including children (Gilling, 2016), adults (Goodcase & Love, 2017; Vromans & Schweitzer, 2009), couples, and families (Suddeath et al., 2017, Freedman, 2014; Freedman & Combs, 2004, 2008).

Narrative therapy has been shown to produce positive outcomes when used with children (Gilling, 2016). A study by Gilling (2016) showed how the use of narrative therapy provided a different understanding of what is typically labeled “problem behavior” in students. The use of narrative techniques facilitated reflection on the motivations behind students’ actions and expanded the conversation to include factors beyond the behavior itself. This opened up the opportunity for change in classroom practices in response to mental health and behavior. Narrative therapy has also been used effectively with adults in various contexts.

A study by Vromans and Schweitzer (2009) supported the use of narrative therapy for adults with major depressive disorder. The study found improvement in depressive symptoms, with a significant percentage of clients also exhibiting reliable improvement, movement to the functional population and clinically significant improvement after eight sessions of narrative therapy. The results of this study provide evidence for the effective use of narrative therapy with adults with major depressive disorder. Goodcase & Love (2016) have also proposed a narrative

therapy model for use with older adults (aged 65 and over). Their proposed model consists of three main phases. The first phase involves the individual telling their story, mapping influences and identifying unique outcomes. The second phase consists of recalling the story and thickening the plot of subjugated stories. The last phase involves exploring possible preferred narratives. This model aimed to support clients in moving towards integrity and away from despair (as described in Erikson's psychosocial theory). It should be noted that this model, while proposed, was not tested. However, its proposal reflects the possibility of adapting narrative therapy for older adults. The potential for using narrative therapy with older adults has also been seen through zine making (Combs, 2019; Houpt et al., 2016). Zines are self-published, non-commercial printed work. Houpt et al. (2016) demonstrated how creating zines and comics were used with residents of a nursing home to promote creativity and a sense of empowerment. Based on the article by Houpt et al. (2016), artist Alex Combs has worked with older adults to tell stories through comic and zine making workshops (Combs, 2019). These workshops generated positive responses from participants. The work by Houpt et al. (2016) and Combs (2019) show the potential of a narrative therapy approach with older adults. Their work will be explored in further detail under the section "Use of Comics in a Therapeutic Setting".

Narrative therapy has been shown to be effective in a family therapy context, and is known as narrative family therapy (Suddeath et al., 2017; Freedman, 2014; Freedman & Combs, 2008). One of the ways narrative family therapy has been adapted from narrative therapy is through the use of a witnessing structure (Freedman, 2014; Freedman & Combs, 2004, 2008). Using this structure, one family member tells a story while other members occupy a reflecting or witnessing position. Those in the witnessing position are then invited to contribute to the telling and meaning making of the story. Through this process the family reaches a deeper level of

understanding of each other's preferred narratives (Freedman, 2014; Freedman & Combs, 2004, 2008). Over the course of working with the family, questions can be used to externalize and deconstruct problematic stories. Research has shown that narrative therapy is successful in addressing multiple aspects of a family system, including working with blended families (Gold, 2016; Jones, 2004, Shalay & Brownlee, 2007), addressing adoption issues (Stokes & Poulsen, 2013), assisting families of adolescents who have come out as lesbian, gay or bisexual (Saltzburg, 2007), supporting couples impacted by infidelity (Duba et al., 2008), reducing parent-child conflicts (Besa, 1994), and supporting families experiencing homelessness (Fraenkel et al., 2009). As demonstrated by the current literature, narrative therapy is therefore a versatile approach that can be adapted to various contexts.

Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy

Narrative therapy and art therapy have been used in combination on multiple occasions, as seen in the following studies. There is a strong rationale for the combination of art therapy and narrative therapy. Art-making lends itself naturally to the narrative therapy approach as it enables clients to create tangible representations of internalized narratives and offers a means of building alternative narratives in a visual form. The articles referenced below discuss the benefits of a combined art therapy and narrative therapy framework and demonstrate how this has been used with various populations and with various mediums.

A combined narrative therapy and art therapy approach has led to positive outcomes when used with various populations experiencing specific traumas or difficulties. Bohanna et al. (2019) showed how a narrative therapy and creative arts approach had a positive impact on transition outcomes for an individual following the occurrence of a traumatic brain injury (TBI). In their study, an Aboriginal man who identified as an artist chose to create a painting illustrating

his transition after suffering a TBI due to a fall. The individual created two paintings and the research team produced a film about this process. The study concluded that the combination of a narrative and creative arts approach was beneficial for the individual and has potential as part of a culturally responsive TBI transitional rehabilitation program for Indigenous Australians. In a similar vein, Butera-Prinzi et al. (2014) incorporated art making into a narrative family therapy approach for families living with acquired brain injury. Four families with members who had suffered an acquired brain injury participated in this study. A narrative intervention called the *Tree of Life* was used, in which the children of the families drew a visual representation of their lives as trees. The parents were also invited to add to their child's tree with their permission. Participants had a positive response to this intervention and to their interactions with the other families within this group setting. In both these studies, a combined narrative therapy and art therapy framework was effective, providing evidence for the strength of this approach.

In addition to this, a narrative therapy and art therapy approach has shown to be effective with individuals suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from childhood sexual abuse (Becker, 2015). Over the course of 9 weeks, participants attended weekly group sessions that integrated art interventions with exposure, grounding and narrative therapy. Participants reported reduced PTSD symptoms after one week and a stable reduction of symptoms at a one-month follow-up. The positive outcomes of this study suggest that this integrated approach is beneficial. A narrative therapy and art therapy approach has also been utilized with individuals in addiction recovery (Conner, 2017). By using the technique of externalizing problems, participants were encouraged to see their addiction as separate from their identity. As part of this intervention, participants were asked to create a list of their current problems and were then asked to imagine what names these problems would have if they had an identity (e.g., "the

wave,” “monster” etc.). After participants had decided on a name, they were given time to draw their problem. Conner (2017) concluded that using this approach allowed participants to discuss their problematic narratives and to gain a sense of power over them. It also allowed them to recognize their own abilities to make choices, overturning the narrative surrounding addiction that typically conveys they have no control. Finally, Pienaar and Viseer (2012) explored how a combined expressive arts and narrative therapy approach was applied with six adolescents in South Africa who were living with HIV. Drawings were used to support the process of storytelling and communication between participants and the researcher. The results revealed how patient identity impacted the experiences of the adolescents and influenced their development of identity as a whole. These studies demonstrate the effectiveness of a narrative therapy and art therapy approach with various populations.

A narrative therapy and art therapy approach has also been used cross-culturally. Stock et al. (2012) utilized a narrative and drawing group intervention with parents and children in a remote Aboriginal community. In this study, the parent-child dyads were given a book in which they created stories and pictures over a period of 10 weeks. The positive responses from the participants’ of this study indicate the success of using a narrative and art therapy approach cross-culturally. As mentioned earlier, the study by Bohanna et al. (2019) also concluded that a narrative and creative arts approach had potential as a culturally responsive intervention with Indigenous Australians. The suitability of a narrative therapy and art therapy approach for cross-cultural application makes sense as narrative therapy prioritizes the experiences and narrative of the individual, which includes their unique cultural background. The use of art therapy also helps alleviate language or translation barriers that exist when communication is purely verbal. The art

product provides an alternative avenue for communication that can help bridge cultural differences between the client and therapist.

The flexibility of a narrative therapy and art therapy framework can also be seen in the wide variety of mediums used in this approach. This includes altered book making (Cobb & Sensen, 2010), basket weaving (Solas, 2015), textiles (Garlock, 2016), painting (Garwolińska, 2018), altar making (Bermúdez & Bermúdez, 2002) and relationship trees (Peterson & Goldberg, 2016). These different medium approaches are evidence of the easily adaptable nature of a narrative and art therapy framework and show how both aspects reinforce each other in the therapeutic process. Cobb & Sensen (2010) discuss altered book making as a form of art therapy using a narrative therapy framework, showing its effectiveness in a case study with a 27 year-old client. The pages in the altered book represent narratives in the client's life. This could be considered a form of sequential art, similar to comics. Other links to comics include the combination of art and writing in a number of narrative and art approaches. The literature on this is reviewed in the following section.

Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy: Combining Art and Writing

To date, to the best of the author's knowledge, there is only one unpublished master's thesis that used comic making as an intervention within a narrative therapy and art therapy framework (Khan, 2020). There are no formal guidelines for using comics as an intervention within art therapy and therapy as a whole. However, other mediums used in combining narrative therapy and art therapy have loose links to the medium of comics. Specifically, art and writing have been used in combination in multiple studies combining narrative therapy and art therapy. The following articles show how the dual mediums of art and writing enhance the process of externalizing narratives and building preferred stories. This is relevant to this study, as it will

explore whether comics result in a greater inclusion of writing as compared to a single image (e.g., comic narration or dialogue).

Multiple studies have shown how the inclusion of writing adds another dimension to the therapeutic process that can be beneficial to the maker. Keeling and Bermúdez (2006) used a combination of sculpture and journaling as an externalization exercise over a period of four weeks with 17 participants. Their results revealed that this helped participants express their feelings, raised their awareness of their abilities, helped externalize their problems, decreased symptoms and created a sense of empowerment. Keeling and Nielson (2005) showed that a similar process of art and writing using a narrative therapy framework was effective in a cross-cultural context with seven Asian Indian women. The approach was well received by participants and indicated the appropriateness of this intervention for this population. A study by Mizock et al. (2015) used a 10-week Narrative Photovoice Intervention with 16 participants with serious mental illness. This intervention combined photography and writing. This was well received by participants, with a high attendance rate and production of photovoice works. The results suggest such interventions have a positive impact on participants including empowerment, positive identity and community integration. Conner (2017) conducted a study where that facilitated the process of externalizing problems through art and writing. This took place within a group setting for substance use treatment. Art and writing with a narrative framework seems to be effective within a group setting, as demonstrated by these studies.

Harber (2011) also demonstrated the effectiveness of a combination of art and writing within a narrative framework when used in an individual setting. Harber (2011) reported about a case study of an adolescent male student transitioning from incarceration to a school setting. A combination of art and writing was used during this process, with image and text combined in

some pieces. The results indicate the successful use of this combination. Multiple studies have shown positive therapeutic outcomes of art and writing interventions using a narrative framework. The combination of art and writing is a natural characteristic of comics. However, only two studies have been conducted to date on comics as an art therapy tool (Haupt et al., 2016; Khan, 2020). This study hopes to contribute to the literature in this area.

Comics and their Unique Properties

This study proposes that comics have great potential for effective use within a combined art therapy and narrative therapy framework. As stated on page 2, in this study, comics were operationally defined as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/ or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (McCloud, 1993, p. 9). This definition was chosen as it gives clear and specific details as to the characteristics of a comic, but is not so narrow that it is unduly restrictive. It was taken from “Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art” by Scott McCloud, which is a well-respected text about the formal elements of comics. McCloud’s text has been widely referenced in articles and studies regarding the use of comics (Ashwal & Thomas, 2018; Castle, 2010; Cohn, 2014; Farinella, 2018; Green, 2010; Holmes, 2014; Hughes et al., 2011; Khan, 2020; Shwarz, 2002; Shwarz, 2006; Whiting, 2019; Williams, 2008).

In addition to providing a working definition of comics, McCloud’s (1993) text breaks down the different components and unique characteristics of comics. This study will explore how, and in what specific forms, these characteristics are represented in the comics produced by participants. The characteristics that McCloud discussed include:

1. Panel-to-panel transitions (McCloud, 1993)
 - a. Moment-to-moment
 - b. Action-to-action
 - c. Subject-to-subject
 - d. Scene-to-scene,
 - e. Aspect-to-aspect
 - f. Non-sequitur
2. Panel shapes to represent time (McCloud, 1993)
 - a. Lengthening panels to increase time
 - b. Shortening panels to decrease time
 - c. Borderless panels and bleeds to convey timelessness
3. Word and picture combinations: (McCloud, 1993)
 - a. Word specific combinations: pictures illustrate but do not significantly add to a largely complete text
 - b. Picture specific combinations: words do little more than add a soundtrack to a visually told sequence
 - c. Duo-specific panels: both words and pictures send essentially the same message
 - d. Additive: words amplify or elaborate on an image or vice versa
 - e. In parallel combinations: words and pictures seem to follow very different courses without intersecting
 - f. Montage: words are treated as integral parts of the picture

- g. Interdependent: words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone

This study analyzed participants' artworks for the characteristics listed above, and examined if common patterns were present. Examples could include the common use of specific kinds of picture-word combinations or panel transitions, or the use of a specific number or format of panels. In *Understanding Comics*, McCloud (1993) discusses how a random sampling of American comics shows that certain panel-to-panel transitions are more common than others (action-to-action, subject-to-subject and scene-to-scene). His review of European comic artists showed similar results. Interestingly, a review of Japanese comics shows a high percentage of aspect-to-aspect transitions. McCloud reasoned that this might be due to a difference between the cultures of the East and the West. He argued that Western culture is more goal-oriented, whereas the East has a "rich tradition of cyclical and labyrinthine works of art" (*Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, McCloud, 1993, p. 81). This, he suggests, may explain the difference in panel transitions between American/ European comics and Japanese comics. It will be interesting to note if any related patterns arise in this study. However, it is important to note the differences between the sample McCloud studied, i.e., comic books created by professional comic artists and numbering dozens of pages, and the sample that this study intends to examine, i.e., short comics created by individuals with varying levels of artistic experience. As such, no patterns may arise, and any that do will have to be verified with further research to have any validity.

The information gathered from this study could help guide future design for comic based interventions, for instance, in designing comic panel templates that individuals find easy to work with. As mentioned earlier, Khan (2020) is the only comic-based intervention that specifically used a narrative and art therapy framework. However, the use of comic consumption and

creation has been employed in settings such as the medical community (graphic medicine), schools (to encourage literacy, reading comprehension and personal narratives) and in various therapeutic settings (cognitive behavioral therapy, art therapy and others). These studies will be reviewed in the following sections and provide support for the use of comics within an art therapy and narrative therapy framework.

Graphic Medicine

The use of comics for medical and healthcare purposes has been termed “graphic medicine” (Graphic Medicine, 2021; Green & Myers, 2010). Graphic medicine has been used in facilitating patient care and education, in training and supporting medical staff, and in critiquing issues within the medical profession (Green & Myers, 2010; Glazer, 2015; Holmes, 2013; Bronwen, 2014; Martin et al., 2014). Graphic medicine has also been used as a form of health education for the general public to encourage healthier choices (Elks Drug Awareness Program, 2013; Montgomery et al., 2012) and to raise awareness about certain medical conditions (Cicero et al., 2020; el-Setouhy & Rio, 2003; Giuliano et al., 2020; Ingrand et al., 2004; Tekle-Haimanot, 2016). Since its inception, graphic medicine has gained increasing recognition within the medical field and among professionals. GraphicMedicine.org was founded in 2007 by Ian Williams, a physician and cartoonist from North Wales, and explores the relationship comics have with healthcare (Graphic Medicine International Collective, 2021). In 2019, the Graphic Medicine International Collective was created as a non-profit organization to promote the use of comics in the field of healthcare.

Patient Care. In graphic medicine, comics have been used as patient care in two main respects: in representing narratives about physical or mental health issues and in conveying educational content to patients about medical conditions (Ashwal & Thomas, 2018). Personal

memoir comics fall under the first category of representing narratives by individuals who have experienced physical or mental health issues. These comics, also known as graphic pathology, are made by individuals about their experiences with their conditions and their encounters in health care (Ashwal & Thomas, 2018). Examples cited by Ashwal & Thomas (2018) include *Our Cancer Year* by Harvey Pekar, Joyce Brabner and Frank Stack, as well as *Spot 12: Five Months in the Neonatal ICU* by Jenny Jaeckel. Holmes (2013) described the use of comics as a medium for narratives of disability and illness, particularly with regard to breast cancer narratives. Three examples she cited of graphic cancer narratives included *Mom's Cancer* by Brian Fies, *Cancer Made me a Shallower Person* by Miriam Engelberg, and *Cancer Vixen* by Marisa Acocella Marchetto. Holmes (2013) argued that comics can be used to make the invisible visible and to add a dimension to a field usually dictated by biomedicine.

Over the past year and a half, individuals have also been using comics to document their experiences of being diagnosed with COVID-19. Jason Chatfield (2021), a cartoonist for the New Yorker, made a comic he titled *COVID-19 Diary* about his experience of being infected with COVID-19. Doctor and cartoonist, Alex Thomas, also made a comic titled *My 12 Days of COVID*, recording his family's experience with COVID-19 after his son contracted it at pre-school (Booster Shot Comics, 2020). An India-based website, *The Quint*, published a comic drawn by Erum Gour (2020) based on the experience of Rithu Thakur, a COVID-19 patient. The comic, titled *When COVID-19 Stole my Sense of Smell and Taste*, explores anosmia, defined as the loss of taste or smell, one of the symptoms of COVID-19. In February 2021, a comic anthology titled *COVID Chronicles* was released (Boileau & Johnson, 2021). This anthology compiles over sixty short comics by multiple artists about the effects of the COVID-19

pandemic. These works show how comics can be used to document and convey the effects of physical illness in a powerful and effective way.

In addition to personal memoir comics about physical conditions, there are also many personal memoir comics about mental health conditions. An example of this is *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me* (Forney, 2012) by Ellen Forney about bipolar disorder. Through this comic, she shares her experience of this mood disorder: about receiving a diagnosis, therapy and her struggles with medication (Georgakopoulos, 2016; Forney, 2012). Another personal memoir comic about bipolar disorder is *Rx* by Rachel Lindsay (Lindsay, 2018), which conveys the symptoms of bipolar disorder she experienced and the challenges of navigating the US health care system (Lindsay, 2018; Williams, 2018). A personal memoir comic that deals with eating disorders is *Lighter Than my Shadow* by Katie Green that represents Green's experiences of traumatic sexual abuse, anorexia and recovery (Green, 2013; Lie, 2018). *Bitter Medicine* by brothers Clem Martini and Oliver Martini (2010) is a graphic memoir around mental illness, specifically around their family's 30-year history with schizophrenia. Clem Martini writes about their family's experience and the flaws of the Canadian health care system. His writing is accompanied by the drawings of his brother, Oliver Martini, who is diagnosed with schizophrenia (Martini & Martini, 2010; Fowles, 2013). Personal memoir comics are a powerful way of representing the narratives of individuals and communicating their experiences of certain conditions. Glazer (2015) discusses how representing narratives on medical conditions may cause patients to feel less alone and provide them with a greater voice in narrative medical accounts of both physical and mental health conditions.

The second category of graphic medicine as patient care is the use of comics to convey educational content to patients. Ashwal and Thomas (2018) argue that comics help patients

understand information to a greater extent than other patient education formats. This is so as the combination of words and images can increase health literacy. Ashwal and Thomas (2018) suggest that in some cases images can be used to represent a concept that would have required lengthy text explanations. One example of comics that convey educational content to patients is *Medikidz*, a series of comic books designed to help children understand illnesses and medical treatment. *Medikidz* has published over 60 titles and distributed more than 2.5 million copies (Bronwen, 2014). This series is a means of educating patients and their families about the illness they or their family members are experiencing. A study by Mendelson et al. (2017) used a *Medikidz* comic book on juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA) with children diagnosed with JIA. A pre- and post-questionnaire showed that participants' knowledge increased after reading the comic book. This study concluded that the *Medikidz* comic book on JIA was an effective educational tool for educating children diagnosed with JIA. Additionally, a qualitative study on a *Medikiz* books about chronic pain elicited positive responses from older adults suffering from chronic pain (Martin et al., 2014). The current research on graphic medicine reflects how comics can be used as a means of conveying important information and representing narratives. This strengthens the argument for the use of comics in a therapeutic setting.

Training and Support for Medical Staff. Within the graphic medicine community, comics have also been used as a means of both training and supporting medical staff. Maatman et al. (2019) conducted a study in which comics were used to train medical residents in patient safety. The study indicated an increase in participants' confidence in identifying and reporting safety topics after the comic book intervention. In addition, 90% of participants found the intervention enjoyable and 98% found it engaging. The study concluded that comics were effective in

improving residents' awareness and confidence surrounding patient safety and were received positively by residents.

In 2009, Michael Green implemented the study of comics for medical students in his bioethics course at Penn State University (Glazer, 2015). Green stated that comics were an effective way of teaching medical students about medical humanities and medical ethnics. In addition to training medical students and residents, comics have also been proposed as a means of helping this population process their experiences and emotions. Maatman et al. (2019) instructed medical trainees to draw "something stressful in medicine". Coders then analyzed participants' comics for emotional content. The most common final code was "overwhelmed", which was present in 34.8% of comics. Other common adjectives included "inadequate", "frustrated" and "helpless". The study concluded that the comic exercise allowed students to express their feelings of stress. It also stated that more research should be done on the use of graphic medicine in processing stress and the impact this could have on burnout.

In a similar vein, Whiting (2019) argued that comics could be combined naturally with multiple approaches to encourage reflection, and could be used effectively with medical students during their training. He proposed that using comics in reflection is a more effective approach than extended pieces of formal writing as it promotes creative thinking and allows practitioners to revisit memories through representing them as a comic. He also suggests that comics can encourage the development of empathic abilities in health care practitioners by reminding them of the patient's perspective. Czerwiec and Huang (2014) also discussed how "hospice comics" could be used to help practitioners develop empathy. In their article they reviewed four nonfiction comics about the dying and death of a parent. They state that comics reveal the complicated experience of this process and also serve as a critique of hospices. They concluded

that medical professionals might benefit from reading such comics as they have the potential to deepen their sense of empathy and shape their ideas of ethics.

Glazer (2015) examined how comics have brought to light multiple aspects of medical care from the perspectives of both patients and providers. She discussed how graphic medicine could critique the medical profession and show the mistakes that are made by medical staff. Raising such issues can generate inquiry among physicians and educators about how students are being trained and the pressure they are subject to. This may help bring about positive changes. These studies demonstrate how graphic medicine can be used not only in patient care, but also in training and supporting medical staff and in critiquing the medical profession. This research shows how comics can be used to reveal important issues, express difficult emotions and start conversations. Facilitating these conversations is important in other care settings as well. Non-profit leaders attended a museum exhibit related to their work providing care for older adult (Partridge, 2019). The exhibit featured a graphic memoir by Roz Chast about the aging process her parents went through (Chast, 2014), and helped spark conversations and increase empathy among the leadership team about their work with older adults. In her most recent book, Partridge also suggested the use of comics as self-reflection for those in the creative arts therapies (Partridge, 2021). The use of comics to facilitate reflection and empathy for staff in caring professions strengthens the rationale for their use as a therapeutic tool.

Health Education. Within the realm of graphic medicine, comics have also been employed frequently as a health education tool for the general public. According to the National Institute of Health, comic books and cartoons have been used in public health education outreach since the 1930s (Lyons, 2006). In 2009, the Public Health Advanced Practice Center of Seattle and King County released a comic book on pandemic flu funded by the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National County & City Health Officials (NACCHO). The comic book, titled “No Ordinary Flu”, was released in 19 languages and educated readers about the 1918 pandemic and practices readers could take to prepare for a future pandemic virus. Despite its release being in 2009, many of the recommendations provided in “No Ordinary Flu” can be applied to the current COVID-19 pandemic. A study by Hanson et al. (2017) tested the feasibility of using a comic in an emergency department setting to educate children and caregivers. This study generated a positive response from participants who indicated the comic was likeable, easy to read, and conveyed valuable information. At a 72-hour follow-up, 86% of caregivers would accurately recall all three teaching points. This study concluded that comics could be feasibly used as an educational tool in the Emergency Department. A study by Sridhar et al. (2019) assessed the use of four educational comics about contraceptive methods with young women at who received services from a college student health clinic. Four groups of 30 participants each viewed one of the four comics. A pretest/posttest survey was used to evaluate participants’ knowledge and results indicated a significant increase across all four groups. The study concluded that comics were an effective means of communicating information about contraceptive methods and should be further explored in other settings and with other populations. These studies show how comic can be used as an effective health educational tool to convey important information to the public.

Comics have been shown to be a useful health education tool for children and adolescents. They have been used to caution children and adolescents against the use of various substances and to promote healthier choices (Elks Drug Awareness Program, 2013; Montgomery et al., 2012), as well as to convey information about certain illnesses and medical conditions (Cicero et al., 2020; el-Setouhy & Rio, 2003; Giuliano et al., 2020; Ingrand et al., 2004; Tekle-

Haimanot, 2016). In 2013, the Elks Drug Awareness Program and Marvel Entertainment collaborated to create the *Hard Choices* comic book, which educated readers about underage drinking. In 2013, more than 600, 000 copies were distributed to elementary and middle schools. Additionally, a study by Montgomery et al. (2012) designed a program titled the Native Comic Book Project (NCBP). The NCBP trained Native youth leaders to create comic books that encourage healthy choices. The population involved in this study consisted of American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) youth. This group has been found to use commercial tobacco at a higher frequency compared to youth from other racial and ethnic groups due to a confluence of factors such as access to tobacco, stressors and influences from other individuals. To address this issue, Native People for Cancer Control designed the NCBP, which involved six youths aged 12 to 15. This study found that participants showed increased awareness of Native stories and of the impact of tobacco. Participants also exhibited more confidence in creating comics and responded positively to the activities. These studies demonstrate the effectiveness of comics in educating children and adolescents and point towards the strength of comics as a communication tool.

In addition to educating children and adolescents about the impact of substance use, comics have also been used to communicate important information about certain medical conditions. For instance, el-Setouhy & Rio (2003) designed a comic book to inform Egyptian school children about lymphatic filariasis (LF), a disease caused by parasitic worms. This comic book was part of a World Health Organization (WHO) global program for the elimination of this disease by 2020. The results indicated that the comic book significantly decreased the fear children had of LF, positively impacted their attitudes towards individuals with LF and lowered the number of participants who said they would avoid an individual with LF. The comic book also increased participants' knowledge of the prevention and treatment of LF. This study

concluded that comic books are an effective method of decreasing stigma and sharing knowledge about disease prevention and treatment. Another example of comics as a health education tool is a study conducted by Ingrand et al. (2004) that used an information campaign utilizing a comic strip to educate adolescents in France about hepatitis C. This study used a pre and post-intervention questionnaire to assess students' knowledge of hepatitis C. Results indicated that participants' knowledge of hepatitis C improved significantly after the campaign, and that the improvement was significantly greater for students who indicated they had read the comic strip than those who had not.

Comic book-based interventions have also been used to educate students about epilepsy. Tekle-Haimanot et al. (2016) conducted a study with high school student in Ethiopia using a comic book about epilepsy. They found that students could absorb a large amount of information from the comic book and that it changed misconceptions about epilepsy. The comic book was approved as useful educational material by 90% of health professionals interviewed by the authors. Cicero et al. (2020) conducted a similar study using a comic-based intervention to educate high school students in Bolivia about epilepsy. Like Tekle-Haimanot et al. (2016), Cicero et al. (2020) found a significant improvement in the knowledge and attitudes about epilepsy in participants. Research has provided strong evidence for the use of comics as a health education tool in conveying important information about medical conditions. This shows how comics have great potential as a communication tool.

Use of Comics in the Classroom

The classroom is another setting in which comics have been used. Multiple articles have been published regarding to use of comics within the school setting to promote literacy for students. The rationale for using comics in curriculum includes high student interest,

development of critical thinking, accessible vocabulary and opportunity for meaningful discussions of visual and literary devices (Schwarz, 2006; Williams, 2008).

A study conducted with 60 elementary school teachers showed a willingness to use graphic novels in the classroom, but also noted the presence of obstacles such as a lack of instructional models, lack of access and low comfort level with the genre. To remedy these problems, guidelines have been suggested for the selection of graphic novels for inclusion in classroom curriculum. Griffith (2010) provided educators with various criteria for evaluating graphic novel based on formats, illustrations and genre. Griffith (2010) also provided a guide for evaluating age-appropriateness and readability of graphic novels, using tools that analyze text complexity. Schwarz (2006) also offered suggestions for graphic novels that can be included in curriculum and possible classroom strategies. The inclusion of comics in the classroom is a relatively recent but growing trend. Its power as a teaching and communicative tool is gaining definite recognition.

Research has also begun exploring the potential benefits of having students create comics in addition to consuming them. Hughes et al. (2011) conducted a case study of 12 students ages 15 to 17 in Toronto. Over six weeks, participants were part of a program that included graphic novels as part of its curriculum. This program concluded with students creating their own sequential art panels illustrating events in their own lives. A qualitative analysis found that participants displayed increased motivation and engagement, personal growth, and the development of multimodal literacy skills. The authors concluded that reading and creating comics was an effective teaching method that should be encouraged.

Comic making has also been used with elementary school students, as seen in the article by Chase et al. (2014). The authors designed a series of lessons teaching a class of grade 2 students about the different components of comics. After completing the activities, students then created their own comics. The authors concluded that this was an effective tool in teaching young children sequencing, a key element for literacy development. The current literature provides evidence of the benefits of comic consumption and creation for children and adolescents, particularly within a school setting. This is important as it demonstrates how comics are a powerful medium for communicating thoughts and ideas. The potential comics have should be explored and utilized within therapeutic settings.

The Graphic Narrative

The graphic narrative intervention created by Tinnin and Gantt (2007) could be viewed as a possible precursor to comics as a therapeutic intervention. The graphic narrative is used in trauma processing and consists of at least eight drawings created by the client using the structure of the Instinctual Trauma Response (ITR) (Rubin, 2016; Tinnin & Gantt, 2007, Tinnin & Gantt, 2014). These drawings are made on separate pieces of paper and would likely not be viewed as a comic in the traditional sense of the word as they are not depicted as panels on a page. However, they are most definitely sequential art, and fit into McCloud's definition of a comic as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/ or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (McCloud, 1993, p. 9).

The graphic narrative is generally centered on a single event. A basic graphic narrative consists of eight drawings: a "Before" and "After" picture, along with six drawings between them that portray each stage of the ITR: a startle, an attempt to fight or flee, a freeze, an altered state of consciousness, automatic obedience and efforts at self repair (Rubin, 2016; Tinnin &

Gantt, 2007, Tinnin & Gantt, 2014). The drawings should also include the individual's thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations, although a separate drawing can be used to depict the response of different body parts. Additional drawings can also be included when appropriate, such as representing a transition between geographic locations that took place during the trauma. The reason why drawings are made on separate pieces of paper is because events are often depicted out of sequence. Since the drawings are on separate papers, the therapist can rearrange the pictures in chronological order and assess if any more drawings are needed to make sense of the narrative. A graphic narrative is typically completed within one to three individual or group sessions (Rubin, 2016; Tinnin & Gantt, 2007, Tinnin & Gantt, 2014).

The graphic narrative concludes with the therapist re-telling the story represented in the graphic narrative. This retelling takes place after the therapist reviews the drawings, their order, and the details of the event to ensure accuracy. At the end of the re-telling, the therapist should intentionally bring the narrative to a clearly established end. Ideally, at least one other individual should witness the representation. This process is usually recorded digitally so a copy is available if the client chooses to review it. This recording and the art are handed over to the client who takes ownership of it. They can choose to share it with a family member or destroy it (Rubin, 2016; Tinnin & Gantt, 2007, Tinnin & Gantt, 2014). The graphic narrative shows how sequential art can be used to deconstruct an event, elicit a narrative from it and hence help the client process what they have experienced. The graphic narrative can be considered a possible precursor to the use of comics in a therapeutic setting, as it demonstrates the effectiveness of sequential art in processing an event. Additionally, there are a number of articles that have argued for the use of comics in a therapeutic setting, and some studies that have used comics as interventions. These articles are explored in the following section.

Use of Comics in a Therapeutic Setting

A number of articles have argued for the use of comics in a therapeutic setting to process life experiences and stressful situations. There is a strong rationale for the use of comics due to their ability to elicit narratives as well as most individuals' familiarity with the medium. The following articles provide support for exploring the use of comics in art therapy. Williams (2008) explores the use of the graphic memoir to explore psychological pain and suffering. He proposes that comics are "a powerful medium with which to convey the subjective self", as "empathetic bonds are created between the artist and the reader" (Williams, 2008, p2).

Mulholland (2004) argued for the use of comics in art therapy as a form of healing. He wrote from his personal experience of therapeutic relief from creating comics and also emphasized how society has begun to recognize comic making as a therapeutic outlet. He discussed how comic creation allows for "expression of the self in terms of body image, verbal expression, physical action and emotion" (Mulholland, 2004, p43). He also described how comics provide a safe outlet of expression for individuals as it allows them full control of the characters and narratives they are depicting. He pointed out how comics can be a useful due to most individual's familiarity with the medium, especially children. Shwed (2016) proposed a similar argument. She stated that the versatility and flexibility of sequential art make it useful tool in art therapy and suggested ways in which it can be used by licensed therapist in a clinical setting. These articles support the use of comics in a therapeutic setting and reflect the unique benefits that comics can bring to the therapeutic process.

In addition to above articles that provide a rationale for the use of comics in a therapeutic setting, a number of studies have put these thoughts into action by actively using comics as therapeutic interventions. The following articles demonstrate how comics have been used as

interventions and have yielded positive outcomes, thus supporting the use of comics in therapy. Malka (2018) used arts as a means of communication during therapy with a 10-year-old girl who had been exposed to intimate partner violence. During this process the girl used comics to open up about the violence in her family. The comics reflected how she was coping with the aggression she had experienced. This study reflected how comics were used to elicit a narrative in the case of this individual. Fernandez and Lina (2020) also explored the use of comics as part of cognitive behavioral interventions. Their study involved a 14-year-old boy who experienced test anxiety. Over the course of five sessions, the participant created comic strips and discussed them with his therapists. The discussions then formed the basis for subsequent comic strips. The authors concluded that comic strips are a useful mechanism for cognitive behavioral therapy goals as they allow individuals to externalize mental processes, emotions and behaviors. Comics also broke up the cognitions and behaviors of the individual, allowing the individual to identify how dysfunctional cognitions arise. The interconnectedness of the panels also allows the individual to understand associations, cause and effect, and change. Another benefit this study observed was that the comic strip allowed the participant to view the problem as less overwhelming, increasing his capacity to manage thoughts, emotions and behavior. Both these studies show the benefits of comics in eliciting a narrative (Malka, 2018), externalizing internal processes, identifying dysfunctional cognitions and increasing one's mental and emotional capacity (Fernandez & Lina, 2020).

Additionally, two studies have explored the use of comics within an art therapy framework. Hout et al. (2016) demonstrated how creating zines and comics were used with residents of a nursing home to promote creativity and a sense of empowerment. In this study, the authors explore the effects of a program called "Write for You", in which the creation of zines

encourage social action and culture change. The results of this study indicated that this program led to increased connection and supported creative development in community members by allowing them an outlet to express their stories. Inspired by the study by Houpt et al. (2016), artist Alex Combs (2019) held zine and comic making workshops with a group of senior residents in an assisted living center. Combs' experience was featured on the Graphic Medicine website, where he shared that residents responded positively to the workshops. One resident said she felt an increased sense of community, while another said the activities helped her "get a more solid hold on her thoughts" (Combs, 2019). The artwork and writing made by the residents and Combs was collected into an "Elder-zine" titled *The Flowing of Old Age*. Combs also made a zine titled *Mind Massage: An All-In-One Workshop for Art Writing, Comics and Storytelling*, containing his worksheets and workshop activities. This is available for others who want to conduct similar workshops.

Another example of the use of comics in art therapy is a thesis by Khan (2020), which involved an eight-week online study with three Pakistani female adolescents using sequential art interventions. A narrative therapy approach to digital storytelling with comics was used in this study. The results indicated that such an approach benefited the mental well being of adolescents in Karachi. This intervention allowed participants to engage in creative expression and convey their unique stories. It encouraged emotional regulation, self-awareness and improved their mental well-being. This study reflected the benefits of using comics within an art therapy and narrative therapy framework. Based on the workshops by Combs (2019) and the studies by Houpt et al. (2016) and Khan (2020), comics can be integrated well into art therapy.

The above studies demonstrate how comics can be used effectively in therapeutic settings. This work supports the use of comics within a combined art therapy and narrative

therapy approach. However, only two studies to date have used comics within the field of art therapy (Haupt et al., 2016; Khan, 2020), and only one (Khan, 2020) used comics within both an art therapy and narrative therapy framework. The current study addresses a gap in research regarding the use of comics in art therapy.

Art Materials

The Expressive Therapies Continuum organizes art materials on a scale that ranges from fluid to resistive. Resistive or structured materials such as color pencils reinforce structure, allow the individual greater control and are believed to support cognitive processes (Hyland-Moon, 2009). In contrast, fluid or unstructured materials are messier and encourage spontaneity or playfulness (e.g., watercolor). The materials that participants will be instructed to use in this study are color pencils and markers, which lie towards the resistive end of the resistive to fluid continuum of art materials (Green & Drewes, 2014; Hyland-Moon, 2009; Walsh, 2013). They were more suited to the purposes of this study as they allowed participants a greater degree of control and structure. While comics have been made using a variety of mediums, the most common representation of comics have typically been made using resistive materials such as pen and ink. The use of resistive materials in this study is therefore consistent with materials that have traditionally been used to create comics.

Color pencils and markers also provided a variety of color choices to the participant. Historically, comics have adopted both a black and white as well as a color format. While they are often depicted in black and white as in material such as newspapers, since the late 70s more comics in color have begun appearing (McCloud, 1993). When comics have been used as interventions or in a therapeutic capacity they have often been drawn in black and white or with minimal color (Fernandez & Lina, 2020; Khan, 2020; Malka, 2019; McMullin et al., 2020;

Whiting, 2019). The lack of color could be due to the greater volume of images produced when drawing comic panels, as coloring all the panels in may take considerable effort and time.

Providing participants with materials that have a variety of color will allow them to choose whether or not to use color in the single image and comic format. This provides an opportunity to study if there is a difference between the two formats in terms of color (e.g., if participants use less or no color in the comic format but use more color in the single image).

Conclusion

Research has demonstrated the effectiveness and versatility of a narrative therapy approach. This review discussed the theory of narrative therapy and the techniques that have been used in its application. The different populations and settings in which narrative therapy has been used were also covered. Three specific narrative therapy techniques that have potential for application to comic making were reviewed: externalizing, deconstructing and reauthoring. These techniques were used to formulate survey questions for participants to evaluate their experience of the single image and comic formats. The current literature also demonstrated how a combined narrative therapy and art therapy framework is effective when applied in various contexts and with different populations. Art and writing in particular has been used successfully. This combination bears loose links to the comic medium, which often combines image and words. In addition to comparing the single image format to the comic format, this study will also examine whether the comic format results in increased text inclusion, which may be a unique benefit of comic making.

Research cited in this review also demonstrated how consuming and creating comics can be an effective learning tool, a means for conveying important information, a source of creative development and a way of representing narratives. Research provides a strong rationale for the

use of comics in art therapy as a tool for communication and expression, and has shown its effectiveness when used as an intervention. This provides a rationale for this study to explore the currently untapped potential as a tool within an art therapy and narrative therapy framework. Materials on the resistive end of the Expressive Therapies Continuum seem to be suitable for creating comics. Providing participants with materials that have various color options will allow analysis of any differences in color use between the comic and single image formats. This study will also examine what other unique visual characteristics may arise in the comic format based on those listed in *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (McCloud, 1993).

Chapter 3: Methodology

The primary research question of this study explored how making a comic compares to making a single image in processing a past event. Specifically, this study compared the ability of the two formats to elicit a narrative from a past problem or challenge. A mixed methods approach was used to address this. A survey gathering quantitative data and a verbal interview collecting qualitative data assessed how participants viewed the two experiences of making a comic and making a single image. An arts-based approach was used to address the secondary research question of how the representation of an event differs from a single image compared to a comic. Participants' artwork was documented and analyzed for differences between the two formats and for any unique characteristics the comic format evoked.

Participants

Participants in this study were normally functioning adults. Normally functioning adults were chosen for this study to establish a baseline of individual's responses to making a single image versus making a comic. An adult was defined using the American Psychological Association's (APA) Dictionary of Psychology: "A person who has reached the legal age of maturity. Although it may vary across jurisdictions, an individual 18 years of age is typically considered an adult" (American Psychological Association, 2020). The definition of "normally functioning" was defined using the APA's Dictionary of Psychology's of "normal": "relating to what is considered standard, average, typical, or healthy... behavior that conforms to a culturally accepted norm, especially as an indication that a person is mentally healthy and does not have a psychological disorder" (American Psychological Association, 2020). This specific population was chosen because they are highly accessible due to their ability to provide informed consent

independently without requiring other's approval. Working with this specific population also minimized risk, as they are not as vulnerable as other populations such as children or the elderly.

Participants were identified via convenience sampling, with a target sample size of 15 to 20 participants. Recruitment methods included social media posts (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, etc.), personal connections, flyers, community networks (e.g., Next Door) and publicity within the art therapy community. The flyer used for recruitment is attached under Appendix A. Interviews with participants were conducted over Zoom and took approximately one hour. This process involved two art activities, an online survey via Google forms and a verbal interview. Using a virtual format increased accessibility, as interviews were not limited to individuals within a certain geographic range. This method also reduced the risks associated with the current COVID-19 pandemic. Meeting virtually guaranteed the safety of both participants and the researcher alike. This study had relatively low risks, with the main risk being potential negative emotions in recalling a past problem or challenge. Possible benefits included the therapeutic benefits associated with art making and insights participants had into their past experiences. Participants were fully informed of the risks, benefits and the voluntary nature of participation through the informed consent. The informed consent was signed and received via email from each participant before the interviews took place. The researcher also verbally reiterated the terms of the informed consent at the beginning of the interview to ensure participants' understanding. To preserve their confidentiality, the participants in this study will be identified by the letter "P", followed by a number reflecting the order in which they were contacted.

Variables

The primary research question of this study explored how depicting an event as a single image compares to depicting it as a comic with regard to processing an event. The independent

variable of this study was art making with two conditions: making a single image and making a comic. The first condition of making a single image was easily defined as using art materials to create a single image on a piece of paper. With regard to the second condition of making a comic, for the purposes of this study, a “comic” was operationally defined as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/ or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (McCloud, 1993, p. 9). Refer to Chapter 2, page 19 for an explanation as to why this definition was chosen.

The dependent variable measured was the ability of the comic and single image formats to help participants process a past event. The aspect of event processing examined in this study was the ability of the single image and the comic formats to elicit a narrative from a past problem or challenge. A problem or challenge was chosen as the prompt because narrative therapy often focused on externalizing and deconstructing problematic narratives. The dependent variable was measured using both a quantitative survey and was further substantiated using qualitative data from verbal interviews with participants. Criteria for measuring this dependent variable were determined using the existing literature on narrative therapy. Three narrative therapy techniques were used to formulate questions for the quantitative survey: externalizing, deconstructing and reauthoring. Participants used this survey to score how effective the two formats were in eliciting a narrative from the past event. This data was analyzed for differences between the two formats and for statistical significance. A verbal interview then explored participants’ experience of the two formats and their general impressions of comics in further detail. This qualitative data was analyzed for themes with the assistance of interraters. Evaluating these components will determine how effective each format (single image and comic) was in eliciting a narrative from a

past problem or challenge. The process of how the survey and interview questions were formulated will be elaborated on in the sections regarding data collection.

The second dependent variable of this study related to the visual characteristics of the comic and the single image formats, and how they differed from each other. This was measured in response to the secondary research question of how the representation of an event differs from a single image compared to a comic. This was evaluated by analyzing participants' artwork for visual characteristics and patterns such as the inclusion of text and the representation of time and movement. The artwork was also analyzed for unique characteristics that the comic format evokes as listed in Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993). A team of six peer interraters were recruited to assist in the analysis of participants' artwork.

Interview

Potential participants expressed interest in participating in this study by contacting the researcher via phone or at an email address created for the purposes of this study:

comics.singleimage@gmail.com. This email address was used solely for the purposes of this study: for contacting participants, in creating the Google Forms survey that participants completed and for receiving documentation of participants' artwork. At the close of this study, data stored on this account will be transferred to an encrypted folder on a password-protected laptop. The email account will then be deleted. Data collected from this study will be kept for a period of seven years.

The researcher used this email address to send and receive the informed consent document from participants, and to schedule interview timings with participants. The interviews took place virtually over Zoom. Once the informed consent document was completed and

participants' eligibility was confirmed, the researcher then scheduled an interview time with participants. The informed consent document is attached under Appendix B. At the start of the interview, the informed consent was reviewed verbally with the participant to ensure their understanding of its terms. The interview was recorded using Zoom's recording feature. Permission to record the interview was included in the informed consent and participants' permission was requested once again at the start of the interview. Once the informed consent and permission to record the interview had been reviewed, the researcher introduced herself to the participant, described the purposes of the study, and gave a summary of the activities the interview entailed. These included two art activities, a Google Forms survey, a verbal interview and a debriefing. Before the art activities were administered, the researcher collected some basic demographic information from participants. This included asking participants of the following: their age, the gender they identify with and their cultural or ethnic identity. This demographic information was used in evaluating the kinds of comics that participants were familiar with to determine if there trends were present between the comics participants consumed and the comics they produced. The researcher recorded participants' demographic information at the top of the verbal interview form, which is attached under Appendix D.

Art Activities

Instructions. The researcher instructed participants on two art activities: making a single image and making a comic based on a past challenge or problem they experienced. The order in which the single image and comic activities were administered was randomly assigned based on participants' ID number. This was done to avoid order becoming a confounding variable. This was done to avoid potential bias. If the activities were given in the same order in every session, participants would have processed the event once before engaging in the second activity,

potentially biasing the results in favor of the second activity. Randomizing the order of the activities was intended to guard against this.

In administering the first activity, the researcher instructed the participants as follows: “Think of a challenge or problem you have experienced. This need not be a traumatic or life-altering event. When you have thought of the challenge or problem, please let me know you are ready.” When the participants indicated that they were ready, the researcher then gave the following instruction: “Using one of the sheets of blank paper, please represent the problem or challenge you faced as a single image (or comic, depending on the order). You will have 15 minutes for this activity. I will let you know when 10 minutes have passed. If you finish the drawing before the 15 minutes, let me know and we can move onto the next step.” When the participant finished, the researcher requested for them to hold the image up to the camera. The researcher then took a screenshot of this first drawing for records purposes and to compare it to the final documentation that participants would eventually submit. The researcher also asked the participant, “Can you tell me about this drawing?” to evoke information from the participant about what they were representing.

Next, the researcher administered the second art activity. The researcher gave the following instruction: “Using your second sheet of blank paper, please represent the same problem or challenge you faced as a comic (or single image, depending on the order). You will have 15 minutes for this activity. I will let you know when 10 minutes have passed. If you finish the drawing before the 15 minutes, let me know and we can move onto the next step.” The administration of the comic activity had one additional step than the single image activity, in which the researcher showed examples of comic templates that participants could use to give them some inspiration. These templates are free templates from printablepaper.net (Savetz

Publishing, 2021) and are listed under Appendix C. The researcher stated: “Here are examples of comic templates to give you some inspiration. You can use any format of panels you want with at least two or more panels.” When the participant has finished the second activity, the researcher requested that they hold the image up to the camera. The researcher then took a screenshot of this second drawing for records purposes and to compare it to the final documentation that participants would eventually submit. The researcher also asked the participant, “Can you tell me about this drawing?” to evoke information from the participant about what they were representing. This concluded the two art activities. The researcher then administered the Google Forms survey. During the debriefing participants were asked to take pictures of both their drawings as documentation and send them to the email address comics.singleimage@gmail.com.

Rationale for given prompt. For the art activities conducted in this study, participants were prompted to think of and represent a problem or challenge they experienced. This prompt posed the risk of evoking negative feelings or thoughts associated with this problem or challenge. To avoid evoking severe emotional or mental stress associated with traumatic events, the researcher made clear that this problem did not have to be a life-altering or traumatic event. The reason that the prompt of a problem or challenge was chosen as compared to a neutral event is because narrative therapy techniques such as externalizing, deconstructing and reauthoring are typically applied to problems or problematic narratives a client is experiencing (Goodcase & Love, 2016; Kerr & Hoshino, 2008; Ramey et al., 2009; Ricks et al., 2014).

Materials. The materials used in this study included two sheets of blank 8.5”x11” paper and color pencils or markers, insofar as they were available to participants. If these were unavailable, participants could request that the researcher send them the materials. Participants also needed access to a device with a stable Internet connection for the Zoom call. Color pencils

and markers lie towards the resistive end of the Expressive Therapies Continuum, which ranges from fluid to resistive (Green & Drewes, 2014; Hyland-Moon, 2009; Walsh, 2013). Resistive or structured materials such as color pencils reinforce structure, allow the individual greater control and are believed to support cognitive processes (Hyland-Moon, 2009). Resistive materials should have allowed participants more control and should have led to higher focus on the content of the drawing rather than the nature of the medium. Because resistive materials are generally easier to control, they were a suitable choice for individuals who did not have much art experience.

Additionally, color pencils and markers are typically cheaper and easier to access than more specialized materials (e.g., paint, graphite etc.). Since participants were completing the art activities from their places of residence, materials were designed to be both accessible and inexpensive. Participants should have been able to purchase these materials from a grocery store, supermarket or stationary shop. Color pencils and markers also provided participants with a variety of color choices. The use of color in the two formats is a topic of interest in this study. When comics have been used as interventions or in a therapeutic capacity they have often been drawn in black and white or with minimal color (Fernandez & Lina, 2020; Khan, 2020; Malka, 2019; McMullin et al., 2020; Whiting, 2019). The lack of color may be due to the greater volume of images produced when drawing comics, as coloring all the panels may take considerable effort and time. Having asked participants to use materials that have a variety of color allowed them to choose how much color to use in the single image and comic formats. This provided an opportunity to study if there was a difference between the two formats in terms of color.

Data Collection: Survey

Following the art activities, the participants took a short survey via Google Forms that compared their attitudes towards the two different art activities. The survey used a 5-point Likert

scale that asked participants to rank the comic making activity and the single image activity for their effectiveness in eliciting a narrative from the past problem. Based on the current literature on narrative therapy, the following criteria were chosen evaluate the effectiveness of the comic and single image format in eliciting a narrative:

1. **Externalizing the event or problem:** Externalizing is the process of naming, characterizing and objectifying narrative/ problems to separate them from the individual (Carlson, 1997; Freedman, 2014; Giling, 2016; Goodcase & Love, 2016; Kerr & Hoshino, 2008; Ramey et al., 2009; Ricks et al., 2014; White, 2007).
2. **Deconstructing the narrative.** Deconstruction is the process of exploring the effects, origins and actions of problematic narratives on an individual's life (Carlson, 1997; Freedman, 2014; Giling, 2016; Kerr & Hoshino, 2008; Suddeath et al., 2017; Vromans & Schweitzer, 2009; White, 2007). Deconstruction can be seen as a subsequent step to externalizing.
3. **Reauthoring alternative preferred narratives:** Reauthoring is the process of telling a different, preferred story about oneself (Carlson, 1997; Giling 2016; Goodcase & Love, 2016; Kerr & Hoshino, 2008; Ricks et al., 2014; Suddeath et al., 2017; White, 2007).

In referencing these three narrative therapy techniques, the following survey questions in Table 3.1 were formulated. The goal of these questions was to determine how effective the single image and the comic formats were in helping participants elicit a narrative from a past problem or challenge they experienced, with a higher score indicating a higher level of effectiveness. The survey presented 18 statements and participants were instructed to respond to these statements “on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “strongly agree” and 5 being “strongly disagree”. Table 3.1

demonstrates which technique each statement is meant to evaluate. The Google Survey form that participants completed is attached under Appendix D.

Table 3.1
Survey Questions

No.	Technique	Question
1	Externalizing	The single image was effective in representing the overall experience of the challenge I faced.
2	Externalizing	The comic was effective in representing the overall experience of the challenge I faced.
3	Externalizing	The comic was able to accurately capture the emotions and thoughts I experienced about this problem.
4	Externalizing	The single image was able to accurately capture the emotions and thoughts I experienced about this problem.
5	Externalizing	The single image was effective in representing the problem as separate from my identity.
6	Externalizing	The comic was effective in representing the problem as separate from my identity.
7	Deconstructing	The comic was effective in representing the timeline of the challenge I faced.

No.	Technique	Question
8	Deconstructing	The single image was effective in representing the timeline of the challenge I faced.
9	Deconstructing	The single image was effective in representing the actions taken by the people involved in the event.
10	Deconstructing	The comic was effective in representing the actions taken by the people involved in the event.
11	Deconstructing	The comic was effective in showing the impact this problem had on my life.
12	Deconstructing	The single image was effective in showing the impact this problem had on my life.
13	Deconstructing	The single image was effective in showing how this problem originated.
14	Deconstructing	The comic was effective in showing how this problem originated.
15	Reauthoring	I would be willing to talk about how the comic relates to other events in my life.
16	Reauthoring	I would be willing to talk about how the single image relates to other events in my life.

No.	Technique	Question
17	Reauthoring	I would be willing to create another single image as a follow up to this activity.
18	Reauthoring	I would be willing to create another comic as a follow up to this activity.

Data Collection: Verbal Interview

The survey was followed by a 10-15 minute verbal interview discussing participants' experience of the two formats and their general impressions of comics. The interview was recorded with participants' permission using Zoom's recording feature. The interview questions explored two subjects: a) participants' experience of the two different formats and b) their general impressions of comics.

Mulholland (2011) speculated that comics are an effective medium in art therapy, particularly for children, as it is familiar to individuals. This interview helped determine if that is the case by assessing participants' familiarity with comics. The interview also provided insights into participants' experience of the two processes, which are used to substantiate their responses to the survey. The questions developed for this verbal interview can be seen in Table 3.2, along with the area each question is meant to evaluate. The question sheet the researcher referred to and used for note taking is attached under Appendix E.

Table 3.2

Verbal Interview Questions

No.	Area of Evaluation	Question
1	Experience of the art activities	Which format did you prefer – the comic or the single image? Why?
2	Experience of the art activities	What differences did you find between the two formats?
3	Experience of the art activities	Which activity was more difficult to complete? Why?
4	Experience of the art activities	If you could use one word or phrase each to describe making the single image and making the comic what would it be and why?
5	Experience of the art activities	What are your thoughts on making comics as part of therapy?
6	General impressions of comics	How familiar are you with comics?
7	General impressions of comics	How do you feel about reading comics?
8	General impressions of comics	What comics have you read/ do you know of?

Debriefing

Participants received a debriefing at the end of the interview. This included a box breathing exercise facilitated using a Youtube video. This video was titled: “Try box breathing with this short animation” (ABC Everyday, 2020) and led participants in a box breathing exercise meant to reduce stress. Box breathing is a relaxation technique that used to facilitate stress management (Norelli et al., 2018). Box breathing involves four steps that are repeated as a cycle: 1) Breathe in through the nose for a count of four; 2) Hold your breath for a count of four; 3) Breathe out for a count of four; 4) Hold your breath for a count of four (Norelli et al., 2018). It is titled “box breathing” as participants are meant to visualize a box with four equal sides as they perform this exercise. Box breathing is a method that is taught to Navy SEALs to help them calm their mind and body under stress. It can also be used by most individuals without special training and has been promoted as an evidence-informed practice for mental well being during the COVID-19 pandemic (Aten et al., 2020). This breathing exercise was chosen to help relieve any stress or tension participants may have felt from recalling a past problem or challenge. It was a simple exercise that participants were able to follow with little difficulty. As part of the debriefing the researcher also provided participants with a list of mental health resources they could access if they need additional support after the interview. A list of resources for participants in Singapore and a list of resources for participants in the United States were both prepared. When it was discovered that a participant was from Canada and temporarily in France, additional resources were created and provided to this participant. These lists are attached under Appendix G.

During the debriefing, participants were also asked to document their artwork after the interview by taking photos of them and sending them to the email address created for this study

(comics.singleimage@gmail.com). Participants were reminded that only the researcher has access to this account and that it is used solely for the purposes of this study. They were also reminded that at the close of this study the information stored on this account will be transferred to an encrypted folder on a password-protected computer and the account will be deleted. The researcher also reiterated that the data collected would be kept for seven years, and that all identifying information would be kept private and confidential. At this point, the researcher invited participants to give comments or ask questions they may have had about this study and their experience. The researcher thanked participants for taking part in the study and concluded the interview. The debriefing statement is attached under Appendix F.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data gathered from the survey and the qualitative data from the verbal interviews was analyzed in response to this study's primary research question of how making a comic compares to making a single image in eliciting a narrative from a past event.

Survey data. Quantitative data gathered from the surveys was analyzed by comparing participants' scoring of the comic making against their scoring of the single image activity. The scores were compared to see which activity scored higher on average, the difference between the positive percentage ratings, and whether there was a statistically significant difference between the two formats. Statistical significance was determined using a paired sample t-test. This study hypothesized that making a comic has the potential to elicit a narrative from a past problem as effectively or more effectively than making a single image. If the results of this survey confirm this hypothesis, participants' scores of the comic making activity will be equivalent or may exceed that of participants' scores of the single image activity.

Interview Data. The qualitative data gathered from the interviews conducted was analyzed using coding and thematic analysis. This analysis searched for common themes that participants reported in their experience of creating comics versus creating a single image (example, if one was more difficult or more enjoyable than the other). This analysis also looked for themes between the level of familiarity with comics participants indicate and their experience of the comic medium. This is so as it has been speculated that comics may be an effective medium in art therapy as they are familiar to individuals (Mulholland, 2011). Participants who are more familiar with comics may have reported a more positive experience in making a comic. A team of six peer interraters was recruited from Dominican University's Art Therapy Department in analyzing the qualitative data for themes.

Arts-based data. This study's secondary research question explores the differences between the representations of an event in the form of a comic as compared to a single image, and the unique characteristics comics have. To address the secondary research question, participant's artwork was analyzed. This analysis examined the following criteria based on *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* by Scott McCloud (1993).

1. Panel-to-panel transitions (McCloud, 1993)
 - a. Moment-to-moment
 - b. Action-to-action
 - c. Subject-to-subject
 - d. Scene-to-scene,
 - e. Aspect-to-aspect
 - f. Non-sequitur

2. Panel shapes to represent time (McCloud, 1993)
 - a. Lengthening panels to increase time
 - b. Shortening panels to decrease time
 - c. Borderless panels for timelessness
 - d. Bleeds for timelessness
3. Word and picture combinations: (McCloud, 1993)
 - a. Word specific combinations: pictures illustrate but don't significantly add to a largely complete text
 - b. Picture specific combinations: words do little more than add a soundtrack to a visually told sequence
 - c. Duo-specific panels: both words and pictures send essentially the same message
 - d. Additive: words amplify or elaborate on an image or vice versa
 - e. In parallel combinations: words and pictures seem to follow very different courses without intersecting
 - f. Montage: words are treated as integral parts of the picture
 - g. Interdependent: words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone

Analysis of these characteristics helped determine the unique characteristics that the comic format evokes. Six peer interraters were recruited from Dominican University's Art Therapy Department in analyzing participant's artwork for themes. Other visual patterns that arose were also noted (e.g., representation of time and movement). The hypothesis was that there would be a pattern of differences between the two formats, and that the comic format evoked unique characteristics such as word inclusion and the representation of time and movement. The

presence of the word and picture combinations is of special interest when considering the use of comics within an art therapy and narrative therapy framework. This is so as studies combining art therapy and narrative therapy have utilized the combination of art and writing (Conner, 2017; Harber, 2011; Keeling & Nielson, 2005; Keeling & Bermudez, 2006; Mizock et al., 2015). The addition of writing to the art making process has been demonstrated to be beneficial in these studies. If comic making naturally leads to text inclusion in art making, this could be a unique benefit of this format.

Chapter 4: Results

This mixed-methods study aimed to explore the potential use of comics within an art therapy and narrative therapy framework. The primary research question was whether comics provide unique benefits in processing a past problem as compared to a single image. To assess this, the process of depicting a past problem as a single image was compared with the process of depicting the same problem as a comic. This study hypothesized that depicting a past problem as a comic has unique benefits over making a single image, specifically in eliciting a narrative from participants and allowing them to deconstruct it through breaking the experience down into panels. This study also aimed to answer the secondary research question of how the representation of an event differs from a single image compared to a comic. This study hypothesized that a pattern of differences would emerge between the two formats, and that the comic format may evoke unique characteristics such as word inclusion and the representation of time and movement.

This study used two art activities as an intervention, followed by a survey and a brief verbal interview. These three methods were used to collect art-based, quantitative and qualitative data respectively. During the art activities participants were asked to process a past problem or challenge in their life and represent it as both a single image and as a comic. The art activities were followed by a short survey taken online via Google forms, which consisted of 18 questions and employed a 5-point scale ranking rank the comic format and the single image format based on three narrative therapy techniques. This was followed by a 10-15 minute verbal interview where participant were asked about their experience creating a single image compared to their experience creating a comic. Participants were also asked about their familiarity with, as well as their general impression of, comics.

This chapter presents the quantitative, qualitative and art based data gathered from this study. The quantitative and qualitative data will be analyzed to address this study's primary research question of whether comics provide unique benefits in processing a past problem as compared to a single image. The quantitative data collected from the survey will be analyzed to compare the effectiveness of the single image and comic formats in helping participants process a past problem or challenge. This was evaluated based on nine criteria derived from three narrative therapy techniques: externalizing, deconstructing and reauthoring. The qualitative data from the verbal interviews was also analyzed for themes and patterns that appeared across participants' responses. This covered areas such as participants' preferences between the comic and the single image, the differences between the two formats, participants' overall impressions of each and their thoughts on using comics as part of therapy. Participants also indicated their familiarity with comics, their feelings towards reading comics and the comic content they had been exposed to. Correlation between these factors and participants' responses towards the activity is discussed in Chapter 4 and 5.

Participants' artwork was analyzed to address this study's secondary research question of how the representations of an event differs in the form of a comic as compared to a single image, and the unique characteristics comics have. In addition to the author, a team of six interraters was recruited to assess participants' artwork. All six interraters were graduate students from Dominican University of California's Art Therapy Department, and were trained by the researcher in the interrater process. The researcher and the interraters independently filled out a survey that compared each participant's single image to the comic with regard to the following characteristics: word inclusion, movement and time. The survey also assessed participant's comics for the following: what panel-to-panel transitions were used, if panel shapes were

changed to alter time, and what word and picture combinations were used. Criteria for these characteristics were based on Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993). Demographic information was also collected from participants, including age, gender and cultural or ethnic identity. This information was analyzed for its relationship to the data, and for patterns or correlations that were present.

Demographics

15 normally functioning adults were recruited for this study. For the purposes of this study, a normally functioning adult was defined as a mentally healthy individual above the age of 18 with no prior history of psychological disorders. All participants completed informed consent forms certifying that they were (a) above the age of 18, and (b) mentally healthy, with no history of psychological disorders. 60% of participants identified as female (n=9) and 40% of participants identified as male (n=6). Their ages ranged from 23 to 57 years old, with an average age of 29.9 years. At the time of their interviews, nine participants were located in the United States, five participants were located in Singapore and one participant was located in France. With regard to cultural or ethnic identity, 47% of participants were Caucasian (n=7), 40% of participants were Asian (n=6) and 13% of participants were South-Asian (n=2). To preserve their confidentiality, participants in this study are identified by the letter "P" followed by a number reflecting the order of contact by the researcher.

Overall Results

Based on the survey, the average scores of the comic were higher than the average scores of the single image in seven out of nine criteria, and lower in the remaining two criteria. The same was true of the percentage positive ratings of the nine criteria. The nine criteria used were derived from three narrative therapy techniques: three criteria were derived from the technique of

externalizing, four criteria were derived from the technique of deconstructing, and two criteria were derived from the technique of reauthoring. The average ratings for externalizing and deconstructing were higher for the comic than the single image, and the average scores for reauthoring was very similar for the single image and the comic.

Based on question one of the brief verbal interview, 73.3% participants preferred the comic to the single image (n=11), 13.3% preferred the single image (n=2) and 13.3% liked both formats equally (n=2). During the brief verbal interviews, participants raised certain themes about the comic and the single image. Themes around the comic included time, deconstruction, processing, storytelling, the details of the problem, the representation of emotion, the resolution of the problem, and having limited time to draw. Themes around the single image included summarizing the problem, symbolism, representing a moment, focusing on a specific aspect of the problem, a lack of skills, being able to include more detail in the scene, and the difficulty of fitting the problem into a single image. Participants' familiarity with comics ranged from having little experience with comics to actively making comics. Most participants indicated an average level of familiarity with comics. Participants had been exposed to a variety of comic content across their lives. In analyzing the qualitative data, the researcher identified nine categories of comics that participants mentioned with varying levels of frequency.

Finally, based on the author's and the interraters' analysis of participants' artwork, 53.3% of participants included more words in their comics than in the single images (n=8), 26.7% included more words in their single images than in the comics (n=4), and 20% included about the same number of words in both. With regard to movement, 80% of participants included more movement in their comics than in the single images (n=12), and 20% of participants included about the same about of movement in both (n=3). In participants' single images, "Moment(s)"

were the most common representation of time, present in 80% of the single images (n=12). In contrast, “Months/years” were the most common representation of time in participants’ comics, present in 60% of the comics (n=9). 86.7% of participants represented a longer period of time in their comic as compared to their single image (n=13). With regard to panel-to-panel transitions, action-to-action transitions occurred the most frequently, closely followed by scene-to-scene transitions. The least frequently used transitions were aspect-to-aspect transitions and non sequitur transitions. The majority of participants (73.3%) did not use panel shapes to alter time (n=11). However, 20% of participants did lengthen panels in their comic to indicate a sense of time passing (n=3), and one participant utilized borderless panels to create a sense of timelessness. With regard to word-picture combinations in the comics, the interdependent combination was most common. The least common word-picture combinations were the montage combination and in-parallel combination, which did not appear in any of the comics.

The following sections represent the analysis of the quantitative, qualitative and art-based data collected in this study. The collection of these three forms of data allowed for a thorough analysis of participants’ experiences. The quantitative data was analyzed by examining the results of the Google Forms survey completed by participants. The average scores and positive percentage ratings of the nine criteria were analyzed to compare the effectiveness of the single image and the comic format. Thematic analysis was used to examine the qualitative data. Participants’ preferences and significant themes were identified. Lastly, six peer interraters were recruited to assist the author in analyzing the art-based data. Participants’ single images and comics were analyzed and compared to identify unique characteristics the comic format evoked.

Quantitative Data

To gather quantitative data during the interview, participants were asked to complete a survey on Google forms. This survey consisted of 18 questions and using a 5-point Likert scale. Participants were asked to rank the comic activity and the single image activity for effectiveness based on nine criteria derived from narrative therapy techniques: externalizing, deconstructing and reauthoring. Participants were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of each criterion for the comic and the single image, with 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree. In the representation of data, this scale was reversed to indicate 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree for ease of viewing. This section presents the results of participants' responses including the mean scores of the comic and the single image for each criterion, the mean scores for each technique, and the positive percentage rating for each criterion.

Mean scores for each criterion. A total of nine criteria were used to assess the effectiveness of the comic and the single image in processing a past problem or challenge. The first three criteria were derived from the narrative therapy technique of externalizing. They assessed how effective the comic and the single image were in doing the following: (a) representing the overall experience of the challenge; (b) accurately capturing participants' emotions and thoughts; and (c) representing the problem as separate from participants' identity. The comic was rated as more effective than the single image for criteria 1 and 2, and less effective than the single image in criteria 3.

The next four criteria were derived from the narrative therapy technique of deconstruction. They assessed how effective the comic and the single image were in doing the following: (a) representing the timeline of the challenge; (b) representing the actions taken by the

individuals involved; (c) representing the impact of the problem; and (d) representing the origin of the problem. The comic was rated as more effective than the single image for all four criteria.

The last two criteria were derived from the narrative therapy technique of reauthoring. They assessed participants' willingness to do the following around the single image or comic: (a) to engage in further dialogue about the comic/single image, and (b) to make another comic/single image as a follow up to this activity. The comic scored higher than the single image for criteria 8 and the single image scored higher than the comic for criteria 9. Based on the mean scores, the comic scored higher than the single image for 7 criteria (criteria 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) while the single image scored higher than the comic for 2 criteria (criteria 3 and 9). The average scores for each criterion are represented in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Average ratings for each criterion

Mean scores for each technique. In addition to analyzing the mean score for each criterion, the mean scores for each narrative therapy technique was also examined. This was done by taking the average of the mean scores for the criteria derived from each technique. The average score for the technique of externalizing was the average of the scores for criteria 1 through 3. The average score for the technique of deconstructing was the average of the scores for criteria 4 through 7. Lastly, the average score for the technique of reauthoring was the average of the scores for criteria 8 and 9. As seen in Figure 4.2, the comic had a higher score than the single image in the mean scores for externalizing and deconstructing, and the single image had a slightly higher mean score than the comic for reauthoring.

Figure 4.2 Average ratings for each Narrative Therapy Technique.

Positive percentage ratings for each criterion. The positive percentage ratings for each criterion were also analyzed and compared. To do this, the percentages of “1”s and “2”s that

participants gave each criterion for the single image and the comic were compared. The results of this were similar to the mean scores for each criterion but the differences in how the two formats were scored were more evident in the percentage positive ratings. Based on the positive percentage ratings, the comic scored higher than the single image for 7 criteria (criteria 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) while the single image scored higher than the comic for 2 criteria (criteria 3 and 9). The average scores for each criterion are represented below in Figure 4.3. Analyzing the positive percentage ratings for each criterion makes the difference between the two formats more evident.

A two-sample t-test was conducted to determine if any of the differences between the comic and single image scores were statistically significant. The t-test determined that the higher scores of the comic were statistically significant for four out of the seven criteria: criterion 1, representing the overall experience of the problem/challenge, criterion 4, representing the timeline of the problem/challenge, criterion 5, representing the actions taken by individuals involved, and criterion 7, representing the origin of the problem.

There was a significant difference in the positive percentage scores for representing the overall experience of the problem/challenge in the comic condition ($M=0.87$, $SD=0.35$) and the single image condition ($M=0.47$, $SD=0.51$); $t(14)=2.48$, $p=0.05$. This finding suggests that the comic format was significantly more effective than the single image format in representing participants' overall experience of the problem/challenge. There was a significant difference in the positive percentage scores for representing the timeline of the problem/challenge in the comic condition ($M=0.87$, $SD=0.35$) and the single image condition ($M=0.20$, $SD=0.41$); $t(14)=4.75$, $p=0.05$. This result indicates that the comic format was significantly more effective than the single image format in allowing participants to show the timeline of the problem/challenge. There was a significant difference in the positive percentage scores for

representing the actions taken by individuals in the comic condition ($M=0.80$, $SD=0.41$) and the single image condition ($M=0.27$, $SD=0.46$); $t(14)=3.35$, $p=0.05$. This finding suggests that the comic format was significantly more effective than the single image format in representing the actions taken by individuals involves in the problem/challenge. There was a significant difference in the positive percentage scores for representing the origin of the problem/challenge in the comic condition ($M=0.80$, $SD=0.41$) and the single image condition ($M=0.27$, $SD=0.46$); $t(14)=3.35$, $p=0.05$. This result indicates that the comic format was significantly more effective than the single image format in representing the origin of the problem/challenge. While the comic scored higher than the single image for three other criteria, none of the differences in scores were statistically significant. The single image scored higher than the comic in the remaining two criteria, but neither of these differences was statistically significant.

Figure 4.3 Positive Percentage Ratings for each criterion

Qualitative Data

During the brief verbal interview, participants were each asked eight questions. Questions one to four were about their experience of the two art activities, question five was on their thoughts about using comic in therapy, and questions six to eight were about their general impressions of comics. 73.3% participants preferred the comic to the single image (n=11), 13.3% preferred the single image (n=2) and 13.3% liked both formats equally (n=2). This is represented in the pie chart in Figure 4.4.

Participants' Preference

Figure 4.4 Participants' Preferences between the Comic and the Single Image.

Participants' responses also revealed significant themes for both the comic and the single image. The most prominent themes in participants' responses towards the comic included: (a) deconstructing the problem or challenge, (b) representing the timeline of the challenge, (c) storytelling, and (d) processing the problem or challenge. Other themes included (e) representing

the details of the problem, and (f) the representation of emotion. The frequency of each theme is represented in Table 4.1.

Prominent themes around the single image included: (a) focusing on an aspect or moment of the problem, (b) summarizing the problem, and (c) difficulty encompassing the problem in one image. Other themes were: (d) using symbolism and (e) being able to include more detail in the drawing. The frequency of each theme is represented in Table 4.2. Both Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 can be viewed on page 70.

*Table 4.1**Themes in participants' responses towards the comic format.*

Theme	Percentage
Deconstructing the problem/challenge	66.7% (n=10)
Representing timeline of the problem/ challenge	60.0% (n=9)
Storytelling	46.7% (n=7)
Processing the problem/challenge	40.0% (n=6)
Representing the details of the problem/challenge	26.7% (n=4)
Representing emotions	20.0% (n=3)

*Table 4.2**Themes in participants' responses towards the single image format*

Theme	Percentage
Focusing on an aspect or moment of the problem/challenge	46.7% (n=7)
Summarizing the problem/challenge	33.3% (n=5)
Difficulty encompassing the problem/challenge in one image	33.3% (n=5)
Using symbolism	20.0% (n=3)
Being able to include more details in the drawing	20.0% (n=3)

Question 1: Preference. In the brief verbal interview, participants were first asked which format they preferred and why. 73.3% of participants preferred the comic (n=11), 13.3% of participants preferred the single image (n=2), and 13.3% of participants liked both formats equally (n=2). Of the 13 participants who either preferred the comic or liked it as much as the single images, 61.5% cited the concept of time as a factor (n=8), 27.3% cited deconstruction as a factor (n=3), and 27.3% cited storytelling as a factor (n=3). Both participants who preferred the single image to the comic cited the ability to provide an overview or summary of the problem in the single image as a factor. One of them stated that the single image allowed a more symbolic representation of her problem, which she preferred.

Question 2: Differences. Participants were then asked to describe the differences between the two formats. In responding to this question, the strongest themes were around the representation of time in the comic and the process of deconstruction through the comic. With regard to the representation of time in the comic, 40% of participants mentioned how the comic allowed them to represent the timeline or chronological order of the problem they experienced (n=6). P14 stated that, “the comic felt more sequential, like you’re thinking in a timeline, which is easier in some sense because you have a container to think about it in, harder because you have to revisit each thing.” In a similar vein, P15 said, “I think there’s definitely more of a sense of scale of time in the comic.” 40% of participants also talked about how the comic led to them deconstructing the problem or challenge they faced (n=6). Words and phrases that were used included “steps”, “series”, “sequential”, “multiple events” and “progression of events”. This was contrasted against the single image, which 33.3% of participants described as focusing on a specific moment or aspect of the challenge (n=5). For example, P7 stated that, “with the single image you can only show a specific point in time, whereas with a comic you can show

progression of events.” Similarly, P9 reported that, “it felt like there was a progression of events in the comic whereas the single image felt like a snapshot,” and P12 said, “the single image required me to focus on... my event as one big experience as opposed to a series of experience.” In identifying differences between the two formats, 20% of participants also mentioned that the single image allowed them to spend more time on the details of the drawing (n=3). For instance, regarding the single image, P5 stated, “I got to spend a lot more time on the details surrounding the moment I chose which was really nice”. To reinforce this point, P12 reported, “technically I was able to put more detail in the single image than the comic.”

Question 3: Difficulty. Participants also indicated which format was more difficult and why. 60% of participants found the comic more difficult (n=9) while 40% of the participants found the single image more difficult (n=6). Participants that found the single image more difficult cited the following issues: (a) not being able to include as much context or detail in the single image (n=2), and (b) difficulty conveying the whole problem in one image (n=5). Participants made statements such as “It was harder to put all the thoughts into one picture”, “I struggled to know how to represent the issue in one image”, and “It’s difficult to convey such a big problem in one image.” Participants who found the comic more difficult cited the following issues: (a) the comic required more time to complete (n=3), and (b) the cognitive demands of breaking down the problem into multiple steps and making the narrative make sense (n=8). Participants stated the comic required them to “break up the problem into multiple scenarios” and to “go through the steps in an order”. For one participant who represented multiple traumas, she said the comic made her “dredge through the thoughts of the trauma”.

Question 4: Overall Impressions of Each Format. Participants were also asked to choose one word or phrase to represent their experience of each activity. The words and phrases used by

participants to describe the single image are shown in Table 4.3 below. Themes included simplicity, difficulty, insightfulness, precision and wholeness. Difficulty, insightfulness and precision were the most prevalent criteria, with 20% of participants choosing words or phrases in each of these categories (n=3).

The words and phrases used by participants to describe comic are shown in Table 4.4 below. Themes included positive emotions, difficulty, insightfulness, storytelling and segmentation. Insightfulness was the most prevalent theme, with 33.3% of participants choosing words or phrases in that category (n=5). Positive emotions and segmentation were the next most prevalent categories, with 20% of participants choosing words or phrases in each (n=3).

Table 4.3

Words and Phrases used to describe the Single Image

Themes	Words and Phrases chosen by Participants
Simplicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple • Very quick and very clean
Difficulty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frustrating • Stress • Difficult
Insightfulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughtful • Contemplative • See the bigger picture

Themes	Words and Phrases chosen by Participants
Precision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Precise • Focused • Snapshot
Wholeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unified • Complete
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoyable • Symbolism

Table 4.4

Words and Phrases used to describe the Comic

Themes	Words and Phrases chosen by Participants
Positive Emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fun • Fun • Release
Difficulty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging • Stress
Insightfulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surprisingly Informative

Themes	Words and Phrases chosen by Participants
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insightful • Reflective • Retrospective • Made me think more about the problem
Storytelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storytelling • Progression
Segmentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Segmented • Video • Like making a movie on paper

Question 5: Application of Comics in Therapy. The majority of participants responded positively to the idea of using comics as part of therapy. 86.7% of participants used words such as “useful”, “helpful”, “good”, “great”, or “interesting” to describe how they felt about the idea (n=13). 26.7% of participants mentioned how making comics can help individuals think about or process the event (n=4). 13.3% of participants recognized that limited artistic skill or ability caused them some frustration, and this may be an obstacle in the use of this intervention in therapy (n=2). For instance, P12 stated, “I want to convey more things which I would do with words that I can’t do with images because I don’t have these skills.”

Question 6: Familiarity. Participants were also asked how familiar they are with comics. 20% of participants stated they were not very familiar with comics (n=3), 33.3% indicated around an average level of familiarity (n=5), 33.3% reported above average familiarity (n=5), and 13.3% said they were very familiar with comics (n=2). In responding to this question, 53.3% of participants alluded to their childhood experiences of comics (n=8). Participants used phrases such as “when I was a kid” and referenced reading comics when they were “growing up”.

Question 7: Perceptions. Participants also responded to a question about their perceptions of comics. All 15 participants had positive associations with comics in various forms (n=15). Participants stated that they “enjoy”, “like” or “love” comics and that they find comics “fun”. 40% of participants alluded to the visual aspect of comics and responded positively to this (n=6). For instance, P1 stated that, “I feel like comics are very digestible, easy to read, easy to like visualize and process because it is a picture.” In a similar vein, P15 stated, “a comic allows you to tell that story, you know, in drawings and you can put into art things that you cannot put on film and you cannot put into words and I think that’s really what’s really powerful about comics”. 20% of participants also mentioned aspects of comics they do not respond positively to (n=3). P2 and P9 said that they liked certain formats of comics but not other formats, while P8 stated that compared to text-based books, he finds comics less immersive.

Question 8: Exposure to Content. To conclude the verbal interview, participants were asked what comics they have read or that they know of. In analyzing this data, the researcher broke participants’ responses down into nine main categories: (a) Newspaper comics, (b) Child-friendly comics, (c) Superhero comics, (d) Webcomics, (e) Comics on Social Media, (f) Graphic novels, (g) Manga or Anime, and (h) Comics in Foreign Language. The most common category mentioned were comics where the main target audience was children or teens, with 80% of

participants mentioning such comics (n=12). This included titles such as Garfield, Calvin and Hobbes, Snoopy, Archie and Tintin. Comics about superheroes were also mentioned by 53.3% of participants (n=8). The majority of these were within the Marvel and DC universes, which are both major publishers of American superhero comics. Common characters mentioned included Batman and Superman, both of whom are from the DC universe. Another prevalent category was comics in newspapers, with 46.6% of participants mentioning reading comics in the newspaper (n=7). 40% of participants also mentioned graphic novels (n=6). The category of manga or anime was also brought up by 26.7% of participants (n=4). Other categories discussed included foreign language comics (n=3), webcomics (n=2), comics on social media (n=2) and graphic medicine comics (n=1). The number of participants that mentioned each category is shown in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5. Categories of comics mentioned by participants.

Art-based Data

To analyze the art-based data, the author and a team of six peer-interraters from Dominican University of California's Art Therapy Department independently filled out a survey assessing participants' artwork. This survey compared each participant's single image to the

comic with regard to the following characteristics: word inclusion, movement and time. If the interraters' answers to these questions varied with regard to any of these criteria, the majority answer was selected. If there was a tie in the answers, the author's answer was used as a deciding factor. The survey also assessed participant's comics for the following: what panel-to-panel transitions were used, if panel shapes were changed to alter time, and what word-picture combinations were used. For panel-to-panel transitions, panel shapes and word-picture combinations, a minimum of four interraters had to agree for the result to be accepted. The results are presented in this section and are discussed further in Chapter 5. The survey filled out by interraters is attached under Appendix H.

Word inclusion. 53.3% of participants included more words in their comic than in the single image (n=8), 26.7% included more words in their single image than in the comic (n=4), and 20% included about the same number of words in both (n=3). This is illustrated in the bar chart in Figure 4.6.

Movement. For the purposes of this study, movement was defined as physical motion. Based on the interrater results, 80% of participants included more movement in their comics than in the single images (n=12), and 20% of participants included about the same about of movement in both (n=3). No participants included more movement in their single image than in their comic. This is illustrated in the bar chart in Figure 4.7.

Time. Based on the interrater results, in participants' single images, "Moment(s)" were the most common representation of time, present in 80% of the single images (n=12). In contrast, in participants' comics, "Months/years" were the most common representation of time, present in 60% of the comics (n=9). 86.7% of participants represented a longer period of time in their comic as compared to their single image (n=13).

Word inclusion

Figure 4.6 Word inclusion in comics versus single images.

Movement

Figure 4.7 Amount of movement in comics versus single images.

Panel-to-panel Transitions. With regard to panel-to-panel transitions, action-to-action transitions occurred the most frequently, appearing in 86.7% of the comics (n=13). This was closely followed by scene-to-scene transitions, which were present in 80% of the comics (n=12). Subject-to-subject transitions were present in 33.3% of the comics (n=5), while moment-to-moment transitions were present in 13.3% of the comics (n=2). The least frequently used transitions were aspect-to-aspect transitions and non sequitur transitions, which both appeared in only 6.7% of the comics (n=1). These results are illustrated below in the bar chart, Figure 4.8.

Figure 4.8 Panel transitions in participants' comics

Panel Shapes. The majority of participants (73.3%) did not change panel shapes in their comics to alter time (n=11). However, 20% of participants did lengthen panels in their comic to increase a sense of time passing (n=3), and one participant utilized borderless panels to create a

sense of timelessness. These results reflect that changing panel shapes to alter time was not intuitive to most participants. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Word-picture Combinations. With regard to word-picture combinations in the comics, the interdependent combination was most common, appearing in 33.3% of the comics (n=5). Picture-specific word combinations and duo-specific word combinations both appeared in 20% of the comics (n=3), while the additive combination appeared in only one participant's comic. The least common word-picture combinations were the montage combination and in-parallel combination, which did not appear in any of the comics.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Discussion of Hypothesis: Quantitative Data

Overall scores. The mean scores and positive percentage ratings for seven of the nine criteria were higher for the comic than the single image. Participants' positive response to the comic format is in line with this study's hypothesis that comics are as effective or more effective at eliciting a narrative from a problem as compared to a single image. A paired-sample t-test determined that the differences in the positive percentage ratings for four of these criteria were statistically significant. This further strengthens the evidence that the comic format is effective in eliciting a narrative from a problem.

Deconstructing. Participants had particularly positive responses to the comic format for criteria derived from the narrative therapy technique of deconstructing. The mean scores and positive percentage ratings for all four criteria were higher for the comic than the single image. This reflects that the comic format is especially effective in helping individuals deconstruct their problems, likely due to the literal breaking down of the problem into panels. Furthermore, a two-sample t-test determined that the differences in the percentage positive ratings for three out of the four criteria were statistically significant: criterion 4, representing the timeline of the problem/challenge, criterion 5, representing the actions taken by individuals involved, and criterion 7, representing the origin of the problem/challenge. While the comic scored higher than the single image for criterion 5, representing the impact of the problem, this difference was not statistically significant. That differences in three of the criteria were statistically significant strengthens the evidence that the comic format lends itself to the narrative therapy technique of deconstructing.

Externalizing. Participants also responded positively to the comic in criteria derived from the narrative therapy technique of externalizing. The mean scores and positive percentage ratings for two criteria were higher for the comic than the single image: criterion 1, representing the overall experience of the problem/challenge, and criterion 2, representing the participants' emotions and thoughts about the problem/challenge. This is in line with the hypothesis that the comic would allow participants to create a comprehensive external representation of their problem or challenge. The difference in the positive percentage ratings for criterion 1 was statistically significant, which strengthens the evidence that the comic format is significantly more effective than the single image format in representing the overall experience of a problem or challenge. The difference in positive percentage ratings for criterion 2 was not statistically significant. However, that the comic scored higher than the single image for these two criteria supports the hypothesis that the comic is an effective format in representing one's experience of a problem or challenge.

However, the results also suggest that the comic was not more effective in allowing participants to separate the problem or challenge they faced from their identity. The mean score and positive percentage rating for criterion 3, representing the problem/challenge as separate from participants' identity, was higher for the single image than the comic. This contradicts the study's hypothesis that the comic format would allow participants to view their problem as separate from their identity through representing it externally. This may be partly explained by participants' responses in the verbal interview. In the verbal interviews, 66.7% of participants mention how the comic led them to deconstruct the problem/challenge ($n=10$), and 40% state how the comic allowed them to process the problem/challenge ($n=6$). It appears that the comic format led some participants to think and reflect on the details of the problem or challenge they

faced. This may have had the effect of immersing participants more deeply in their past experience, leading them to feel more involved in the problem or challenge rather than separate from it. More research needs to be done to determine if this is the case.

Re-authoring. The comic and the single image scored very similarly for the narrative therapy technique of reauthoring. The mean scores and positive percentage ratings for one criterion was slightly higher for the comic than the single image: criterion 8, willingness to dialogue further about the problem/challenge. The mean scores and positive percentage ratings for the other criterion was slightly higher for the single image than the comic: criterion 9, willingness to create another comic/single image as a follow up. This study hypothesized that the comic would score higher than the single image with regard to both criteria. The fact that both formats scored similarly indicates that participants were very open to dialoguing further about both the single image and the comic, and in creating follow-up pieces to both. Participants' willingness to continue engaging in this process shows the appeal of the art-making process in general, regardless of the format. While the results do not support the study's hypothesis, they do reflect that participants are as willing to talk about and create follow-up artwork around comics as compared to the single image. This suggests that comic format is as strong as single image format in sustaining continuity in dialogue and art making.

Discussion of Hypothesis: Qualitative Data

Overall responses. Based on the verbal interviews with participants, 73.3% participants preferred the comic to the single image (n=11), 13.3% preferred the single image (n=2), and 13.3% liked both formats equally (n=2). For a representation of this data, see Figure 4.4 on page 68. The strong positive response from participants' towards the comic reflects that the comic format possesses a strong appeal as a means of processing one's problems or challenges. Both

participants who preferred the single image to the comic stated that they liked how the single image provided a summary or overview of their problem. P10 also liked how the single image allowed a more symbolic representation of her problem. Based on these two responses, a single image could be an effective accompaniment to comic making. This suggestion is discussed in further detail under the section “Recommendations for Clinical Practice.”

Another finding of participants’ overall experiences of the two formats was that more participants found the comic format more difficult (n=9) as compared to the single image format (n=6). Based on participants’ responses, they found the comic format difficult as it was cognitively demanding (n=8) and took more time to complete (n=3). These characteristics may cause comic making to be challenging for certain clients. This is discussed in further detail under the section “Implications for Clinical Application”. Participants also encountered challenges with the single image format, primarily in how they found it challenging to encompass the whole problem or challenge in one image (n=5). While the comic possessed its own unique challenges, it potentially provided a more holistic way of representing participants’ problems or challenges, as compared to the single image.

Significant themes around the comic format. Participants’ responses revealed significant themes for both the comic and the single image. The most frequent themes around the comic included: (a) deconstructing the problem or challenge (n=10), (b) representing the timeline of the challenge (n=9), (c) storytelling (n=7), and (d) processing the problem or challenge (n=6). See Table 4.1 on page 70 for a representation of this information. The prominence of theme of deconstruction, suggests that the comic was particularly effective in allowing participants to break down their problem into events or steps. This is likely a result of the literal breaking down of the problem into multiple panels. This is supported by the quantitative data, in which the

comic scored higher than the single image for all four criteria derived from the narrative therapy technique of deconstruction. The differences in scores for three of these criteria were statistically significant. The theme of deconstruction in the comic was contrasted against the single image, which some participants described as focusing on a specific moment or aspect of the challenge (n=5). For example, P7 stated that, “with the single image you can only show a specific point in time, whereas with a comic you can show progression of events.” This reflects that the comic is uniquely adept at breaking down a problem or challenge into multiple steps, as compared to a single image. Another prominent theme, representing the timeline of the problem or challenge, is also consistent with other findings from the verbal interview. For example, of the 13 participants who either preferred the comic or liked it as much as the single images, 61.5% cited the concept of time as a factor (n=8). This is consistent with participants’ responses to the survey, where 86.7% of participants rated the comic as highly effective in representing the timeline of their problem or challenge. These results suggests that the comic format may be especially helpful with regard to problems that span a significant period of time and that have identifiable markers.

Significant themes around the single image format. Prominent themes around the single image included: (a) focusing on an aspect or moment of the problem (n=7), (b) summarizing the problem (n=5), and (c) difficulty encompassing the problem in one image (n=5). Other themes were: (d) using symbolism (n=3) and (e) being able to include more detail in the drawing (n=4). See Table 4.2 on page 70 for a representation of this information. Based on participants’ responses, the single image format allowed participants to focus on a particular part of their problem, summarize their problem, or represent it in a symbolic manner. A single image format could be incorporated into comic making in order to take advantage of these characteristics. For example, a client could draw a cover image for their comic strip or comic book that could

provide an overview and/or a symbolic representation of the problem. This suggestion is discussed in further detail under the section “Recommendations for Clinical Practice.” Another noticeable theme was the difficult participants faced in encompassing the problem in a single image. This reflects the advantage the comic format has in breaking the problem down into multiple images or panels.

Participants’ general impressions of comics. Questions 6-8 of the verbal interview aimed to find out participants’ general impressions of comics and how this may have influenced their attitudes towards comic making. With regard to familiarity, most participants had an average to high level of familiarity with comics (80%, n=12). This reflects that the comic format is a medium that is familiar to many individuals. This may make the activity of comic making approachable to clients in a therapeutic setting. 20% of participants stated that they were not very familiar with comics (n=3). However, all three participants did cite previous experiences with comics through the newspaper, in bookstores, or as a child. Furthermore, all three participants understood what the comic format entailed. Despite these three participants’ lack of familiarity with comics, all of them were able to complete the comic making activity without any additional support. This shows that comic making is an easily accessible medium as participants with varying levels of familiarity with comics were all able to engage with it successfully.

All 15 participants had positive associations with comics in some form. Participants mentioned that they “enjoy”, “like” or “love” comics and that they find comics “fun”. This shows that individuals generally respond positively towards comics. This would allow comic making to be an approachable medium in a therapeutic setting. Some participants specifically mentioned how they appreciated the visual aspect of comics (n=6). Participants stated that the visual aspects of comics made them uniquely appealing because they are easy to read and

process. However, the visual aspect of comics that drew some participants to comics also made comics a less immersive medium for one participant. P8 stated that compared to text-based books, he finds comics less immersive as “all the scenes are shown” and not as much is left to the imagination. This was in direct contrast with a comment by P7, who stated, “the visual medium it allows you to immerse yourself a lot more in depth with the characters that are being portrayed as opposed to just a purely textual medium.” This reflects how the same characteristics that make comics appealing to one person might make them less appealing to another. Replication studies with larger sample sizes or studies with additional interview questions about the visual aspects of comics can provide deeper understanding of this phenomena.

Over the course of the interview, many participants talked about their childhood experiences with comics (n=10). This finding is consistent with the kinds of comics participants mentioned when asked what comics they were familiar with. Participants most frequently mentioned comic titles that were directed at a child or teenage audience (n=12) such as Garfield, Calvin and Hobbes, Archie and Tintin. These findings reflect that comics are accessible and easy to understand, since many participants recall being drawn to them as children. However, this finding also suggests that people may generally associate comics as a medium meant for children. As a result, clients may view the introduction of comic making as juvenile or patronizing. Clinicians should be aware of this possibility. Suggestions for how this can be navigated are addressed under the section “Recommendations for Clinical Practice”.

Finally, in discussing the kinds of comics they had been exposed to, participants covered a wide range of material. During analysis of the data, the sources of comics participants mentioned were divided into nine categories: (a) Newspaper comics, (b) Child-friendly comics, (c) Superhero comics, (d) Webcomics, (e) Comics on Social Media, (f) Graphic novels, (g)

Manga and Anime, and (h) Comics in Foreign Language. For a representation of this data as a bar chart, see Figure 4.5 on page 77. As discussed in the earlier paragraph, the most frequently mentioned category were comics directed at child or teen audiences (n=12). Superhero comics were the next most common category (n=8), with the majority of titles in the Marvel or DC universes. The superhero genre has become increasingly popular over the recent years due to the adaptation of many comics into movies. One participant, P14, mentioned how she has watched many superhero movies and how they acted as a connection to the world of superhero comics. Some participants also mentioned manga or anime (n=4), which originates from Japanese culture, as well as comics in foreign languages (n=3) such as Chinese and French. These findings point to the cross-cultural applicability of comics as a form of visual expression. As an art therapy tool, comic making has the potential to appeal to individuals across different cultures. Lastly, some participants mentioned how they encountered comics on social media (n=2) and as webcomics (n=2). This shows how comics have evolved over the years. The comic format is not restricted to paper, but has expanded online. This makes comics more accessible to large groups, especially younger generations.

Discussion of Hypothesis: Art-based Data

Overall findings. A team of six peer interraters and the author analyzed the art-based data collected in this study. This consisted of participants' comics and single images. Based on interrater's assessments, slightly over half of the participants included more words in their comic than their single image (n=8). Analysis of the data also showed that the majority of participants included more movement in their comic than their single image (n=12). Finally, this study found that most participants represented a longer period of time in their comic than in their single image (n=13). Overall, analysis of the data found that the comic format resulted in a unique

representation of time and movement in participants' artwork, specifically, longer periods of time and more movement.

Word inclusion. 53.3% of participants included more words in their comic than in the single image (n=8), 26.7% included more words in their single image than in the comic (n=4), and 20% included about the same number of words in both (n=3). This study hypothesized that participants would include significantly more words in their comic than in their single image. While more participants included a higher number of words in their comic, the percentage of those that did so was not as high as this study anticipated. More research needs to be done in order to confirm whether or not the comic format leads to more word inclusion. P10's artwork is an example of a comic that was rated by the interraters as having significantly more words than the single image. Her single image had one word, whereas her comic had approximately 30 words. A comparison of her artwork can be seen in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 Artwork by P10: Comic (left, word count ≈ 30), Single image (right, word count = 1)

Movement. Based on the interrater's results, 80% of participants included more movement in their comics than in the single images (n=12), 20% of participants included about the same amount of movement in both (n=3), and no participants included more movement in their single image than in their comic. This finding supports the original hypothesis that the comic

format would result in a unique representation of movement as compared to the single image. These results provide evidence that the comic format evokes unique characteristics, in this case, an increased representation of movement. P2's artwork is an example of a comic that was rated by the interraters as having significantly more movement than the single image, as seen in Figure 5.2. The comic shows the following actions: her approaching her bike, riding her bike towards the hill, riding her bike up the hill, and finally getting off her bike and walking the remaining distance up the hill. In comparison, she represented only one action in the single image of her riding her bike towards the hill. For P2, the comic format resulted in her representing more movement than she did in the single image.

Figure 5.2 Artwork by P2: Comic (left, more movement), Single image (right, less movement)

Time. In participants' single images, "Moment(s)" were the most common representation of time, present in 80% of the single images ($n=12$). In comparison, "Months/years" were the most common representation of time in participants' comics, present in 60% of the comics ($n=9$). The most common representation of time in participants' single images was the shortest amount of time ("Moment(s)"). In contrast, the most common representation of time in participants' comics was the longest amount of time ("Months/years"). Furthermore, 86.7% of participants represented a longer period of time in their comic as compared to their single image ($n=13$).

These findings support the hypothesis that the comic format results in a unique representation of time. Specifically, these results indicate that individuals tend to represent more extended periods of time in comics than in single images. This is supported by the quantitative and qualitative data. In the survey, 86.7% of participants rated the comic as highly effective in representing the timeline of their challenge (n=13). Additionally, in the verbal interviews, 60% of participants mentioned how the comic was able to represent the timeline of their challenge (n=9).

P12's artwork (Figure 5.3) is an example where a much longer period of time was represented in the comic compared to the single image. The majority of interraters indicated that the comic spanned a period of "Months/years" and that the single image spanned "Moments". This is consistent with P12's description of her artwork. P12 stated how her problem was not being able to stay in countries past a certain point due to visa issues. In the comic, she shows all of the countries she has lived in, and how she has had to leave each of them at some point. The first three panels have a country's flag and the caption, "NO VISA NO STAY". The final panel depicts P12 and a globe, with her asking, "Where can I go that doesn't depend on a visa?" Her depiction of the problem spans multiple years.

In comparison, P12's single image is a drawing of her at an airport with a sad expression saying, "Goodbye." To her left is a family of five saying, "Yay, holiday!!" P12 explained that she feels people are excited to travel because they have a place to return, "Then there's me saying goodbye because I don't get to come back." In contrast with her comic, her single image depicts a specific point in time where she has to leave a country. P12's artwork is therefore an example of how the comic format might evoke a longer representation of time than the single image format.

Figure 5.3 Artwork by P12: Comic (left, longer period of time), Single image (right, shorter period of time).

Panel transitions. Action-to action transitions were the most common ($n=13$), followed by scene-to-scene transitions ($n=12$), subject-to-subject transitions ($n=5$), moment-to-moment transitions ($n=2$), aspect-to-aspect transitions ($n=1$) and non sequitur transitions ($n=1$). The most prominent transitions were action-to-action and scene-to-scene transitions. This is consistent with Scott McCloud's analysis of American and European comics in which action-to-action transitions were the most common and scene-to-scene transitions were the third most common transition (McCloud, 1993). In comparison, McCloud found that Japanese comics have a high frequency of aspect-to-aspect transitions. McCloud offers the explanation that Western art and literature, including comics, are more goal-oriented. In comparison, Asian art and literature have historically had a more cyclical approach that focuses on the process rather than the end goal (McCloud, 1993).

Considering this information in the context of this study's prompt, it makes sense that action-to-action and scene-to-scene transitions are more common even though there were participants from Asian and South-Asian cultures ($n=8$). These transitions focus on the actions and eventual outcome of a situation, which most participants were attempting to represent

regarding their problem or challenge. In doing so, it makes sense that participants used action-to-action and scene-to-scene transitions. The relatively short length of the comic (one page) probably also influenced the kinds of panel transitions that were used. Since participants' comics were relatively short (one page), there was a need to encompass one situation in relatively few panels. Therefore, there would have been less room for "wandering" panels such as those in aspect-to-aspect transitions (n=1). Since participants were also attempting to communicate their problem to the researcher, most of their panels had logical transitions, which explains why non-sequitur transitions rarely occurred (n=1). The nature of the prompt and length of the comics likely influenced the kinds of panel-to-panel transitions used by participants.

It would likely benefit clinicians to gain some familiarity with the kinds of panel transitions that can be used. This information could be useful in supporting clients during their art making process. Based on participants' artwork, action-to-action transitions (n=13), scene-to-scene transitions (n=12), and action-to-action transitions (n=5) are relatively intuitive. However, moment-to-moment transitions (n=2), aspect-to-aspect transitions (n=1), and non sequitur transitions (n=1) were not as common and may therefore not be as intuitive. Clinicians who have knowledge of this transitions could provide this information to clients in order to help them better convey their narratives.

An example of action-to-action transitions can be seen in panels two to three and panels five to six of P4's comic in Figure 5.4 (outlined in yellow and enlarged). In panel two, P4 depicts himself working at his computer and seeing an error code appear. There is then an action-to-action transition to panel three, as P4 transitions from looking at his computer to looking at his phone. A similar action-to-action transition occurs between panels five and six. In panel five, P4

is looking at his phone when a message alert appears on his computer. This leads to him transitioning back to working on his computer in panel six.

Figure 5.4 Artwork by P4: Action-to-action transitions in panels two to three (top right) and panels five to six (bottom right), outlined in yellow and enlarged on right.

An example of scene-to-scene transitions can be seen in panels three to four of P8's comic in Figure 5.5 (outlined in yellow and enlarged). In his comic, P8 represented the challenges he has encountered in working with his colleagues in research. In panel three, P8 (blue figure) and his colleague (red figure) are interacting with the professor overseeing their work (figure in suit). In this interaction, P8 was unable to deliver results for his part of the project, as this was dependent on his colleague finishing his part, which his colleague had not done. In panel four 4, there is a scene-to-scene transition. P8 appears to be standing outside and contemplating the challenges he has been facing. This scene-to-scene transition implies that

between panels three and four, P8 left the location in panel three and arrived at a new location in panel four. This change in location is conveyed even without being explicitly stated.

Figure 5.5 Artwork by P8: Scene-to-scene transition in panel 3-4 (bottom) outlined in yellow and enlarged on right.

Subject-to-subject transitions were the third most common transition in this sample ($n=5$). This was not as consistent with Scott McCloud's findings of American and European, where he found that subject-to-subject transitions were the second most common transition. This could be explained by the study's prompt and subsequent subject matter of participants' comics. Participants were asked to represent a problem or challenge that they had faced. As such, most comics had the participant as the main subject navigating the problem, leading to fewer subject-to-subject transitions. From these findings, we can see how prompts, length and subject matter of a comic can influence the kind of panel transitions used.

Panel shapes. Most participants did not change panel shapes to alter time ($n=11$). This reflects that the technique of changing panel shapes to alter time is not necessarily an intuitive process. This may be a tool that clinicians may want to introduce to clients during the comic making process, as a means of communicating their narratives more effectively. It should also be noted, however, that all comics created by participants were relatively short (on one piece of

paper) and made under a time limit (15 minutes). Given more time and space to draw, participants may have been more likely to include a variety of panel shapes. While most participants did appear to change panel shapes to alter time, four participants did appear to do so. Based on the interrater responses, three participants, P7, P14 and P15, lengthened panels in their comic to increase a sense of time passing.

An example of this in P14's comic can be seen in Figure 5.6, with the panel that was lengthened highlighted in yellow and enlarged. In this particular panel, P14 had drawn an airplane flying between New Jersey and Arizona to depict her move from across states. This panel stretched across the whole page, and is noticeably longer than other panels P14 drew. For example, in the row below this panel, five panels occupy the same space. The use of this extended panel potentially achieved two effects: (a) increasing the sense of physical space depicted in the panel, and (b) lengthening the sense of time portrayed in the panel. Both these effects appear consistent with the event P14 was depicting.

As P14 was showing a big geographical move, the physical distance covered in this panel was much greater than in any of the other panels. P14 also depicted the process of travelling for multiple hours, as compared to a single moment in time. This extended period of time of effectively conveyed by lengthening the width of the panel. As compared to the shorter panels in the row below, where one event leads to another, this long panel communicates an event that takes place over a longer period of time. Lengthening panel shapes can be seen in this case to increase a sense of physical space and lengthen the sense of time passing. This is consistent with the use of panel shapes to alter time in Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993).

Figure 5.6 Artwork by P14: Lengthening panels to increase a sense of time passing (outlined in yellow and enlarged on right).

The interrater responses also indicated that one participant, P11, utilized borderless panels to create a sense of timelessness. P11's artwork depicted the challenge she faced in the process of obtaining a wedding dress from a vendor. There are two instances in which she utilizes borderless panels, which are circled in yellow and enlarged in Figure 5.7. In the first instance, P11 drew a computer screen and cell phone without any panel borders (top middle). This seemed to represent the process of communication and work that took place between her first meeting with the vendor and the final design of the dress. In this case, a borderless panel may have created a sense of time passing. In the second instance, P11 drew a calendar with no panel borders (top right). This seemed to convey the months passing after the final design for the dress was agreed upon. This borderless panel then leads to panels (with borders, bottom left) depicting P11's frustration with the vendor. In this instance, the borderless panel was directly related to the representation of time passing, and may have helped emphasize the sense of time passing. In both cases, P11's use of borderless panels seem consistent with the effect of altering time as discussed in Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993).

Figure 5.7 Artwork by P11: Using borderless panels (circled in yellow and enlarged on right).

Word-picture combinations. Interdependent word-picture combinations occurred most frequently in participants' comics ($n=5$), followed by picture-specific combinations ($n=3$), duo-specific combinations ($n=3$) and additive combinations ($n=1$). The montage combination and in-parallel combinations did not appear in any of participants' comics. This reflects that participants who used words in their comics did so in a way that the image and words worked together to communicate a message or emphasized either the image or the words. The results also show that all of participants' word image combinations made logical sense, as none of them fell under the category of in-parallel combinations. This may be an effect of the prompt, however, as participants were asked to represent a problem or challenge they faced. As such, most if not all participants were trying to create a narrative that made sense and would be understood by the researcher. It is hence unsurprising that there were no in-parallel combinations. It should be noted that the most common word-picture combination, the interdependent combination, only appeared in 33.3% of participants comics ($n=5$). None of the word-picture combinations showed up strongly in participants' comics. This may also be the result of the small sample size. This

may also be due to the short length of the comics (one page). A study with a larger sample size and more comic material may find more word-picture combinations.

Theoretical Implications

The theory of narrative therapy believes that identity and views of the world are shaped by the stories internalized from life events. This approach focuses on the externalizing of internalized narratives and the creation of preferred alternative stories (Freedman, 2014; Kerr & Hoshino, 2008; White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990). Therapists aim to help clients deconstruct unproductive narratives and reauthor their identities through externalizing problems, using therapeutic questions, seeking unique outcomes and building alternative preferred stories. This study proposed that the following narrative therapy techniques have the potential for application in the process of creating comics: externalizing problems, deconstructing narratives, and reauthoring preferred narratives. As seen in the previous section, the comic format scored higher than the single image format in the mean ratings for externalizing and deconstructing, and scored similarly as the single image format for reauthoring. This reflects that comic making is compatible with the art therapy technique of deconstructing and externalizing.

This appears to be especially so with regard to deconstructing. The positive percentage ratings of all four deconstructing criteria were higher for the comic than the single image. Furthermore, three out of four of these differences were statistically significant. These criteria were: (a) criterion 4, representing the timeline of the problem/challenge, (b) criterion 5, representing the actions taken by individuals involved, and (c) criterion 7, representing the origin of the problem. That the differences in these criteria were statistically significant demonstrates the effectiveness of the comic format in helping clients deconstruct past events. This is in line with this study's hypothesis that comic support individuals in deconstructing events by literally

breaking them down into multiple panels. The findings of this study strongly support the compatibility of the comic format with the narrative therapy technique of deconstruction.

The comic also scored higher than the single image for two out of three of the externalizing criteria: (a) representing participants' experience of the problem or challenge, and (b) capturing the thoughts and emotions participants experienced. This difference was statistically significant when it came to representing the overall experience of the problem or challenge. This shows that the comic format was especially effecting in helping participants capture the overall experience of an event. However, the comic scored lower than the single image in helping clients view the problem or challenge as separate from their identities. This indicates that the comic may actually cause clients to identify more with the problem or challenge. This could be due to them reflecting more on the details of the events. It should be noted that this difference was not statistically significant. More research needs to be done to determine whether the comic format does in fact make it more difficult for individuals to separate a problem or challenge from their identities.

The comic and single image scored similarly for the technique of reauthoring. The comic scored slightly higher than the single image for participants' willingness to dialogue further about the artwork. The single image scored slightly higher than the comic for participants' willingness to create more artwork as a follow-up. However, these differences were minimal and neither was statistically significant. Furthermore, both these questions referred to hypothetical situations with participants having to imagine potential dialogue or potential follow-up art activities. The compatibility of each format with the technique of reauthoring would be more effectively assessed if clients actually engaged in follow-up conversations or follow-up art making and evaluated these formats based on these continued experiences. This idea will be

further explored in the section “Recommendations for Clinical Application”. More research needs to be done to determine if comic making is compatible with the narrative therapy technique of reauthoring.

Implications for Clinical Application

Overall, all participants responded positively to the idea of using comics as part of therapy. This strengthens the argument for the use of comics in therapeutic settings. All participants said they could see benefits of incorporating comic making into the therapeutic process. 86.7% of participants used words such as useful, helpful, good, great, or interesting to describe how they felt about the idea (n=13). 26.7% of participants mentioned how making comics can help individuals think about or process the event (n=4). P5 said the comic made her “think about events in order and in more detail than I have before”, adding that it would allow individuals to “delve into the weeds, I guess, of what’s like lying underneath your emotions or the situation”. P13 said in making comics, one has to “give some thought into it, not just about the structure, but also what you’re gonna put in it, the content, and how it’s gonna flow, how the images are gonna link together.” These participants’ feedback shows how comic creation can facilitate insight and reflection about past experiences. Participants’ positive responses to the use of comics in therapy further strengthen the argument for its application.

While participants had overall positive responses to the comic medium, eight participants noted that the comic was more cognitively demanding than the single image. This led them to rate the comic as more difficult than the single image. Participants reported that the comic required them to break down the problem into multiple steps and put these steps into an accurate chronological order. This aspect of the comic activity required planning and thoughtfulness. Participants also stated that they had to put mental effort into ensuring the narrative made logical

sense. While comics can facilitate reflection and processing of past events in therapeutic setting, this characteristic simultaneously leads to heavier cognitive demands on clients. It may require more mental effort and sustained attention compared to creating a single image. This may be especially challenging for individuals who have difficulty focusing or concentrating, such as individuals with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). It may also be unsuitable for populations that have cognitive challenges, such as individuals with neurocognitive disorders. The cognitive demands of comic making should be taken into account when considering its use with clients.

Recommendations for Clinical Application

In introducing comic making to clients, it is important for clinicians to note that individuals may vary in their preferences towards different formats or content of comics. A clinician should take this into consideration when introducing comics and comic making to participants. For example, P2 stated that she enjoys comics in the newspaper but she does not enjoy them in the form of a book. An individual with such preferences may enjoy making shorter comic strips and may find making a longer narrative spanning multiple pages less enjoyable. P9 made a distinction between graphic novels and comics, stating that he does not like most comics but that he does like graphic novels. He associates comics with superheroes and does not enjoy the plots of superhero comics, whereas he associates graphic novels with adaptations of books. For individuals who dislike superhero comics, a comic-making directive that involves superheroes may be ineffective and may even hinder the therapeutic work. In introducing a comic making activity or showing examples of comics, a clinician should take into consideration the individuals' preferences. If possible, the clinician should also have a range of comic material available to show clients, to demonstrate that the comic medium has a lot of flexibility and that a

client does not need to feel constrained to a particular format or content (e.g. newspaper strips or superheroes).

Clinicians should also note that clients might find comics juvenile or childish, which may affect their response to a comic making activity. As discussed in Chapter 4 on page 88, many participants associated comics with their childhood experiences (n=10). Furthermore, the most commonly mentioned category of comics was titles directed at a child or teenage audience (n=12), such as Garfield, Calvin and Hobbes, Archie and Tintin. This reflects that comics are easily accessible as many titles are directed at young readers. However, this may also mean that clients might associate comics as being juvenile or only for children. Adult clients may therefore find the introduction of a comic making activity as patronizing or childish. Clinicians can help change this perspective by showing clients comics that confront serious or sensitive topics such as mental health or illness. This is especially relevant to personal memoir comics in the field of graphic medicine. By introducing such titles to clients, clinicians can show how the comic medium is not only meant for children but can be used to navigate difficult issues as well. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, it would be useful for clinicians to have a range of comic material to show to clients. This may help alter clients' general impressions of comics.

Another finding from this study was that some participants appreciate how the single image provided a summary or overview of their problem. This indicates that the single image format could be used in combination with the comic and could further enhance a comic making activity. Even a participant like P12, who preferred the comic format, appreciated how the single image helped "pinpoint the issue" she was describing. She stated that even though her problem was a series of events "it all culminates in like this sense of loss", which was represented in the single image. Additionally, P10, who preferred the single image, stated how the single image

allowed a more symbolic representation of her problem. It may therefore be helpful for clients to create a single image *after* creating a comic. This could help clients come up with an overarching metaphor to summarize their experience or to pinpoint a particularly significant moment or aspect of their experience. Doing so could support clients in processing the events they expressed in their comic. This could be done as a cover image for a comic book, a title panel for a comic strip, or even a separate single image that stands apart from the comic as its own piece. By incorporating both the comic format and the single image format, clinicians may be able to take advantage of the benefits offered by both.

It may also be beneficial for clinicians to have some knowledge of the formal elements of comic making. Clinicians could use this knowledge to support clients in their comic creation and offer suggestions or help if clients encounter difficulty conveying their narratives. Clinicians can gain such knowledge through books such as *Understanding Comics* by Scott McCloud (1993). In his verbal interview, P4, who has extensive experience with comic making, indicated interest in the idea of “a therapist that was really able to pick up on the visual language,” or even having “a therapist who could guide or say keep the panel silent or try to show your full body language.” As suggested by P4, it may be helpful for a therapist to have some knowledge of the various elements of comics in order to support clients in conveying their narratives. This could include the kinds of panel transitions that can be used or how panel shapes can be changed to alter time. At the same time, clinicians would need to find a balance between supporting the client in this manner and not restricting the clients’ artistic freedom or causing clients to feel criticized.

Lastly, clinicians should also keep in mind the time required in making comics. 3 participants noted that they found the comic more difficult because it took longer to complete. Clinicians should hence ensure that clients have sufficient time in session to work on a comic.

Clinicians should also recognize that a comic might take multiple sessions to complete depending on the nature of what the participant is representing. The structure of comics lends itself to continuity as it forms a narrative that can be added onto with more panels or pages. A comic may turn into a series of strips or into multiple continuous pages that could eventually become a book. With this in mind, the therapist should monitor the client's progress and ensure that the client has sufficient closure at the end of each session, even if they are unable to finish their comic. This is especially relevant if the client is representing events that might have traumatic content. This may mean pausing the client 10 to 15 minutes before the session ends in order to have sufficient time to practice an exercise involving mindfulness or grounding. This may be necessary to ensure the client leaves the session with a feeling of safety or closure. Clinicians should be attentive to the content of clients' comics and the time needed to complete the comic. If the comic appears to require multiple sessions to complete, it may be helpful for the clinician to collaboratively establish a plan or ending ritual with the client that can help contain the client's experience within the session even if the comic is unfinished.

Strengths

To the best of the author's knowledge, this is one of the only studies that has explored the use of comics within a combined art therapy and narrative therapy framework. Furthermore, it is the first study of its kind that directly compared the comic format with the single image format. By using the single image format as a benchmark, this study was able to better establish the effectiveness of the comic format. Participants responded to the same prompt for both formats, and were therefore able to directly compare the two with each other in their responses. As both art activities were done in the same one-hour period, the researcher could ensure that the conditions under which both the comic and the single image were made were as similar as

possible. In doing so, a fairer comparison could be made between the two formats. To guard against bias, the order in which the single image and comic activities were completed was alternated depending on participants' ID. This reduced the possibility that the order in which the activities were completed influenced participants' overall responses towards the two activities.

Another strength of this study was the collection of multiple forms of data. Various aspects of participants' experiences were captured through the quantitative, qualitative and art-based data gathered. This was accomplished through incorporating the survey, art-making and verbal interview in participants' experience. The survey provided an easily measurable means of comparing the effectiveness of the two formats while the verbal interview allowed participants to elaborate more on their experiences. Finally, the art-based data provided a visual representation of participants' experiences and allowed for patterns to be identified between the comic and the single image formats. Gathering multiple sources of data ensured a holistic view of participants' responses to the two formats.

As this study took place online, participants from different geographical regions were able to participate. Participants in three different countries and from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds were involved in this study. The activities in this study were understood and completed by all participants with little difficulty. Almost all participants were also able to obtain the art materials required for the comic and single image activities (color pencils or markers). In cases where participants had difficulty obtaining materials, the researcher was able to have the materials sent to participants via mail. This fact that this study could be completed in different geographical settings and with individuals of various cultural and ethnic backgrounds indicates that this study's design can be applied cross-culturally and may be easily replicated in a different cultural setting.

Lastly, the reliability of this study was strengthened by the presence of interraters. A team of six interraters was recruited to analyze the art-based data. The interraters independently compared participants' comics and single images in relation to factors such as word inclusion, representation of time, and representation of movement. The interraters also assessed the panel transitions, panel shapes and word-picture combinations used by participants in their comics. The presence of interraters was especially important given the subjectivity of art-based data. The collective analysis of the interraters increased the reliability of the results.

Limitations and Threats to Validity

One of the major limitations of this study is sample size. This study was based on a small sample of fifteen participants, which weakens the validity and reliability of this study. This study attempted to compensate for this with the depth of each individual interview and the scope of information gathered (qualitative, quantitative and art-based). Additionally, this research was conducted entirely online through using platforms such as Zoom and Google Forms. While this was done to guarantee the safety of participants and the researcher during the COVID-19 pandemic, this meant that participants either had to find their own art materials or request that the researcher send them certain materials. This limited the materials accessed by participants, and also resulted in increased variability in the materials used. If this study had been conducted in-person, accessibility and consistency with regard to art materials would have been maintained. Furthermore, the fact that this study took place via online platforms meant that participants were limited to those who had more access to technology, or who have more difficulty utilizing technology due to factors such as age. This constraint made this study less available to populations that had less access to such platforms due to limited resources.

Recommendation for Future Research

Future studies would benefit from recruiting a larger sample size to strengthen the validity and reliability of results. Conducting future studies in-person would also help increase accessibility to art materials and maintain the consistency of art materials used. Furthermore, in-person studies may help expand the pool of participants to individuals who have limited access to technology or who have more difficulty utilizing technology due to factors such as age.

Future studies may also benefit from switching the scales used in the quantitative survey from 1 indicating “strongly agree” and 5 indicating “strongly disagree” to 1 indicating “strongly disagree” and 5 indicating “strongly agree”. This is so as there was some confusion among participants with regard to the direction of the scale. The researcher verified the accuracy of the survey results with all 15 participants after they had completed the survey. 11 participants had filled the survey in accurately while a total of 4 participants had inverted responses. With the permission of these 4 participants, these responses were adjusted appropriately. To avoid such confusion in the future, the author recommends using the scale 1 indicates “strongly disagree” and 5 indicates “strongly agree”.

The researcher would also recommend any replication studies change the wording of the prompt to more strongly emphasize the exclusion of traumatic material. There was an unanticipated risk in that one participant, P14, brought up multiple years of trauma in her response to the art activities. The researcher resolved this situation by acknowledging the serious nature of the participant’s content and providing a list of mental health resources to the participant. This occurred despite the researcher stating as part of the prompt, “This need not be a traumatic or life altering event.” As such, the researcher recommends any phrasing this more strongly in any replication studies to avoid similar occurrences and minimize distress to

participants. For example, future research could use the prompt, “Please think of a *small* problem or challenge that you faced,” or “This *should* not be a traumatic or life altering event.”

Finally, future studies could explore the concept of reauthoring more effectively by having multiple sessions of art making. In evaluating the concept of reauthoring, participants evaluated their willingness to dialogue further about their artwork or to make more art as a follow-up. Rather than only evaluating participants’ willingness, future studies could actually engage participants in reauthoring their artwork. For example, participants’ could make the single image and comic in a subsequent session but from a different perspective. Alternatively, participants could construct an entirely different, preferred narrative in a comic and single image. Having participants actually engage in the work of reauthoring or building alternative narratives would allow a more accurate assessment of how effectively this narrative therapy technique could be applied in comic creation.

Conclusion

The primary research question of this study addressed the effectiveness of the comic format compared to the single image format in processing a past problem or challenge, particularly in eliciting a narrative from the problem or challenge. Quantitative, qualitative and art-based data were gathered during this process. The findings from the quantitative and qualitative data strongly suggest that comics are as effective or more effective than a single image in processing a past problem or challenge. Participants evaluated the two formats using a survey based on nine criteria derived from narrative therapy techniques. The mean scores and positive percentage ratings of the comic were higher than the single image for seven out of the nine criteria. The differences in the scores were statistically significant for four criteria, all of which the comic scored higher for than the single image: (a) representing the overall experience

of the problem/challenge, (b) representing the timeline of the problem/challenge, (c) representing the actions taken by individuals involved, and (d) representing the origin of the problem. This provides evidence that the comic format is as effective or more effective than the single image in eliciting a narrative from a past problem or challenge. The comic appeared to be especially effective at facilitating the narrative therapy technique of deconstructing, likely due to the comic format literally deconstructing or breaking down the problem or challenge into panels.

Furthermore, all participants had positive associations with comics in some form (n=15), indicating that the comic format is approachable and accessible. When comparing the comic format to the single image format, 73.3% participants preferred the comic to the single image (n=11), 13.3% preferred the single image (n=2) and 13.3% liked both formats equally (n=2). Participants' positive responses to the comic format further strengthen the rationale for its use in art therapy. However, it is important to note that more participants found the comic format more difficult (n=9) as compared to the single image format (n=6). Participants stated that the comic format was cognitively demanding and took more time to complete. Due to these characteristics, the comic format may be unsuitable for certain clients or contexts with time constraints.

Lastly, through analysis of the art-based data, it was found that the comic format evoked unique representations of time and movement. Participants included more movement in their comics than in their single images (n=12). Most participants also represented longer periods of time in their comics as compared to the single image (n=13). This demonstrates how the comic format has the potential to allow the representation of time and movement in ways that the single image format does not. The findings of this study strongly suggest the powerful potential of comic creation within an art therapy and narrative therapy framework. More research is needed to further explore the potential of comic making as a therapeutic tool and to establish how

clinicians could use comic making to achieve positive treatment outcomes with clients. By beginning this important work, this study hopes to spark further research and encourage the use of comic creation in therapeutic settings.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

**APPROVED BY THE
NDNU IRB COMMITTEE**

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN

A SINGLE IMAGE

AND A COMIC?

Participate in a one hour Zoom interview exploring these two mediums. No art experience is required! This study is conducted by a graduate student from Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont, CA.

Art making can be beneficial and therapeutic for individuals of all ages and backgrounds. However, for the purposes of this study, participants recruited must be over the age of 18 and not be previously diagnosed with a psychological disorder.

If you are eligible and interested, please contact Christine Phang at comics.singleimage@gmail.com or 412-539-6047.

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Agreement to Participate in Research

Responsible Investigator: Christine Phang, +1(412) 539-6047

Supervisor: Dr. Erin Partridge, +1(925) 405-2847

Title of Research Project: Individual versus Sequential: Comparing Making a Single: Image to Making a Comic

Participant ID: _____

I have been asked to participate in a survey-based research study that is investigating the differences between representing an event as a single image and representing an event as a comic. The results of this study should further the understanding of how single image formats and comic formats facilitate the processing of past problems or challenges and will provide insights into the visual characteristics of both formats.

I certify that (please mark an “X” in all boxes that apply):

- ☐ I am above the age of 18.
- ☐ I am mentally healthy and have not been previously diagnosed with any psychological disorders.

I understand that:

1. I will participate in an interview over Zoom with the researcher that should take approximately 1 hour. I will need to provide a device with a stable Internet connection.
2. During the interview,

- I will be asked basic demographic questions on my age, gender and cultural or ethnic identity. I may decline to answer any of these questions.
 - I will be asked to participate in two art activities that should take about 10 to 15 minutes each. I will need to provide 2 sheets of blank paper and a set of color pencils or markers with at least 8 colors.
 - I will be asked to take an online survey about my experience of the art activities that should take approximately 5 to 10 minutes.
 - I will be asked about my experience of the art activities and my impressions of certain art mediums. This should take approximately 10 minutes.
 - I will be asked to send my completed artwork to comics.singleimage@gmail.com. At the close of this study, data stored on this account will be transferred to an encrypted folder on a password-protected laptop. The email account will then be deleted. The data collected from this study will be kept for 7 years.
3. The Zoom interview will be recorded for research purposes. Only the researcher will have access to recordings, which will be stored in an encrypted folder on a password-protected laptop. The recordings will be kept for a period of 7 years. If I am uncomfortable with this I may request that the interview not be recorded.
 4. The possible psychological risks may be some discomfort based on recalling a past problem or challenge in my life. Should any negative feelings be elicited based on my participation in this study, I may contact the organizations on a referral list provided by the researcher. No physiological risks are anticipated.

5. Possible benefits of my participation include the therapeutic benefits associated with art making. The results of this study will help expand our knowledge on how a single image and a comic format can facilitate event processing.
6. Although alternative procedures may be used, the present procedure is the most advantageous and economical.
7. The results of this study and my artwork may be published, but any information from this study that can be identified with me will remain confidential.
8. Any questions about my participation in this study will be answered by Christine Phang at +1(412) 539-6047. Any questions or concerns about this study should be addressed to Dr. Erin Partridge at +1(925) 405-2847. Complaints or concerns about this study may be addressed to Dr. Jean Nyland, (Chair, Institutional Review Board, NDNU) at jnyland@ndnu.edu.
9. My consent is given voluntarily without being coerced. I may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study, and I may withdraw at any time, without prejudice to any future contact with NDNU.
10. I have received a copy of this consent form for my record.

I HAVE MADE A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE. MY SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT I HAVE READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED AND THAT I HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE.

Print Participant's Name

Participant's Signature

Date

Investigator's Signature

Appendix C: Comic Templates shown to Participants

Figure C1: Grid with 4 panels

Figure C2: Strip with 6 panels

Figure C3: Page with 7 panels

Appendix D: Google Forms Survey

22/03/2021

Art Activities Survey

Art Activities Survey

Please answer the following questions on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "strongly agree" and 5 being "strongly disagree":

*Required

1. Participant ID (This is assigned in the informed consent document. If you are unsure of your participant ID please ask the researcher.) *

2. The single image was effective in representing the overall experience of the challenge I faced. * 1 point

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

3. The comic was effective in representing the overall experience of the challenge I faced. * 1 point

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

06/12/2021, 15:37

Art Activities Survey

4. The comic was able to accurately capture the emotions and thoughts I experienced about this problem. *

1 point

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

5. The single image was able to accurately capture the emotions and thoughts I experienced about this problem. *

1 point

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

6. The single image was effective in representing the problem as separate from my identity. *

1 point

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

06/12/2021, 15:37

Art Activities Survey

7. The comic was effective in representing the problem as separate from my identity. * 1 point

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

8. The comic was effective in representing the timeline of the challenge I faced. * 1 point

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

9. The single image was effective in representing the timeline of the challenge I faced. * 1 point

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

06/12/2021, 15:37

Art Activities Survey

10. The single image was effective in representing the actions taken by the people involved in the event. *

1 point

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

11. The comic was effective in representing the actions taken by the people involved in the event. *

1 point

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

12. The comic was effective in showing the impact this problem had on my life. *

1 point

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

06/12/2021, 15:37

Art Activities Survey

13. The single image was effective in showing the impact this problem had on my life. *

1 point

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

14. The single image was effective in showing how this problem originated. *

1 point

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

15. The comic was effective in showing how this problem originated. *

1 point

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

06/12/2021, 15:37

Art Activities Survey

16. I would be willing to talk about how the comic relates to other events in my life. * 1 point

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

17. I would be willing to talk about how the single image relates to other events in my life. * 1 point

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

18. I would be willing to create another single image as a follow up to this activity. * 1 point

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

06/12/2021, 15:37

Art Activities Survey

19. I would be willing to create another comic as a follow up to this activity. * 1 point

Mark only one oval.

☐ 1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms

Appendix E: Verbal Interview Question Sheet**Session No.:****Participant ID****Demographic Information****Age:****Gender:****Cultural or Ethnic Identity****Verbal Interview Questions**

1. Which format did you prefer – the comic or the single image? Why?
2. What differences did you find between the two formats?
3. Which activity was more difficult to complete? Why?
4. If you could use one word or phrase each to describe making the single image and making the comic what would it be and why?

Single image:

Comic:

5. What are your thoughts on making comics as part of therapy?
6. How familiar are you with comics?
7. How do you feel about reading comics?
8. What comics have you read/ do you know of?

Appendix F: Debriefing Statement

Thank you for your participation in this research study comparing the single image format to the comic format. Two art activities, a multiple choice scale questionnaire and a verbal interview were used in this study. The goal of the questionnaire was to evaluate the effectiveness of the single image and the comic format in processing an event. The information from the verbal interviews will be used to substantiate the findings from the survey. This study hypothesizes that making a comic has the potential to elicit a narrative from a problem as effectively or more effectively than making a single image. Your participation is important in helping researchers understand the potential of comic for use within an art therapy and narrative therapy framework.

Please take clear pictures of the artwork you created today and send them to comics.singleimage@gmail.com. Only the researcher has access to this email account and it is used solely for the purposes of this study. At the close of this study the information stored on this account will be transferred into an encrypted folder on a password-protected computer and the account will be deleted. Data collected from this study will be kept for 7 years. The results of the study and participants' artwork may be published but all identifying information will be kept private and confidential. Documenting and sending your artwork is a very important step in this study. The artwork made by participants in this study will be analyzed for differences between the single image and the comic formats and for any unique characteristics the comic format may evoke. This study's hypothesis is that there will be a pattern of differences between the two formats, and that the comic format may evoke unique characteristics such as word inclusion and the representation of time and movement.

Final results will be available from the investigator, Christine Phang, by January 1st, 2022. You may contact me at +1(412) 539-6047 to receive an email copy of the final report. Your participation, including your name and answers, will remain absolutely confidential, even if the report is published. If you have any additional questions regarding this research, please contact Christine Phang at +1(412) 539-6047.

Appendix G: List of Referral Services for Participants

Figure G1: List of Referral Services for Participants in the United States

If any negative emotions have been evoked based on your participation in this study, you may contact the following organizations that provide free mental health services or free services in finding mental health providers. In an emergency call **911** or head down to the **Accident & Emergency (A&E) Department** of the nearest hospital for someone to attend to you.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255); En Español 1-888-628-9454

The Lifeline is a free, confidential crisis hotline that is available to everyone 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Lifeline connects callers to the nearest crisis center in the Lifeline national network. These centers provide crisis counseling and mental health referrals. People who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have hearing loss can contact the Lifeline via TTY at 1-800-799-4889.

Crisis Text Line

Text “HELLO” to 741741

The Crisis Text hotline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week throughout the U.S. The Crisis Text Line serves anyone, in any type of crisis, connecting them with a crisis counselor who can provide support and information.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

For general information on mental health and to locate treatment services in your area, **call the SAMHSA Treatment Referral Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357)** or go to

<https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/locator>. SAMHSA also has a Behavioral Health Treatment

Locator on its website that can be searched by location (go to <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>).

Mental Health America Affiliate

Your local Mental Health America affiliate is an excellent resource for information about local programs and services including affordable treatment services (go to

<https://arc.mhanational.org/find-an-affiliate>).

Psychology Today

Psychology Today's Therapy Directory to search for mental health professionals in your area.

You can search by zip code, city, last name, etc. For each provider listed, you can read about their therapy approach, specialty areas, information about their fees including whether they accept insurance and whether they offer sliding scale fees, as well as their credentials and contact information. There are a variety of options for sorting your results to find providers who most closely match your needs. You can also send them an initial e-mail (go to

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists>).

Theravive

Theravive provides a searchable directory of licensed therapists who seek to make mental health counseling safe and easily accessible (go to <https://www.theravive.com>).

Sources:

National Institute of Mental Health <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/find-help/index.shtml>

Mental Health America <https://www.mhanational.org/finding-therapy>

Figure G2: List of Referral Services for Participants in Singapore

If any negative emotions have been evoked based on your participation in this study, you may contact the following organizations that provide free mental health services or free services in finding mental health providers. In an emergency call **999** or head down to the **Accident & Emergency (A&E) Department** of the nearest hospital for someone to attend to you.

Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH) Helpline

Call 1800-283 7019 (Mon-Fri, 9am to 1pm; 2pm to 6pm)

SAMH's toll-free helpline provides support and information on mental health issues.

SAMH also provides counselling services on a donation basis and by appointment. It is not compulsory to give, although SAMH encourages our clients to offer any amount they are comfortable with as the amount collected goes into supporting our programmes and services (go to <https://www.samhealth.org.sg>).

Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) Helpline

Call 1800–221 4444 (24 hours) or email pat@sos.org.sg

SOS has a 24-hour hotline providing round the clock emotional support for those in distress. This service is manned by trained volunteers. They also provide emotional support via email (pat@sos.org.sg). This service is manned by professional counsellors. Find out more about their services on their website (go to <https://www.sos.org.sg/about/our-services>).

Community Health Assessment Team (CHAT)

Free Mental Health Check for Young People aged 16 to 30

Make an appointment at <https://www.chat.mentalhealth.sg/get-help/make-chat-referral/>

CHAT provides a free mental health check, which involves a confidential, in-depth conversation with their qualified mental health professionals about your mental health concerns. Through this, CHAT shares with you their impression (i.e. what you might be experiencing) and recommendations of professional help based on your needs. If you are agreeable, CHAT will help with the necessary referral(s). To find out more go to <https://www.chat.mentalhealth.sg/get-help/mental-health-check/> or email chat@mentalhealth.sg or call 6493 6500

Care Corner Counselling Hotline (Mandarin)

Call 1800 3535 800

Care Corner has provides free counselling in Mandarin via their hotline.

Silver Ribbon (Singapore)

info@silverribbonsingapore.com

Silver Ribbon (Singapore) provides basic complimentary counselling services via appointment at three branches. To find out more about their services email info@silverribbonsingapore.com or go to their website (go to <https://www.silverribbonsingapore.com/counselling.html>). The three branches of Silver Ribbon (Singapore) are listed below:

Hang On. Life's Awesome (H.O.L.A.)

Blk 208, Serangoon Central #01-238 S(550208)

Call 63861928

The Linkage

Wisma Geylang Serai, 1 Engku Aman Turn Level 4 S(408528)

Call 6509 0271

Raintree Sanctuary

Blk 550, Hougang Street 51 #01-169 S(530550)

Call 6385 3714

Psychology Today

Psychology Today's Therapy Directory to search for mental health professionals in your area.

For each provider listed, you can read about their therapy approach, specialty areas, information about their fees including whether they accept insurance and whether they offer sliding scale fees, as well as their credentials and contact information. There are a variety of options for sorting your results to find providers who most closely match your needs. You can also send them an initial e-mail (go to <https://www.psychologytoday.com/sg/counselling/sg/singapore>)

Figure G3: List of Referral Services for Participants in France

If any negative emotions have been evoked based on your participation in this study, you may contact the following organizations that provide free mental health services or free services in finding mental health providers. In an emergency call **112** or head down to the **Accident & Emergency (A&E) Department** of the nearest hospital for someone to attend to you.

S.O.S. Amitié

Call 09 72 39 40 50

Or internet chat at <https://www.sos-amitie.com/en/web/internet/chat>

SOS Amitié offers 24/7 service in France for anyone who needs to speak anonymously and confidentially. They have 1,700 trained listening volunteers that can listen to you.

Suicide écoute

Call 01 45 39 40 00

Suicide écoute offers 24-hour service to people in France who suffer both psychologically and physically.

Sources:

Therapy Route: <https://www.therapyroute.com/article/suicide-hotlines-and-crisis-lines-in-france>

Figure G4: List of Referral Services for Participants in Canada

If any negative emotions have been evoked based on your participation in this study, you may contact the following organizations that provide free mental health services or free services in finding mental health providers. In an emergency call **911** or head down to the **Accident & Emergency (A&E) Department** of the nearest hospital for someone to attend to you.

Canada Suicide Prevention Service

Call 1-833-456-4566 (available 24/7) or text 45645 (available 4pm-12am)

Crisis Services Canada (CSC) evolved out of the Canadian Distress Line Network (CDLN) – a national network of existing distress, crisis and suicide prevention line services that has been engaging members since 2002.

eMentalHealth.ca

[eMentalHealth.ca](https://www.ementalhealth.ca) has a thorough database of mental health programs available across Canada, for Canadians of all ages. You can search for services including counselling and therapy by location, then filter by criteria — such as age and "no fees" — to find community services near you. (Go to <https://www.ementalhealth.ca>)

Wellness Together Canada

Call 1-866-585-0445 (for adults) or text the word WELNNESS to 741741 (for adults)

Through Wellness Together Canada, individuals of all ages in Canada or Canadians abroad can access supports ranging from self-assessment and peer support, to free and confidential sessions with social workers, psychologists and other professionals.

Supports are provided online in both official languages as well as by phone and text for those without internet access. Phone-counselling sessions are available in 200 languages and dialects, through instantaneous interpretation. (Go to <https://wellnesstogether.ca/en-CA>).

Therapytribe

TherapyTribe aims to help people find great mental health resources like therapists, support groups, wellness tools as well as an overall sense of community (Go to <https://www.therapytribe.com/online-therapy/canada/>).

Psychology Today

Psychology Today's Therapy Directory to search for mental health professionals in your area. For each provider listed, you can read about their therapy approach, specialty areas, information about their fees including whether they accept insurance and whether they offer sliding scale fees, as well as their credentials and contact information. There are a variety of options for sorting your results to find providers who most closely match your needs. You can also send them an initial e-mail (Go to <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/therapists>).

Sources:

Crisis Services Canada <https://www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/our-organization/>

TherapyTribe <https://www.therapytribe.com/online-therapy/canada/>

Psychology Today <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/therapists>

CBC: How to access free mental health and support during the covid-19 crisis

<https://www.cbc.ca/life/wellness/how-to-access-free-mental-health-and-emotional-support-during-the-covid-19-crisis-1.5519397>

Government of Canada: Mental Health support <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/mental-health-services/mental-health-get-help.html>

Appendix H: Forms for Interraters

Interrater Form

Please complete the following sections to assess participants' drawings. Each section assesses one participant's artwork. There are 15 sections in total.

*Required

Participant 1

1. Please compare the amount of words in the comic and single image (3 represents no/minimal difference between the two) *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Single image has many more words than comic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Comic has many more words than single image

2. Please compare the amount of movement in the comic and single image (3 represents no/minimal difference between the two) *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Single image has much more movement than comic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Comic has much more movement than single image

3. Please indicate the amount of time represented in the single image and the comic *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Moment(s)	Minutes/hours	Days/weeks	Months/years
Single image	☐	☐	☐	☐
Comic	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. What panel-to-panel transitions are present in the comic (choose as many as apply)? *

Tick all that apply.

Sample image from page 70 of
"Understanding Comics:
The Invisible Art"
by Scott McCloud (1993)

☐ Moment-to-moment

Sample image from page 70 of
"Understanding Comics:
The Invisible Art"
by Scott McCloud (1993)

☐ Action-to-action

Sample image from page 71 of
"Understanding Comics:
The Invisible Art"
by Scott McCloud (1993)

☐ Subject-to-subject

Sample image from page 71 of
"Understanding Comics:
The Invisible Art"
by Scott McCloud (1993)

☐ Scene-to-scene

Sample image from page 72 of
"Understanding Comics:
The Invisible Art"
by Scott McCloud (1993)

☐ Aspect-to-aspect

Sample image from page 72 of
"Understanding Comics:
The Invisible Art"
by Scott McCloud (1993)

☐ Non-sequitur

5. Were panel shapes used in the comic to achieve any of the following effects (choose as many as apply)? *

Tick all that apply.

Sample image from page 101 of
"Understanding Comics:
The Invisible Art"
by Scott McCloud (1993)

Sample image from page 101 of
"Understanding Comics:
The Invisible Art"
by Scott McCloud (1993)

☐ Lengthening panels to increase a sense of time passing

☐ Shortening panels to decrease a sense of time passing

Sample image from page 102 of
"Understanding Comics:
The Invisible Art"
by Scott McCloud (1993)

Sample image from page 103 of
"Understanding Comics:
The Invisible Art"
by Scott McCloud (1993)

☐ Using borderless panels to create a sense of timelessness

☐ Using bleeds to create a sense of timelessness

6. Were any of the following word-picture combinations used (check as many as apply)? *

Tick all that apply.

Sample image from page 153 of
“Understanding Comics:
The Invisible Art”
by Scott McCloud (1993)

☐ Word-specific combination

Sample image from page 153 of
“Understanding Comics:
The Invisible Art”
by Scott McCloud (1993)

☐ Picture-specific combination

Sample image from page 153 of
“Understanding Comics:
The Invisible Art”
by Scott McCloud (1993)

☐ Duo-specific combination

Sample image from page 154 of
“Understanding Comics:
The Invisible Art”
by Scott McCloud (1993)

☐ Additive combination

Sample image from page 154 of
“Understanding Comics:
The Invisible Art”
by Scott McCloud (1993)

☐ In parallel combination

Sample image from page 154 of
“Understanding Comics:
The Invisible Art”
by Scott McCloud (1993)

☐ Montage combination

Sample image from page 155 of
“Understanding Comics:
The Invisible Art”
by Scott McCloud (1993)

☐ Interdependent combination

☐ None of the above