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by Nararya Rahadyan Budiyono

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EXPRESSIVE WRITING AND SOCIAL MEDIA AS EMOTIONAL RELEASE

Nararya Rahadyan Budiyo^{a,1}, Suryo Sudiro^{b,2}, Adityo Permana Wibowo^{c,3}

^a Department of Guidance and Counseling, University of Technology Yogyakarta

^b Department of English Education, University of Technology Yogyakarta

^c Department of Informatic, University of Technology Yogyakarta

e-mail : ¹ nararya@uty.ac.id, ² sudiro71@gmail.com, ³ adityopw@uty.ac.id

Abstract

Everyone has problem to solve. Each problem has positive and negative impacts but it makes someone stronger. This research aims to figure out the effectiveness of expressive writing and social media as media to express thought, ideas, and emotion of the users. The arrangement of research is descriptive studies through the examination of a number of social media accounts by employing purposive sampling method. Expressive writing is an activity to direct to communication skill through writing for sharing feelings, thoughts, and anything that is wanted by the user without a feeling of being blamed by somebody else. Expressive writing becomes one of curative alternatives to solve traumatic experience and other psychological matters. Expressive writing helps someone to release emotional expression. Expressive writing in the era of technology is not only performed in conventional ways, handwriting but also performed through modern devices. Social media such as facebook, twitter, and path is a product of technology that is popularly used to share problems (expressive writing). This is phenomenology research. It shows that 150 user accounts of facebook, twitter, and path conduct expressive writing to release their emotional expression on problems that they are facing. Based on the research, it is found the impact of social anxiety on the reliance on social media that is significant and positive.

Keywords: emotional release, expressive writing, social media, phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, copes with the normal stress of life, works productively and fruitfully, and makes a contribution to her or his community. A healthy mental is also characterized by individuals that understand and maximize their potential. It may exhibit the ability of individuals to overcome stressing situation and to work productively and to be beneficial in their work places, families, communities and friends. The other indicators are the ability and determination to overcome psychological matters (http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/ret.10 August 2016).

Various counseling approaches and psychology theories are introduced to practitioners as counseling service alternatives. Sigmund Freud concept, for instance, in psychoanalysis theory observes clients as so weak and so uncertain individuals that they need big help to reconstruct normal personality (Gibson, 2011: 211). The key factor of this therapy is on the willingness of the client to uncover the real problem he or she is in although it is very painful or scary.

The next example is the theory of *Person Centered Therapy* that is introduced by Carl R. Rogers that focuses on the ability of the client to recognize, identify and face the reality more accurately. The better the self recognition of a client, the bigger the

capacity of identifying his or her attitude. (Gibson, 2011: 213). The expected alteration that appears with this approach is the ability of the client to observe him or her in different way. The other alteration is that the client may open to evidence no matter it is from outside or inside. At last the openness of the client to uncover his or her problem is the key success of this therapy is the first step that determines the success of a therapy to reach mental health.

The activity of uncovering problem is not only through verbal expression but also through expressive writing. Therapy conducted with writing is initiated from clinical practice in which writing is considered one way to heal the patient or client. Some psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselor from the mentioned schools, such as psychoanalysis, person centered therapy, and rational emotive apply writing therapy to their clients the 18th, a medical clinician, Benjamin Rush asked his patients to write the symptom that they felt and found that the writing process could ease his patients' stress and give more information on the problems faced by his patients.

Writing can become one of many techniques of guiding, counseling media and psychotherapy. In western countries, scientific people develop some terms such as therapeutic letter writing, expressive writing, therapeutic writing, scriptotherapy, and the terms are related to narrative therapy and Morita therapy (White and Murray, 2002; Soper and Bergen, 2001; Feltham, 2000; Adams, 2009; Riordan, 1996).

The feedback of the problem expression in written form is not always direct, even perhaps there is no response from other parts. It does not matter because the concept of uncovering problems through writing is an effort to reduce psychological load, and it is not merely an effort to expect responses from other parts.

In the field of study of literature, writing is bringing back ideas that are in the domain of fantasy to reality. Writing makes fantasy that becomes a specific load in human's soul and mind realized in reality. If it is an idea, the idea will not only move around the soul and mind of a certain person. It also happens when it is an opinion or feeling. The expression that is put on writing will then be printed writing. When it is published, it will find feedback from the ones who accept it.

In the context of the relation of Literature and Psychology, Sigmund Freud (in Welleck, 1962: 82) stated that an author is previously someone that experiences dissatisfaction when facing realities. He then sinks into his fantasy that is full of ambition and satisfaction. He writes and it makes him create a literary work. It becomes a momentum to get back to a reality with a new condition.

Observing the relation, it is possible to find a relation of a human psychology and his work. The work that is arranged from words can be written as an expression of mind and feeling. The work possibly becomes a new reality that has more values for him and others. Certainly, the words become a medium of emotional release of the author.

The phenomenon of counseling development through writing rises in western or eastern countries including Indonesia. It happens because of its flexible ability to cope with technology advancement such as e-mail therapy or e-counseling (Oliver, 2007; Murphy and Mitchell, 1998). Those are counseling services through email. In this technology advancement era, expressing ideas, opinion and feeling in the forms of sadness, happiness, emotion, ambition, and other psychological responses are not only conducted face to face, between a human and another human or other conventional methods in the form of writing or manual. Users of technology make use of social media as a tool of expressing problems that they think and feel.

Social media is one information technology products that are mostly used by users as media of expressive writing such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Blackberry etc. The social media provides the users with features and menus that possibly make them able to express what they think and feel. Although we often find the ethical matters on freedom of users for expressing ideas and feelings into their social media accounts, it is without a doubt that social media has become alternative of treatment in the process of mental health therapy.

This is an article written after a phenomenology research. Phenomenology views human on his or her

attitudes as a meaningful thing because human gives meaning in his or her attitude and behaviour. With the meaning human considers his or her concrete experience that is equipped with consciousness.

METHOD

a. Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis views personality in three systems; *id*, *ego* and *superego*. *Id* is the genetic heritage or heredity factors that work on happiness principal. Therefore it gives inner force to reach ambition or personal interest. *Ego* works on reality principal so that it controls consciousness, provides consideration and realistic and logical planning, and prevents irrational wills. *Superego* represents inner force that works on moral realism principal. *Superego* provides awards such as proud feelings, and also punishment such as guilty feelings of the person who has it.

In this triangle of personality components, psychoanalysis theory views tensions or contradictions among the components hence all attitudes are directed to reduce the tensions (defense mechanism). Freud's daughter, Anna developed psychoanalysis further by broadening her father concept of defense mechanism. One of main defense mechanism found in psychoanalysis approach is *repression*. It is an effort to hide and keep all memories, feeling, and thinking deeper or the deepest inside since the existence of the memory, feeling and thinking will cause pain and fear. However since *repression* is considered the most basic and principal defense mechanism, process of psychoanalysis therapy will try to recall all things repressed into consciousness to re-analyze and re-examine. The strategy to recall the repressed matters is with expressive writing.

b. Person Centered Therapy

Rogers idea is different from what Freud views that humans must be controlled by society on the sexual force and aggression that are possessed by them. Rogers, differently, thinks that humans are basically well mannered and they are not necessarily controlled. The effort to control them will make them worse (Olson, 2013: 772). Rogers introduces a concept on main motive of a human that is called self actualization. It is a strong motivation of a human in life. It makes a human more independent and socially responsible. (2013: 780). The view of Rogers conclude that the key process of a therapy is on the client as a result of his effort to control himself in the process of therapy. This concept is the same as the concept of

expressive writing in which client holds a full control of the therapy process.

c. Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy

Rational emotive therapy views humans are born with good or bad potential. One of negative sides of humans is a tendency to ruin himself, avoid considering matters, feel pity of mistakes, be intolerant, blame himself and avoid development and self actualization (Corey, 2010: 238). The implementation of expressive writing in the concept of this theory is to overcome the all mentioned tendencies by guiding client to be more honest to the reality and facts of himself.

d. Written Words in Literature as Psychology Representation.

Literature is related to any sciences in the world. One of them is to psychology. To see the relation, it is necessary to learn from Sigmund Freud about it. He states

The artist (says Freud) is originally a man who turns from reality because he cannot come to terms with the demand for the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction. As it is first made, and who then in phantasy-life allows full play to his erotic and ambitious wishes. But then he finds a way of return from this world of phantasy back to reality; with his special gifts, he mould his phantasies into a new kind of reality, and men concede them a justification as valuable reflections of actual life. Thus by certain path he actually becomes the hero, king, creator, favorite he desired to be., without the circuitous path of creating real alternations in the outer world. (Welleck. 1962: 82).

It means that an author can move his fantasy about the world that is different from reality that he faces. He can use words that are coming out from his thought and feeling. What he spills out into his writing can be a new reality to him and to others who read. The new reality is the one that is considered valuable by others.

Words as a necessary element in literary work are also instruments to express the purpose of an author. If the words are arranged to become writing, there will be a meaning. Meaning of a word in an utterance or writing can cause matters of interpretation, as Cruse says, The interpretation we give to a particular word form can vary so greatly from context to context. (2000: 105). When writing is accepted well by the readers, it becomes a cultural product. The product can be well known as a masterpiece work because it is valuable and powerful.

Many writings become valuable cultural products that are powerful in society. *Dear Mrs Roosevelt* written by Robert Cohen and edited by Eleanor Roosevelt is one example. It is a collection of letters written by poor children and teenagers of United States in 1933 through 1941 to Mrs. Roosevelt, the first lady at the time. Specifically, the letters describe the suffering and the necessities of children and teenagers at the peak of the worst economic crisis of United States.

Another example is a book, *The Hell of Stalingrad*, written by Franz and Charles Gulans. It is a book of letters of soldiers of Germany in 1941. They were waiting for death after caught and sent to the war hostage camp by Soviet soldiers. They wrote letters to their parents, girlfriends, and relatives. They wrote stories of their own and told the world the cruelty of war and the cruel regime.

In Indonesia, the famous letters were written by R.A. Kartini. She wrote the letters to her friends in Europe in 1900s before she died in 1904. The letters were then printed and published by J.H. Abendanon, the Dutch minister of Culture, Religion and Craft. The book was entitled "*Door Duïsternis tot Licht*". It tells Kartini's aspiration on women's condition in Indonesia and also her ideas of human social development.

Writings of humans are essential. In addition to becoming media of expressing feelings and thoughts, writings are also media of emotional release. When the writings are printed and published, they become cultural products that has humanity values.

e. Social media as an Expressive Writing Media

Social media is online media in which the users can participate, share ideas, and create content easily. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as a group of internet media based applications that are build on web 2.0 ideology and technology and that make possible the creation and changing users' generated content. The social media technology is created in the forms of magazine, internet forum, weblog, social blog, microblogging, wiki, podcast, photos or pictures, videos, social bookmark by applying a set of theories in the domain of research media (social attendance and property media) and social process (self presentation and self disclosure).

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), there are six kinds of social media as follows:

1. Collaboration project; Website allows users to alter, add or remove the contents in the website. Ex: Wikipedia.
2. Blog and Microblog: Users are freer to express something in this blog such as to share problems or to criticize government policies. Ex: Twitter

3. Content: users of this website (users) can share media contents such as videos, ebooks, pictures etc.
4. Social Network Sites: this application allows users to connect with other users by applying private information such as photos. Ex: Facebook
5. Virtual Game World: virtual world in which users replicate 3D situation and in which users can appear in the form of avatar. The avatar then interacts to other users in the real life. Ex: online me.
6. Virtual Social World : virtual world in which the users feel living in a virtual world, just the same as virtual game world they can interact with other users, However, Virtual Social World is freer and more directed to real life.

According to Soliha (2015) one of many factors that can make someone use media and then generate addiction on the media. It is called motive. Social anxiousness is posited as individual motive to meet the needs related to *interpersonal relationship* because the needs are not met in daily life situation. The effect of social anxiousness on the addiction is directed significantly to positive direction. It means the higher the social anxiousness, the more the media social addiction. However with the less impact, the social anxiousness is getting lower and it makes the media social addiction is also less. They do not posit as the only tool to interact with other people.

f. Phenomenology Research

Phenomenology views human as a creature that has consciousness (Shri Ahimsa Putra; 2012). The consciousness is always on something and the consciousness on something is also understood as a knowledge. Knowledge in human is initiated from interaction or communication. The set of knowledge or consciousness framework becomes an individual guidance to realize attitude and behaviour.

It is a view that becomes a basic understanding of the importance of language in humans' knowledge. From the interaction or communication knowledge is initiated and language is one significant tool of making interaction or communication. The interaction surely deals with individuals in a community and it develops in bigger and bigger society. Then, it generates social consciousness.

Social consciousness of human makes him or her have purposes that are related to the consciousness object. The consciousness of purposes makes human create a set of meaning makers. He or she can then give meaning that human life is meaningful because of the meaning given by humans involved in the life or the activities of life.

A significant concept to learn in phenomenology is to understand. In his article (2016), Shri Ahimsa Putra wrote that to understand in the context of a phenomenology research is to recognize views, knowledge, values, norms and rules that exist in a society or that are obeyed by individual and then he or she can determine the relation to the attitude of society members as the attitude of collective individuals or the attitude of certain individual.

Phenomenology also influences researches on writings by the concept of viewing language as the basic element of meaning production. Although in Husserl's phenomenology language is underestimated, Terry Eagleton views differently (in Mahdavi et al. 2012). Eagleton considers language more important than the activities of humans. It does not simply expresses and reflects meaning but produces it. It means that language generates the meaning or in other words, language shapes the consciousness.

Language and meanings are in my opinion important things to see in the phenomenon. They bring a probability to find an emotional release in the writings of the social media users. The meaning is or probably meanings are taken in the forms of emotional release, views, knowledge, values, norms and rules of the users. They are considered the results of human life activities that are conducted with consciousness and the consciousness makes the activities meaningful.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This is a phenomenology research. Researchers observe and take some status posted in the social media; Facebook, Twitter and Path. Researchers also do a library study on social media and emotional chatarsis. It also includes some reviews on some existing researches regarding the impact of social media on emotional release. This is an effort to have basic assumptions of the relation of social media using to emotional release.

Researchers also try to collect some phenomena of emotional cases shared in the social media. From the matters collected, researchers make some necessary matters that are going to be discussed and explained. Then, researches conduct interview with some persons that have social media accounts. The questions are directed to recognize the feelings of the respondent after posting their status on a social media.

From the answers of respondents taken with a purposive sampling method, researches list some findings and analyze them. Subsequently, researchers analyze the findings by comparing them with what is already mentioned in the literature review. Researchers then conclude what they have founded. The conclusion is directed to find how users use expressive writing,

how they use social media and how the activities give impacts on their emotion. Finally, researchers the research process and result in the form of an article. It becomes the ethnography of the research.

The observation of 150 status posted in social media; Facebook, Twitter and Path, and the interview with the account users result in a conclusion that 90% users agree that expressive writing method through social media give impact on their emotional chatarsis. The main purpose of the problem sharing is to lessen and to press on negative emotion that has a potential to generate negative attitude. Another purpose is to satisfy the users to make possible to share what they feel and think.

The following samples are the expressive writing that users like to use in social media. Some specific terms and styles are used by users. Figure 1



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

CONCLUSION

Basically expressive writing through social media as a tool to share matters is an alternative activity in the therapy process. To share matters immediately is a necessary responsive treatment to

press on the emotional chatarsis that has a potential of conductive negative attitude. However, one thing that a therapist should do is to conduct a client guidance in order to keeping ethical values and language politeness in social media. Social media is accessed by many users even though expressive writing is conducted in a personal account.

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