UNSUCCESSFUL TREATMENTS OF "WRITER'S BLOCK": A META-ANALYSIS[1,2]

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Summary.—A wide literature of the unsuccessful treatment of writer's block has emerged since the early 1970's. Findings within this literature seem to confer generalizability of this procedure; however, small sample sizes may limit this interpretation. This meta-analysis independently analyzed effect sizes for "self-treatments" and "group-treatments" using number of words in the body of the publication as indication of a failure to treat writer's block. Results of the reported findings suggest that group-treatments tend to be slightly more unsuccessful than self-treatments.

Following Upper's (1974) seminal study on the unsuccessful self-treatment of writer's block, researchers have seemingly demonstrated generality of the findings in both self- (Malloy, 1983; Hermann, 1984; Didden, Sigafoos, O'Reilly, Lancioni, & Sturmey, 2007) and group-treatment approaches (Skinner, Perlini, Fric, Werstine, & Calla, 1985; Skinner & Perlini, 1996). Participant mortality (e.g., some participants were no longer alive), however, may have confounded unanimity of findings. As such, a research synthesis that pools samples is needed for better interpretation of the phenomenon.

METHOD

The authors generated a preliminary database of publications using EBSCOhost, with a search period ranging from 1974 (the publication date of Upper's original work) to 2007. The search terms used were *unsuccessful treatment* and *writer's block*. This yielded 10 research studies. Three studies were removed because they were duplicates of studies already collected. One study was removed because it was a review of the literature (Olson, 1984). Lastly, one study was removed because it was a follow-up of a previous study (Skinner & Perlini, 1996), which breaks the assumption of independent sampling. In total, five studies met the criteria for inclusion in the analysis.

Several pieces of information were retrieved from each study, including the word count within the body of the publication, number of authors (*n*), and treatment type (individual or group).

Heterogeneity of effect sizes for unsuccessful treatments of writer's block (word count) for writers in group- or self-treatment settings was as-

sessed using Pearson's chi-square. Publications were weighted by authorship because, regardless of setting, any author listed had the ability to receive successful treatment for writer's block. Additionally, weighting by author respects the phenomenology of writer's block experienced by each author on the publication.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the major findings of the analysis. Heterogeneity of effect size for self- and group-treatments indicates the pervasiveness of unsuccessful treatments of writer's block in both group- and self-treatment settings [χ^2 (1, $N=13$)=0.68, $p=.41$]. *Post hoc* analysis using Moses' (1963) test of extreme reactions indicates that self-treatment settings were more likely to produce extreme scores (trimmed, $p<.001$). The results suggest that group-treatments tend to be slightly less successful than self-treatments. Practically speaking, the authors tentatively advise that sole authorship *may* be related to "wordy" manuscripts. Thus, in pursuit of brevity, group-treatments may reduce number of words produced in a research article on this topic.

TABLE 1
COMPARISON OF TREATMENT UNSUCCESSFULNESS ACROSS STUDIES

Study	n	Treatment Setting	Word Count
Didden, *et al.* (2007)	5	Self	0
Hermann (1984)	1	Self	23
Malloy (1983)	1	Self	0
Skinner, *et al.* (1985)	5	Group	0
Upper (1974)	1	Self	0
Total	13	χ^2=0.68	$p=.41$
Group	5	Span=1	
Self	8	Span=8	Trimmed $p<.001$

Note.—Observed spans are smaller than the theoretical minimum due to ties in the data.

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