

Research Paper

Body Image in the Mirror of Psychodrama: A Group Therapy Report

Mehdi Purrezaian  ^{1*}

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Art, University of Shahed, Tehran, Iran.



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Abstract

Introduction and Objective: Negative body image is one of the most common problems among women and is associated with various psychological disorders such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and depression. This issue appears to be a psycho-social problem; therefore, group psychotherapies may serve as effective treatment methods. Despite its potential suitability, psychodrama has rarely been used in studies addressing negative body image. The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of group psychodrama on the modulation of negative body image in a group of girls.

Research Methodology: Fifteen girls with negative body image, aged 18 to 22 years, participated in this randomized controlled trial. Participants were randomly assigned to an intervention group ($n = 8$) and a control group ($n = 7$). The intervention group attended 12 sessions of group psychodrama, while the control group was placed on a waiting list. The effectiveness of the intervention was evaluated using the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ).

Findings: The findings showed that group psychodrama was significantly effective in modifying the negative body image of the participants.

Conclusion: Group psychodrama is effective in moderating negative body image and demonstrates feasibility as a therapeutic method for addressing similar problems.

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***Corresponding author:** Mehdi Purrezaian

Address: Department of Art, University of Shahed, Tehran, Iran.

Tell: 09121756145

Email: purrezaian@shahed.ac.ir

Introduction

Body image is a person's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about his or her body (Grogan, 2016). Therefore, the body image is not the image of the persons in the mirror, but the image of them in the mirror of their mind. But this is not a complete description of body image. For many, body image is also a reflection of how they feel about themselves (Willett, 2007). It can be also an imaginary reflection of a person's image in the eyes of others. This point is rooted in sociocultural theories of body image propose that societies have body shape ideals which are communicated to individual who internalize them resulting in body (dis)satisfaction (Grogan, 2016). So, the body image is a psycho-social concept. Negative body image needs to be corrected and it encompass many forms such as body-appearance dissatisfaction, body surveillance, body shame, and internalization of media appearance ideals. But there is also an adaptive side of body image -positive body image - that needs to be promoted (Daniels et al., 2018). Among the methods to modify the negative body image and facilitate the positive body image, group methods, especially psychodrama with several interpersonal techniques, seem to be more effective due to the social dimension of body image. Double, mirroring, and role-reversal (Cruz et al., 2018; Moreno, 1966) are the most famous and important interpersonal techniques of psychodrama. Moreno, the pioneer of psychodrama has used a special image that well illustrates the psycho-social nature of psychodrama. A nature that is exactly like the nature of the body image: 'A meeting of two: eye to eye, face to face. And when you are near, I will tear your eyes out and place them instead of mine, and you will tear my eyes out and will place them instead of yours, then I will look at you with your eyes ... and you will look at me with mine' (Moreno, 2019). Furthermore, psychodrama integrates all of the sensory organs, as well as affect and physicality, in order to facilitate the free expression of emotions and physical impulses (Aichinger & Holl, 2017). Therefore, it is able to represent body images hidden deep in people's minds. In addition, catharsis that occurs during psychodrama can elicit negative emotions from a negative body image. Moreno discovered that all of the individuals involved in the psychodrama sessions (protagonist, auxiliary egos, and the audience) experience a type of catharsis as the social and network catharsis (Cukier, 2007).

Despite these features, so far little research has investigated the role of psychodrama in improving body image (Davidson, 2019; Izydorczyk, 2017). Even the number of studies examining the effect of psychodrama on psychological disorders associated with negative body image, such as eating disorders or social anxiety disorder, is limited. The mentioned research and studies have shown that psychodrama can be an effective method for modifying negative body image or creating a positive body image because its techniques, especially the mirroring, can be easily adapted to all the issues that people with distorted body image struggle with (Abeditehrani et al., 2023; Davidson, 2019; Izydorczyk, 2017; kabusi et al., 2023; Osman, 2003; Prosen, 2015; Şimşek et al., 2020; Vogelbach-Woerner, 2012; Wan, 2023). However, due to the small number of studies available in this field, more research is necessary. Therefore, the most important purpose of the present study is to investigate the effect of group psychodrama on body image.

Methodology

Participants

15 girls aged 18 to 22 years with negative body image and mild symptoms of anorexia or bulimia nervosa, participated in the group therapy of the present study. Eight girls in the intervention group and seven girls in the control group were randomly assigned.

Instrument

The "Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ)" was applied in the present research. It is a 69-item self-report inventory for the assessment of self-attitudinal aspects of the body-image construct (Cash, 1990, 2015). The full version consists of 10 subscales: Evaluation and Orientation vis-à-vis Appearance, Fitness, and Health/Illness, plus OP, SCW, and the BASS. Internal consistency for the subscales of the MBSRQ ranged from 0.67 to 0.85 for males and 0.71 to 0.86 for females. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for total scale in female Iranian sample was 0.83 (Khodabandehloo et al., 2019).

Design

The present study undertook in a randomized controlled trial design, which is placed in the category of experimental research. After selecting the participants in the study (based on the score of the MBSRQ and diagnostic criteria) an introductory session was held with the intervention group members and then the group psychodrama was applied for them in 12 sessions. The present research data were analyzed by ANCOVA.

Results

A one-way ANCOVA was conducted to compare the effectiveness of group psychodrama. Normality test and homogeneity of variances check with Levine's test were carried out and the assumptions met (see Tables 2 & 3). According to Table 4, there is a significant difference in mean of MBSRQ score in two groups ($F_{(1,13)} = 129.713$, $p = .000$).

Table 1. Demographic (descriptive) characteristics of the participants

Identification code	Age	Level of Education	History of anorexia or bulimia nervosa	History of other psychiatric disorders
P1-intervention	19	Undergraduate student	Bulimia nervosa	Major depression
P2-intervention	18	Undergraduate student	Anorexia nervosa	No
P3-intervention	22	Bachelor	Anorexia nervosa	Obsessive compulsive disorder
P4-intervention	19	Undergraduate student	Anorexia nervosa	No
P5-intervention	20	Undergraduate student	Anorexia nervosa	Major depression
P6-intervention	20	Undergraduate student	Anorexia nervosa	
P7-intervention	21	Bachelor	Bulimia nervosa	Generalized anxiety disorder
P8-intervention	22	Bachelor	Anorexia nervosa	No
P9-control	21	Undergraduate student	Bulimia nervosa	Obsessive compulsive disorder
P10-control	19	Undergraduate student	Anorexia nervosa	Major depression
P11-control	18	Undergraduate student	Anorexia nervosa	Major depression
P12-control	19	Undergraduate student	Anorexia nervosa	No
P13-control	21	Undergraduate student	Anorexia nervosa	No
P14-control	21	Bachelor	Bulimia nervosa	Generalized anxiety disorder
P15-control	20	Undergraduate student	Bulimia nervosa	Obsessive compulsive disorder

Table 2. Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk			
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.	
MBSRQ	intervention	.214	8	.200*	.879	8	.183
	control	.196	7	.200*	.928	7	.538

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 3. Test of Homogeneity of Variances

	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
MBSRQ-pretest	.274	1	13	.610

Table 4. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: MBSRQ_posttest

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	63185.037 ^a	2	31592.519	129.713	.000	.956
Intercept	830.516	1	830.516	3.410	.090	.221
MBSRQ_pretest	247.608	1	247.608	1.017	.333	.078
type	62455.265	1	62455.265	256.429	.000	.955
Error	2922.696	12	243.558			
Total	428967.000	15				
Corrected Total	66107.733	14				

a. R Squared = .956 (Adjusted R Squared = .948)

Discussion and Conclusion

The main aim of the present study was to investigate the effectiveness of psychodrama on body image. Therefore, group psychodrama was performed for eight girls with negative body image. The results showed that the MBSRQ scores of all participants increased significantly. These results are consistent with studies have confirmed the effectiveness of psychodrama in improving the body image (Davidson, 2019; Izydorczyk, 2017).

Through four mechanisms seems that psychodrama has been effective in changing the body image of the present research's participants: a) verbal expression of hidden thoughts and beliefs in the mind about the body; b) achieving a realistic knowledge of the body through physical movements; c) catharsis; d) Representation and correction of interpersonal relationships.

Inability to express the hidden thoughts and beliefs about the body is one of the problems that people with negative body image face with. Psychodrama through its techniques (Cruz et al., 2018) provides the opportunity for verbal expression of thoughts. This expression through the dialogues of the play can be one of the effective factors of psychodrama.

Distorted cognition of the body is another problem for people with negative body image. Physical movements in all of the sensory organs while performing psychodrama (Aichinger & Holl, 2017) can lead to a realistic knowledge of the body. In addition, one can see oneself through the eyes of others (Moreno, 2019) and thus the body image can be corrected.

Negative but hidden personal or social emotions are another problem in people who suffer from negative body image. Since catharsis is one of the beneficial outcomes of psychodrama (Cukier, 2007), the discharge of the mentioned emotions also occurs in psychodrama sessions, and it can be one of the factors of psychodrama's effectiveness in changing the body image.

In addition to emotions and thoughts, psychodrama also reveals destructive social relationships. As mentioned earlier, negative body image is a psycho-social problem and psychodrama is basically based on social group relationships. In psychodrama, each person's social relationships are represented, reconstructed, and then modified.

Considering the effect of psychodrama on body image, it can be said that this psychotherapy is also effective in treating famous disorders such as social anxiety disorder and eating disorders including anorexia and bulimia nervosa that are associated with a negative body image, and of course, research also confirms this effectiveness (Abeditehrani et al., 2023; kabusi et al., 2023; Osman, 2003; Prosen, 2015; Şimşek et al., 2020; Vogelbach-Woerner, 2012; Wan, 2023). Another disorder that seems to be clearly related to negative body image is body dysmorphic disorder, for which psychodrama has not been used in any research to date.

Here, it can be concluded that group psychodrama is an effective method to modify the negative body image. However, more research is suggested in this area. As we know, body image can become more distorted at different ages, including adolescence and middle age. Negative body image can be the cause of many psychological disorders or their consequences. In addition, some physical illnesses can play a double role in creating a negative body image due to the obvious changes they cause in the patient's body. In addition, a strong desire in some people to make physical changes through surgery can also be caused by a false body image. Therefore, it is suggested that clinical and health psychologists, after receiving the necessary training in psychodrama, use this method in clinics and hospitals.

Compliance with ethical guidelines

All procedures were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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