



The effects of psychodrama on young adults' attachment styles

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to determine the effectiveness of psychodrama on the attachment styles of young adults and to assess the qualitative gains of psychodrama participants. The subjects of the study were 21 master's level students. Data were gathered by using the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) form and a personal information form. The study used the mixed method. The quantitative aspect of the study involved the use of pretest–posttest experimental and control group design with random assignment, while the qualitative aspect utilized the methods of case study, observation and interview. A 12-session psychodrama program extending over 3 months was implemented with the experimental subjects, while the control subjects underwent a placebo study. The quantitative findings showed that participating in the group psychodrama program was effective on the anxious attachment style of young adults. However, no meaningful difference existed between the experimental and control groups regarding the anxiety dimension. The qualitative findings, on the other hand, suggested that psychodrama participants improved themselves in understanding the self; developing insight; having awareness of attachment styles; natural and forthcoming in their relationships; having self-confidence; developing listening, empathy and coping skills; and seeing life from a more hopeful perspective.

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Introduction

Close relationships are important in people's lives as satisfaction gained from them contributes to happiness and adds meaning to life. Particularly during adolescence and adulthood, satisfaction with close and romantic relationships constitutes an essential part of life. Romantic relationships are mostly defined as a freely-chosen togetherness marked by passion, attachment and intimacy (Sternberg, 1986). One of the most important elements ensuring satisfaction in a relationship is the quality of love found in it, which may be healthy or unhealthy (Maslow, 1968; Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000). A healthy love relationship sets the partners free to develop themselves, hosts mutual love and interest, is long-term, and contains mutual commitment and intimacy. Previous studies have shown that a healthy love relationship has positive effects on the development and psychological health of individuals. Indeed, Dietch (1978) found a positive correlation between healthy love relationships and individuals' self-actualization level. In the same vein, Furjman and Schaffer (2003) reported that healthy relationships affect youngsters' character development positively.

One of the most important factors in establishing healthy relationships is people's attachment styles. According to the attach-

ment theory developed by Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980), the early relationship between children and their caregivers determines the quality of their future close relationships. Hazan and Shaver (1987) and Hazan, Shaver, and Bradshaw (1988) reviewed studies about child attachment to explain the attachment process of adults. As a result, they concluded that they were three major styles of attachment: *secure*, *avoidant* and *anxious-ambivalent*.

Individuals with the *secure attachment style* establish close relationships with ease and are defined as individuals who can trust others and have low separation anxiety. Those with the *avoidant attachment style* are nervous about intimacy and commitment and those with the *anxious-ambivalent attachment style* have an intense desire for establishing intimacy but at the same time experience fear of rejection and not being loved enough.

Later, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) redefined adult attachment styles and developed the four attachment patterns, which classified attachment styles as *secure*, *preoccupied*, *fearful* and *dismissing*. Studies about adult attachment make different definitions of attachment styles. Despite these differences, the two main dimensions underlying attachment styles have been the same across all studies: *anxiety* and *avoidance*. The present study also uses these two dimensions.

Previous studies have shown that those with the insecure attachment style experience more problems in their relationships. Creasey, Kershaw, and Boston (1999) stated that adolescents who had insecure attachment were less successful in conflict resolution

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with their attachment figures and adjusting their negative feelings. Shi (2003) showed that avoidance and anxiety in adults are two important predictors of conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction. Other studies have also shown that attachment styles affect depression and anxiety levels (Keklik, 2004; Lee & Hankin, 2009; Roberts, Gotlib, & Kassel, 1996; West & Sarah, 1999).

Studies conducted with individuals with the secure attachment style have revealed these people to display behaviors that are associated with a healthy lifestyle and to have a higher level of self-respect (Huntsinger & Luecken, 2004). They were also found to have a higher capacity for self-regulation (Kobak & Sceery, 1988; Sonnby-Borgstrom & Jonsson, 2003). They have also revealed these people to display behaviors that typically belong to a healthy love relationship. Simpson (1990) showed the secure attachment style to be related to greater relationship interdependence, commitment, trust and satisfaction; Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) revealed the correlation between secure attachment and ratings of coherence, intimacy, balance of control in friendships, level of involvement in romantic relationships, self-confidence and warmth; and Shi (2003) concluded that those who attach securely are more likely to be problem solvers, as well as integrative and compromising. In addition, there are also studies pointing to a relationship between attachment styles and satisfaction. While Hazan and Shaver (1994) reported that satisfaction depends on the attachment style, Pistole and Clark (1995) established that adults with the secure attachment style derive more satisfaction from their relationships than others. As can be seen, attachment styles and the two underlying dimensions – anxiety and avoidance – are important elements of romantic relationships.

The studies mentioned above which focused on romantic relationships and attachment styles were generally not experimental in nature. They mostly investigated the relationship between a healthy emotional relationship and psychological health. Studies on attachment, on the other hand, largely focus on the evaluation of attachment styles (Main & Goldwyn, 1994). Although the most common reason for students to apply to university psychological help centers are relationship difficulties (Creasey et al., 1999; Dogan, 2007), the small number of practical studies cited in the literature mostly focus on the use of Emotional Focused Therapy (EFT) developed for couples (Johnson & Taitman, 1997) and psychodrama which is likewise used in couples and family therapy (Holmes, 1993; Kipper, 2005; Remer, 1990). Most studies in the literature were conducted with couples, one single spouse or a family. As a group study, there is one regarding the effects of an attachment oriented psychoeducation group program on students with obsessive attachment (Celik, 2004). Despite the lack of many group studies, the literature stresses the importance of group therapy/counseling in developing healthy interpersonal relationships (Pistole, 1997; Yalom, 1995).

Pistole (1997) emphasized the advantages of group psychological counseling in developing the secure attachment style in patients. Yalom (1995) stated that the duty of group psychotherapy is to help patients develop healthy and satisfying interpersonal relationships.

Participants in a self-development psychotherapy group use feedback from others and self-observation to realize the important aspects, strengths and boundaries of their own interpersonal behaviors, their interpersonal conflicts, and their maladaptive behaviors that attract negative reactions from others. Participants not only become aware of their personal responsibility in the shaping of interpersonal relationships but also realize their power to change them (Yalom, 1995). As a method of psychotherapeutic and sociotherapeutic action, psychodrama is a particularly lifelike form of group psychotherapy (Ozbek & Leutz, 1987).

Moreno (1977) defines psychodrama as an approach which studies the existence of human and the realities in different life

situations by using drama methods. Psychodrama gives individuals a chance to enact their problems rather than only talk about them (Blatner, 1996; Ozbek & Leutz, 1987; Schutzenberger-Ancelin, 1995). Thanks to a realistic enactment, the traumatic situation is re-created as it was in the past. When referring to this re-creation, Moreno states that “every second experience liberates people from the first” (as cited in Ozbek & Leutz, 1987). In psychodrama, past events, future hopes and fears are transmitted to the present time and resolved. The double, mirror and role reversal are basic psychodrama techniques. In addition, empty chair and monolog/soliloquy are also among classical techniques.

Developed by making use of spontaneous theater, psychodrama offers additional benefits other than the ones listed above. Thanks to the enactment of past experiences, psychodrama participants gain insight into the mental representations they have developed through the relationships they had with figures of attachment during their childhood. By doing so, individuals with the insecure attachment style recognize the impact of these styles on their relationships and alter them if necessary. On the other hand, participants may reverse roles with figures that were important to them, gain behavioral and emotional insight into their situation at the time, and improve their empathy skills. The inner experience enacted in psychodrama may also be in the form of the rehearsal of a future dream. The intense interactions that participants have in the meantime help them live through new experiences and situations, which in turn enable them to act accordingly in the future.

Owing to these contributions, psychodrama groups are thought to assist participants in getting to know themselves better, thinking about their own attachment styles, and developing healthier secure attachment behaviors. On the other hand, participants get the opportunity to observe other participants' attachment styles and adjust their behavior accordingly. With the secure attachment benefits derived from the psychodrama group, participants may also be at an advantage to raise children with healthy attachment styles when they become parents themselves.

The literature shows that psychodrama group studies are also used to treat psychotic patients (Cabral & Gracia, 1977; Marchant, Sanchez de Lopez, & Lillo, 1987), raise the performance of health sector workers in their personal and clinical lives (Costa & Walsh, 1992), resolve adolescent-parent conflicts (Carvalho & Brita, 1995), treat sexually abused girls coping with trauma (Carboneli & Partelena-Barehmi, 1999), help the elderly at retirement homes cope with psychological and behavioral problems (Kalkan-Oguzhanoglu & Ozdel, 2005), and treat alcohol and substance addicts (Coskun & Cakmak, 2005; Somov, 2008). However, there are no studies which focus on the effects of psychodrama on young adults' attachment styles. It is a well-established fact that the most important developmental task of young adults is close relationships (Erikson, 1968), and studies have also shown a meaningful relationship between close or romantic relationships and attachment styles.

Therefore, the main aim of this study was to establish the effectiveness of psychodrama training on young adults' anxious and avoidant attachment styles. The secondary aim of the study was to evaluate the qualitative gains of psychodrama training participants.

Method

Subjects

The subjects of the study were 21 master's level students from a university in Ankara during the 2007–2008 academic year. The experimental group included a total of 11 students, 8 females and

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