

The Creative Body in Physiotherapy. The Utilization of Embodiment in Developing an Interdisciplinary Approach in Mental Health

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Synopsis

Within the biopsychosocial model of health, physiotherapists changed their approach. From seeing the body mostly from a biomechanical view, they started to include psychosocial aspects in their work. This presentation explores the concept of embodiment and how physiotherapists can benefit from this approach and develop their own way of integrating it into their work. Here, embodiment is achieved through movement improvisation, a dance-based technique, also used by dance movement therapists. Its usefulness is presented through eight case studies that approach in unique ways some of the common issues that patients address in physiotherapy.

Keywords: Embodiment, creativity, movement improvisation, physiotherapy

1. Background

Embodiment was described as a way of understanding the body. It is a concept emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between mind (cognition, emotion and perception) and body (motor behavior, non - verbal behavior, physiological processes). In physiotherapy the concept of embodiment has been explored to a limited degree and it's a topic that needs further research.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this study was to offer the embodiment perspective in physiotherapy and promote interdisciplinarity between physiotherapy, dance and dance movement therapy. In practice, physiotherapists encounter patients experiencing significant emotional distress that often lead them in losing their motivation and meaning in therapy. Through movement improvisation patients were encouraged to become aware of their embodied expressions and to reflect upon them.

3. Methods

The presentation is based on qualitative research. Data collection came from literature review, document study and qualitative observations. We focused on eight more common experiences that patients referred to as 'difficult' and/or 'frustrating' during physiotherapy. Eight patients agreed to engage in movement improvisation as a creative way to gain insight in those frustrating experiences.

4. Instruments

We used movement improvisation, a creative dance-based approach to gain insight on how people actually experience their health problems and how we can use this approach therapeutically. This creative process has been described by Halprin Daria and has five parts: Identification, Confrontation, Release, Change and Growth.

5. Analysis

We used content analysis of our movement observations and notes. We focused firstly on the physical expression followed by movement exploration and spoken language that evoked by reflecting on their movement.



We present eight embodied expressions of the most common experiences that patients usually share in physiotherapy practice, such as pain, laziness, tiredness, crying, fear of movement, shame about one's body image and not being able to express their feelings especially sadness and anger.

6. Results

In reflecting upon the unique process of embodied experience through movement improvisation, our main findings are:

When patients engaged in movement improvisation following the five parts model, themes and patterns from their lives were revealed. Movement improvisation enabled all of them to acknowledge that many aspects of their experience (emotions, thoughts, actions, behaviors) were being unexpressed, over criticized or even rejected, thus limiting their motivation and participation in their recovery and also in their experience of joy in life. After the process, they felt more positive with their bodies and appreciated their bodies. This process enabled patients gradually to gain insight in terms of the psychosocial factors influencing their ongoing physical symptoms. At the end, they mentioned they felt more hopeful and confident to cope with their health problems.

Conclusion

In future, physiotherapists may include the concept of embodiment in their education and clinical work. Giving attention to embodied experience, physiotherapists can be more effective in using a biopsychosocial approach in health and can contribute to the development of an Interdisciplinary approach while working closely with other health professionals.

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Additional Resources

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