

## Can Theatre-Therapy Centered on Stanislavskij'S Method and Positive Psychology Improve Personality Traits?

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### Abstract

*In Theater-Therapy, that is Stanislavskij's method linked to Positive Psychology, emotions are produced through body actions; where the body is the custodian of the actions associated with emotions. This association could improve some aspects of personality. Everyone can feel themselves in an immediate way. Hence, an increased knowledge of emotions and thoughts can improve the relationship with others. In the current study, 6 subjects took part in a research to ascertain if participation to Theater-therapy to verify if they can improve some personality aspects, according to the Big Five theory. The experiment included one three-hours weekly meeting for six months. On the first day, the BFQ was administered to each subject and re-administered on the last day of the experiment. Results showed that all factors improve after the Theater-therapy meeting. This can be explained by Theater- therapy enabling subjects to feel emotion and handle conflicts immediately through the body and the use of actions.*

**Keywords:** Theater-therapy, Stanislavskij's Method, Positive Psychology, Personality, Big Five.

### 1 Introduction

Theater-therapy that is Theater joint with Positive Psychology (Seligman, 1990; 2004; 2011) could be a good method to improve wellness. In fact, the link between Psychology and Theater is very strong. Despite these two disciplines present different methods and goals, are actually much closer than the researchers admit. As an example, the major link is observed between Stanislavskij's thought and Psychology, although performance on stage is the goal for the former and individual well-being is the goal for the latter. Stanislavskij (1936; 1938; 1950) claims that the actor must be freed from his personal schemes and, to be credible, he/she must merge with the character he/she play. Only about one hundred yearslater, Berne (1967) will talk about personal scripts. Stanislavskij asks to interpret the character "psychologically", referring to a set of psychological situations that coinciding with the actor's experience. To do this, Stanislavskij draws on different artistic experiences and creates a system of physical exercises to transform the body into a tool ready to accept the psychological nuances of the character. According to the author, the body is the custodian of the actions corresponding both to emotions and states of mind for the theater workshop.

Stanislavskij's method is a system in which emotions are produced through the use of actions, analytical research of the given circumstances of the text, and imagination (Bussels, 2012). Hence, these characteristic aspects of Stanislavskij's method show a psychological value because the body is the mean to join emotions. Through the action, the emotions linked to it reappear in all their cognitive and neuro-autonomic conditions. Thus, one can learn to get familiar with emotions, to get to know them and use them in an adaptive way. Stanislavskij stresses the objectives, which are the character's goals within each scene (Bussel, 2012).Also, this aspect shows a psychological background. Moving with a pre-fixed goal is crucial to recognize the self and for a more internal locus of control. From another point of view, the creative aspect has been observed to create wellbeing both as an immediate "activator" of positive emotions and as a process of problem-solving that can be generalized to more than one reality (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010).Moreover, positive mood is associated with creativity and innovative action (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010). As for the emotional aspects, Fauladi and Shabidi (2010) remarked that creativity plays a primary role in reducing anxiety and depression.

Another critical point is the group as a system for experimenting and creating one's own identity. In this context, Theater-therapy is a typical group activity. In Theater-therapy, the creative process operates simultaneously for every individual involved, as well as for the group. The understanding process is organically synergic (Bicherstaff, 2011).

Stress, anxiety and worries are felt in people and cause high in meaningfulness and low in happiness (Seligman 1990; 2004; 2011). Thus, it could be important to teach them the power of shifting one's perspective in everyday behavior in a positive sense (Seligman 1990; 2004; 2011).

Theater-therapy based on Positive Psychology approach aims to:

- 1) increase the experience of positive emotions in participants;
- 2) develop their own strengths and abilities;
- 3) find and build a sense of hope into the participants' perspective;
- 4) help them to find a sense of well-being;
- 5) help them to find an optimistic point of view.

Moreover, since creativity is crucial to fulfill the above mentioned points (Seligman 2011), Theater-therapy could be an effective tool to obtain these results. In fact, the current study aims to ascertain if participating in Theater-therapy meetings can change some aspects of personality according to the Big Five model. Specifically, it was studied if Theater-therapy can stimulate to experiment new skills and problem solving involving personality aspects according to the BF model. A better knowledge of emotions, experienced through physical actions, should improve self-efficacy, positively affecting personality.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Subjects**

Five volunteers (1 male and 4 female) aged  $30,1,3 \pm 3,2$  years.

All subjects had a master degree and lived in Sardinia (Italy).

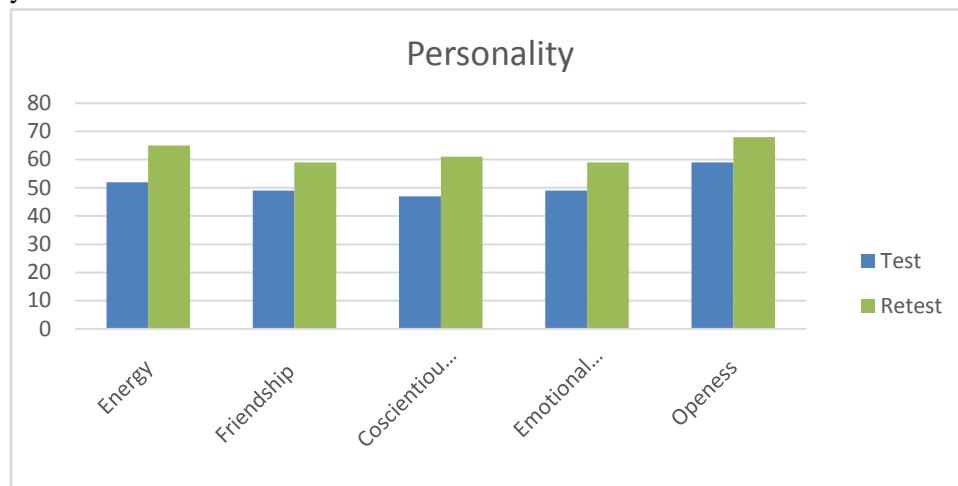
### **2.2 Experimental procedure**

The experiment included one three-hour weekly for six months. Each meeting was divided into two stages. In the first, the subjects were invited to work on body, voice and narration. An improvisation technique was used (two hours). In the second stage, the subjects were requested to give a feedback of their physical, psychological and emotional feelings felt during the first stage. Moreover, they were requested to tell how they were modifying their lives in order to gain a better wellness as well as an effective goal-oriented behavior, according to a Positive Psychology approach (Seligman, 1990, 2004, 2011) (one hour).

### **2.3 Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ)**

The following definitions of the main dimensions and their facets were used as generative criteria for statements in BFQ (for the Italian version, Caprara et al., 1994). Energy/Extraversion (E): refers to the characteristic that in the literature are subsumed by Extraversion (McCrae and Costa, 1987) or by Surgency (Goldberg, 1990). The label "Energy" seemed more appropriate to the specific meaning that in the Italian context is associated with the words "Extraversion", often used as a synonym of Sociability, and "Surgency". This dimension is organized into the following two facets: "Dynamism", referring to expansiveness and enthusiasm, and "Dominance", referring to assertiveness and confidence. Friendliness (F): refers to the factor usually labeled as Agreeableness (McCrae and Costa, 1987) or Friendliness vs Hostility (Digman, 1990). This dimension is organized into the following two facets: "Cooperativeness/Empathy", referring to concern and sensitiveness towards the others and their needs, and "Politeness", referring to kindness, civility, docility, and trust. Conscientiousness (C): refers to impulse control in both its proactive and inhibitory aspects (Digman, 1990; McCrae and Costa, 1989). This dimension is organized into the following two facets: "Scrupulousness", referring to dependability, orderliness and precision, and "Perseverance", referring to the capability of fulfilling one's own tasks and commitments. Emotional Stability (S): refers to aspects of "negative affectivity" (Watson and Tellegen, 1985; McCrae and Costa, 1987). This dimension is organized into the following two facets: "Emotion Control", referring to the capacity to cope adequately with one's own anxiety and emotionality, and "Impulse Control", referring to the capability of controlling irritation, discontent, and anger.

Openness (O): refers to the factor labeled as Culture (Norman, 1963), or Intellect (Goldberg, 1990), or Openness to Experience (Costa and McCrae, 1985). This dimension is organized into the following two facets: "Openness to Culture", referring to the broadness or narrowness of one's own cultural interest, and "Openness to Experience", referring to openness to novelty, tolerance of different values, interest toward different people, habits and lifestyle.



**Graph. 1 shows a significant increase from Test to Retest for all factors of BF.**

## 2.4 Data analysis

The data consist of the answers of each subject to the BFQ, divided by factor (Energy, Friendship, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Openness) in the two surveys: Test and Retest. In order to verify the differences between the Testperiod and the Retest period and, therefore, to verify changes in the personality aspects of the subjects, a repeated 2x5 ANOVA was performed. Factors were: Time (2 levels: Test and Retest), BF (5 levels: Energy, Friendship, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Openness).

## 2.5 Results

ANOVA $2 \times 5$  (repeated design) showed significant results for Time ( $F = 17.51$  df=  $\frac{1}{4}$  p=0.0139; Test = 51.80 Retest=62.48) (graph.1). Interaction TimexBF and BF were not significant ( $P>0.05$ ); The theater-therapy meetings improve all traits of personality. After six months of meetings subjects showed a significant increase of energy, friendship, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness.

## 3. Discussion

This current study shows a significant increase of BF factors between the beginning and the end of Theater-therapy. This means that Theatre-therapy can be a helpful tool to test oneself and live emotions freely. Furthermore, the group may be a protection both for the single and the group. The link between actions and emotions is helpful to recognize oneself's emotions as well as the other's ones. Joining Stanislavskij's method Stanislavskj 1936, 1938, 1950 with Positive Psychology (Seligman 1990, 2004, 2011) is useful for: (1) an increased experience of positive emotions; (2) a better development of their own abilities and (3) for building a sense of hope and wellness. These aspects affect the individual thought and goals with beneficial effects on the personality traits. In fact, the participants learn to place one's trust in the other and tend to be sensitive toward their own and the other needs. This implies, on the one hand, a greater openness and acceptation of the other and on the other hand a greater openness towards the experiences of life. Moreover, an increase of Energy due to the need to get directly involved was observed, confirming a typical situation of Theater-therapy. Also, the greatest increase in Energy can be explained by Theater-therapy pushing subjects to test themselves, try emotions and handle psychological conflicts immediately through body, as well as physical actions. Energy is also related to a subjective well-being. Stress and anxiety are less experienced with increased happiness. Moreover, the capability of fulfilling one's own tasks and goals is improved after theater-therapy meetings. Finally, also learning to move with a goal implies the responsibility of one own actions outstanding the individual as the only actor of his/her own life.

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