

Original Article

Systematization of a transdisciplinary experience: Fashion Therapy workshop for adult users of the Mental Health Center of Recoleta

Sistematización de una experiencia transdisciplinaria: taller de Modaterapia para personas adultas usuarias del Centro de Salud Mental de Recoleta

Sistematização de uma experiência transdisciplinar: oficina de Modaterapia para adultos usuários do Centro de Saúde Mental de Recoleta

Daniel Lagos-Cerón^a , Milagritos Mesinas Arana^b , María Ignacia Mella Astudillo^a , Pamela Gutiérrez Monclus^a , María Elisa Berríos Etcheberry^a 

^aUniversidad de Chile, Santiago de Chile, Chile.

^bCentro Comunitario de Salud Mental COSAM de Recoleta, Santiago de Chile, Chile.

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Abstract

Introduction: Fashion Therapy has been defined as an emerging interdisciplinary therapy that uses fashion to achieve well-being. This article presents the experience and results of a Fashion Therapy Workshop conducted with adults who have mental health issues. **Objective:** To systematize and analyze the experience and perceived effects of the Fashion therapy workshop for adult users of the Recoleta Mental Health Center - COSAM from an ethnographic approach. **Methodology:** From an interpretive paradigm and qualitative design, the method used was the systematization of experiences with an ethnographic approach and exploratory scope. The target population included COSAM Recoleta users who participated in the workshop and the facilitating therapists. The sampling was non-probabilistic and convenience-based. **Results:** The analysis was divided into seven categories: evaluation strategies, therapeutic strategies, perceived effects by users, perceived effects by therapists, strengths, weaknesses, and emerging aspects. Multiple

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personal, relational, and collective effects were perceived. Strengths highlighted included horizontality, the safe space achieved, and transdisciplinarity. Three key elements emerged to consider: personal and collective history with fashion, aesthetic violence, and knowledge about health. **Conclusions:** It is concluded that Fashion Therapy is a transdisciplinary and complex therapeutic modality that places fashion at the center of the therapeutic process and is enriched by various theoretical approaches.

Keywords: Interdisciplinary Communication, Mental Health, Psychotherapy, Group, Self Concept.

Resumen

Introducción: La Modaterapia ha sido definida como una terapia interdisciplinaria emergente, que utiliza la moda para conseguir un bienestar. El presente artículo presenta la experiencia y los resultados de un Taller de Modaterapia realizado con personas adultas que presentan problemas de salud mental. **Objetivo:** Sistematizar y analizar la experiencia y los efectos percibidos del taller de Modaterapia para personas adultas usuarias del Centro de Salud Mental de Recoleta - COSAM, desde un enfoque etnográfico. **Metodología:** Desde un paradigma interpretativo y diseño cualitativo, el método utilizado fue la sistematización de experiencias con enfoque etnográfico y alcance exploratorio. La población objetivo incluyó a las usuarias del COSAM de Recoleta que participaron del taller y a las terapeutas facilitadoras. El muestreo fue no probabilístico y por conveniencia. **Resultados:** El análisis se dividió en siete categorías: estrategias de evaluación, estrategias terapéuticas, efectos percibidos por usuarias, efectos percibidos por terapeutas, fortalezas, debilidades y aspectos emergentes. Se percibieron múltiples efectos personales, relacionales y colectivos. Se señalaron como fortalezas la horizontalidad, el espacio seguro logrado y la transdisciplina. Emergieron tres elementos claves a considerar: la historia personal y colectiva con la moda, la violencia estética y los conocimientos sobre salud. **Conclusiones:** Se concluye que la Modaterapia es una modalidad terapéutica transdisciplinaria y compleja, que ubica a la moda en el centro del proceso terapéutico y que se enriquece de varios enfoques teóricos.

Palabras-clave: Comunicación Interdisciplinaria, Salud Mental, Psicoterapia de Grupo, Autoimagen.

Resumo

Introdução: A Modaterapia foi definida como uma terapia interdisciplinar emergente que utiliza a moda para alcançar o bem-estar. Este artigo apresenta a experiência e os resultados de uma Oficina de Modaterapia realizado com adultos que apresentam problemas de saúde mental. **Objetivo:** Sistematizar e analisar a experiência e os efeitos percebidos da oficina de Modaterapia para adultos usuários do Centro de Saúde Mental de Recoleta - COSAM, em uma perspectiva etnográfica. **Metodologia:** A partir de um paradigma interpretativo e desenho qualitativo, o método utilizado foi a sistematização de experiências com abordagem etnográfica e escopo exploratório. O público-alvo incluiu os usuários do COSAM de Recoleta que participaram da Oficina e as terapeutas facilitadoras. A amostragem foi não probabilística e por conveniência. **Resultados:** A análise foi dividida em sete categorias: estratégias de avaliação, estratégias terapêuticas, efeitos percebidos pelos

usuários, efeitos percebidos pelas terapeutas, fortalezas, fraquezas e aspectos emergentes. Foram percebidos múltiplos efeitos pessoais, relacionais e coletivos. As fortalezas destacadas incluíram a horizontalidade, o espaço seguro alcançado e a transdisciplinaridade. Três elementos-chave a serem considerados emergiram: a história pessoal e coletiva com a moda, violência e conhecimentos sobre saúde.

Conclusão: Conclui-se que a Modaterapia é uma modalidade terapêutica transdisciplinar e complexa, que coloca a moda no centro do processo terapêutico e se enriquece com várias perspectivas teóricas.

Palavras-chave: Comunicação Transdisciplinar, Saúde Mental, Terapia de Grupo, Autoimagem.

Introduction

This study is based on the outreach and research project entitled “Fashion Therapy Workshop for Adult Users of the COSAM in Recoleta.” The project was developed and implemented by the Department of Occupational Therapy and Occupational Science at the University of Chile in conjunction with the Mental Health Center (COSAM) of the Recoleta district in Santiago, Chile. The initiative emerged as an outreach and community engagement activity that aims to contribute to innovation and intersectoral work. This article summarizes how the workshop was conducted and the main results obtained. The main concepts that informed the proposal and how the project was developed are presented below.

Fashion Therapy: an interdisciplinary therapy

One of the least explored dimensions of fashion is related to its therapeutic power. There are few publications on “Fashion Therapy” experiences worldwide, and authors define it in different ways. In fact, the term “*Modaterapia*” is the Spanish translation of the concept “*Fashion Therapy*.” According to Thompson (1962), “Fashion Therapy” can be understood as a form of “psychotherapy”, as it focuses on how behavior, cognitive state, and emotions are affected by fashion. However, more contemporary authors propose an interdisciplinary approach between psychotherapy, fashion, and the textile industry for a more comprehensive understanding (Son et al., 2015).

The first documented experience with Fashion Therapy happened in the United States, targeting a group of institutionalized adolescents (Thomas, 1976). During the “Fashion Therapy” program, several participants exhibited increased interest in their personal appearance, particularly improving their hair care and makeup use. Conversely, in 2020, author Renate Stauss conducted a critical analysis of the document and warned that the program sought to reinforce the cultural expectations that applied in that context to be considered “healthy women.”

Recent publications from Seoul, Korea, report on Fashion Therapy programs aimed at women, with or without mental health conditions (Yoh, 2015; Lee et al., 2016a, 2016b, 2020). These experiences involve group workshops, ranging from four to eight sessions. Most of participants affirmed that choosing clothing that makes them feel good

automatically boosted their confidence. Likewise, a South African experience conducted in 2020 (Kalitanyi, 2021) explored the benefits of focusing on fashion for women with disabilities, showing that more than 90% of participants perceived that clothing choices can improve self-esteem and body image.

The experiences mentioned above concluded that participation in a Fashion Therapy workshop generates behavioral, psychological, social, and emotional benefits, positively impacting self-confidence, self-esteem, body satisfaction, self-expression, and self-concept. Regarding the activities carried out, the following were mentioned: the use of makeup, hair and nail care, color, clothing, and mirror activities.

Regarding its theoretical foundations, cognitive behavioral therapy, atavistic cognition, and object relations theory are proposed as underlying psychological theories (Lee et al., 2016a). Similarly, Son et al. (2015) agree that Fashion Therapy is articulated between psychological theories and art therapy theories. Based on this, the team created for this experience took the approaches of Son et al. (2015) as a reference and Kalitanyi (2021), initially defining Fashion Therapy as an interdisciplinary therapy that considers that conscious (deliberate) use of fashion can improve body satisfaction and self-esteem.

It is also important to mention that, according to the exhaustive literature search, no research on Fashion Therapy has been documented in Latin America or in Spanish. This lack of studies could limit the understanding and application of Fashion Therapy in specific cultural contexts in the region, highlighting the need to explore and develop this intervention in a local context.

Body image and satisfaction in Chile

The benefits reported in Fashion Therapy experiences are directly related to current issues surrounding personal image (Lee et al., 2020). Body image or self-image consists of a person's opinions, beliefs, and feelings about their own body and physical appearance (Gimenez et al., 2013). This self-image is closely connected to self-esteem, which is the ability to have confidence in and respect for oneself (Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2013).

Body image distortion is an increasing problem in Chile. Some national studies show that a large portion of the population is not satisfied with their personal image. For example, a study conducted among Chilean youth (ages 14 to 25) found that women, compared to men, show greater dissatisfaction with their body image and more concern about weight (Cruzat-Mandich et al., 2016). This aligns with other research suggesting that Chilean women are more concerned with their appearance and more aware of their weight than men, and also more than other Latina women (Heras-Benavides et al., 2017; Varela et al., 2019).

According to Villegas-Moreno & Londoño-Pérez (2021), dissatisfaction with body image leads to and sustains different disorders, including eating behavior problems, depression, anxiety, and body and muscle dysmorphia. These authors also argue that these problems are influenced by sociocultural factors that explain the internalization of prevailing beauty stereotypes in Western society, resulting from pressure exerted by the media, peer groups, and family.

Regarding the concept of body satisfaction, Benton & Karazsia (2015, p. 23) define it as "[...] the degree of acceptance a person has when evaluating their physical

appearance”. This evaluation is usually categorized as negative, when it decreases confidence in others and arouses negative emotions, and positive, when it increases confidence in social relationships (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). According to Felipes (2013, p. 46), some studies confirm the relationship between body perception and self-esteem, and between self-esteem and the way one dresses:

Thus, low self-esteem manifests itself either in clothing that excessively shows the body (when the individual considers this to be their only strength and shows it off to seek the appreciation and approval of others), or in clothing that excessively conceals it (when the person does not accept their own body, is ashamed, and seeks to avoid being noticed).

The background presented shows that problems of body dissatisfaction, self-image, and self-confidence in dressing are increasing and interrelated. Meanwhile, Fashion Therapy workshops have been held in some parts of the world to specifically address these issues. Considering the aforementioned benefits, Fashion Therapy is considered an innovative modality that can contribute to addressing these issues at the national level.

Fashion Therapy workshop as a contribution to mental health

The study called “Mental Health Thermometer in Chile”, conducted between 2020 and 2021, shows that 23.6% of Chileans have suspicions or mental health problems, and that 45.9% assess that their mood is worse or much worse than before the pandemic (Bravo et al., 2021). On the contrary, the percentage of the health budget for the public system that was actually allocated to mental health in 2021 was 2.4%, a figure that is well below what is recommended for OECD countries (5%) (Aguilera & Arenas, 2022).

The high prevalence of mental disorders, along with the limited allocation of public resources, has provoked significant difficulties and obstacles for the operation of Community Mental Health Centers (COSAM), which provide specialized mental health care for medium- to high-complexity conditions (Chile, 2017). The report prepared by the Model Management Board of Community Mental Health Centers and Health Services in the country (Chile, 2018) identifies critical issues and barriers affecting their performance, including the limited incorporation of group and community interventions, insufficiently updated therapeutic approaches, the overemphasis on individual interventions within the center, and significant deficiencies in intersectoral work. In this context, the need to strengthen the existing relationship between the Department of Occupational Therapy and the Recoleta COSAM through a collaborative project began to emerge.

The Recoleta COSAM is located in the municipality of Recoleta, in the northern part of Santiago, Chile. It was created in 2004 and, under the regulations issued by the health service, defines a community-oriented clinical work plan led by a multidisciplinary team made up of psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, and psychiatrists (Municipalidad de Recoleta, 2020). It addresses a variety of mental health problems, including anxiety disorders, depression, and severe psychiatric disorders.

The project was conceived as an opportunity for intersectoral work, based on the premise and commitment to create a participatory and interdisciplinary group workshop, aligned with the purposes of the current National Mental Health Plan (Chile, 2017) and the University of Chile's Outreach and Community Engagement Policy (Universidad de Chile, 2020). Initially, the idea of a Fashion Therapy workshop was proposed by the Department of Occupational Therapy to the COSAM of Recoleta, who recognized that body dissatisfaction and self-image issues were common among some users. The team in charge consisted of an occupational therapist, a psychologist, a social worker, and an occupational therapy student.

Thus, a first Fashion Therapy workshop was organized, also associated with a research process. The general objective of the study was: to systematize and analyze the experience and perceived effects of the "Fashion Therapy Workshop for adult users of the COSAM in Recoleta", from an ethnographic approach. The specific objectives were structured as follows:

- To organize the assessment and therapeutic strategies implemented during the execution of the Fashion Therapy workshop;
- To analyze the effects perceived by the users and facilitators who participated in the Fashion Therapy workshop;
- To identify the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of the Fashion Therapy Workshop.

In order to distinguish the strategies implemented, the research team considered as assessment strategies the activities and techniques aimed at understanding various aspects of the participants' initial situation, including information about their personal background, interests, expectations, and needs. On the other hand, therapeutic strategies were understood as the set of techniques or activities aimed at achieving a therapeutic effect, that is, to generate well-being or a transformation perceived as positive by the participants.

Methodology

The research was framed within the interpretive paradigm, which has its roots in phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, ethnography, and anthropology (Ricoy, 2006). This paradigm is based on the understanding of meaning, and the researcher is a participant in the reality being studied (Zavala, 2011). It does not seek generalization and assumes that reality is dynamic and interactive, relying on subjectivities to understand the world.

The research was qualitative, seeking to understand events from the perspectives of the people being studied and the researchers. The method used was experience systematization with an ethnographic approach (Expósito & González, 2017). According to Jara (2018), systematization is a process of individual and collective reflection on a practice that has been carried out or experienced. It involves an orderly reconstruction of what happened, fosters a critical view of the experience, and produces new knowledge. To carry out the systematization, three of the four therapists acted as therapist-researchers, facilitating the workshop and keeping a personal field diary.

The object of study was the experience of the “Fashion Therapy Workshop”, from the perspectives of the team of therapists and the participants. The study was exploratory, as this type of approach allows for visibility of underexplored issues, thereby expanding knowledge on the subject (Sampieri et al., 2014; Ramos-Galarza, 2020). The systematization was organized over four semesters (Table 1), following the stages and characteristics proposed by Jara (2018).

Table 1. Systematization process.

| Period | First semester 2022 | Second Semester 2022 | First Semester 2023 | Second Semester 2023 |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Stages (Jara, 2018) | 1. Starting Point | Experience itself | 3. Process recovery | 4. Background reflections |
| | 2. Plan development | | | 5. Conclusions |
| Actions | Planning the experience | Implementation of the Fashion Therapy workshop | Key informant interviews | Content analysis meetings |
| | Evaluation by the ethics committee | Preparation of field minutes and journals | Report construction with annexes | Formulation of conclusions |
| | | | Content analysis meetings | |

Source: Own elaboration.

The study's target population included COSAM users in Recoleta who participated in the Fashion Therapy workshop and the facilitating therapists. The sampling was non-probabilistic and convenience-based (Hernández González, 2021), as those who attended the workshop were invited to participate. Twelve people participated: eight users with varying attendance rates and four facilitators. In addition, once the workshop was over, some participants were interviewed as “key informants”, who were specifically selected to provide information that would help reconstruct the experience in its entirety (Álvarez, 2010).

The inclusion criteria for users were:

- People between the ages of 18 and 60, registered at the COSAM in Recoleta;
- Be seen by a professional at the center;
- Have mild to moderate mental health problems, as determined by the COSAM team (referring to users maintaining physical and mental function, stabilized in their diagnostic status, and with good adherence to comprehensive and pharmacological treatment);
- Attend the COSAM at least two months before the start of the workshop;
- Be motivated to address issues of self-esteem and self-image.

The exclusion criteria for users were:

- People with intellectual disabilities;
- People with severe mental health diagnoses;

- People who remain in the initial stage of treatment and/or who have decompensated in their comprehensive treatment;
- Users who do not consistently adhere to their comprehensive treatment.

The inclusion criteria for key informants were:

- Users or therapists who participated in the Fashion Therapy workshop during the second half of 2022;
- Users or therapists who participated with attendance of more than 75% of the sessions.

The research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Chile (Project No. 166-2022). All participants signed an informed consent form, which explained the objectives of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, confidentiality, and potential risks and benefits.

Regarding data collection techniques, participant observation was used, field diaries were kept, and semi-structured interviews were conducted after the workshop. The therapist-researchers kept a field diary, describing their experiences, interpretations, and reflections from the perspective of the “participant as observer” (Gurdián-Fernández, 2007). Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with the “key informants”, as this allows for understanding how a person interprets a specific reality (Taguenca & Vega, 2012).

Considering the field diary records and the transcription of the interviews conducted, all the information was compiled into a single document and a content analysis was performed, based on the three stages proposed by Arbeláez & Onrubia (2016): pre-analysis phase, descriptive-analytical phase and interpretive phase. For the anonymization of the participants, the letter “P” followed by a number (1-8) was used, and for the therapists, the letter “T” followed by a number (1-4).

The predefined analysis categories based on the specific objectives were: (1) assessment strategies, (2) therapeutic strategies, (3) effects perceived by users, (4) effects perceived by therapists, (5) strengths, and (6) weaknesses. During the analysis, other aspects emerged that were fundamental to the proper development of the workshop and comprise the last emerging category (7) arose.

Results

General aspects of the experience

Given that women were the primary participants in this experience, the terms therapists and users were used to refer to the facilitators and assistants, respectively. The workshop was held between September and December 2022 and consisted of 11 group sessions. Eight users participated in the first sessions; however, as the meetings progressed, the group was reduced to four regular users (attendance over 75%) and four therapists who worked from the beginning. The team of therapists agreed to hold a weekly planning meeting, in which they analyzed what happened in the previous session and planned the next meeting.

In summary, the team's work was structured as follows:

- 3 pre-meetings to organize the call, dissemination, and the first sessions;
- 11 planning meetings for each session;
- 11 sessions of the Fashion Therapy workshop.

The results will be presented, including quotes to illustrate and analyze different moments and perceptions that marked the experience. First, the categories of “assessment strategies” and “intervention strategies” are developed, for which it was also decided to create tables that organize and summarize the actions performed. Then, the rest of the predefined categories in the specific objectives are explained, and finally, the “emerging” category is presented.

Assessment strategies

Because the first sessions were about building the topics based on what they proposed at the time, we didn't know what they were going to propose either, so while we had broad objectives, we didn't know how to achieve the more specific ones (T1, p. 42).

The strategies and activities carried out in each session emerged from the weekly planning meetings held by the intervention team, which were agreed upon and assigned equitably. Initially, the assessment strategies were proposed only by the intervention team, since they did not yet have a comprehensive understanding of the participants or their interests. Various activities were proposed, but the main focus was to identify shared issues and needs. Based on what was achieved, the main assessment strategies were (Table 2):

Table 2. Assessment strategies and purposes.

| Strategy | Purpose |
|----------------------------|--|
| Presentation dynamics | Get general information |
| Dialogue in small groups | Identify interests, expectations and needs |
| Relaxation techniques | Recognize the level of body awareness |
| Participatory diagnosis | Select topics and Schedule |
| Personal Commitment box | Identify a personal purpose for the workshop and store it in a box. (These were reviewed on the last day of the workshop.) |
| Past photographic analysis | Know the personal history in relation to fashion |

Source: Own elaboration.

During the second session, a participatory assessment was conducted to define and schedule the main topics to be addressed. Participants were also asked what they understood by the concept of Fashion Therapy and what their expectations were for the workshop. The initial planning by topic was organized as follows (Table 3):

Table 3. Topics for each session.

| Session | Topic | Subtopics |
|---------|----------------------|---|
| 03 | Fashion in Childhood | Personal experiences with fashion. |
| 04 | Fashion in Adulthood | Mandates and stereotypes. Relationship with the body. |
| 05 | Bodies | Corporeality and silhouettes. Recognition in front of the mirror. |
| 06 | Colors | Colorimetry, skin classification, and colors. |
| 07 | Face | Facial care, makeup, and hairstyles. |
| 08 | Personal style | Facial care, makeup, and hairstyles. |
| 09 | Personal beauty | Self-image and appreciation of one's own beauty. |
| 10 | Photoshoot | Poses and photography. |
| 11 | Workshop closure | Evaluation of the experience |

Source: Own elaboration.

It should be noted that, at the end of the experience, both therapists and users recall some of the first activities performed and highlight their participatory nature. In this regard, the assessment process was characterized by the gathering of clients' opinions, as the following therapist comments:

...from the beginning, it was like super connected to us and very participatory, like, no, it wasn't difficult to break the ice, like, gosh, you suddenly ask a question in a workshop and nobody wants to talk. Here, it kind of flowed very spontaneously, like verbalization (T4, p. 47).

Therapeutic strategies

The sessions were more playful because of the makeup, the play, the daring to do your makeup differently, with different colors, and seeing that it really looks pretty (P2, p. 71).

Both users and therapists agreed that multiple and varied activities were done during the workshop. The strategies implemented considered the issues raised by the users, and plenty of space was provided for recreational and exploratory activities that allowed for “dare.” Below is a summary table of the main therapeutic strategies implemented by topic (Table 4):

Table 4. Therapeutic strategies.

| Topic | Strategy | Purpose |
|----------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Fashion in childhood | Past photographic analysis | Reconstruct through photographs the personal history in relation to fashion. |
| | Candid Photography | Increase confidence when taking photos |
| | Relaxation technique | Increase body awareness and decrease anxiety levels |

Table 4. Continued...

| Topic | Strategy | Purpose |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Fashion in adult life | Current photographic analysis | Compare preferences regarding the use of fashion and concern for personal image |
| | Letter to the past | Reconcile with a situation experienced in the past that was painful, castrating, or humiliating. |
| Bodies | Dialogue on body diversity | Reflect on body diversity and standards of beauty and normality |
| | Measuring silhouette types | Identify the different types of silhouettes that exist Recognize the geometric dimensions of the body |
| | Mirror technique | Transform internal dialogue in relation to self-image |
| Colors | Colors and emotions | Reflect on which colors can generate greater well-being or freedom. |
| | Colorimetry | Identify skin tone and color palettes that promote harmonization |
| | Color wheel and combinations | Learn to combine colors and put together a style proposal |
| Face | Skin care education | Promote daily skin care and hygiene |
| | Peer-to-peer makeup | Learn basic social makeup techniques and share experiences with peers |
| Personal style | Color combination, wardrobe and makeup. | Reflect on a personal style that can generate greater well-being or authenticity. |
| | Fashion illustration | Graphically represent through a drawing the style you wish to acquire |
| Beauty | | Share personal qualities and attributes. |
| | Internal and external beauty | Recognize personal attributes that were not present before the workshop. |
| | Reconciliation with one's own beauty | Prepare wardrobe, makeup, and concept for the photo shoot |
| Photograph | | Participate in a photo shoot |
| | Photo shoot with photographer | Take a photograph that represents some of the changes experienced during the workshop |
| Workshop closure | Assessment of personal commitment | Reflect on the personal commitment that each user wrote in the past. |
| | Dialogue on changes and learning | Share the changes perceived from the workshop experience |

Source: Own elaboration.

Although a contribution was recognized in each of the sessions, it was decided to delve deeper into the following therapeutic strategies, which were recognized as the most valued by the group:

Mirror technique

I have the mirror theme firmly ingrained in me. Maybe I forget other things, but the mirror theme, of accepting ourselves, really left a mark on me (P1, p. 58).

The mirror technique consisted of guided self-observation in front of a wall mirror, intended to identify the initial perception and internal dialogue that one tends to verbalize regarding one's own image. At first, a therapist provided instructions for the clients to follow as they observed different parts of their bodies. Positive verbalizations were then generated out loud to work on affective resonance and promote internal cognitive changes. According to the clients' accounts, the mirror technique allowed them to become aware of the constant self-criticism they felt about their bodies and encouraged them to cultivate greater self-acceptance.

Colorimetry and color theory

Colorimetry... It was also interesting because we started to see what other colors we could use, instead of just sticking with the colors we normally wear. It was like, look: this color looks good on you too, but those are your tones; obviously, it's our opinion; you can take it however you want (P4, p. 76).

The users highlighted the session on colors and colorimetry because it allowed them to analyze how some specific colors favor each skin tone and not others. During the session, the organization of the color wheel was explained, colors in clothing were discussed, and an individual analysis was conducted by skin tone. These strategies were positively valued because they encouraged them to think of new colors to wear.

Makeup

The other thing is that makeup was nice to see how people tried to do something different, because it was a somewhat extravagant makeup [...] It was great to see people in a different light than they normally are, who don't wear makeup (P4, p. 77).

The makeup activity, on this occasion, not only allowed us to explore new practices, colors, or shapes, but also became an opportunity to share knowledge and provide assistance in the execution of the makeup itself. It was also considered an activity to do something different and to "see" oneself differently.

Photographs and photoshoot

So it was like knowing that they were proposing to do things, not all of them, but those who did dare, it was like, it was nice. Seeing them and seeing them face the camera, which was also something they struggled with because at one point they were invited to take photos and they didn't want to, so now, I think, it was a great effort for them (T1, p. 41).

For the users, photographing themselves during the workshop was a great challenge; however, these experiences contributed to their empowerment process. Therapists, for their part, viewed the act of photographing themselves as an opportunity to dare to be seen by others and find greater enjoyment in this activity.

Effects perceived by users

This category includes effects that the users themselves reported during or after the workshop. In line with what has been seen abroad, the experience of the Fashion Therapy workshop demonstrates multiple effects, which were grouped into two subcategories: personal effects and relational effects.

Personal effects

It is a workshop that helps you connect with yourself, recognize your image, how you perceive yourself and how others perceive you, because there is also feedback on what others see in you (P2, p. 71).

Changes are evident in how the users perceive themselves. The workshop provided opportunities for personal reflection and the recognition of many aspects that had not been previously considered. First-person accounts, “for me”, and concepts such as “connecting with myself”, “change in myself”, “self-image”, etc. appear. At the same time, it is highlighted that there is positive feedback from others, which helps with self-recognition.

On the other hand, changes are also reported in relation to the daily activities the users performed, specifically those related to using the mirror, applying makeup, personal care, and getting dressed, as the following participant mentions.

That session was very interesting when we recognized what was hurting us when we looked in the mirror and what we were hearing, the voices of others, and when we decided at that moment to say something positive to ourselves and start looking in the mirror. That was important for me; from that day on, I started looking in the mirror and putting on makeup more often, for that acceptance of what I'm seeing (P2, p. 67).

Effects were also evident on an emotional level, specifically linked to the feeling of freedom and the possibility of having a space for emotional expression. This freedom also translated into less self-criticism, greater body acceptance, and the ability to dare to wear new colors, among other things.

Relational effects

The bond that was created between us, in general, with everything, with everyone. Having discovered that people thought things about me that I had no idea about; and also with the others who participated [...] In part, it has to be what one reflects, but there are many positive things that sometimes one doesn't... don't see (P1, p. 68).

The users report effects at the relational level, since the workshop also became a space to build bonds and face the challenges of connecting with new people. On the other hand, they report that “others” help them see things they do not see, which allowed them to rethink some skills and attributes they had not been able to explore. On the

other hand, they began to recognize the importance of fashion in everyone's life, not just their own, as reported in the following quote:

I don't do it now, because now I know that the person may or may not wear something, because it can affect them. Maybe they like stripes, and maybe their family has forbidden those stripes all their life, so maybe they're rebelling... I don't know their story (P1, p. 67).

Effects perceived by the therapists

This category includes effects that the therapists perceived during or after the workshop. The therapists reported multiple changes and effects, which were grouped into three subcategories: personal effects (internal and external), relational effects, and effects on the therapists themselves.

Personal effects

Finally, they were asked if they wanted to be photographed, and all three participants agreed. This is also relevant given that in previous sessions they had never wanted to be photographed. The fact that they agreed to be photographed also reflects the trust placed in the space and the equipment. It could shed light on greater self-confidence (T3, p. 32).

The therapists agree that they perceive changes in the participants. Similarly, as some participants report, concepts related to self-confidence and authenticity are mentioned. This reinforces the idea that the workshop became a space for self-knowledge and personal liberation. In line with what the users explained, the following quote illustrates changes perceived by the therapists, which affected other aspects of their lives:

There are several, I don't know, one person who wore certain colors and dared to wear other colors, another person who wore a dress she'd never worn before because she felt it didn't suit her, that it looked bad on her, I don't know what, and the next day she came in with the dress and felt super comfortable. Another participant who decided to study Costume Design, uh, another participant who began to question family relationships and, I don't know, her mother's fixation on her wardrobe. So, those were very concrete examples (T4, p. 52).

These examples show that the effects of the workshop had different impacts on each participant. In some cases, it allowed them to rethink life decisions, such as academic prospects. In other cases, it also prompted reflection on the impact family has on the image each person projects or would like to project.

Relational effects

One of the positive things I saw was the group's cohesion. Since they gave each other strength, helped each other, and complimented each other, that also helped

to bring more positive elements into your life, especially this rumination that one has about the negative aspects (T2, p. 42).

The therapists highlighted a process of group cohesion and collective strengthening, which was evident in the users' constant motivation to promote equal participation and the sense of mutual support that the experience left. The use of “compliments” and the joint visualization of positive aspects were highlighted.

Effects on the therapists themselves

As I said at the beginning, it wasn't just the patients here and us here, but I think we as facilitators also brought a lot of ourselves to the workshop, our own experiences as well, and for me it was also like a learning process (T4, p. 49).

Transformations and effects were seen both in the users and in the intervention team, which challenges the idea that the workshop only has an effect on the “users” or “assistants.” The therapists' accounts contain some personal reflections that can be used to illustrate how the workshop experience encouraged them to make transformations in their own lives or in their role as therapists.

Strengths of the workshop

In addition to all the effects already described, it is important to highlight three aspects that, being frequently reiterated by therapists and users, become the strengths of the workshop: collective construction and horizontality, the workshop as a safe space, and transdisciplinary work.

Collective construction and horizontality

You would not come here with a ready workshop, but rather it was a construction between the facilitators, the users, the COSAM patients, and that role also suits me quite well, as a more horizontal role with our patients (T4, p. 47).

Both the therapists and the users emphasize the horizontality that was present during the experience and the collective construction of the workshop. From the therapists' perspective, it is believed that the workshop was developed by everyone, and that there is greater comfort from a horizontal position. Similarly, it is mentioned that during the experience, moments of listening and conversations were gratifying for everyone.

Well, I said it before, the integration... the integration of you with us. As if suddenly, one forgot that you were the professionals and that we were in the workshop. The fact that we all tried on the clothes (P1, p. 66).

Likewise, the users highlighted the integration (connection) that existed within the group, as they observed shared learning and/or participation. They noted that there was

no significant difference between “professionals” and “users”, and that the therapists also participated in most of the activities.

The workshop as a safe space

I highlight what P8 mentioned about how this workshop was a safe space for her, where in addition to finding refuge for her confidences, opinions, and feelings, we were (and it was wonderful to feel like I was part of it) motivation and drive for decision-making, feeling more confident and taking action on certain things, like getting a piercing, which showed me that she was feeling very well (T2, p. 22).

Therapists and users emphasize that the workshop became a safe space for everyone. The workshop is described as a space where personal experiences and feelings are shared, which is also valued as a contribution. The concept of “refuge” is used to convey that the people who participated in the workshop are safe and that, on the other hand, the workshop also takes place in its own time/space dimension, as if there were an “inside the workshop” and an “outside the workshop.”

It was important to reiterate the freedom found in the space. I link it to freedom of expression (as a human right). Feeling free to arrive as one wishes is an opportunity to share with others an appearance that is hidden in other contexts or to innovate in appearance (T3, p. 24).

The workshop had enough privacy for people to feel comfortable and free to share their experiences. In addition, the physical characteristics of the space (largeness, brightness, presence of mirrors, etc.) were valued, contributing to this sense of freedom and privacy. Similarly, the support provided by the group throughout the activities was valued.

Transdisciplinarity

And I think it was all very well discussed, very well agreed upon, and also from a very personal perspective... because I also feel that it was like, it was good to have the perspective of an occupational therapist, a social worker, and a psychologist, because each one put their own perspective on it, right? And there was also the human aspect, as we liked each other very well, so the complementarity that existed between the three of us was very, very good (T1, p. 39).

From the therapists' perspective, the ability to generate transdisciplinary work is valued, which implies embracing the multidimensionality of reality and the necessary disciplinary integration and fusion. In this experience, the therapists' work was defined as complementary, and the complicity that existed within the team is highlighted.

Weaknesses of the workshop

On the other hand, users and therapists also recognize aspects that need to be improved and specific situations that they believe could have been handled differently.

This category includes: timing, call for participants, and modifications to the mirror technique.

Timing

Negative, suddenly some people would stay talking for a long time and not let us continue the activity, and that person would act like, talking... they would wander off in other directions and their conversation would be much longer, and we really wanted to continue with the activity (P4, p. 80).

It is stated that some sessions lasted longer than expected. It is emphasized that in some cases it is necessary to “frame”, which shows that some users participated more than others. This is related to the ability of the facilitation team to organize and optimize time, so that the activities can be carried out smoothly.

Call for participants

I remember now that I wish more people had participated in the call for participants because I think it was a very beneficial workshop for people in their mental health (T4, p. 51).

Another aspect considered weak was the call for participants and the number of participants in the space. Regarding this point, it should be noted that the concept of Modaterapia (Fashion Therapy) is a recent translation into Spanish, and few people are able to approach the experience with the concept alone. Therefore, reaching more people is a challenge.

Modifications to the mirror technique

I mean, while it helped us love ourselves more as we are and accept ourselves, I would like it to be like how another person sees us, and of course, that person sees us in the mirror and says: I see this about you, I like this about you, or I don't like this about you. Things like that could be, because I think that, in any case, we still care about other people's opinions (P4, p. 77).

The same users offered suggestions regarding how the “mirror technique” was carried out. They mentioned that more time was required to express what they experience in front of the mirror and that it would be a good opportunity for their classmates to share how they see others. From these opinions, it can be concluded that the topic of the body and the topic of the mirror should possibly be addressed separately for further exploration.

Emerging aspects

Below are several aspects that were not considered priorities at the beginning of the workshop, but which became key themes. These emerging aspects are considered

essential points to take into account for future similar workshops: personal and collective history with fashion, aesthetic violence, and health knowledge.

Personal and collective history with fashion

P4 tells us 'I never felt comfortable with my body.' He tells us that as a child, he was bullied for being 'chubby,' 'four-eyed,' 'dressing badly.' His mother insisted he wear pink, but his favorite color was black. He highlights the influence of his cousin and music. It's striking that, while attending a Catholic school, he was told that the color black is from the devil (T3, p. 26).

In this case, experiences of childhood bullying directed specifically at a person's appearance and other conflicts related to their way of dressing are presented. These experiences also illustrate how cultural meanings associated with color influence clothing. The family and the educational institution appear as relevant actors when directing or correcting clothing styles.

P8 points out, 'My mom had the strange idea of dressing me in frilly socks, and I didn't like them because they made my ankles itch.' She states that a whole conflict arose between what she liked and what was imposed on her, and she was given nicknames for her hair, which leads her to maintain the perception that "I was a bitter girl" (T1, p. 6).

This experience once again proves that families play a fundamental role in shaping and constructing the image that a person forms of themselves. This self-image is not only related to appearance but also to personality traits. By referring to "I was a bitter girl", the user is mentioning identity traits that are articulated based on how she dressed and conflicts that are embedded in that activity. Her story demonstrates that, ultimately, our relationship with fashion is shaped by personal and family experiences and histories.

Aesthetic violence

The idea of body dissatisfaction, experiences of bullying, and nicknames are repeated. Many references are made to people's body types: "fat", "short", "tall", which makes me think that as a society we have internalized an ideal body type, and when it is not met, it is a reason for insults, mockery, pointing fingers, or criticism (T3, p. 27).

In the session on fashion in childhood, participants shared various stories marked by nicknames, insults, and constant questioning about appearances that do not fit the "ideal body." This is relevant to consider when addressing topics related to fashion, the body, and mental health, since all participants, including the team of therapists, shared some experience of violence or abuse related to personal image, clothing choices, or body shapes.

Health knowledge

Faced with the possibility of dispensing with mental health professionals for experiences like these, it became clear to me the need to have support and assistance figures in case a major problem arose, as was the case with the epileptic seizure (T3, p. 37).

A third emerging element lies in health and clinical knowledge, which was considered and assessed in various ways. One of the most complex situations experienced during the workshop was a seizure suffered by one of the users during one of the sessions. This emergency emphasizes the clinical knowledge (diagnostic differences, first aid, crisis management) that the mental health team in charge of an experience like this must have.

However, this did not imply that the focus of the intervention was on clinical aspects. The team of therapists affirms that their perspective on the participants changed as their diagnoses were set aside and each person's story was considered, as illustrated in the following quote:

I believe that from this experience, I highlight the need to understand the topics discussed [...] and to set aside the diagnosis and validate them as people with stories that have shaped their way of seeing themselves (T1, p. 10).

Discussion

The results of this study confirmed, as has been shown in other countries, that a Fashion Therapy workshop improves body satisfaction, self-concept, and self-esteem (Yoh, 2015; Lee et al., 2016a, 2016b, 2020). Both therapists and users positively assessed the entire experience, particularly highlighting its participatory and collective nature.

Although all the topics addressed were selected jointly, four sessions were significant for the group. The body and mirror session, which, by addressing the topic of self-image, reaffirms the importance of image and the mirror in today's society (Stauss, 2020), and the colorimetry session, based on Jackson's (1987) "four seasons theory" and color psychology (Satsangi, 2022). The makeup session proved its therapeutic power by fostering connection with the body and personal expression (Triolo-Rodriguez, 2023). The photo session documented the changes in the patients and opened the possibility of considering the theoretical contributions of phototherapy or therapeutic photography (Irala-Hortal, 2018).

Regarding the strengths, the most notable was the horizontality between therapists and users, the sense of safety and freedom provided by the space, and the participatory perspective evident in the identification of common needs and the joint search for solutions (Montenegro, 2001). This shows that the therapeutic experience was not only based on the strategies and activities implemented, but also on the group building and strengthening that occurred throughout the process. In this sense, recent authors state that the group and its members are the key element of the therapeutic process:

The critical therapeutic agent is the group, which is organized to solve the problem-tasks that arise in the work of connecting with a composed object,

which requires both cooperation [...] and the completion of the task in terms of achieving a personally chosen objective and agreed upon as a common goal (Tari García, 2015, p. 4).

The results of this systematization demonstrate that therapy was not understood solely in terms of individual changes, but also as a complex group process and as a “collective occupation.” In the words of Palacios (2013), collective occupations are those that can provide cohesion, a sense of community, well-being, belonging, and social identity, based on the logic of participation, strengthening the community and social organization itself. In this case, the workshop was characterized by a participatory and horizontal logic that promoted group cohesion, which has also been defined as a key characteristic of collective occupations and therapeutic groups (Ramugondo & Kronenberg, 2015; Yalom & Leszcz, 1985).

Guajardo (2016) adds that collective occupations can be considered a fundamental strategy for the construction of identities, belongings, and processes of autonomy, which enable the awareness and self-awareness of groups and individuals. In this way, the workshop was also configured as a space for constant reflection and awareness on personal and shared themes that are influenced by fashion. In this regard, Stauss (2020) warned that Fashion Therapy could be used as a normalizing technology that reproduces desirable feminine characteristics; however, this experience analyzed and questioned how fashion is present in our lives and imposes ideals, mandates, and prohibitions. The workshop became a safe and emancipatory space, conducive to exploration and liberation through fashion.

The collectivist results of this experience also relate to the perspective of Nerea De Ugarte (2022), who argues that self-esteem must be understood politically because its construction is influenced by the cultural parameters and expectations that affect us. De Ugarte (2022, p. 104) defines her concept of political self-esteem as:

[...] the process of understanding and awareness through which we internalize, become aware of, and redefine that self-esteem has for years been a device of control, subordination, and profitability in our culture, used by the market through various sources of social learning to benefit from the insecurities it constructs, massifies, and imposes.

In line with this intersubjective view of self-esteem, the workshop reflected on sociocultural oppressions and foreign beauty standards imposed, especially on women. Participants were able to question why they were so critical of their own image in light of an impossible aesthetic standard. These results reinforce the idea that Latin American women feel objectified by a Eurocentric or North American version of feminine beauty, which leads to stigmas and stereotypes (Villalobos Reyes et al., 2023).

Another topic addressed was bodies and corporality. During the experience, the perspective of “body diversity” was presented, which posits that there is a variety of bodies that must be recognized, respected, and nurtured within a discriminatory cultural system (Pérez, 2018). Similarly, the shared stories of abuse and bullying reflect the “aesthetic violence” embedded in Chilean culture, which refers to the set of narratives, representations, practices, and institutions that exert harmful pressure and

discrimination on women to force them to conform to the prevailing beauty standard (Pineda, 2020). These forms of aesthetic violence were important to address, as they reflected a direct impact on the body and on practices related to clothing.

Consequently, during the workshop, bodies were not treated as “healthy” or “sick”, a division common in reductionist approaches to health (Pérez, 2019). The workshop focused on the notion of the “clothed body”, which considers clothing as a second skin and a place where the body resides, an interface that connects body and context (Eskola Torres et al., 2023). The results show that the focus of the intervention did not only address bodily appearance but also included the symbolic and cultural framework that dresses and undresses the body (Sunyé, 2018). Accordingly, fashion was considered a contextual bodily practice susceptible to transformation (Entwistle, 2002). At the end of the experience, it was reaffirmed that the “clothed body” is not just a shell but also subjectivity and an internal world, identity and autonomy, power and resistance.

From a disciplinary perspective, the findings also reaffirm the transformative and emancipatory power of “workshops”, understood as a collective occupation. A workshop can be defined as a process of transformation and learning, experienced through individual and group experimentation, which allows for the establishment of unique construction methods and seeks, through its strategies, to promote changes in social reality (De Brito & Santiago, 2010; Pereira et al., 2014; Pérez et al., 2014). Therefore, when a group workshop becomes a counter-hegemonic practice, pursuing the principles of autonomy and social emancipation, it fulfills the main characteristics of a collective occupation (Núñez et al., 2019).

Finally, it is important to emphasize the transdisciplinary nature of this experience, given that the work was articulated “[...] across different disciplines and beyond any discipline” (Nicolescu, 2002). The intervention team's initial interdisciplinary theoretical approach was transformed by the need to share diverse knowledge and expertise that made it possible to address the issues and variety of strategies implemented. However, this systematization also makes it clear that those facilitating a “Fashion Therapy” experience must have a minimum clinical background to work with people with mental health problems.

Conclusions

The results of this research allow us to conclude that Fashion Therapy can be considered a complex, transdisciplinary therapy that places fashion at the center of the therapeutic process and is enriched by various theoretical approaches. In this particular experience, perspectives from occupational therapy, psychotherapy, and social work were fused, while also adding contributions from other social and artistic disciplines. This framework includes group psychology, the theory of encloded cognition, gender studies, and the foundations of art therapy, in addition to color psychology, the social psychology of fashion, the sociology of fashion, therapeutic photography, and therapeutic makeup. Without losing sight of the fact that the process was also shaped by the knowledges and practices that the participants themselves contributed to this experience.

This experience encourages occupational therapists in Latin America to continue exploring the power of fashion as a therapeutic process, understood from a critical and

complex perspective. This is consistent with the development of an innovative and transdisciplinary occupational therapy capable of developing collective projects open to the inclusion of new knowledge. The challenge is to continue addressing the current needs of the population that derive from the aesthetic oppressions imposed by Western colonialism, considering fashion as a bodily practice that allows for the construction of new subjectivities and promotes processes of individual and collective transformation.

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Author's Contributions

Daniel Lagos-Cerón: Main researcher. Text conception, source organization, writing, data collection, data analysis, discussions, and final editing. Milagritos Mesinas Arana: Writing, data collection, data analysis, and discussions. María Ignacia Mella Astudillo: Source organization, writing, data collection, data analysis, and discussions. Pamela Gutiérrez Monclus: Analysis plan, data analysis, and discussions. María Elisa Berrios Etcheberry: Writing, data analysis, and discussions. All authors approved the final version of the text.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

Corresponding author

Daniel Lagos-Cerón
e-mail: dlagosceron@uchile.cl

Section editor

Prof. Dr. Daniel Cezar da Cruz