


Embodied Reflections of Body-Oriented Clinical Psychology Students during Covid-19

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Report

Abstract

The world has encountered a pandemic named Covid-19 that has affected people's lives in numerous dimensions. During this ongoing dramatic and stratified period, we have been shattered globally in various layers. As 12 students of the first Body-Oriented Clinical Psychology master's program at Maltepe University in Turkey, we experienced uncertainty caused by the pandemic accompanied with online Body-Oriented Psychotherapy classes. Our experiences in Turkey, mostly Istanbul between mid-March and June, 2020 can be an example of reacting with uncertainty to the unexpected Covid-19 pandemic and may highlight the role of the body coping. In this article, we intended to reflect our pandemic experiences of significant changes in our lives. We examined our perception of the *new normal* as 'Body-Oriented Clinical Psychology students' in our reflections with distinct and common experiences. In addition, we covered the experiences of body awareness, embodiment, emotions, and interpersonal relationships while coping with the coronavirus. Our reflections revealed that the uncertainty of online education and other circumstances during this time caused anxiety and anger, while body-oriented courses helped us feel regulated and attuned. Sharing our experiences and evaluating the effects of our education on these experiences of lock-downs were important in gaining a better understanding of the circumstances in order to determine helpful solutions.

Keywords: Body-oriented psychotherapy; Covid-19; Coping; Uncertainty

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Introduction

A rapidly changing and developing era seems to be facilitating significant progression in anticipating and controlling events in advance, but it is impossible to obtain absolute knowledge and utter foresight and to perceive the universe holistically (Yýldýz, 2017). The differences of the individual perceptions of uncertainty depend not only on events, but also on interpersonal relationships. Therefore, experiencing uncertainty in the transition from face-to-face learning to online learning during the pandemic will be reflected in this article by Body-Oriented Clinical Psychology students.

Considering the current situation, the uncertain course of events related to the Covid-19 pandemic has led people to become unable to foresee that which will happen (Aykut & Soner Aykut, 2020). Even though every individual has her/his unique way of dealing with uncertainty and unpredictability, some ambiguity themes could be seen as collective. Individuals and society might experience intense anxiety and trauma since problems like unknown treatment techniques, lack of consensus about general properties of the virus, number of infected people around the world, infection pace of the virus, the fear of ourselves or our loved ones getting infected, lost lives, fear of death, radical changes in life, and the influence on economy and alterations in social relations are present (Aykut & Soner Aykut, 2020; del Valle, Andrésa, Urquijoa, Yerro-Avincetto, López-Morales, & Canet-Juric, 2020).

Anxiety is a common emotion with reactions similar to that of fear. Fear causes the fight or flight response in reaction to a currently identifiable threat (i.e., assault). It is a basic, appropriate, and protective emotion (Sahin, 2017). Moreover, anxiety is related to an unidentifiable or non-existent potential threat (Asmundson, Taylor, Bovell, & Collimore, 2006). Even with the knowledge of the distinction between fear and anxiety, classifying the current emotion toward the pandemic is not simple. Various researches have stated that uncertainty is a stressor with psychological and physical outcomes and a predisposition to anxiety (Sarýcam, 2014; Ýýldýz, 2017; Berenbaum, Bredemeier, & Thompson, 2008; Kasapoglu, 2020).

Considering that there are many uncertainties in our daily lives, perceiving ambiguous situations as threats inevitably leads to negative emotions (Behar, DiMarco, Hekler, Mohlman, & Staples, 2009). These negative emotions might evolve into traumatic experiences that might bring about an anxiety response. According to Bessel van der Kolk (2000), people experience a mix of numbness, withdrawal, confusion, shock, and silent terror when faced with a life threatening situation.

Pandemic

The rapidly spreading coronavirus is threatening the world and influencing global economy and countries, and has brought about diverse precautions and practices. These practices are mainly enforced by local/government level administrations and include regulations intended to create social distancing, such as flight limitations, quarantine, and martial law. A suppression approach has been adopted to slow down the pandemic by keeping masses at home and diminishing mobility to the extent possible (Telli & Altun, 2020). These conditions match various dimensions of the definition of trauma.

As Bessel van der Kolk (2020) mentioned in one of his talks, trauma is being unable to sustain usual activities, and feeling helpless and unable to change the situation. The Covid-19 pandemic experiences match this definition precisely. When

coronavirus was introduced to our lives, individuals experienced unexpected radical changes in their daily habits and suffered significant losses, such as loss of freedom, separation from loved ones, increased domestic violence cases, job loss and the related poverty, increased drug abuse, and stigmatization and discrimination (Aykut & Soner Aykut, 2020). Such radical changes and losses cause distress through triggering a response in our nervous systems. The Polyvagal theory essentially emphasizes that the central nervous system has multiple defense strategies. The brain regions that are related to high level functions like thinking and reasoning stop responding and regions that are related to primal “fight-flight-freeze” response are activated when faced with a threat especially to our physical unity (Hanscom et al, 2020). The present pandemic visibly threatens our physical unity and that of our loved ones.

A situation like a pandemic which leads to isolation and social distancing could be seen as a trigger for itself. Isolation is described as an undesirable situation that might trigger negative feelings such as fear and anger (del Valle et al., 2020). Due to these negative feelings, individuals might experience lockdowns and social distancing as a trauma. As Porges (2020) has asserted, bodies of individuals often hold on to fear after a traumatic event. Both pandemic diseases and their related precautions influence the well-being of embodied minds. A visible uncertainty has emerged as a result of the destruction of boundaries and expectations in current conditions (van der Kolk, 2020). Individuals might be able to tolerate uncertainty when they interpret it as an exciting adventure, whereas uncertainty that is interpreted as an obstacle or threat is harder to tolerate, such as in Covid-19 lockdowns. A significant amount of the population suffers from anxiety and depressive symptoms due to Covid-19 lockdowns, which can be explained as intolerance to uncertainty regardless of age (Askin, Bozkurt, & Zeybek, 2020). Pandemic related uncertainty can present itself as an overwhelming stress due to the unpredictability of the future and inability to control events.

As the level of distress caused by uncertainty during the coronavirus pandemic and lockdowns vary depending on prior level of vulnerability, not all coping strategies provide equal benefits (Rettie & Daniels, 2021). Every individual has their own unique way of coping with the situation depending on their internal factors like compassion and vulnerability. In this article, these coping strategies will be discussed on the basis of body and interpersonal relationships.

It should be noted that past and daily life experiences (trauma, anxiety, etc.) are shaping our bodies, emotions, cognitions, and lives. Although trauma has emotional and cognitive effects, it is essentially a physiological process (Levine, 2016). In anxiety, a high level of energy is visible in the body, in addition to a great deal of neural tension sensations such as nausea, heart palpitations, inhibited breathing, and tension on the chest (Röhrich, Gerken, Stupiggia, & Valstar, 2013). Röhrich et al. (2013) stated that, in order to cope with these stances, regulating the nervous system, breathing, grounding practices, and body awareness can be used as strategies to facilitate the formation of a steady stance on earth when feeling anxious. Therefore, these bodily strategies help individuals stay in the “here and now” and feel embodied.

As it is known, humans are social beings and live as a whole with their environment. The new social life adapted to social isolation is incompatible with the human nature, and thus, causes profound mental impairments (Aykut & Soner Aykut, 2020). There might be some steps that can be used during this period to help individuals to feel positive in order to protect their mental health and provide them

with psychosocial support. Workout videos and health applications that encourage and provide physical activity through the internet, mobile technological devices, and television are other ways of maintaining physical functionality and mental health during these critical times (Arslan & Rcan, 2020). Consequently, people tend to discover and develop various protective factors for stress caused by the uncertainty brought about by the pandemic.

The aim of this article is to reflect the Covid-19 experiences and coping strategies of body-oriented clinical psychology students through a body-oriented reflection on body perception, body awareness, embodiment, emotion regulation, and interpersonal relationships. These concepts reflect our own experiences during the transition period to the “new normal” accompanied by online Body-Oriented Psychotherapy courses from the beginning of the pandemic.

All 12 of us students are women from Turkey with an age range of 24-32 years (*Mean* = 26.8). In addition, 10 of us live with our families, while 2 of us live with friends. Contributors tried to isolate themselves to the extent possible. All of us have completed our psychology undergraduate degrees and the first term of body-oriented clinical psychology program.

Body Perception

The effect of anxiety on body perception could be seen as a common concept within the contributors. As mentioned, social isolation is found to be increasing anxieties related to health, financial issues, and loneliness (Thunström, Newbold, Finnoff, Ashworth, & Shogren, 2020; Reger, Stanley, & Joiner, 2020). Therefore, when Covid-19 was introduced, uncertainty emerged in many areas of daily life. For example, Xiao et al. (2020) found that individuals, who are in high-risk groups, might be potentially infected, or have contacted infected people, experience negative psychological effects even though they were physically healthy and not infected (as cited in Askin et al., 2020). This shows that the perception of one's own body might be affected by anxiety related factors. For instance, Allen and Walter (2016) noted that factors such as body (dis)satisfaction, social physique anxiety, and body image disturbances reflect on one's perception of one's own body.

They stated: “...perceptions of the physical self that can be damaging to psychological well-being. For example, high levels of body dissatisfaction, low levels of body esteem, higher dysmorphic facial beliefs, and low levels of body appreciation are generally considered to reflect a more negative body image.” (Allen & Walter, 2016). In the same manner, one contributor's Covid-19 experience shows how overwhelming emotions might reflect on body (dis)satisfaction and affect one's body perception:

“I felt anxious throughout this process and it affected my body perception negatively. I had a body perception that felt familiar and similar to that of my previous anxiety attacks. I was feeling a lot of pressure on my body. This feeling of repression led me to close in and allow my body to be still. My body became immobile and my vestibular system was affected. I became more careless, lazy, and anxious, and my body posture changed. As my anxiety increased, I started to look at my body more negatively. I found myself thinking that I was ugly because of the acne sores on my face”. (Author A)

The emotions that stood out in this process caused changes in our body perception. Anxiety caused by uncertainty was one of the most common emotions. According to Röhrich and Priebe (1996), body perception is negatively correlated with anxiety levels (as cited in Röhrich et al., 2013). This correlation has also been observed in our experiences.

Before Covid-19, there were many stressors in our daily lives. For example, as Allen and Walter (2016) cited: "Sociocultural factors, such as exposure to media images depicting a thin ideal, have been found to contribute to negative perceptions of one's body (Grabe et al., 2008; Groesz et al., 2002)." Therefore, it might be hard to be aware of the way we perceive ourselves because of concurrent overwhelming environmental factors. Thus, we might be in need of something such as body movements or focus on our own body, as one of the contributors mentioned:

"My belly has gotten bigger and my legs have gotten thicker. I feel heavier and bulkier. It does not seem strange that this has happened while constantly staying at home ... When we return to normal life, I will try to get rid of this dissatisfaction by losing the weight. I am aware that my perception about my body originates from society's ideal female figure. The feeling of my new weight results in an incredible tension, especially in my abdomen. Putting my hand on my belly in meditation relaxes me, makes me feel more regulated, and makes me more aware of my bodily sensations, but I have not felt motivated enough to do it for a longer time. Interactions at online Body-Oriented Psychotherapy classes motivated me to do it." (Author B)

Moreover, 'the perception of our own body is unique because it occurs from the inside, via touch and proprioception, and from the outside, via vision', as Allen and Walter (2016) stated. Because body perception is unique, not all of the contributors had a negatively affected body perception. The environmental factors that we underwent during the quarantine also affected perception. Another contributor who was able to move and exercise in her body more freely expressed her reflection more positively:

"I try to work extremely hard in physical fitness activities to ensure that I maintain my fitness. Therefore, I am physically active and always engage in sport activities. As a result, I believe I have my ideal body, which has helped me to develop a positive perception towards it. Thus, when Covid-19 started, I felt the benefits of physical activities in maintaining mental health and body fitness." (Author C)

In addition, Sheets-Johnstone (2005) stated: "Perceptions of one's own body are, in other words, the *sine qua non* of both conceptual understandings of, and emotional attitudes toward, one's body. If one did not perceive one's body, one would have no grounds for building or having such conceptual understandings or emotional attitudes." (Prester & Knockaert, 2005). The effect of overwhelming emotions on our body perceptions can be so unbearable that people might engage in avoidant behavior. In this regard, a contributor stated:

I have always felt dissatisfied with my body, but it was different this time. I remember that my sensations were shut down at the beginning of Covid-19. I do not remember feeling or thinking anything. There was no action physically or mentally. It was like, I was in a state that had stopped and I was protected from the outside world by borders. When the Body-Oriented Clinical Psychology classes started, I started to realize how much weight I had gained and it was hurting for the first time. It was not the first time I had gained weight, but it was the first time I had felt shame and dissatisfaction to such a degree. (Author D)

With the examination of the body perception experiences of contributors, we can say that the effect of overwhelming emotions, body (dis)satisfaction, environmental factors, and embodied activities is visible on body perception during the quarantine period. Emotions have really affected the body perception of the contributors, whether positively or negatively. Thus, we can say that emotions may alter the perception, but the key point here is to notice and accept sensations by raising awareness and embodiment.

Body Awareness and Embodiment

Cebolla et al. (2016) described body awareness as a modulating factor of embodiment, which may alter the perception of our body. Therefore, the primary influence of body awareness and embodiment was another common concept between the contributors. This concept can be explained as high body awareness provides higher life quality, lower pain, and depressive symptoms (Erden, Altuğ, & Cavlak, 2013). Body awareness is beyond proprioception or having control over the body. Body awareness can be defined as “the perception of bodily states, processes and actions that is presumed to originate from sensory proprioceptive and interoceptive afferents and that an individual has the capacity to be aware of.” (Mehling, Gopisetty, Daubenmier, Price, Hecht, & Stewart, 2009). Thus, it provides us with some valuable information for the well-being of a person. Without the information from body awareness, individuals might get disembodied, for example, as Totton (2003) noted, body awareness can be defined as a basic step to feeling embodied.

The pandemic process was a new and unpredictable experience; it diminished our awareness of our body and feelings at the beginning of the process. Because of constantly being alert to the dangers caused by environmental factors, we might move away our awareness and avoid our needs in order to cope with the overwhelming situation.

“I started living with my family during the quarantine. Feelings of being stuck, intense anger, and anxiety occasionally created conflicts at home. I was unaware of the effects of this tension and its reflections on my body. During a mirroring exercise, I focused on my body and noticed the tension in my chest and shoulders, but somehow I could not feel embodied. It was necessary to find out what caused the tension in my body, which meant to face the event. I did not want to do this when I was in the same environment with my family, and so, did not complete that exercise.” (Author E)

“I have always had some semi-autistic features in my vestibular functions and body awareness, until I learned how to give attention to and feel at home in my body. Feeling grounded is not that easy for a person who barely touches the floor, but somehow I managed -or even forced myself- to do it. Shifting from a hypo-embodied state to a nearly hyper-embodied one changes not only your perception of your body state, but also the way you experience your emotions. I understood for the first time in my life what anxiety really is. Numbness in my arms and legs, irregular breathing, and constant discomfort without a concrete reason accompanied me for a while during the quarantine until I found a way to release the tension through mindfulness techniques.” (Author F)

As stated in these reflections, gaining body awareness has not always been an easy process. Moreover, these experiences have clearly demonstrated the effect of body awareness on embodiment. According to Röhrich et al. (2013), “body awareness techniques are utilized with a view to emphasize the importance of embodied activity for one’s state of mind.” Embodied exercises enabled us to experience the process in a calmer and more realistic way by becoming aware of the bodily reflections of the mind.

Moreover, the continuation of body-oriented classes during this period enabled us to gain body awareness. This kind of awareness has led us to develop more potential for self-regulation as a result of strengthening the neuronal connections between the limbic system and the prefrontal cortex. In addition to doing this, it allowed us to use it as a resource to improve our functionality in everyday life and deal with problems. The following statement of a contributor refers to how obtaining body awareness through body exercises helped them to accept the process.

"I felt my emotions so intensely at the beginning, but right now I can regulate myself. The milestone of this regulation is of course the continuation of body-oriented courses. The online courses opened up a space for me to experience my body, which helped me to feel embodied. In addition, experiencing my body during the quarantine periods made me feel more connected with my soul. The body-oriented practices gave me the opportunity to explore my bodily resources and strengthen my awareness. The feeling of self-care and self-love helped me to feel more embodied and to make a distinction between my feelings and my senses from the beginning of the pandemic situation until now. I became aware that I am not composed of feelings, but rather temporarily affected by them." (Author G)

When we feel embodied, it is easier to come to the here and now, which creates a baseline for living in the moment. Totton (2003) explained that embodiment refers to the state of being united with bodymind, which is often used to name the state of experiencing this unity. According to our experiences, a person has to find their resources to have an enduring embodiment because the resource will provide the power to strengthen the bodymind connection. Increasing our bodily and mental awareness will help us to become easily grounded and it will lead to a better embodiment experience. The benefits of repeating body awareness exercises and accepting this experience throughout the process are clearly stated in the reflection of another contributor:

"Once you can observe what is going on with you, you start feeling able to make choices; so, I used some Hakomi exercises to activate my body to feel emotionally regulated. There were some times in which I closed my eyes and asked myself where in the body do I need a touch? I hugged my body and said: 'I am here.' This exercise helped me to feel embodied and emotionally regulated. Through the body-oriented techniques, we, as clinical psychologist candidates, have learned that without being embodied, one cannot fully understand others. When I need to regulate myself, I first start by being embodied because of this. Doing this made me feel less anxious throughout the day." (Author H)

In light of the above reflections, it can be clearly seen that we had diverging body awareness experiences via body awareness exercises during quarantine. In this period, we have experienced different emotions and bodily sensations. Body-oriented practices helped us to gain insight about our body awareness and to accept the overwhelming circumstances.

Emotion Regulation

Emotions are the most primitive experience of one's body. Although recognizing emotions could be considered as the most basic and natural need of human beings, we are mostly confined to the mind level due to our cultural norms. We tend to suppress and ignore emotions rather than just normalize them. In her reflection, one of the contributors pointed to the search for emotional regulation while dealing with her overwhelming emotions.

"Everything was overwhelming for me and I tried to escape from all my feelings by watching something or spending time on social media, but it did not work for long. Even though I really forced myself to do something, I could not concentrate on anything because I felt so anxious. I also felt lost, life was going on and I could not do anything like others, who I saw on social media, to improve myself. All these things made me more and more anxious". (Author I)

Our thoughts and feelings are shaping our body. Experiences, especially when they are overwhelming, change our nervous system and the body tries to find a solution to regulate itself (Levine & Frederick, 1997). What we define as emotion

actually arises through chemical changes as a result of mental processes linked to our nervous system. Thus, we can actually define our emotions as the defense systems in our body. If we are disconnected from our emotions, when we encounter an emotion, we usually see the effects of that emotion at the mind level and try to analyze its effects in our life. However, every emotion has a purpose, so the most important question to be asked is what does the emotion want us to know, and from what does it protect us? Being aware of these emotions and being able to stay with them enables the person to establish a better connection with their emotions, and accordingly, to express them in a healthy way. One of the contributors explained, in her reflection, how embodied exercise and self-acceptance helped when she had difficulty in recognizing and regulating these overwhelming emotions.

"During the lockdown period, I always tried to calm myself down because I felt so intense. When I started to meditate to get calm, I had a hard time focusing. I felt like I was in my study room, because I could not get out of my mind. I have always planned something when trying to focus on my body and my feelings. Then, with the body-oriented psychotherapy courses I started to feel my body more through learning, experiencing, and touching, and concentrating on my breath, my heartbeat, and my senses. I noticed that I became more relaxed day by day. Being in the body makes me feel safer; when I was in my body, I also felt the here and now. After managing that, meditation became my routine and I started to try not to judge myself for not doing something I had planned." (Author J)

In many statements, body-oriented classes were considered as the biggest support for gaining insight. It is seen in our reflections that we, first, became aware of how to feel, and then, how to define those emotions and senses. At the beginning of the pandemic, we often had trouble recognizing our emotions because of the exhausting encounter with unpleasant emotions. Like many people, we did not know what reaction we should have in this new and unconventional situation. As we began to recognize and accept our emotions we discovered how to regulate them in our own unique way.

"As a Body-Oriented Clinical Psychology student, when I became embodied, I was able to realize my unhealthy behaviors quickly and transform them into experiences which brought balance. In other words, at first I was disconnected from my emotions and body, and I felt almost numb. Then, as we went through our classes, I became aware of my emotions and tried to regulate them. In this period, I learnt that in order to cope with overwhelming emotions, the first thing is to accept them. I discovered some relaxation strategies that helped me accept the situation" (Author K)

Movement was one of our primary sources for regulating our overwhelming emotions, which we could not define at first. We can say that this pandemic is a traumatic event and people who live traumatic experiences feel stuck in their body and need to release tension in order to heal the trauma (Totton, 2003). If we are not able to release the energy, we remain stuck in our nervous system and lose our resilience. Creating a safe place in the body to let the energy flow is necessary, because the energy comes from the body. Movements and exercises presented in the body-oriented clinical psychology classes helped us to eliminate the feeling of being stuck and to regulate our emotions.

"Dancing, by myself or with my friend via camera, made me feel more energetic and gave me hope for life. Three or four times a week I practiced yoga. I started yoga before the quarantine so I knew the poses, functions, and breathing exercises required for practicing it. Sometimes, I confronted my unpleasant feelings and fears after yoga. I asked myself regularly: "What is happening in my body?" "How is my breath/my body at this moment?" I found

many answers, but actually I did not want to look into those sensitive parts of myself intentionally. After starting the Body-Oriented Clinical Psychology master program, I became more aware of my body.” (Author B)

Our emotions, mind, and body are acting as a whole, and in our work with the body, we actually increase the balance between them and our capacity of resilience. Our reflections showed that body movement/exercise have positive effects on regulating the nervous system and help us calmly accept the overwhelming outcome of difficult situations.

Interpersonal Relationships

Our daily routine was changed with the pandemic lifestyle. People started to stay at home and could not see their friends, co-workers, or even (elder) family members. The term “new normal” was introduced in order to define the new balance of our lives and relationships. The new normal has restricted our relationships with our environment. As embodied human beings, we are programmed to form relationships from the earlier stages of life (Totton, 2015). To fulfill this need, we sought different ways to build relationships.

Most people started to interact with others through smartphones and video meetings. As mentioned by Aristovnik, Keržic, Ravšelj, Tomaževic, and Umek (2020), in order to protect psychological well-being, survival mechanisms lead people to find alternative ways to communicate and relate during social isolation, such as online communication with family and friends or using social networks. As many people do, we started to communicate online with the people around us in order to cope with this process easier; we had the urge to sustain our relationships and social needs.

“Sharing joyful experiences such as watching movies with a friend through video call or celebrating birthdays and having a family dinner on Zoom were helpful in fulfilling my social needs and it created the feeling of being surrounded.” (Author E)

During the quarantine period, people had to quit the types of interactions they were used to and find a new channel of communication in order not to lose their social relations. The social psychology perspective emphasizes the importance of being socially active and in contact with others. The two significant aspects of contact, the sense of community and social support, are found to have a stress, anxiety, and depression buffering effect and enhance welfare (Obst & Stafurik, 2010). Sustaining our relationships with people throughout the process also affected our well-being positively. Being in similar conditions with these people also made it easier for us to attune to each other.

“I usually contacted my friends online. Being in contact, even if online, felt significant for the connection and attunement. The most important thing that I have learned from this pandemic period about relationships is that attunement with other people is significant for a trustworthy and enduring relationship, but the main point is to feel the attunement in ourselves in order to make other people feel attuned to you.” (Author K)

Feeling surrounded is an important aspect of this pandemic situation. It might help to create and to collect positive experiences. The feeling of being a part of one or more groups plays an important role in the construction of a person's social identity (Antonini, Schiavio, & Biasutti, 2020). Eisenberger (2012) defines the disruption of social identity as one of the most painful and emotionally unpleasant feelings a person can experience because it involves the risk of damaging one's ability to relate to other individuals. Therefore, we continued to stay in touch with people in order to protect this identity. One of the contributors expressed the effect of being united and

feeling accepted by others in the following words:

"Being with others during the pandemic situation gave me confidence because I knew that I was not alone. As social creatures we live in the eyes of others, so we need others to feel alive. Acceptance and seeing reaction are our needs, we need to feel accepted in a group. In a body psychotherapeutic group, as in any other small group, the members tend to listen to each other, but first we need to find out how we can understand each other." (Author A)

As social beings, we all needed to socialize and create connections with others to feel attached. Because of the pandemic, these social needs were restricted regardless of our wishes. According to Holt-Lunstad (2017), "lack of social relationships during isolation, influences psychological and emotional wellbeing negatively" (as cited by Askin et al., 2020). After getting out of the pandemic shock, people found a way to maintain their relationships for being regulated. Moreover, this regulation could be seen as helpful for gaining tolerance regarding the uncertainty of social isolation.

Discussion

This article has analyzed our embodied reflections during the pandemic in terms of body perception, body awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relation. As previously mentioned, the authors of this article encountered the pandemic when their education proceeded as body-oriented master program students. The study group (13 students and professors who have traveled around the world) had previously met each other in person, and thus, were able to create a healthy and close relationship with each other. This may affect the authors' statements and reflections. The contributors' first contact with body work had not been during the pandemic; all contributors had experienced embodied exercises in "normal" classroom settings. Yet, all statements are reflecting embodied experiences during the pandemic, which were made in an online setting. Consequently, this article is written by authors who are new to the field of body work, but had the chance to experience it in physical close settings. It should also be mentioned that all experiential body exercises were performed under the supervision of body psychotherapists, which might also lead to a therapeutic intervention. Even though our statements are compiled under the key concepts of body perception, body awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relation, they are experienced individually and vary in different reflections.

The theme body perception, which is defined as the perception of one's own body of both conceptual understanding and emotional attitudes by Sheets-Johnstone (2005), was repeated often in statements. The effect of overwhelming emotions, body (dis)satisfaction, environmental factors, and embodied activities are visible on the body perceptions of authors. Body awareness leads to the development of more potential for self-regulation as a result of strengthening the neural connections between the limbic system and the prefrontal cortex. The statements of authors were based on concepts like overwhelming emotions, environmental factors, embodied movement/exercise, and self-acceptance. The main idea remains with the outcome that bodily and mental awareness leads to a grounded state and shifts the body to an embodiment experience. The knowledge that emotions, mind, and body are acting as a whole led to a common statement that there was an increase in the balance between them and our capacity for resilience. Regular body work shows effectiveness in controlling the nervous system and on individuals' ability to deal with difficult situations without being overwhelmed by the intensity of emotions. Concepts like overwhelming emotions, embodied movement/exercise, and self-acceptance were repeatedly stated in embodied reflections under the term emotion regulation.

Relationships were also considered as a regulation tool. Daily life and communication had gained a new dimension called a new normal. Yet, reflections under interpersonal relations in general were made under the subjects social needs, acceptance, and sharing. This brand new lifestyle caused many changes such as different forms of communication. We benefited from communicating with people including family, friends, and professors, and maintaining relationships with them. This helped us to understand the situation and support ourselves. These connections through a screen helped to regulate and create tolerance for the pandemic.

During these experiences, some of us experienced focusing on the body and becoming embodied as easy and relaxing, while others found them difficult. Trying and not feeling successful in focusing on the body can emerge as a source of distress. Even though we had worked with the body before, we had never experienced it under the pressure of unexpected pandemic uncertainty. While experiencing various states in becoming embodied, all the body related exercises were applied and constantly supervised by experienced instructors. The presence of an instructor was essential and supportive for those who showed intense and anxious expressions. It is suggested that such training programs be guided by qualified instructors in order to ensure their ethically appropriate progression. While evaluating this article, the circumstances mentioned above should be considered.

Contributors knew each other very well before shifting to the online context and were regularly meeting. Sharing our experiences and evaluating the effects of our education on these experiences of lock-downs were important in gaining a better understanding of the circumstances in order to determine helpful solutions. Consequently, the setting of online body-oriented classes might have a group therapy effect. Further research might investigate the effects of body-oriented work on newly formed groups or individual practice. Moreover, all contributors had previously had the chance to meet and experience body related work in face to face settings. Future research can investigate the effects of body-oriented work on people who have never experienced body-oriented work before.

Conflict of Interests

Authors have no conflict of interests.

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