Combination of actor’s play training and assertiveness program to reduce difficulties in self-affirmation: A preliminary study.

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Ascertiveness, also called self-affirmation, is an interpersonal attitude through individuals affirming themselves while respecting others. Ascertiveness is an important feature contributing to well-being. Indeed, people presenting difficulties in self-affirmation often suffer from social anxiety and fear distress (Corten, 2001). Indeed, combination of difficulties in ascertiveness and social anxiety are often met in several psychopathologies such as depression, schizophrenia, agoraphobia and personality disorders (Servant, 2002). Patients often report difficulties in six general domains: (1) to complement, to give a present or to apply for something; (2) to criticize; (3) to respond to a compliment; (4) to start a refusal or to give an agreement; (5) to negotiate; (6) to respond to a criticism. Moreover, social anxiety inhibits patients who will then use avoidance which will strengthen ascertiveness issues.

The second wave of cognitive and behavioral therapeutic procedures have already proven their effectiveness in helping patients suffering from ascertiveness issues and social anxiety using exposition, cognitive reconstrucation, social competences and ascertiveness training (Sala & Saintecatherine, 2012). The third wave of cognitive and behavioral psychotherapies added to these procedures more emotional methods such as mindfulness and negative emotions acceptance. Our study originally is to find a combination of methods from the second and from the third waves. More precisely, this study aimed to test the efficacy of a therapeutic procedure combining classical ascertiveness program (2nd wave) and mindfulness (3rd wave) which was practised through actor’s play training.

Many patients suffering from ascertiveness issues often join theoretical groups or improvisation group to deal with their difficulties. Thus, we were interested by the psychological processes involved in the actor’s play training. A psychologist and an actress worked collectively to develop a program combining knowledge of classical ascertiveness programs, including role-playing, and actor’s play technique. Actor’s play enables patients to play the role of someone else, to not identify themselves with their characters and to develop social creativity. Moreover, being someone else during actor’s play training seems makes emotions acceptance easier and enables patients to focus on social tasks as mindfulness done.

In other words, actor’s play training allows mindfulness practice. The objective of actor’s play training is that patients Firstly transpose what they had learned in role-playing sessions in their daily life.

Our objective was to assess the efficacy of this new psychotherapeutic procedure in a preliminary study with the hypothesis that patients will improve on different independent measures.

Subjects
20 participants (12 women and 8 men; age: M = 37.6, SD = 8.75) suffering from difficulties in ascertiveness were included in this training program.

Study design and assessment procedure
Participants were assessed before (T0) and after the training program (T1) with the same self-assessment questionnaires.

Training program
The program consists of 10 sessions lasting three hours. These sessions were organised in five units focussed on the same topic: each unit comprised two sessions, the first animated by an actress and the second animated by a psychologist. Topics are presented in figure 1.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and effect sizes analysis.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and effect sizes analysis.

Note that statistical significance improvement appeared on behavioral, cognitive and affective symptoms which support the idea that this new psychotherapeutic program is effective. Most important changes appeared for social self-affirming, ascertiveness abilities and self-esteem. Moreover, depression and anxiety’s scores decreased suggesting that participants’ general state has improved. Nevertheless, participants didn’t reach scores obtained by control groups in studies using the same questionnaires.

In conclusion, the combination of actor’s play training and classical ascertiveness program helps people suffering from asertiveness issues. In other words, our results confirm that the practice of mindfulness through actor’s play training helps people to overcome difficulties. In conclusion, in this study, we can’t state on the specific actor’s play’s effect as we don’t have a control group using only classical ascertiveness program. Future research should replicate this protocol using a control group to overcome our study’s limitation.