The Arts in Psychotherapy 93 (2025) 102288

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

The Arts in Psychotherapy

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/artspsycho

Role reversal enhances an understanding of the other, but not of the self

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Role reversal
Psychodrama
Drama therapy
Acting
Perspective taking

ABSTRACT

One of the key techniques of psychotherapeutic methods like psychodrama is role reversal, in which a client engages in the dramatic act of portraying another person. Such a portrayal is believed to provide insight not only into oneself, but into the perspective and experiences of the portrayed person. In this experimental study, university students (n = 57) were asked to recount a conflictual episode involving another person. In different conditions, they did so from either their own first-person perspective ("I"), from the third-person perspective ("she/he/they"), or from the "fictional first-person" perspective (speaking as "I" while portraying the other person), where the latter is akin to role reversal in psychodrama. A within-subject analysis of self-report questionnaires following each trial revealed that, relative to the first-person condition, role reversal failed to increase insight into one's own behavior, but led to a significant increase in insight into the other person's actions, as well as a sense of connectedness with that person. These results suggest that role reversal can increase empathy for someone with whom we are in conflict.

Introduction

Within the field of the creative arts therapies, the psychodynamic model interprets the arts-based psychotherapies as relying on the projection of an undesired self state onto an artistic medium, transforming it so that it reflects a more-desired self state and then internalizing it as an identity, which becomes the basis for adaptive behavior (Johnson, 1998). Psychodrama, which is a drama-based psychotherapy, follows this model. Unlike drama therapy, which may involve enacting scenes from existing fictions that are not directly related to a client's life, psychodrama involves enacting scenes that approximate a client's own life (Kedem-Tahar & Kellermann, 1996).

The methods of dramatic reenactment used in psychodrama involve several different techniques. The most important of them for the purposes of the current study are role playing – in which a client reenacts a scene from their own perspective – and role reversal, in which the client reenacts a scene while portraying another person, much the way an actor would. Psychodramatic techniques such as these have been demonstrated to have therapeutic efficacy (Kipper & Ritchie, 2003; Orkibi & Feniger-Schaal, 2019). However, the mechanisms by which they confer benefits are relatively unknown. Different elements of role reversal, such as perspective switching, have demonstrated effects when people read written narratives (Brunyé et al., 2011; van Lissa et al., 2016), but these mechanisms have been far less explored in the context of the in-person conversational situations that approximate psychotherapy. The current study investigates the impact of switching narrative perspectives and of engaging in role reversal on an individual's experience while verbally recounting an interpersonal conflict.

Compared to research into other psychotherapies, research on drama-based interventions is relatively sparse (Orkibi & Feniger-Schaal, 2019). Most of the psychodrama literature consists of case studies, illustrative reports, and theory, with little in the way of experimental work and meta-analyses (Orkibi & Feniger-Schaal, 2019). However, some reviews exist that survey the extant literature and that provide quantitative evaluations of psychodrama. For example, a systematic review by Kellermann (1987) demonstrated psychodrama's efficacy in a number of clinical contexts, including treating adjustment disorders and antisocial behavior. More recent reviews, such as that of Orkibi and Feniger-Schaal (2019), mirror findings from earlier reviews in demonstrating the efficacy of many psychodramatic techniques. However, while psychodrama has been shown to be an effective psychotherapy, the specific mechanisms through which it operates remain to be understood.

Role reversal

In contrast to role playing, where a client adopts their own perspective while dramatically reenacting a conflict, role reversal

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2025.102288
Received 3 January 2025; Received in revised form 15 March 2025; Accepted 17 March 2025
Available online 26 March 2025

involves a client adopting the perspective of someone other than themselves by *portraying this other person* in the conflict, much as when an actor portrays a character in a theatrical context. Brown (2017) refers to transient acts of character portrayal as "proto-acting," and psychodrama provides the clearest example of this in the creative arts therapies. For example, someone having a conflict with a friend might reverse roles and enact the conflict from the perspective of their friend. The meta-analysis of Kipper and Ritchie (2003) demonstrated that role reversal was among the most effective psychodrama techniques, greatly outperforming role play in improving mental health. A later systematic review by Cruz et al. (2018) revealed that role reversal is also the most commonly cited psychodrama technique. Taken together, these findings suggest that it is not merely the act of revisiting a conflict (e.g., as happens during role play where only one's own perspective is adopted), but rather the revisiting of a conflict *from a different perspective* that makes role reversal as effective as it is.

What are some of the specific benefits that role reversal offers? Research has shown that participants who engaged in role reversal improved their ability to gain insight into the reality of the person whose role they played (Treadwell & Dartnell, 2022). In addition, the use of reciprocal role reversal – in which two clients work together to role play and then reverse their roles with one another – has been shown to modify the biased perceptions people have of each other (Kellerman, 1994). In particular, reciprocal role reversal has been shown to enhance empathy, improve interpersonal functioning, and promote interpersonal conflict resolution (Kellerman, 1994; Schacht-Lavine, 1982; Vidanagamage et al., 2024). In another study, participants who engaged in a psychodrama program where they engaged in role reversal during various sessions reported that it improved insight into both their own lives and the lives of others, as well as in learning to see life in a more hopeful manner (Dogan, 2010). Role reversal is also used to increase empathy for the protagonist in one's interactions, with the rationale being that assuming the role of another person can lead people to empathize with that person (Von Ameln & Becker-Ebel, 2020). Empathy consists of many components but can be basically defined as a process of contagiously sharing in the emotions of another person, for example feeling sad when seeing someone who is distressed (Decety & Holvoet, 2021; Spreng et al. 2009). Beyond experience-sharing per se, empathy also includes prosocial concern, perspective taking, and compassion (Zaki & Ochsner, 2012), and is often associated with a sense of connectedness with someone (Ferguson et al., 2021). The nature of role reversal is intrinsically tied with empathy, as it requires both experience sharing and perspective taking (Von Ameln & Becker-Ebel, 2020).

Previous research has investigated the effect of role reversal in various settings. Johnson (1967) found that, compared to self-presentation, participants who engaged in role reversal had a greater understanding of their opponent's position within a hypothetical court case when discussing opposing viewpoints. For research on social anxiety disorder, role reversal has been found to be an effective technique to change negative connotations held by participants (e.g., assuming that others are critical and are evaluating them negatively) (Abeditehrani et al., 2021). These studies have investigated the impact of role reversal on changing one's understanding of others, feelings of being understood by others, and reducing negative cognitive connotations. To our knowledge, no prior research has directly compared role reversal to both the third-person and first-person perspectives on how one perceives a real-life personal conflict.

Perspective switching

Narrative perspective refers to the point of view from which a story is told, and is reflected in the use of pronouns. For example, "I went shopping" (the first-person perspective), "you went shopping" (the second-person perspective), and "she went shopping" (the third-person perspective) all convey the act of shopping, but from different points of view. Psychodrama involves an unconventional type of narrative perspective – referred to as the "fictional first-person" perspective (Brown et al., 2019) – in which someone adopts the first-person perspective of *some other person* through the dramatic act of character portrayal. In doing so, the "I" of their speech refers not to themselves, but to the person whom they are portraying, just as occurs in theatrical acting. For role reversal in psychodrama, one must assume the role of another person, with this process involving a perception and comprehension of what another person is experiencing internally (Kellerman, 1994). Switching roles forces one to take on the perspective of another person (Abeditehrani et al., 2021). Role reversal within psychodrama enables one to take on the perspective of another person, but also requires a continuous interweaving of perspectives, in which the actor must observe and reconstruct the situation and themselves from another's perspective (Von Ameln & Becker-Ebel, 2020).

The impact of switching perspectives on emotional experience has been studied, although this research primarily concerns the impact of switching narrative perspectives on a *reader's* experience of a written text (Brunyé et al., 2011; van Lissa et al., 2016). This is in contrast to the domain of psychodrama, in which perspective switching occurs during a social interaction with one or more people. For example, one study examining the effect of changing narrative perspective in a written text found that people experienced stronger emotions and developed a richer understanding of the text when they were shown a text in the second person ("you"), compared to the first person ("I") (Brunyé et al., 2011). Another study demonstrated an increase in trust in a character when reading texts in the third person ("she," "he," or "they"), compared to the first person ("I"), due to how the third-person perspective was perceived as being more impartial, detached, and objective (van Lissa et al., 2016). These findings indicate a relationship between narrative perspective and a reader's emotions. While these findings relate to written texts, we sought to explore whether similar relationships between narrative perspective and a speaker's emotions would exist during conversation.

Psychological distance

One factor that may elucidate the relationship between narrative perspective and emotion is psychological distance, which refers to the degree to which a person feels cognitively and emotionally removed from a phenomenon, with greater psychological distance indicating greater removal from a phenomenon (Maglio et al., 2013). "Nearer" narrative perspectives (first-person) are associated with higher emotional intensity (i.e., the arousal dimension of emotion) as well as with stronger personal bias, whereas "farther" perspectives (third--person) are associated with lower emotional intensity and lesser bias. For example, previous research has shown that manipulating the psychological distance of an emotionally charged situation – for example, by imagining scenes moving closer or farther from oneself – leads to a change in one's emotional experience of that scene (Davis et al., 2011). More specifically, imagining emotionally negative scenes moving away from oneself made those scenes feel less intense and less negative (Davis et al., 2011). This transformation – whereby increasing psychological distance decreases emotional intensity – is akin to that which occurs when reading a text written in the third-person, as opposed to the first person. In studies that have examined the effect of narrative perspective on emotion, emotional intensity has been shown to decrease and feelings of detachment to increase during third-person perspective taking, whereas the opposite has tended to be occur for the first-person perspective (Brunyé et al., 2011; van Lissa et al., 2016). Because psychological distance and narrative perspective have similar effects on emotion, such findings suggest a link between psychological distance and narrative perspective, and point to the possibility of a bidirectional influence between psychological distance and narrative perspective, on the one hand, and emotional intensity, on the other. People may feel psychologically closer to events when they experience more emotional intensity in relation to them, and vice versa.

The current study

The principal aim of the current study is to examine the effect of changing narrative perspective (and, by extension, psychological distance) on the experience of recounting a real-life conflict involving another person. Participants were asked to recount this conflict from either their own first-person perspective using the pronoun I, the third-person perspective – in which they used the pronouns she/he/they to describe both themselves and the other person – or the fictional first-person perspective of the other person, in which they recounted the event *as* the other person using the pronoun I. The fictional first-person condition is analogous to a psychodramatic role reversal, and involves the process of proto-acting. After each trial, participants responded to 6 questions regarding their emotional state, expressivity in storytelling, psychological distance, understanding of their own actions, understanding of the other person's actions, and sense of connectedness with the other person.

We predicted that role reversal (i.e., retelling a conflict from the fictional first-person perspective) would increase insight (i.e., provide new understanding) into both the self and the other person, relative to the other narrative perspectives. We also predicted that the third-person perspective, by using third-person pronouns, would evoke the greatest sense of psychological distance. As a result, we also predicted the third-person perspective would show the lowest expressivity in storytelling and lead to the least-negative emotions while discussing the conflict. Overall, the study sought to experimentally examine the relationship between narrative perspective, psychological distance, emotional intensity, insight, and empathy.

Methods

Participants

Participants (n = 57, 41 women, mean age 19 years old, range 18–20) were recruited from the undergraduate testing pool in the Department of Psychology, Neuroscience & Behaviour at McMaster University. They received course credit for their participation. Inclusion criteria were that participants had to be at least 18 years old, speak English fluently, and be willing to talk openly about a conflict that they had experienced with another person. The study was approved by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board. Participants provided written informed consent before participating in the study.

Procedure

Each participant was brought into a sound booth along with the experimenter (author MW). They were asked to recall a distressing life event involving a conflict with another person, one that they were also willing to describe to the experimenter. The conflict was required to be limited to a single individual (not multiple people or a social group), who essentially functioned as the "antagonist" in the person's narrative. Once the participant identified a conflict that they were willing to share, they briefly described the event in a few sentences by typing it into a computer. The experimenter would confirm the conflict's appropriateness by evaluating the short summary provided by the participants. Once it was deemed appropriate, the participant would move on to the verbal recounting of the conflict. The contents of the conflicts described by the various participants were equivalent in terms of structure, complexity, affect, and intensity. Given the participant pool consisted of undergraduate students at a similar life stage, the conflicts most commonly described were situations with parents, friends, roommates, and partners. Participants were informed both on the consent form and again verbally that they were only to share what they felt comfortable doing so. They were also told that their participation was completely voluntary and that, if they felt too distressed to continue, they could take a break or terminate the study with no negative consequences.

Next, during three successive trials lasting 5 minutes each, the participant verbally recounted the event to the experimenter. Each trial occurred according to a different narrative perspective: 1) the *first-person* (1P) perspective, recounting the episode from their own point of view using the pronoun I; 2) the *third-person* (3P) perspective, recounting the episode from a third-person perspective in which both they and the other person were described using the pronouns she/he/they; and 3) the *fictional first-person* (Fic1P) perspective, recounting the episode through role reversal by portraying the other person while using the pronoun I. The order of the three perspectives was randomized across participants. The experimenter was aware of the research hypotheses and was trained to maintain an emotionally neutral stance during the participant's storytelling. She could respond by asking clarifying questions whenever the narrative was unclear or request elaboration if the participant finished their storytelling before the 5-minute trial was over. If the participants showed signs of distress, the experimenter would check in and ask if they would like to continue the experiment, and offered the option of taking a break or ending the study.

After each trial, participants answered a set of 6 self-report questions (see Table 1), always in the same sequence. The participants answered the questions independently on a laptop computer with the screen facing away from the experimenter to minimize any influence of the experimenter on the participant. The questions probed the participant's 1) present emotional state, 2) degree of emotional expressivity, 3) understanding of their own behavior, 4) understanding of the other person's behavior, 5) psychological distance from the event, and 6) sense of connectedness with the other person. All questions were on a 7-point Likert scale, except for Question 6 about personal connectedness, for which the participant had to circle one graphic item from a set of seven items showing increasing degrees of connectedness between themselves and the other person (see the Appendix). Their selections were converted into a 7-point ordinal scale. The Likert data were analyzed by means of pairwise t tests across the three conditions (df=56), resulting in three contrasts: 3P vs. 1P, Fic1P vs. 1P, and Fic1P vs. 3P.

Results

Fig. 1 shows the participants' mean self-report responses to the 6 questions across the 3 perspectives, as well as the results of pairwise t tests among the 3 conditions. The descriptive statistics are listed in Table 2. One-way analyses of variance for the individual questions were all significant at the 0.05 level, except for Question 3, which was non-significant (not shown).

Contrary to our predictions, Question 3 about self-understanding showed a null effect. However, consistent with our predictions, Question 5 revealed that participants reported feeling a greater sense of psychological distance from the episode during the 3P condition than during the 1P and Fic1P conditions. Complementary to this, Question 2 revealed that participants were the least expressive in their recounting of the episode from the 3P perspective, compared to the other two perspectives, perhaps because they were not able to use "I" statements in their storytelling. In addition, Question 1 revealed that participants

Table 1
Questions presented after each trial.

1. Overall, how did you feel while you were describing the event?	1 = I felt very bad 7 = I felt very good
2. To what extent were you emotionally expressive while you were describing the event?	1 = I was not at all expressive 7 = I was fully expressive
3. Did you develop a new understanding of yourself and why you acted the way you did?	1 = No, not at all 7 = Yes, very much so
4. Did you develop a new understanding of how the other person felt and why they acted the way they did?	1 = No, not at all 7 = Yes, very much so
5. How near or far did the event feel in space and time while you were describing it?	1 = Very near to me 7 = Very far from me
6. Select the image that best describes how connected you feel with the other person having described the event.	See the Appendix for the graphic images used for this

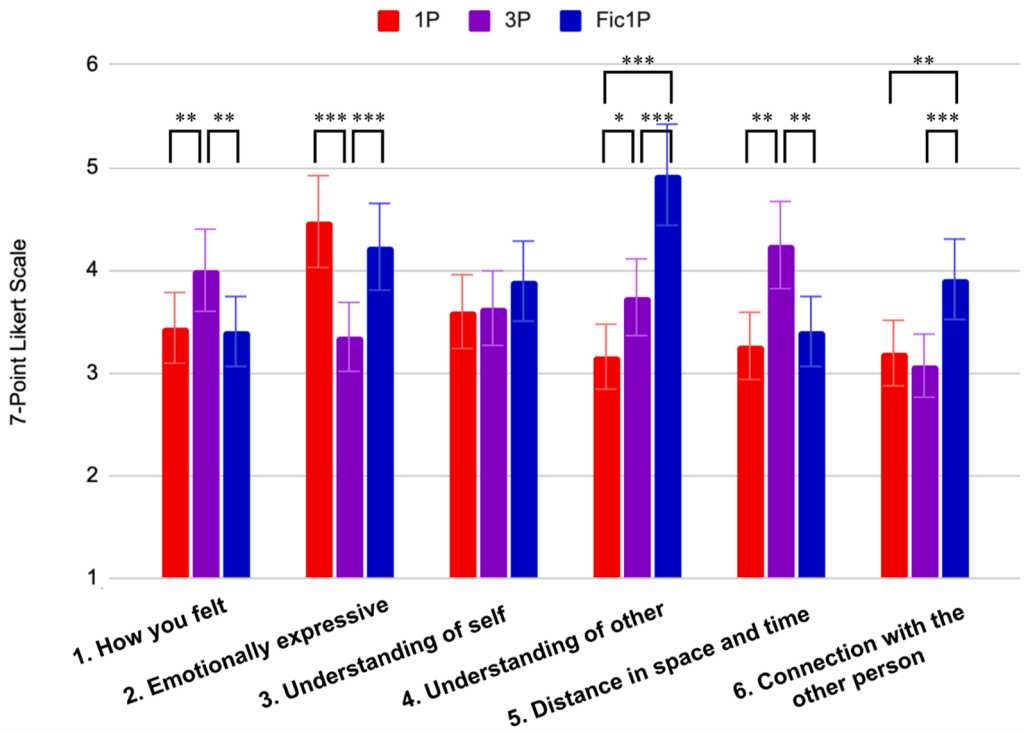


Fig. 1. The effect of narrative perspective on participants' recounting of a conflictual episode with another person. See Table 1 for the full form of each of the six questions. The means for each condition are shown (n = 57). The error bars are standard errors of the mean. * = p < 0.05, * * = p < 0.01, * ** = p < 0.001.

Table 2
Mean Likert ratings for the six questions (left) and t-values for the three pairwise comparisons between conditions (right).

	Condition	Mean	SD	Comparison	*t-value (56)*	*p-value*	Cohen's d
Q1: Feeling	1P	3.43	1.24	3P vs. 1P	3.05	0.003	0.46
	3P	4.00	1.21	Fic1P vs. 1P	−0.16	0.875	−0.03
	Fic1P	3.40	1.60	Fic1P vs. 3P	−3.08	0.003	−0.42
Q2: Expressivity	1P	4.47	1.55	3P vs. 1P	−4.84	< 0.001	−0.73
	3P	3.35	1.54	Fic1P vs. 1P	−1.38	0.172	−0.15
	Fic1P	4.23	1.72	Fic1P vs. 3P	3.69	< 0.001	0.54
Q3: Self understanding	1P	3.60	1.72	3P vs. 1P	0.15	0.879	0.02
	3P	3.63	1.88	Fic1P vs. 1P	1.36	0.180	0.17
	Fic1P	3.89	1.70	Fic1P vs. 3P	1.16	0.249	0.15
Q4: Other understanding	1P	3.16	1.82	3P vs. 1P	2.45	0.020	0.31
	3P	3.74	1.89	Fic1P vs. 1P	6.94	< 0.001	0.98
	Fic1P	4.93	1.81	Fic1P vs. 3P	5.35	< 0.001	0.65
Q5: Distance	1P	3.26	1.64	3P vs. 1P	3.45	0.001	0.58
	3P	4.25	1.72	Fic1P vs. 1P	0.49	0.628	0.08
	Fic1P	3.40	1.68	Fic1P vs. 3P	−3.44	0.001	−0.50
Q6: Connection	1P	3.19	1.97	3P vs. 1P	−0.46	0.651	−0.07
	3P	3.07	1.81	Fic1P vs. 1P	3.18	0.002	0.37
	Fic1P	3.91	1.92	Fic1P vs. 3P	3.74	< 0.001	0.45

reported feeling significantly better emotionally when recounting the event from the 3P perspective than from the other two perspectives, which may have been a function of their perceived psychological distance from the episode, as mentioned for Question 5. Next, Question 4 showed that adopting the 3P perspective led to a small but significant increase in understanding about the other person.

Our main interest was about the impact of role reversal (the Fic1P condition) on people's experience of the conflictual episode. Recounting the episode *as* the other person showed a significant improvement over both the 1P and 3P perspectives in two aspects of the experience, both of which conformed with our predictions. For Question 4, participants reported developing a greater understanding of the other person when they were portraying them, a much larger effect than was shown by the 3P condition. Likewise, Question 6 revealed that participants reported feeling a greater sense of connectedness with the other person when they were portraying them. Overall, role reversal failed to increase self-understanding (Question 3), but led to significant improvements in other-understanding (Question 4) and connectedness with the other person (Question 6), indicating a greater sense of empathy for that person.

Discussion

In this experimental study of the role-reversal technique of psychodrama, we demonstrated that recounting a conflictual life episode while portraying the other person in the conflict led to greater insight into and a greater sense of connectedness with that person than telling the story from the first- or third-person perspectives. However, adopting the Fic1P perspective had no impact on self-understanding, nor did it improve mood relative to adopting the 1P or 3P perspectives. A second principal finding of the study was that recounting a conflict from the 3P perspective increased the sense of psychological distance from the event, which in turn seemed to have the dual effect of reducing emotional

expressivity and improving mood when recounting the conflict.

Role reversal: understanding of the other

To our surprise, neither the Fic1P nor 3P perspectives increased self-understanding, compared to the standard 1P perspective of psychotherapy. By contrast, the largest effect of changing narrative perspective was on insight into the *other* person (or "antagonist") in the conflict. This showed a staircase effect in which the Fic1P condition was significantly stronger than the 3P condition, which was significantly stronger than the 1P condition. Role reversal may have led to a greater sense of empathy with the other person in the conflict. Empathy and perspective-taking are linked phenomena since empathy requires that one to adopt the subjective viewpoint of another person, either consciously or unconsciously (Decety, 2005). Previous studies have demonstrated that role reversal within the context of psychodrama can increase empathy for another person (Dogan, 2010, 2018; Kellerman, 1994), an effect that we replicated here in a non-therapeutic conversational setting.

Along with this increase in understanding of the antagonist, role reversal increased the sense of connectedness with that person relative to the other two narrative perspective conditions. Participants speaking from the Fic1P perspective, compared to the other perspectives, may have felt more empathy and identification with the other person. Empathy may be an intrinsic part of speaking from the Fic1P perspective itself since this perspective requires that the individual take on the role and perspective of another person. Overall, speaking about a conflict from the Fic1P perspective using role reversal elicited the highest levels of understanding about and sense of connection with the other person in the conflict. This highlights a potential *empathic* mechanism underlying the therapeutic benefits of role reversal.

The third-person perspective: psychological distance from the situation

A second set of findings from the study pertain to the 3P condition and its impact on psychological distance from the episode. As predicted, recounting a conflict from the 3P perspective led participants to rate the conflict as more psychologically distant and less emotionally intense than when doing so from either the 1P or Fic1P perspectives. This result aligns with previous work linking narrative perspective, psychological distance, and emotional intensity. For example, Gu & Tse (2016) and van Lissa et al. (2016) showed that adopting the 3P perspective while recalling an autobiographical memory increased psychological distance and reduced emotional intensity, compared to the 1P perspective. Similarly, with respect to written texts, Park et al. (2016) showed that writing about a stressor from the 3P perspective lowered emotional reactivity, which in turn allowed the writer to emotionally distance themselves from the stressor. Also in relation to writing, Van Boven et al. (2010) demonstrated a link between emotional intensity and psychological distance, whereby writing about an event using language that is more emotionally intense decreased psychological distance.

Our observed increase in psychological distance in the 3P condition had the dual effect of reducing emotional expressivity and reducing the intensity of the negative emotions that participants felt during their recountings, relative to both the 1P and Fic1P conditions. After speaking from the 3P perspective, participants rated their mood more positively. It is likely that the increased psychological distance when speaking from the 3P perspective allowed participants to remove themselves psychologically from the negative emotions associated with their conflicts. This is consistent with studies showing that switching between narrative perspectives in written texts can affect readers' emotional reactivity (Brunyé et al., 2011) and emotional intensity (Mar et al., 2011). Switching narrative perspectives can also affect a writer's choice to include more or less emotional words in their writing (Fuentes et al., 2021). Our results extend findings from the realms of reading and writing to that of verbal narration. This may be clinically relevant. Clients in psychotherapy who have difficulty verbally processing a conflict due to the intense negative emotions associated with it may find benefits from speaking about it from the 3P perspective.

Finally, we observed that self-reported emotional expressiveness was significantly lower in the 3P condition than in either the 1P or Fic1P conditions (which did not differ between themselves). This can again be explained in terms of the increase in psychological distance associated with the 3P condition. It is likely that placing oneself in the position of an external narrator when recounting the conflict – rather than being an active participant – created feelings of neutrality, leading to lower levels of emotional expressiveness. An external narrator has no knowledge of a character's emotions, and is thus forced to present the story more dispassionately and impersonally (Bamberg, 1997). This in turn produces a more objective, external, and less egocentric narrative. Overall, the 3P condition, relative to the 1P and Fic1P conditions, showed a linked suite of features: greater psychological distance from the episode, combined with reduced expressivity and a more positive emotional state.

By contrast, "I"-based statements have the potential to convey higher levels of emotional intensity and to thus be communicated with higher levels of emotional expressiveness during storytelling. In this regard, both the 1P and Fic1P conditions employed I-statements and showed equivalently high levels of emotional expressiveness during storytelling, where both were significantly higher than the 3P condition. This increase in expressiveness may underlie some of the therapeutic benefits of psychodrama. It has been proposed that the successful resolution of a painful memory in psychodrama involves expressing and releasing the negative emotion connected with it during dramatic enactment (McVea et al., 2011). However, it should be noted that, during a conversation, people may be motivated to conceal their emotions due to a variety of factors, including gender identity (Hess et al., 2000) and the quality of the relationship they would like to build (Clark & Taraban, 1991).

Limitations

There are several limitations of the current study. First, the research sample consisted entirely of university undergraduate students, the majority of whom were women. Because of this, it is possible that our results might not be applicable to the general population or to clinical populations undergoing psychodrama or drama therapy. Second, while we sought to improve our understanding of the mechanism of action of psychodramatic role reversal, our methods only involved brief recountings outside of a therapeutic context, and so it is uncertain how our findings would apply to an actual psychodrama. Along similar lines, the study looked at single-shot uses of role reversal-like perspective switching, and thus was not able to examine the potential benefits of longer-term uses of role reversal across multiple sessions under the supervision of a therapist, as might take place in actual psychodrama. Another limitation is the potential effect of repeated recountings across the various trials on participants' emotional responses, as such responses might have become habituated across trials. However, at the level of the group analysis, this effect should have been less impactful since the order of the conditions was randomized across participants.

Conclusions

Engaging in role reversal in an experimental context led to a significant improvement in understanding of the other person in an interpersonal conflict, as well as an increased sense of connectedness with them. However, retelling an interpersonal conflict from the Fic1P perspective had no effect on self-understanding. These results suggest that role reversal can increase the sense of empathy for "antagonists" in our life, which can have important therapeutic implications for people. Engaging in 3P storytelling, by contrast, did not increase insight into one's conflict partner, but did lead to a more positive emotional outcome than did role reversal. This is most likely due to the increased psychological distance engendered by being an external narrator of the

episode, rather than being an active experiencer. Speaking about a negative episode from a more detached position results in the negative emotions associated with it being experienced as less intense, which improved mood. Overall, changing narrative perspective appears to impact the processing of a personal conflict. Therefore, the change in narrative perspective may be responsible for the efficacy of role reversal as a psychodrama technique.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Miranda Wu: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Jacob Cameirao:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Steven Brown:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors have nothing to declare.

Acknowledgments

This work was funded by a grant to SB the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) of Canada (grant number 371336).

Appendix

The following questions were on the online form completed by participants after each narrative perspective condition.

1. Overall, how did you feel while you were describing the event?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

(I felt very bad) (I felt very good)

2. To what extent were you emotionally expressive while you were describing the event?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

(I was not at all expressive) (I was fully expressive)

3. Did you develop a new understanding of yourself and why you acted the way you did?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

(No, not at all) (Yes, very much so)

4. Did you develop a new understanding of how the other person felt and why they acted the way they did?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

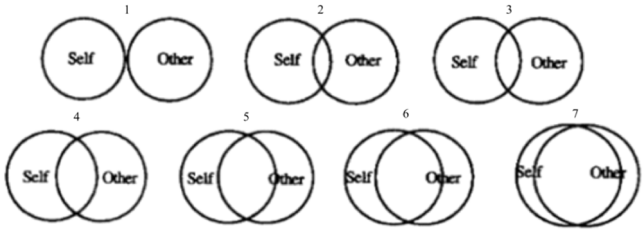
(No, not at all) (Yes, very much so)

5. How near or far did the event feel in space and time while you were describing it?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

(Very near to me)	(Very far from me)

6. Select the image below that best describes how connected you feel with the other person after having described the event.



Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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