

## The Effectiveness of Bibliotherapy in Reducing Body Image Dissatisfaction Among High School Girls

Monique Elizabeth Sukamto  
Faculty of Psychology, University of Surabaya

**Abstract.** The aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in reducing body image dissatisfaction among high school girls. Participants were 45 girls from three different high schools, whose BMI were normal (18.5 – 22.9) and experienced moderate to very high body image dissatisfaction. Using pretest – posttest control group design, participants from each high school were assigned to one of three conditions: interactive or reading bibliotherapy as experimental conditions or as waiting-list control group. Body image dissatisfaction of each participant was measured at pre-treatment, post-treatment, and 1-month follow-up and analyzed using One-Way ANOVA and General Linear Model – Univariate. The result of this study showed that either interactive ( $\text{sig.} = 0.000 < 0.05$ ) or reading bibliotherapy ( $\text{sig.} = 0.012 < 0.05$ ) was effective in reducing body image dissatisfaction among high school girls and their effectiveness were maintained until 1-month follow-up.

Keywords: bibliotherapy, body image dissatisfaction, high school girls

**Abstrak.** Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk mengetahui efektivitas *bibliotherapy* dalam mengurangi ketidakpuasan terhadap citra tubuh pada siswi SMU. Subjek penelitian ini adalah 45 siswi SMU dari tiga SMU yang terpisah, yang memiliki IMT yang tergolong normal (18.5 – 22.9) dan mengalami ketidakpuasan terhadap citra tubuh yang tergolong cukup hingga sangat tinggi. Menggunakan *pretest – posttest control group design*, para subjek dibagi dalam tiga kelompok, yaitu *interactive bibliotherapy*, *reading bibliotherapy*, dan kelompok kontrol (*waiting-list control group*). Pengukuran dilaksanakan sebanyak tiga kali, yaitu pada saat sebelum perlakuan, setelah perlakuan, dan sebulan setelah perlakuan serta dianalisis menggunakan Analisis Varian Satu Arah dan Analisis Varian Sampel Berkorelasi. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa baik *interactive* ( $\text{sig.} = 0.000 < 0.05$ ) maupun *reading bibliotherapy* ( $\text{sig.} = 0.012 < 0.05$ ) terbukti efektif dalam mengurangi ketidakpuasan terhadap citra tubuh pada siswi SMU dan efektivitasnya dapat tetap bertahan hingga satu bulan setelah perlakuan.

Kata kunci: *bibliotherapy*, ketidakpuasan terhadap citra tubuh, siswi SMU

The enormous influence of the media toward urban population regarding woman's ideal body image causes women, especially the adolescent girls, to experience body image dissatisfaction. It refers to the girls' (1) dislike or dissatisfaction toward the mental pictures of their bodies or specific parts of their bodies and (2) inability to accurately judge the size of their bodies or specific parts of them. Body image dissatisfaction is one of body image prob-

lems that mostly happened (Rice, 1995). According to Brehm (1999), the spreading of body image dissatisfaction nowadays is a result of a large gap between the current beauty standard and the women real body shape. Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz, and Thompson (as cited in Dittrich, 2003) have found that the average size of idealized woman (as portrayed by models) has become progressively thinner and has stabilized at 13–19% below physically expected weight.

Some studies have revealed that body image dissatisfaction could lead to serious problems, such as low self-esteem, depression, smoking behavior, and eating disorders that even might lead to death. Therefore, some solutions to cope with this problem are needed, one of which is bibliotherapy.

Bibliotherapy is a kind of therapy using an activity of reading selected literatures or materials to promote

---

This article has been presented at the International Conference on Improving the Quality of Human Life: Multidisciplinary Approach on Strategic Relevance for Urban Issues, on September 6-7, 2007 in Surabaya.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Monique Elizabeth Sukamto, S.Psi., M.Si., Laboratory of Clinical Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, University of Surabaya, Jl. Raya Kalirungkut, Surabaya 60293, Indonesia. E-mail: monique@ubaya.ac.id

mental health (Sciabassi, as cited in Herink, 1980; Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 1994). In this study, the researcher compiled a light literature (booklet) titled "Greatest Love of All: Learning to love me (GLOA)". The booklet covered materials about self-acceptance, self-esteem, ideal-healthy body measurement (Body Mass Index), body types, myths about body-weight, stories of some celebrities regarding their body shapes, influences of the media to promote an unrealistic body image, and effects of body image dissatisfaction. In the process of compiling the booklet, the researcher referred to some books, journals, also magazine and newspaper articles.

The researcher conducted two bibliotherapy approaches, that is, reading bibliotherapy and interactive bibliotherapy. In reading bibliotherapy, the therapy process focused on reading the booklet independently and there was no group discussion. The point was that the interaction took place between the reader (participant) and the materials (booklet) and did not directly involve the person who made the suggestion (the facilitator). On the contrary, in interactive bibliotherapy, the therapy process focused on reading booklet independently and group discussion at school about the materials. There was a triad of reader – materials – facilitator which means that there was a dual interaction: the reader's personal response to the materials was important, but dialoguing with the facilitator and friends about that response could lead to a new dimension of insight (Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 1994).

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 45 senior high school girls who studied in SMU "X", SMU "Y", and SMU "Z" in Surabaya and complied with the research criteria, such as having normal Body Mass Index (18.5 – 22.9), experiencing moderate to very high body image dissatisfaction, and willing to sign up the informed consent. Participants from each high school (n=15) were assigned to one of three conditions: interactive bibliotherapy as experimental condition 1, reading bibliotherapy as experimental condition 2, or as waiting-list control group.

*Interactive Bibliotherapy.* In the interactive bibliotherapy, the participants were given a week long

to read the materials and did the exercises of the related materials. Those exercises functioned to stimulate individual responses from the participants and to facilitate the group discussion. On the agreed meeting schedule, the participants gathered in a classroom and were divided into small groups to discuss about the materials that they had read. In the group discussion, the participants had a chance to dialogue with the facilitator and peers regarding their responses. It was expected that through the discussion process, the participants could have a new dimension of insight.

The bibliotherapy materials (booklet) were split into three parts and not shared all at once, but those were given per chapter in each session. The sessions for group discussion were scheduled to be four weeks long, and the session would be once a week. One session took around 1.5 hours.

*Reading Bibliotherapy.* In reading bibliotherapy, the therapy process was focused on reading the booklet independently and there was no group discussion. The booklet was the same as the one in the interactive bibliotherapy. Those reading materials also were not given all at once, but were given per chapter. Therefore, a session with the participants was scheduled once a week to share the subsequent reading materials and to collect the exercise results from them. This therapy lasted for four weeks; the session was once a week. The duration of each session was planned about 30 minutes.

### *Procedure*

Before the treatment, the researcher gave a pretest to the three subject groups by asking them to fill in the self-identity and Body Image Dissatisfaction questionnaires in order to find out their baseline conditions. The girls who complied with the criteria, that are, having normal Body Mass Index and experiencing moderate to very high body image dissatisfaction, were recruited as the participant candidates. A week after the pretest, the researcher held an introduction meeting with the participant candidates from SMU "Y" (Experimental Group 1) and SMU "X" (Experimental Group 2). The aim of the introduction meeting was to brief the girls about the training, including the aim, process, and rights and duties of the participants in the training. When the participants had read and under-

stood all about the training, they were asked to decide their participation in this training by signing up the informed consent. Among the participant candidates who had signed up the informed consent, the researcher selected 15 girls from Experimental Group 1 and 15 girls from Experimental Group 2. In addition, the researcher also selected 15 girls from Control Group.

The bibliotherapy session for Experimental Group 1 and Experimental Group 2 commenced a week after the participants signed the informed consent up. The Control Group was given bibliotherapy after the research on the other two groups had been accomplished. Then, the posttest for Experimental group 1, Experimental Group 2, and Control Group was conducted after the bibliotherapy sessions had been completed (in the 4<sup>th</sup> session).

The sessions for Experimental Group 1 were conducted in 4 weeks subsequently during extracurricular activity "Personality Building", which was held every Friday at 2.30 pm. Each session lasted for 90 minutes. The participants were split into three groups, each of which was led by a facilitator. The group discussions were held in three different classrooms in SMU "Y".

Meanwhile, the sessions for Experimental Group 2 were also conducted for 4 weeks subsequently during the Guidance and Counseling subject. As the time for the subject differed for each class, the researcher provided some sessions every Wednesday and Friday in the Guidance and Counseling room. This training contains 4 sessions. In fact, the duration of some sessions in reading bibliotherapy groups were more than 30 minutes because the participants would not go back to their classroom and stayed to talk with the facilitator and their friends. The researcher thought that it could influence the bibliotherapy process and might change the reading into semi-interactive bibliotherapy. It might be consider as a limitation of this study.

A month after the posttest, Experimental Group 1, Experimental Group 2, and Control Group carried out a follow-up assessment. The follow-up assessment was to find out whether the effectiveness of either interactive or reading bibliotherapy to reduce body image dissatisfaction was maintained until 1-month follow-up.

## Results

The researcher employed *One Way ANOVA* to i-

dentify the mean difference of body image dissatisfaction change between the pretest and posttest ( $\Delta$ ) of the three groups. The statistical analysis indicated that at least there was one mean difference of body image dissatisfaction changes between pretest and posttest ( $\Delta$ ) from the three participant groups ( $\text{sig.} = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$ ). Through a mean test among the body image dissatisfaction changes in the three groups using *Post Hoc Test* and *LSD* method (assumed that the variances were the same), the results were as follows:

There was no mean difference of body image dissatisfaction change between the group that received interactive bibliotherapy and the one that got reading bibliotherapy ( $\text{sig.} = 0.054 > \alpha = 0.05$ ). The researcher assumed that it could be the effect of the limitation mentioned above because the examination of the means plot of pretest-posttest changes revealed that there was a difference in body image dissatisfaction changes between the interactive and reading bibliotherapy groups.

There was a significant mean difference of body image dissatisfaction change between the group that received interactive bibliotherapy and the control group ( $\text{sig.} = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$ ).

There was a significant mean difference of body image dissatisfaction change between the group that received reading bibliotherapy and the control group ( $\text{sig.} = 0.012 < \alpha = 0.05$ ).

The effectiveness of bibliotherapy, either interactive bibliotherapy or reading bibliotherapy, were assumed maintain if there was no significant mean difference of body image dissatisfaction between posttest and follow-up assessment; in other words, the condition of the participants remained the same as the one after receiving the therapy. The statistical analysis technique used was *General Linear Model - Univariate* from *SPSS 12.0 for Windows*.

The result of this research showed that there was no mean difference of body image dissatisfaction between the posttest and follow-up assessment in interactive bibliotherapy ( $\text{sig.} = 0.262 > \alpha = 0.05$ ). It proved that the effectiveness of the interactive bibliotherapy in reducing body image dissatisfaction could maintain up to a month long.

Also, in reading bibliotherapy, it was discovered that there was no mean difference of body image dissatisfaction between the posttest and follow-up assessment ( $\text{sig.} = 0.883 > \alpha = 0.05$ ). Similarly, the

effectiveness of the reading bibliotherapy in reducing body image dissatisfaction maintained for a month.

## Discussion

The research findings revealed that the group who got interactive bibliotherapy (Experimental Group 1) had gone through a significant mean decrease of body image dissatisfaction before and after the training. The mean of body image dissatisfaction before the training (60.60) that was in moderate category decreased into 47.20 after the training, and it was classified into low category. Besides, the mean of body image dissatisfaction changes between the pretest and posttest ( $\Delta$ ) in this group also pointed out a significant difference from the mean of changes of the control group's. These entire results had demonstrated that the interactive bibliotherapy was indeed effective in reducing the body image dissatisfaction among high school girls.

The group that got the reading bibliotherapy (Experimental Group 2) also experienced a major decrease in the mean of body image dissatisfaction before and after the training. In this group, the mean that previously was in the high category (65.87) went down into moderate category (57.73) after the training. Moreover, the mean of body image dissatisfaction changes between the pretest and posttest showed a significant difference from the mean of changes of the control group's. This result had proven that the reading bibliotherapy was also effective to lessen the body image dissatisfaction among high school girls.

Furthermore, the results indicated that there was no significant mean difference of body image dissatisfaction changes between pretest and posttest from the group that received the interactive bibliotherapy and the one that got reading bibliotherapy. Thus, statistically, it could be stated that the interactive bibliotherapy and reading bibliotherapy had relatively equal effectiveness in reducing the girls' body image dissatisfaction. The researcher assumed that it could be the effect of the limitation mentioned above because the examination of the means plot of pretest–posttest changes revealed that there was a difference in body image dissatisfaction changes between the interactive and reading bibliotherapy groups. This fact complied with Hynes's

and Hynes-Berry's opinion (1994) that the group discussion process conducted in the interactive bibliotherapy could lead the participants to a brand new dimension of insight and contribute the girls therapeutic experience or insight that might not present in one-on-one interaction.

Based on the analysis of the question "Within a month, have you ever reread the materials in your booklets?" in the follow-up questionnaire, it was found out that some participants from the interactive bibliotherapy group and reading bibliotherapy group replied "Yes". The materials that were reread by participants were different, depending on the needs and problems that they had. That fact might be one factor that could help explain why the effectiveness of the interactive bibliotherapy and reading bibliotherapy in reducing the body image dissatisfaction in this research could prevail up to a month long.

## Conclusions

Although the interactive and reading bibliotherapy proved to have relatively equal effectiveness in reducing the body image dissatisfaction among high school girls, it still need to be evaluated carefully because there was a limitation on the duration of some reading bibliotherapy sessions.

The effectiveness of the interactive bibliotherapy and reading bibliotherapy was sustained by the internal validity of this research. Conducting the research in three different senior high schools could minimize treatment imitation, compensation, and demoralization of the group that got reading bibliotherapy and the control group. However, the researcher could not manage to arrange the pre-treatment, post-treatment, and 1-month follow-up measurements between the three schools at the same time. It might be considered as another limitation of this study.

The effectiveness of the interactive bibliotherapy and reading bibliotherapy in reducing the body image dissatisfaction among high school girls could remain as long as a month after the treatment. It was due to the participants' willingness to reread the materials in the booklet whenever they needed some information or they had a problem related to their body image.

## References

- Brehm, B.A. (1999). *Body dissatisfaction: causes and consequences*. Retrieved May 8, 2003, from <http://www.fitnessworld.com/info/infopages/library/labnotes/labnotes 0399.html>
- Dittrich, L. (2003). *About-face facts on body image*. Retrieved May 8, 2003, from <http://www.about-face.org/r/facts/bi.html>
- Hynes, A.M. & Hynes-Berry, M. (1994). *Biblio/poetry therapy the interactive process: a handbook*. St. Cloud: North Star Press of St. Cloud, Inc.
- Rice, C. (1995). *Promoting healthy body image: a guide for program planners*. Retrieved August 20, 2003, from <http://www.opc.on.ca/beststart/bodyimg/httoc.html>
- Sclabassi, S.H. (1980). Bibliotherapy. In R. Herink (Ed.). *The psychotherapy handbook: the A to Z guide to more than 250 different therapies in use today* (pp. 54-56). New York: The New American Library, Inc.