

Case Study

Movement-Based Expressive Arts Therapy: An Embodied Pathway for Anxiety, Trauma, and Identity Healing

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Abstract

Movement-based expressive arts therapy is not only a therapeutic technique but also a way of listening to the body's stories. In my practice as a psychotherapist, I have seen how movement combined with drawing, voice, and writing helps clients experiencing anxiety, trauma, and identity loss. This paper shares reflections from my work with individuals and groups, including the community project Meri Awaaz Meri Pehchaan with widows in New Delhi. Through guided movement, participants described releasing long-held tension, finding confidence in their voices, and reclaiming parts of themselves that felt lost. These experiences highlight the potential of movement-based expressive arts therapy as a holistic approach that restores presence, resilience, and identity.

Keywords: Movement therapy; Expressive arts; Anxiety; Trauma; Identity; Somatic psychotherapy

Introduction

Anxiety, trauma, and identity struggles often silence people in ways that words cannot reach. I have found that when the body is invited to move, it begins to speak in gestures, rhythms, and shapes that open new pathways to healing. This article is grounded in my own practice as a psychotherapist in New Delhi, and it reflects on both individual and group work [1].

One of the projects closest to my heart, Meri Awaaz Meri Pehchaan ("My Voice, My Identity"), brought together widows who had been silenced by grief, stigma, and isolation. Through movement and

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expressive arts, these women began to rediscover their voices and reclaim their identities. Their experiences, along with the journeys of individual clients in my practice, form the core of this article [2].

Practice Approach

Part of my work is simply being with the body, listening, slowing down, and following its wisdom. Movement is not limited to large gestures; even the breath is a movement, an internal rhythm that carries presence and possibility. Physiological and anatomical movements, the rise and fall of the chest, the trembling of a hand, the shifting of posture, all become pathways into deeper awareness.

The body speaks not only through these movements but also through sensation: physical, emotional, and mental layers that guide where the client is in the moment. From this awareness, we begin to explore more deeply.

Different mediums, art, writing, voice, dialogue, then become ways of expressing and expanding what the body reveals. They also create a gentle distance, helping clients look at their experiences from a different lens without losing the depth of connection. Each client relates differently to each medium. My role as a therapist is to notice which medium is speaking with which client, to hold the space for it, and to follow that thread [3].

This process is not about forcing expression but about trusting the body's wisdom. Breath, movement, and creative mediums work together to touch the depth of experience, allowing healing to emerge in a way that feels authentic and embodied [4].

Reflections from Practice

Meri Awaaz Meri Pehchaan

In this project with widows, many participants initially described feeling disconnected from their bodies. Through simple movements, swaying, stepping, reaching, they began to notice sensations and release tightness. One woman said, "When I raised my arms, I felt the heaviness leave me. I did not know my body could feel this light." Another shared, "For the first time in years, I felt I had a voice again."

Individual Sessions

With clients experiencing anxiety and depression, movement often became a way to discharge built-up tension. A client described it as "shaking off the panic that lives inside me." Others found that movement gave them access to emotions they could not put into words. One client reflected, "When I drew after moving, the colors showed me what I was feeling, something I couldn't have said aloud."

Discussion

These reflections point to the holistic nature of movement-based expressive arts therapy. It is not only about symptom relief but about reconnecting with the body, reclaiming voice, and rebuilding identity. Projects like Meri Awaaz Meri Pehchaan show its power in community healing, while individual sessions highlight its depth in personal psychotherapy.

Limitations remain, more research and structured training are needed but the lived experiences of clients are compelling evidence of its value. This work also shows how creative and embodied approaches can complement psychotherapy by making space for healing beyond words.

Conclusion

Movement-based expressive arts therapy has shown me that healing begins when the body is allowed to move and speak. In both group and individual settings, I have witnessed clients release long-held tension, reclaim their voices, and reconnect with their identities. My practice in New Delhi continues to affirm that creativity and movement are essential tools in holistic psychotherapy — restoring not just mental health, but wholeness.

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