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EFFECTS OF A MARATHON GROUP ON SELF-ACTUALIZATION AND ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN¹

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PROBLEM

There is a growing impact of the women's liberation movement on the attitudes and role behaviors of females in today's society^(2, 3). In this regard, living in the here-and-now rather than in the past and an independent orientation to life have been emphasized as desirable characteristics for the liberated woman⁽¹⁾. Shostrom⁽⁸⁾ has suggested that self-actualized persons are more present-oriented and independent than non-self-actualized persons. Thus, it was predicted that women who participated in a marathon growth experience designed to increase individuality, self-expression, and independent thought and action would become more present-oriented and independent while they experienced an attitudinal shift toward greater agreement with tenets generally held by the proponents of women's liberation.

METHOD

Subjects. The Ss were 28 female undergraduates who volunteered to participate in a 16-hour marathon group that was described as having the purpose of greater self-understanding and self-awareness. The mean age of the entire sample was 22.5, with a range from 19 to 38 years.

Treatment. There were two marathon groups. Four female predoctoral candidates in clinical psychology functioned as leaders with two leaders in each group. The four leaders collectively decided upon the treatment format prior to the beginning of the experiment.

The treatment consisted of a structured personal growth group experience; the same format was used in both groups. The role of the leaders was to help the participants to explore their behavioral roles as women in various interpersonal situations and to involve group members in exercises designed to enhance interpersonal trust and involvement. Participants received feedback on how they were perceived by the leaders and by other members. The leaders and the participants discussed alternative ways to handle interpersonal situations. Communication exercises, relaxation exercises, and sensory awareness experiences also were used within a here-and-now framework.

Measures. *The Personal Orientation Inventory (POI).* The POI was developed by Shostrom^(7, 8) to measure personality characteristics associated with "positive mental health." The test consists of 150 two-choice comparative value statements that form 14 scales. Shostrom⁽⁸⁾ suggested that the scores of the two scales that include all the items (*i.e.*, Time Competence and Inner-Directedness) can be used as global indices of self-actualization. The raw scores on these scales were converted into standard scores as provided by Shostrom⁽⁸⁾; this procedure allows for greater confidence in the interpretation of change.

The Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS). The AWS⁽⁹⁾ is a 25-item Likert-type scale that contains statements about women's rights and roles in vocational, educational, intellectual, social and sexual activities, and marital relationships and obligations. Each item has four response alternatives that range from agree strongly

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to disagree strongly. In the present study, each item was given a score from 1 to 4; 4 represented the most traditional and 1 the most contemporary, profeminist response.

Procedure The two marathon groups were conducted one weekend apart, and the same procedure was used at both times. The Ss were assigned randomly to the treatment or nontreatment conditions before pretesting.

The Ss responded to the test measures 1 day before the beginning of the marathon. At that time none of the Ss knew whether they were in the marathon or control conditions. After pretesting, the Ss who were assigned to the marathon condition were instructed to report to the Psychological Service Center of the University of South Carolina 2 days later. The control Ss were instructed to report for posttesting 3 days later.

The actual time of the 16-hour marathon was from 8:00 A. M. Sunday morning until 12:00 P. M. that night. The marathon and control Ss responded to the postmeasures the day after the marathon. All Ss responded to the same measures 5 weeks after the first posttest.

RESULTS

There was a significant negative correlation between the Attitudes Toward Women Scale and Time Competence ($r = -.53, p < .01$) and Inner-Directedness ($r = -.61, p < .001$) on the pretest scores for all Ss. Thus, attitudes consistent with the profeminist movement were related significantly to a present orientation (i.e., Time Competence) and an independent, self-supportive outlook (i.e., Inner-Directedness) prior to the marathon experience.

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the experimental and control groups on the dependent variables for each testing period (pretest, first posttest, second posttest). The data presented in Table 1 were evaluated through an analysis of covariance design in which the pretreatment scores were used as the covariate. Significant differences were found between the two marathon groups on the AWS on the first ($F = 13.52, df = 1/16, p < .01$) and second ($F = 29.37, df = 1/16, p < .001$) posttest. Table 1 shows that these significant findings were due to the fact that the score of group 1 decreased, while the score of Ss in group 2

TABLE 1. MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF MARATHON AND CONTROL GROUPS ON ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN, TIME COMPETENCE, AND INNER-DIRECTEDNESS

Scale	Testing	Marathon Group 1 (N = 9)		Marathon Group 2 (N = 10)		Control Group (N = 9)	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Attitudes Toward Women ^a	Pretest	38.8	10.0	42.8	12.9	43.6	10.2
	Post 1	35.4	9.3	44.8	14.0	45.6	10.9
	Post 2	30.0	4.4	46.3	13.6	44.9	9.2
Time Competence ^b	Pretest	47.4	13.7	47.6	12.4	45.6	11.4
	Post 1	52.7	4.6	50.5	12.2	45.6	15.0
	Post 2	48.8	12.8	48.7	13.5	46.3	15.7
Inner-Directedness ^b	Pretest	47.7	13.4	42.9	9.6	46.0	11.2
	Post 1	56.7	6.5	49.5	14.6	45.6	12.4
	Post 2	58.3	5.8	53.8	11.9	46.7	11.4

^aLower scores indicate greater agreement with profeminist attitudes.

^bHigher scores indicate higher levels of self-actualization.

remained relatively unchanged. When the two marathon groups were combined and compared with the control group, a significant difference was found on the Inner-Directedness scale on the first ($F = 6.10, df = 1/25, p < .05$) and second ($F = 13.28, df = 1/25, p < .01$) posttest, due to the fact that the scores of the treatment groups increased, while the scores of the control Ss remained relatively unchanged.

Because different leader dyads conducted the two treatment groups, separate comparisons were made between each treatment group and the control group. The comparison between group 1 and the control group on the first posttest revealed a significant difference on the AWS ($F = 5.59, df = 1/15, p < .05$), which was due to the decrease in score of group 1. A significant difference also was found on the Inner-Directedness scale ($F = 12.70, df = 1/15, p < .01$) due to the increase in score of group 1. On the second posttest, the difference between group 1 and the control group on the AWS became even more significant ($F = 54.39, df = 1/15, p < .001$). Table 1 shows that the score of group 1 showed greater movement in the direction of liberal attitudes toward women, while the control group remained relatively unchanged from the pretest. Similar to the results of the first posttest analyses, a significant difference was found on the Inner-Directedness scale in favor of group 1 ($F = 17.71, df = 1/15, p < .001$).

The comparison between group 2 and the control group on the first posttest yielded a significant difference on the Inner-Directedness scale on the first ($F = 4.37, df = 1/16, p < .05$) and second ($F = 10.05, df = 1/16, p < .01$) posttest, due to the fact that group 2 reflected an increase in score. No other treatment effects were significant.

DISCUSSION

The present study showed that: (1) 16-hour marathon groups facilitated a significant increase in independence or self-supportedness (*i.e.*, POI scale Inner-Directedness) in the participants that was maintained 5 weeks after the first posttest; and (2) there was a differential effect with regard to changes in attitudes toward women as a function of marathon group membership. Ss in group 1 experienced a significant shift in the direction of agreement with profeminist attitudes, which became more pronounced on the second posttest. By contrast, Ss in group 2 did not differ significantly from the control Ss on either posttest. These findings indicate that one marathon session can facilitate both greater agreement with profeminist attitudes and an independent orientation that are maintained over time and that a more pronounced independent, self-supportive orientation is not necessarily related to increased agreement with profeminist attitudes. Thus, in addition to fostering personality changes (*e.g.*, ^{5, 6}), the marathon group has some utility in facilitating attitudinal changes.

The failure to find a significant attitudinal shift in group 2 is somewhat puzzling in that the Ss were assigned randomly to groups and the pretest scores of the two groups on the AWS were not significantly different from each other ($F < 1$). Because it is unlikely that one group would have a greater personal predisposition to react against those aspects of the treatment format that dealt with attitudes toward women's roles, it is most reasonable to assume that a group effect resulted in the postexperimental discrepancy in attitudes between the two groups. This interpretation gains support from the marathon Ss' ratings of "group climate" obtained at the first posttesting period. The Ss rated nine items that reflected their perceived level of closeness, trust, and confidence in their group on a scale from one to seven. A comparison of the mean ratings over these items showed that Ss in group 1 rated their group significantly higher on these dimensions than did Ss in group 2 ($t = 4.21, df = 17, p < .001$). The leaders' subjective impressions further suggested that the members of group 2 were not as interested in pursuing issues related to women's interpersonal roles as were the members of group 1. Unfor-

Unfortunately, no effort was made to obtain participant ratings of the leaders, which also may have been a factor that contributed to the differential changes on the AWS observed in the two groups.

Future studies should replicate this study by holding the leader variable constant across treatment groups. In addition to obtaining participant ratings of the group and the leaders, it would be valuable to supplement personality test data with independent assessments of the participants by significant others to determine the extent of the behavioral correlates associated with greater agreement with profeminist attitudes. According to Kelman⁽⁴⁾, a crucial determinant of attitude-action consistency is whether the individual's environment is supportive and accepting of the behavioral manifestations of the attitude. Thus, both the broader social climate and the more immediate interpersonal context of an individual need to be considered in the prediction of behavioral changes.

SUMMARY

This study investigated the impact of a 16-hour marathon session on levels of self-actualization and attitudes toward women both 1 day and 5 weeks after the group experience. Female undergraduates were assigned randomly to one of two marathon groups or to a no-treatment control group. Ss in both marathon groups experienced a significant shift toward increased independence or self-supportedness on both posttests. However, a differential group effect was found from separate comparisons of each marathon group with the control group on pre-post shifts in attitudes toward women; Ss in one marathon group reflected significantly greater agreement with profeminist attitudes on the first posttest and experienced an even greater shift in that direction on the second posttest, while Ss in the other marathon group did not differ significantly from the control Ss on either posttest.

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