



Collaborative Couple Dance Therapy

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Abstract

Dance has been used as a metaphor by couple therapists such as Johnson (1996) for Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFCT) (Johnson, 1996). However, Johnson preferred to have the couples do the leading in the therapy albeit staying at the realm of metaphor. As a result, the therapy is slow and her outcome studies take at least 12 sessions (Johnson, 1996).

Whilst dance as a metaphor is useful, couples need more direction. They are like the novice dancer coming to learn some form of dance new to them or to brush up their dance steps of a dance they have not been dancing for a while and expect the therapist to be much more leading as the expert dance instructor.

Instead the Emotionally Focused Couple Therapist (EFCT) would spend many sessions doing just validation of both parties - in order to de-escalate their communication dynamics (Johnson, 1996). This akin to allowing the couples fumble in their out of rhythm dance steps.

In this paper a new model of couple therapy based on the dance metaphor which is much more directional and collaborative than that used in EFCT will be presented and it will be shown that this model is more efficient and effective as a form of couple therapy and psychotherapy.

Of course, the same dance still needs to be adapted for each couple differently as they have different needs - different heights, different tastes and different passions. The specific dance steps for the couple will be collaboratively created by the Couple Collaborative Dance Therapist (CCDT).

Keywords: Collaborative Couple Dance Therapy, Couple Dance Therapy, Dance Therapy, Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy, Emotion Focused Therapy, Couple Therapy

Introduction to Couple Collaborative Dance Therapy

The CCDT is not only the teacher but a choreographer as well. Unlike the EFCT, he is not committed to any rigid psychotherapy

theory; EFCT (1996) is based solely on attachment theory.

CCDT is more akin to Collaborative Therapy (Anderson, 2012) which has an open enquiry between the therapist and clients and together they arrive at the dance



steps that work for the specific couple in therapy.

Together the CCDT and couple create some new dance steps collaboratively. The CCDT may identify some previous dance steps that once served the couple well but not necessarily so now, perhaps because one or both of them have changed. These may be suggested as re-romanticising activities similar to Imago Therapy (Hendrix and Hunt, 1996).

Start of Dance Couple Therapy Session: Invitation to the Dance

The CCDT would listen briefly to each party's story with empathy and then invite them to do a dance literally.

The parties may respond to this invitation in a number of ways which would inform us about their feelings about their relationship.

They may be hesitant, unwilling or unable to do so. Or they may willingly take each other in embrace. Or each party may respond differently from the other; one inviting, the other hesitating or rejecting.

These dance steps form vital assessment clues about the couple's relationship. The CCDT can then reflect back these observations to the couple and together observe how their responses relate to their relationship and to the stories just told.

Out of Rhythm Dance Steps

EFCT (Johnson, 1996- hold me tight) like to use the metaphor of the bad dance. The EFCT would in fact request the couple to name a dance they are bad in, say polka, and think of their relationship as the "bad polka".

The CCDT on the other hand does not request the couple to negate their whole

relationship dance. There is no bad dance as such. Rather, there are some out of rhythm dance steps that each of the party make and may get stuck in.

This metaphor is more enabling for the couple. They do not feel their whole relationship is bad. Rather they are experiencing some bad phases and may even be stuck in some of these. But they have had a good relationship before. Their dance has been a good one and can still be good.

The role of the CCDT is therefore to help the couple to get back into the rhythm of their dance. And they do this together collaboratively: each of the couple with the CCDT. The couple contribute to the process with their expert knowledge of each other and of themselves: whether they are able and willing to feel each other's mood; follow each other's lead and be willing to lead.

The role of the CCDT is to help the couple rediscover the rhythm of their relationship dance.

Dancing in Rhythm

The CCDT can illustrate dancing in rhythm with "the couple fingers leading/following exercise". Each of the couple would be instructed to touch each other's hand and then take turn to lead each other whilst the other follows. They will then be instructed to do this with just touching each other's fingers. Follow by doing this without any party leading or following. The couple would then just dance with each other in rhythm.

This is the experience that the CCDT help the couple to re-experience: dancing with each other in rhythm.

The CCDT will then together with the couple reflect on the current steps of their relationship which are out of rhythm.



And together they reflect on how to dance back in rhythm.

Validating her Anger and Supporting him for it

A couple was in distress. Jeff had promised Joe that he will pick up their daughters from school at 8.30am and when Joe called, Jeff was still in the house. Joe was obviously furious. It takes more than half an hour to get to the school from their house. When Joe shouted on the phone, "You are going to be late", Jeff shouted back, "Yes and you are not helping by calling me right now."

Their dance steps are out of rhythm. The CCDT reflected that Jeff needed to validate Joe's anger. Instead of shouting back at Joe and telling her that she is not helping by calling him now, he can tell her that he can see that she is angry and he understands that because he has promised to fetch the kids on time and he is not honouring that.

But Jeff needed some help from Joe: some dance signals.

Whole Bodies Dancing

Couples need to dance with their whole bodies. They need to be mindful of their primary emotions (Greenberg, 2004): what their Amygdala is saying. (Chan, 2015, 2016). Their emotions and amygdala are essential parts of their bodies and the CCDT help couples to dance in tune with their own and each other's whole bodies.

The CCDT further reflected that Joe can help Jeff to get into rhythm by letting him know that she is going to let him know about her anger. Jeff can then have time to prepare his amygdala from reacting to Joe's anger and get out of rhythm. Instead he will have this dance signal from Joe to

execute a dance step in rhythm: validating her anger.

In this case, Joe was shown a dance step choreographed by the CCDT to be mindful of her amygdala's response and give the signal of this awareness to Jeff so that Jeff can be mindful of his own amygdala response. These steps enable Jeff to be able to be mindful of Joe's anger and of his possible anger response to her anger. With these mindfulness, made possible by Joe's dance signal choreographed by the CCDT, Jeff is able to validate Joe's anger.

Collaborative Couple Dance Therapy Intimacy Reconnection

CCDT is a collaborative therapy between the CCDT and the couple. Together they reflect on the couple's relationship steps that are out of rhythm and collaboratively discover steps that help the couple relationship dance to be in rhythm again so that they can reconnect and intimacy is re-experienced.

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