Practical Applications of Process Research on the Mechanisms of Change in Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFT)

presentation by Lorrie Brubacher, M.Ed, LMFT
for the
2017 EFT Summit,
San Diego, CA
with gratitude for the work of Dr. Sue Johnson

Learning Objectives

Following the workshop, participants will:
1. Monitor degree of partners’ confidence in the therapy process.
2. Identify indicators of client depth of emotional experiencing.
3. Demonstrate therapist interventions to facilitate the task aspect of the therapeutic alliance (or repair task alliance ruptures) and to increase depth of emotional experiencing.
4. Identify indicators of affiliative interactions.
5. Demonstrate therapist interventions to structure, heighten and process affiliative interactions.

www.iceeft.com Summary of EFT Research

In the Art and Science of EFT Outcome and Process Research Converge What works and how does it work?

3 Stages & 9 Steps
Stage 1: De-escalating the Negative Interactive Cycle
Stage 2: Restructuring the Bond
Stage 3: Consolidating the Positive Cycle

3 Change events
Process of Change Studies
identify moment to moment processes associated with positive outcome.

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Three client factors central to the success of EFT

T ask Alliance — Between therapist and partners
E motional Depth — Within partners
A ffiliative Interactions — Between partners

EFT Interventions

**EXPERIENTIAL** To create alliance. To access, expand, and reprocess emotional experience
- Empathic Reflection - essence of EFT - co-regulates
- Validation of client realities, emotional responses
- Evocative responding - process enquiries & replays
- Heighten, expand awareness - repeat, re-enact, refocus, use imagery
- Empathic conjectures, inferences in attachment context

**SYSTEMIC** To track patterns & shape attachment security
- Track and reflect processes, making positions and patterns explicit. (hyper-activating or de-activating / pushing or turning away)
- Reframe the experience in attachment context.
- Shape interactions (Enactments – affiliative interactions – disclosures and responses)

Therapist interventions to...

Foster and monitor Task alliance
Facilitate depth of Emotional experiencing
Shape Affiliative interactions

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<th>Experiential Interventions</th>
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<td>to build alliance &amp; to access, expand, and reprocess emotional experience</td>
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<th>Systemic Interventions</th>
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<td>to track patterns and shape new cycles of emotion regulation</td>
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Combined in the brilliantly simple 5 moves of the *EFT Tango*

Building Task Alliance

Fostering and monitoring clients’ confidence in the therapy process and the relevance of the therapeutic tasks

It is “important for couple therapists to take note of their clients’ reactions to and confidence in the interventions that they use during the course of treatment, because these are related to outcomes”

Greenman & Johnson, 2013, p. 46.
How EFT Therapists can build and maintain task alliance

1. Be transparent from the outset and throughout, about the process we are following

2. *Catch bullets* and repair alliance ruptures when they occur -- Swank and Wittenborn (2013) - examined the process of repairing a ruptured therapeutic alliance in EFT through task analysis and outlined 4 specific steps found to be effective.

3. Monitor moment-to-moment process in session – responding explicitly when the alliance appears to be at risk and checking at the end of sessions how partners feel about the process.

Depth of Emotional Experiencing & Affiliative Interactions - Key Client Factors of Change

Studies that have focused on client variables confirm many of the postulates of the EFT model. More intense emotional experiencing in clients appears to be related to more frequent self-disclosure, understanding, and intimate sharing ("affiliative responses") in session and to significant increases in relationship satisfaction (Greenman & Johnson, 2013, p. 52).

Two main aspects of the therapeutic process have been identified as key elements of change, depth of emotional experiencing and the gradual shaping of interactions to help partners clearly express fears and needs and to move toward affiliative responding with one another (Wiebe & Johnson, 2016, p. 11)

“We need tools.”

- Reflect and validate desire for tools to get out of painful place
- EFT does not teach tools and strategies for behavioral change – provides "tools" to send clearer message – so best attempts don’t push partner farther away, or fire them up in anger.
- Transparency: – begin with exploring together how relationship keeps getting stuck in the same old ruts – explore the hidden emotions – like quiet background music –that keep getting in the way of sending messages partner is able to hear and receive.
- Then – find ways to use these emotions to shape news tools you are seeking – where you can send clear messages and can hear each other clearly and feel cared for and important to one another.

- from Stepping into Emotionally focused Couple Therapy, Chapter 4

Depth of Experiencing

“Experiencing is always a composite of what one directly “senses” and the feel that there is more that, with effort, could be sensed. Experiencing may involve, but will never be just equal to, emotions, words, concepts, and muscle movements” (Klein et al., 1986, p. 25).

Depth of Experiencing is measured with Client Experiencing Scale (Klein et al., 1969, 1983)

Affiliative Interactions

An affiliative posture (Benjamin et al) is warm, caring, tender, sensitive, curious, nurturing, appreciative vs. a disaffiliative posture - hostile, domineering, dismissive, cold, ignoring, belittling, or blaming. (p. 403, Benjamin et al, 1986)

Detected in tone of voice, posture, eye contact and context - both content and process. (p. 407, Benjamin et al, 1986)

Affiliation is measured with the SASB (Structural Analysis of Social Behavior) (Benjamin et al, 1974, 1986).
Emotion is a Process

The first core feature of emotion has to do with **when** it occurs. (What triggers it?) The second core feature of emotion is that it is a multi-faceted process - a cascade of rapidly unfolding elements. - Gross (2014). *Handbook of Emotion Regulation*

What is the cue? What does your body do? What does it say to you? What do you do? Now own what's true
adapted from Bob Goettle, Seattle

The Flow of EFT Interventions – The Five Basic EFT Tango Moves

1) Reflect Present Process – within and between (interaction/dance steps/pattern, elements of emotion)
2) Explore more primary, deeper or new emotions (use handles - deepen and distill)
3) Set up Coherent Enactments (disclose clear message / more primary emotion to partner)
4) Process Enactment (“How did it feel to tell her?” “How does it feel to hear it?”)
5) Integrate, Reflect process, Validate competence (“Tie a bow”) (view of self, view of other, attachment relationship)

STAY - Slow, Simple, Soft, Specific, Vivid, Explicit - in the NOW

Facilitating Depth of Emotional Experiencing

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7
Levels 1-3 - Detached from inner experience, recounting events without impact on self, impersonal, abstract, general, behavioral, external descriptions, lacking affect.

**Level Four** - Attending to felt flow of inner experience

Level 5 - 7 - Expansive - increasingly concrete, vivid, “alive”; a felt shift emerges, fresh way of knowing, increasing trust of inner experience (as reliable guide) emerges.

*Client Experiencing Scale* (Klein et al., 1969, 1983)

Shaping Affiliative Interactions

*(Tango Moves 3 & 4)*

**Set Stage for an Enactment**
- Create meaningful context.
- Deepen experiencing.
- Anticipate contact.

**Make Simple, Direct Request**
- Sharpen the focus.
- Block detours and refocus.
- Contain escalation.

**Process the Enactment**
- Check with discloser and recipient.
- Expand and/or heighten new experience.
- Validate reactions, facilitate acceptance.
- Consolidate and integrate new experience.
References


Johnson, S. M., & Brubacher, L. L. (2016a). Clarifying the negative cycle in emotionally focused couple therapy (EFT). In G. Weeks, S. Fife, & C. Peterson

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Techniques For the Couple Therapist: Essential Interventions (pp. 92-96). New York: Routledge.


