

Emotion and Systems: In-Session Competency

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Brent Bradley, Indiana Wesleyan University

Susan M. Johnson-Douglas, University of Ottawa

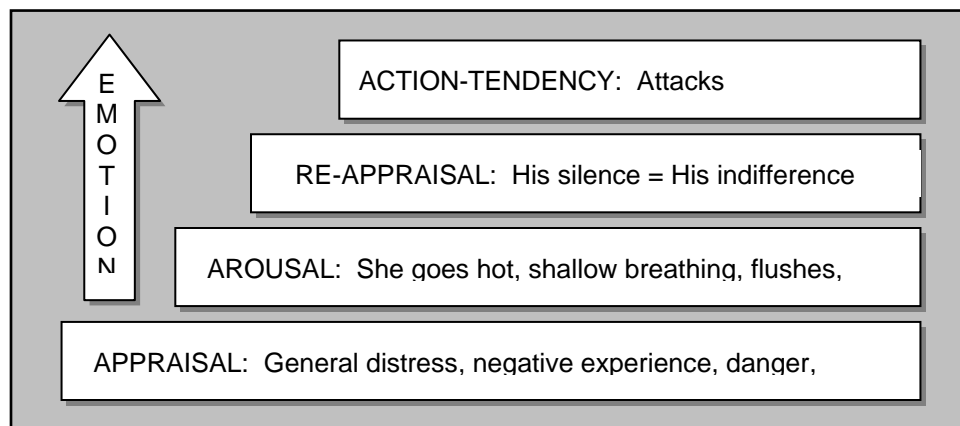
James L. Furrow, Fuller Graduate School of Psychology

Emotions and Systems Theory

Emotions have both personal and social dimensions

- Serve a unique role in self-regulation and social interaction (Fridja, 1986; Greenberg, 2002; Greenberg and Safran, 1987; Johnson & Greenberg, 1994).
- Adaptive resource - Providing a system of meaning that enables the evaluation of specific events relative to personal well-being
- Action tendencies that promote rapid adaptive responses (Fridja, 1986; Izard, 1991, Tomkins, 1968)
- Primary signaling system regulating close relationships (Sroufe, 1996)

Emotion as a process



CUE: Husband becomes silent in a tense couple discussion

Emotions have personal and social dimensions

- Family systems emphasis on interpersonal: Negative interaction patterns: Demand/Withdraw
- Emotions seen as primary intrapersonal: Negative absorbing states: Negative sentiment override
- Johnson (1998) argues that both are needed –Clinical approaches need to bring together the intrapsychic needs of the partners along with how those needs taken together influence the relationship.

Emotions and Attachment

- Emotional expression defines characteristic of nature of attachment relationships
- Emotions are primary signaling system: Negative interaction patterns
- Emotional cues pull for responses: Sadness → Comfort, Anger/Protest → Review
- Emotions prime core cognition: Withdrawal → Fear of Abandonment → Needs / Wants

Emotionally Focused Therapy

- Focuses on emotional experience and interpersonal interaction
- Change requires the integration of new emotional experience and new events, which foster secure attachment
- Exploration and expansion of emotional experience is necessary for engaging attachment related behaviors that in turn organize a couple's interaction.

Focusing on Emotional Experience

Primary

- Initial reactions to a given situation
- Need to be accessed to promote adaptive response

Secondary Emotions

- Response to initial / primary emotion
- Function to respond to primary emotion not to situation that elicited the initial emotional response
- Need to be explored in order to access primary emotions that underlie these secondary responses

In-Session Processing of Emotion

Theoretical Lens

Secondary Emotion

- Hear and validate secondary emotion
- Track and reflect within context

Primary Emotion

- Find it (degree of difficulty varies)
- Focus on/reflect emotional process rather than content
- Make the often implicit explicit

Secondary-to-Primary: Key Interventions

- Reflecting: Track Cycles
- Evocative Responding: Reflections & Questions
- Reframing

Segment I: Context & Set-Up (Session 6)

- Working towards withdrawer engagement (husband)
- No history or fear of violence or abuse in relationship.
- Couple saw past therapist abroad – references this several times
- Husband felt very blamed by past therapist, wife felt supported.

Exercise

- Clung to attachment theory – anger a response to separation distress
- Attempts to access primary that did not succeed:

Segment II

- Tracking and reflecting his cycle when so angry
- Entry points into primary emotion

Attachment-Related Affect and Restructuring

Emotion in Couple Therapy: Four processes:

1. Access / Engage / Accept (Level)
2. Regulate / Structure (Working Distance, Safe Haven)
3. Complete / Expand / Transform - Integrate into model of self, other.
4. Enact - New emotions = new signals to partner.

Result: New transforming intra/inter experience created.

Emotion in Couple Therapy

- Emotion is a “leading element” in a relational system – it “moves” us.
- Primary attachment affect moves us to:
 - Engage – risk - reach
 - Congruently ask for attachment needs to be met
- Expressed primary affect moves the other to:
 - Attune – engage
 - Respond – caring, compassion.

Result - New kinds of engagement/cycles – Bonding events.

The Power of Emotion:: Levels of Change

- Emotion changes emotion
- Emotion changes cognition
- How self and other are appraised – perceived in the moment
- How meaning is made in interactions.

Models revised - (Secure attachment is in mind and in interactional response)

Emotion organizes/re-organizes key behaviors - Expands options in dance with partner.

Transcript points to notice:

- How the therapist stays with attachment affect – and evokes the context - the negative cycle
- Derail moments – and recovery/refocus
- How therapist frames his responses in terms of attachment emotions – fears – longings – needs
- Validation of therapist contains/ makes safe emotional experiencing
- Repeated support of risking – support other to take in /respond to risking

The HOW of using emotion (R I S S S C)

- Repeat – refocus.
- Images - capture and hold emotion, tangible v abstract
- Simple
- Slow
- Soft - voice tone
- Client’s words - use

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