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Dance movement therapy techniques to promote kinaesthetic empathy for couples: 'I have to dance seriously with you'

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ABSTRACT

Dance movement therapy (DMT) for couples is characterised by including bodily discourses in the analytical space of the session, unlike other traditional approaches. Current studies have shown the importance of this inclusion to heal maladaptive relational styles developed by individuals in their childhood. This study, in which six couples participated, investigates the effectiveness of a pedagogical programme to promote kinaesthetic empathy (KE). The material analysed using movement analysis methods and thematic analysis, allows us to understand how affective attunement, somatic mirroring and synchronous movement, facilitate the emergence of empathy and the expression of unmanifested emotions, while promoting a feeling of connection between the members of the dyad.

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KEYWORDS DMT with couples synchronous movement kinaesthetic empathy affective attunement somatic mirroring couples therapy

Introduction

Interest in investigating in the field of couple therapy, and the inclusion of the body and its discourses as a source of analysis, has arisen from the need, shared by various authors, to create more efficient work strategies in a field that has found great difficulty in offering effective and lasting therapeutic programmes (Kessel, 2013; Kim et al., 2013; Pietrzak et al., 2016/2017; Shuper-Engelhard, 2018, 2019a &, 2019b).

Non-verbal behaviours have been recently included in this field of research, and existing studies support that this aspect has a fundamental role in interpersonal relationships (Andersen et al., 2006). Disciplines such as neuroscience, evolutionary psychology and phenomenology have demonstrated the embodied components of emotion (Pietrzak et al., 2016/2017).

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Kinaesthetic empathy (KE) is a vital concept in romantic relationships, since it deepens emotional comprehension from an embodied perspective. In its absence, communication becomes challenging, and triggers conflicts that are difficult to resolve (Shuper-Engelhard, 2019a). This study focuses on understanding how certain dance movement therapy (DMT) techniques promote KE in the interactions of couples.

Theoretical framework

Taking DMT with couples to a workshop format

As the practice of DMT with couples suggests, the therapeutic use of movement redirects attention from the verbal content to the somatic content that emerges in body interaction, in order to observe the experiences that the other cannot express through words as they were inscribed in the body in pre-verbal stages of development (Wagner & McGinn Hurst, 2018). These dynamics lead to a deeper understanding of the functioning of romantic relationships (Shuper-Engelhard, 2018).

The intervention protocol developed here seeks to consolidate a bridge between research and clinical practice. The protocol implements a series of techniques collected from various studies, which have researched how they promote the emergence of KE and strategies for conflict resolution in romantic couples (Kim et al., 2013; Shuper-Engelhard & Vulcan, 2019; Wagner & McGinn Hurst, 2018).

Kinaesthetic empathy

The German word 'Einfühlung' has been used to describe the relationship between an artwork and the observer. Its later translation to 'empathy' shifts from an intentional form of perception by analogy, to including a shared experience of the world. Gallese (2003) defines empathy as the shared manifold of intersubjectivity. This requires feeling what the other feels, knowing the context and responding accordingly. The inclusion of dance and expressive movement in the clinical psychotherapeutic field has deepened the kinaesthetic understanding of the empathic process, as well as drawing on other disciplines such as neuroscience, which has even developed a motor theory of empathy (Gallese, 2009; Gallese & Goldman, 1998).

KE, then, involves the exercise of feeling like the other, through non-verbal communication, or the movement sense (Meekums, 2012; Samaritter & Payne, 2013). Its consolidation is favoured by the synchrony of body movements and other physical actions such as mirroring, which generate in the other a feeling of affective attunement (Bräuninger, 2014; Rova, 2017; Samaritter & Payne, 2017).

Affective attunement

Affective attunement is the basis of empathic reflection, and involves a sensitive process of attending to the bodily expressions of the other (Cunningham, 2014). To ensure a secure attachment platform in infancy, a primary caregiver must be able to read the infant's non-verbal cues and respond in a consistent manner (Fonagy & Campbell, 2015; Fonagy et al., 1996; Johnson, 2004). In the same way, in a romantic relationship, a willingness for attunement is expected by the partner (Cuevas Lacson, 2019).

The current hypothesis maintains that the mirror neuron system allows affective attunement through the observation and imitation of movements and the development of empathic functions (Gallese & Ferri, 2015; Gallese & Goldman, 1998; Behrends et al., 2016/2017). In this process, the observing subject reaches empathy, when he or she is able to discern that the origin of the felt emotions is attributable to the observed subject (Shuper-Engelhard, 2019a).

Somatic mirroring

Somatic mirroring refers to the exercise of imitating the bodily actions and non-verbal communication of the other. The objective of this practice is to promote the emotional understanding of the other (Bräuninger, 2014; Chaiklin & Schmais, 1986; Fischman, 2009). The act of reflecting movement is accompanied by the action of resonating. This second concept has an internal character and is an indispensable tool for completing and deepening the empathic experience (Koch & Fischman, 2011). Thus, KE generates a common space of experience in which each member of the couple can share his or her subjectivity, while supporting individuality.

Research carried out in recent years by Shuper-Engelhard (2019a) indicates that somatic mirroring in intervention with couples generates willingness and calmness during therapeutic sessions, and promotes the ability of identifying and understanding the perspectives and emotions of the other. It is an effective transformation tool, since it allows the rewriting of procedural patterns of the right cerebral hemisphere, which regulate the consolidation of bonding, from new actions that lead to a process of attunement and empathic resonance that may not have been experienced in childhood (Lapides, 2011; Schore, 2014).

Synchronous movement

Synchronous interactions can be defined as the coordination of movements between two or more subjects which, regardless of their form, happen together in the temporal dimension (Behrends et al., 2012). Research on the use of synchronic movement as a facilitating element of empathy concludes that it promotes empathic skills, pro-social behaviours, the feeling of

belonging, connection and trust, group cohesion and the tendency to cooperate. It also raises self-esteem and reduces aggressive behaviours (Bräuninger, 2014; Pietrzak et al., 2016/2017).

Method and materials

To carry out this research, a workshop entitled 'I have to dance seriously with you: a workshop for communication in motion' was designed. The purpose of this was to offer participants an experience with their partners (lasting two and a half hours) in which they would experience affective attunement, somatic mirroring and synchronous movement. Below is a general outline of the workshop programme:

- (1) Welcome:
 - Presentation gesture.
 - Warming-up.
- (2) My body and the body of the other – affective attunement:
 - Self-contact.
 - Contact with the other.
 - Mutual massage.
- (3) Somatic Mirroring:
 - Relaxation, breathing and meditation.
 - Contact exercise with palms together (investigation of weight, strength and leadership).
 - Mirroring: One member of the couple moves, while the other watches. Next, the observer reflects the movement and then the roles are inverted.
- (4) Synchronous movement:
 - Improvisation 1 (free at a fast pace).
 - Improvisation 2 (free at a slow pace).

Process

The workshop was carried out on two occasions, first with a group of 3 couples (two heterosexual and one homosexual), and the second time with 6 couples (all heterosexual). However, 3 of these couples did not meet the minimum relationship time, and therefore their data were excluded from the analysis. The majority of the studies consulted had in common the inclusion of couples who had completed at least three years of relationship, since this is a time considered as standard, so that the partner can be considered as a main attachment figure (Middelberg, 2001). The final group of selected participants was 6 men and 6 women, involved in a romantic relationship (watch Table 1). During the course of the workshop, the subjects were guided through a series of exercises following the themes such as described above.

Table 1. Demographic Summary of the participants.

Name	Country (city)	Language employed during workshop	Religion	Annual income	Age	Relationship time
Juan A	Colombia (Bogota)	Spanish	Catholic	130,400 USD	60	4 years
Lorena A	Colombia (Bogota)	Spanish	Catholic	20,600 USD	37	
Karla B	Colombia (Sta. Marta)	Spanish	Catholic	6,000 USD	47	23 years
Esteban B	Colombia (Sta. Marta)	Spanish	Catholic	6,000 USD	61	
Allie C	Colombia (Neiva)	Spanish	Catholic	1,570 USD	35	10 years
Cesar C	Colombia (Neiva)	Spanish	Catholic	1,570 USD	46	
Laura D	Colombia (Bogota)	Spanish	Catholic	23,250 USD	58	37 years
Bruno D	Colombia (Bogota)	Spanish	Catholic	23,250 USD	65	
Raul E	Canada (Ottawa)	English	Atheist	42,400 USD	52	4 years and a half
Sonia E	Brazil/Mexico (Bethlehem)	English	Atheist	11,300 USD	40	
Tania F	Cuba (Bayamo)	Spanish	Atheist	14,200 USD	27	6 years
Robert	Spain (Seville)	Spanish	Atheist	100,000 USD	42	

Research tools

To collect the data, the following tools were used: (1) an initial questionnaire, (2) video recording of the workshop exercises, (3) audio and video recording of the focus group and (4) personal notes taken during the workshop.

Data collection and analysis

The total duration of the workshop was recorded on magnetic media, and in order to generate a movement analysis report, the resulting film material was analysed using:

- (a) Aspects of Laban Movement Analysis LMA (categories of space, effort and body).
- (b) Aspects of Kestenberg Movement Profile KMP (from System I: tension flow rhythms, tension flow attributes, pre-efforts and efforts, and from System II: bipolar shape flow, unipolar shape flow, shaping in directions and shaping in planes).

After this process, the qualitative method of *thematic analysis*, recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used for the analysis of the questionnaire and the focus group, and for a global analysis of the three research sources. This analysis system allows a flexible approach to material as subjective as the kinaesthetic experience of individuals. The first phase of analysis was carried out regardless of the interpretation of content. In later

stages of the research, the information obtained from the movement analysis was contrasted with that of the interview and the focus group, to find similarities and discrepancies.

Ethics

Those who participated in this study did so in an informed and voluntary manner. The participants were given an explanatory letter and a letter of informed consent describing the purpose and confidentiality of the use of the data recorded in audiovisual media (the names of the participants were changed to guarantee their anonymity). They were also advised of the possibility of abstaining from being part of the research project at any time.

Results

From the analysis of the information collected from the three research sources, three (3) central themes emerged: 'actions that allow and promote the establishment of kinaesthetic empathy', 'states of emotional connection and disconnection in relation to synchronous movement' and 'the emergence of conflicts or positive aspects in the couple through bodily discourses'.

1. Actions that allow and promote the establishment of KE

When reflecting on how the workshop experience generates a sense of connection and reunion, the participants found 3 actions that facilitated empathic listening between them: (a) relaxation, (b) self-awareness and bodily self-attunement and (c) somatic mirroring. These three subtopics have in common the displacement of attention and internal disposition, as a preliminary step to being able to listen to one's own bodily discourses and those of the partner, thus allowing them to connect and attend to the emotions and sensations arising from the interaction.

(A) Body relaxation as a prerequisite for affective intonation

During the group discussion, some of the participants expressed that prior relaxation allowed them to enter into a state of calm, in which it was possible to perceive internal sensations with greater clarity and to consciously connect with the 'here and now'. In the following vignette,

Table 2. Contact with palms together between Sonia and Raul (E) vs Focus group.

Sonia reduces muscle tone and tension (pre-efforts: hesitant and flexible). An energetic adjustment is perceived between the two. From a fighting dynamic, they move to an indulgent one, through the swaying rhythm that she proposes.	Sonia: "If you ask me: if you hadn't come to the workshop, would you have been able to get rid of the anger that you brought with you, and talk to him calmly? I don't know, but: Did it help me? Yes, it did. The exercises helped us, they entertained us ... we had to say, 'Better relax, so that we can get to empathize and understand the logic of the other' ... so it helped me to relax, to observe my angry tendencies."
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one of the participants refers to how relaxation helped her to become aware of the anger that she had at that moment towards her partner (watch [Table 2](#)):

In the case of Raul and Sonia, sustaining and dialoguing with the fighting rhythms proposed by both, allowed the necessary flow adjustment to happen in order to reach a more synchronous and indulgent state of movement. According to Sonia and other participants, relaxation made it possible, during the exercises, for there to be a greater degree of attention towards themselves and towards their partners, and a greater willingness for empathy.

B. Self-awareness and self-attunement as facilitators of empathic listening

During the workshop, emphasis was placed on attending one's own bodily experience both in the warm-up and in the rest of the activity, in order to offer a space for self-observation that would allow recognition of one's own internal states. The below vignettes highlight the usefulness of self-perception, in the transition of going from self-contact to touching the other (watch [Table 3](#) and [4](#)):

What is striking about the interaction between Robert and Tania is that from the outside a communication channel was perceived, evident in the permanent eye contact and the adjustment of rhythms of tension

Table 3. Mirroring between Tania and Robert (F) vs Focus group.

When Tania reflects Robert's movement, she exaggerates and expands on what he does, creating something new from what she felt when observing him. When Robert mirrors her movement, he modifies the sequence, but maintains the qualities of movement.	Robert: 'I think that when you touch yourself, and you do it with affection ... then the transition to the other is even easier ... I noticed that, when I went from touching myself to touching her ... it was as if the channel was not interrupted, but rather continued.'
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Table 4. Mirroring between Allie and Cesar (C) vs Focus group.

By mirroring Allie's movement, Cesar imitates her swaying rhythm, but modifies the sequence and adds things such as standing on tiptoe, offering gestures, and knee bends.	Cesar: 'Touching myself, appreciating myself and feeling the sensation of loving and recognizing myself, and then looking at her, moved me and connected me with her.' Allie: 'To know another person, you first have to know yourself ... and you are always very used to touching the other, but you never touch yourself.'
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flow. A resonant and empathetic response to the movement of the other could be seen, which was possible thanks to a previous exercise in self-awareness.

During the somatic mirroring exercise, both Allie and Cesar cried and during the verbal discussion, they expressed having felt many emotions and a sense of internal connection throughout the workshop. This suggests that there was a relationship between having carried out a previous exercise in self-awareness and self-observation and the emergence of these emotions, as the former allowed them to observe internal sensations and establish a resonant connection, which is reflected in non-verbal attitudes, such as eye contact and physical proximity.

C. Somatic mirroring and KE.

The results of the present study indicate that after performing the various somatic mirroring exercises, couples felt the possibility of having empathy towards their partners and developing a high state of connection, which does not occur in times of conflict. It was also possible to observe how non-verbal communication between some couples intensified after the exercise, suggesting that there were pleasant sensations and a search for intimacy (watch [Table 2](#)).

Likewise, Laura and Bruno (D), were able to establish an empathic dialogue regarding the distribution of weights, leadership, the amount of pressure exerted and other elements that come into play during the ‘contact with palms together’ exercise, to achieve a rhythm adjustment that would sustain the dialogue. During the verbal discussion, Laura stated that she felt very fluent and attuned with Bruno during this exercise. Likewise, Bruno said that he was able to perceive how a bond is maintained despite the years, and that this showed itself through physical actions of mutual understanding and cooperation. In this case, the serene disposition towards the exercise helped the emergence of kinaesthetic empathy, which led to an understanding and highlighted an existing virtue in the relationship (proceed to [Table 5](#)).

Robert and Tania achieved many moments of attunement throughout the workshop. In fact, during the verbal discussion Tania expressed having felt that she was able to communicate, look at and get very close to Robert (proceed to [Table 6](#)).

Table 5. Synchronous movement between Tania and Robert (F) vs Focus group.

Face-to-face, they look into each other's eyes. Robert walks up to her, and puts his arms around Tania's neck and holds her tight against him. They hardly move, they cradle each other in the embrace. There is quite a lot of stillness, a lot of physical closeness and contact.	Tania: 'For me it has been a very nice, very effective experience and I feel that there has been a change. We have communicated, we have seen each other, we have moved together, and we leave much more united than when we came ... it has given me a feeling of great connection.'
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Table 6. Contact with the palms together between Allie and Cesar (C) vs Focus group.

The fighting rhythm of surging\birthing can be seen, while they grip their hands together. When they rotate to become back-to-back, Allie's way of releasing weight is firmer, she seems more confident, and she lunges at him with great energy. The muscular tension lowers and a more fluid dialogue is observed between their bodies. In the first part of the exercise, they maintain eye contact.	Cesar: 'When you feel good your partner transmits, laughter, conformity, everything, (but when) a moment of fighting tension comes up, you don't want anything. That is, you are totally flat, nothing is transmitted and obviously addressing it is difficult.'
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The palm-to-palm contact seems to make a power struggle evident, which is ratified in the verbal discussion in which issues of cultural relevance such as gender roles and male chauvinism emerge. Allie questions her position in the relationship, feeling Cesar's physical weight on her. This brings up a series of questions triggered by the somatic experience, which seem to be essential elements for establishing a communication process in which KE develops. However, this couple is able to overcome the misunderstanding and seek the establishment of an empathic dialogue through somatic mirroring.

2. States of emotional connection and disconnection in relation to synchronous movement

Some of the participants in the study reported experiencing pleasant feelings of internal connection, and play while moving synchronously. Other participants who did not experience coordinated or complementary movements, expressed feelings of frustration or misunderstanding. The vignettes below exemplify in each case situations of perception of synchrony and asynchrony (watch [Table 7](#)).

In the case of couple A, Juan spoke of misunderstanding, and in the recording, he and Lorena are seen expressing different fighting rhythms throughout the improvisation. To reach synchronicity and establish kinaesthetic empathy, they needed to get through the moment of flow adjustment in the initial tension, but they did not seem to be willing enough to do so.

This suggests that KE is established when there is an adaptive connection between the differences in the rhythms of tension flow of the two members of the couple, and that the states of connection and disconnection occur during the search for strategies of adjustment and adaptation to the other.

Table 7. Asynchronous movement between Juan and Lorena (A) vs Focus group.

She puts her arms around Juan's neck and lets herself be led by him, they do salsa spins with each other, but they don't seem to identify a common rhythm. Finally, she puts herself next to him, and they walk back and forth together. The quality of the movement is indulging.	Juan: 'There is a situation in which there is no connection, and that lack of connection does not necessarily generate frustration, but well, maybe suddenly you didn't understand it ... you don't really know what is happening.'
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These are two interdependent polarities, since there cannot be a feeling of connection if there has not been a feeling of disconnection first and vice-versa.

3. The emergence of conflicts or positive aspects in the couple through bodily discourses (embodied processes)

During the workshop, the participants were able to find various points of connection between personal situations of the relationship, and physical feelings experienced there. The following vignettes exemplify this (watch Table 8 and 9):

Laura and Bruno managed to establish a synchronous dialogue. In fact, in the verbal discussion they expressed feeling that, throughout the workshop, their bonding connection had been ratified in some bodily actions, which gave them great satisfaction. In the case of Karla and Esteban, she stated in the group discussion that, thanks to the exercise of palm-to-palm contact, she was able to recognise a conflictive situation that she was living with her partner (regarding the amount of responsibility that she carries at home). Through the action of carrying her partner, she had a bodily sense of clarity, which she was able to associate with her current situation and communicate verbally to her partner. In short, attention to the bodily discourses and the emergent emotions of the participants helped them to establish a dialogue and to communicate things of which they were not fully aware.

Table 8. Contact with palms together between Bruno and Laura (D) vs Focus group.

Both perform mirror actions such as lowering the head or crouching. There is permanent eye contact, which was not present in the previous improvisation. The time is decelerated, and the weight is very light. In the end, she puts her weight on him and he arches backwards (complementary movement).	- Bruno: "When I was getting changed, I said to Laura, 'That was really nice.' To feel that after so many years with Laura, there is an understanding, I find it . . . (he remains silent) " - Workshop facilitator: 'Did you see that understanding materialize in physical actions?' - Bruno: 'Yes.'
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Table 9. Contact with palms together between Karla and Esteban (B) vs Focus group.

When they lean on each other back-to-back, Karla goes into a direct, strong, fighting profile, and her body seems more muscularly active. From the outside, you can see that she makes a great effort and that she holds her breath. However, in this new position, she also allows herself to drop the weight on him with more determination.	- Karla: 'I felt something very clear when he was leaning on me . . . a woman always has the greatest burden, even if they work more physically, the part . . . of a woman always carries more.' - Workshop facilitator: 'So did the physical exercise of holding him help you to make that association?' - Karla: "Exactly. I compared it and I said to him, 'no more, not so much weight', and instead I tried to unload myself on him, 'now you carry me.'
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Discussion

The structure of the discussion will follow the sequence of the four processes that have taken place within the experience of the workshop, and that support the development of empathy:

1. Prepare the ground for KE

As manifested by the participants from this study, turning the attention towards one's inner disposition and adopting a calmed and relaxed body and mind set, served as preparatory element to facilitate the emergence of kinaesthetic empathy.

Relaxation: In moments of conflict escalation between the members of a couple, a process of emotional dysregulation occurs, which increases body tension and promotes defensive behaviours, which ultimately activate the fight or flight mechanism. The relaxation techniques applied here are scientifically proven methods to regain calmness of mind and to be able to function in a state of emotional regulation, which ultimately favours attunement and empathic dialogue as an adaptive solution to conflict (Hendrix et al., 2015).

Self-awareness: The researchers consulted mention that empathy requires a state of self-awareness of the body and of internal states. These self-perceptual processes are necessary for the individual to offer an adaptive and contained attitude, instead of a fight or flight response, in the face of failed interactions (Kim et al., 2013; Behrends et al., 2016/2017). The practice of bringing thinking into perception and feeling promotes self-reflection and prevents impulsive reactions. Certainly, relaxation and self-awareness would be fundamental for the development of meaningful and connected relationships (Germer, 2013).

Linking the participants' moving patterns and verbal expressions regarding the self-perception and relaxation exercises (indulgent qualities of movements and feelings of distress and connection), we can confirm that they prepare the ground for empathic willingness. This in turn allows a connection with the other and with the 'here and now', which consolidates an emotional balance and means that the emerging emotional material can be handled in a more playful and pleasant way (Pietrzak et al., 2016/2017; Shuper-Engelhard, 2019a).

2. Intonation through somatic mirroring

In the studies consulted couples who experimented with mirroring reported greater emotional attunement, relief, validation, and perspective about unexpressed emotional content (Pietrzak et al., 2016/2017). Likewise, participating regularly in mirroring leads to improved functioning of the mirror neuron

system and the consequent activation of the limbic system, which in turn leads to a greater capacity to develop empathy (Cuevas Lacson, 2019). Correspondingly, the participants from this study, expressed feelings of connection and comprehension, when moving like their partners. This confirms then researchers' suggestion of considering somatic mirroring as a tool of fundamental use in the clinical field of psychotherapeutic intervention with couples.

3. Transition between connection and disconnection

Bodily synchronicity through dance allows us to attune to others and create feelings of connection. The ability to synchronise with the rhythms of the other is essential for the development of a secure attachment bond (Hawkes, 2003; Fonagy & Campbell, 2015). The feeling of human connection does not occur when it is unlimited, but when it comes and goes, and the couple (Behrends et al., 2016/2017; Hawkes, 2003; Kim et al., 2013; Shuper-Engelhard, 2018) sustain this flow. In line with previous research, the study confirms that KE emerges through an adaptative and fluid connection between the differences in rhythm states of tension flow of the two members of the dyad.

4. Observe embodied processes

The literary review that was carried out suggests that familiarity with the content expressed by the body reduces anxiety during interactions and prevents the use of primitive defence mechanisms. Likewise, the opportunity to use kinaesthetic experience with the partner creates a channel for listening in an appropriate environment, which allows the subsequent verbal communication of unexpressed emotions (Cunningham, 2014; Shuper-Engelhard, 2019b). The participants of this workshop expressed that the experience of moving together brought new perceptions to the couple about the conflictive and positive dynamics of the relationship.

In short, the participant's ability to name and communicate their emotions, through their somatic experience, confirmed the activation of neurobiological and psychological processes that facilitate the emergence of KE, when listening and later naming the body's narratives by the couple (Cuevas Lacson, 2019; Fischman, 2009; Kim et al., 2013; Shuper-Engelhard, 2019a).

Practical implications

These results confirm many of the conclusions expressed in the research consulted for the creation and application of this study. Despite being a workshop, and not a therapeutic program with a 'setting' that can significantly favour the process of integration and change (Panhofer & Payne, 2011),

the simple experience of moving with one's partner in a safe environment seems to trigger processes and questioning, which may motivate the subsequent search for more far-reaching intervention spaces. The study highlights thus the importance of including programmes for therapeutic work for couples, that contain an analysis of bodily discourses.

Conclusions and limitations of this study

This research experience, based on the assumptions drawn by other researchers regarding the importance of including the body in the psychotherapeutic field of work with couples, has specifically looked into how certain techniques such as somatic mirroring, attunement and synchronous movement facilitate the process of kinaesthetic empathy. A protocol like this allows the emergence of bodily discourses and unconscious patterns, mainly stored in the right cerebral hemisphere (Schoore, 2014) which are affecting the interaction of the couple. It also offers a series of strategies to promote adaptive communication, which allows emerging material to be handled in a more pleasant, creative and playful way, enhancing pleasant sensations and a search for intimacy (Shuper-Engelhard, 2018, 2019c).

The participants of the workshop stated that they reached a feeling of connection between each other and observed aspects of the relational dynamics that until now had remained unexpressed. Although a workshop does not have the scope of couple therapy, we can say that it sets a precedent for the participants regarding non-verbal aspects that are fundamental for communication and conflict resolution (Shuper-Engelhard, 2019c). Non-verbal communication between some couples intensified after the exercises.

Although the number of participants selected was unremarkable in size and in the cultural origin of the individuals, this investigative exercise is valuable insofar as the specific cases it presents, invites those who are dedicated to the practice of DMT to continue researching about how the inclusion of movement can favour the solution of conflicts within the romantic couple. Additionally, the similarities in structure and findings between the present research and the consulted studies (Behrends et al., 2016/2017; Cunningham, 2014; Kessel, 2013; Kim et al., 2013; Shuper-Engelhard, 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2020; Shuper-Engelhard & Vulcan, 2019; Shuper-Engelhard et al., 2019 & Wagner & McGinn Hurst, 2018), strengthen its reliability. Given the fact that analogous interventions to those consulted, were tested here in individuals from different countries and cultures obtaining similar results, significant reinforcement is brought to the field.

In situations in which words fail to express the pre-linguistic experiences that our relational dances have encoded, the body can be a turning point to create a communication channel that favours KE (Koch & Fischman, 2011; Meekums, 2012; Panhofer & Payne, 2011; Rova, 2017; Shuper-Engelhard,

2018). This makes it possible to generate lasting and transformative changes in the lives of many couples who suffer the difficulties of sustaining long-term romantic relationships and who could benefit widely from more holistic and meaningful resources.

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Data Availability Statement

Data regarding this study will be shared upon reasonable request.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Clara Marcela Castro Jaramillo, In 2008, she began her training as a flamenco dancer, and later started her studies as a Plastic Artist at the National University of Colombia (2015). She moved then to Spain where she continued her training as a flamenco dancer in Seville and Madrid, and completed a master's degree in Dance Movement Therapy at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. Since October 2020, she lives and works in Bogota, Colombia.

Heidrun Panhofer, PhD (University of Hertfordshire), MA (Dance Movement Psychotherapy, Laban Centre), is an associated professor at the Department of Clinical Psychology at the Autonomous University of Barcelona where she created and coordinates the Master and Postgraduate Programme in Dance Movement Therapy since 2003. Formerly President and Founding Member of the Spanish Association for Dance Movement Therapy (ADMTE), Heidrun has a wide clinical experience in private practice and different educational and psychiatric settings. She lectures internationally and has published extensively on DMT.

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