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Cultural Consciousness: Elements of Gujarati Folk Forms in Dance Movement Psychotherapy

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My work for the last few years has been based on the working model of Sara Boas (2006) of Transcultural Competence in dance movement therapy. I am moved by her model of co-creating a culture that transcends and honors differences in the cultural fabric which enhance ethical therapeutic practice. I am aware that culture is embodied and dynamic. Based on my work in the last 6 years, I am curious about my own multicultural self and understand that my awareness about my own context will never be complete, let alone understanding the multiple, complex and constantly evolving cultures that I encounter in my daily life. This has led me to use my own cultural background at times creatively in my therapeutic practice with an intention to further therapeutic goals. My presentation was based in providing an experiential understanding of Boas' working model using elements of my training in Indian Folk Dance and my own ancestral folk forms.

The Gujarati culture is an amalgamation of a plethora of traditions, beliefs, customs, arts, values with a tinge modernization as well. Use of rituals and folk forms has many benefits. The benefits are seen in areas of socialization, communication and expression.



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movements and drama in a satirical manner to raise awareness about cultural prejudices in their day-to-day life based on the extracted theme. For example, they and self-esteem. Transformation and empowerment of individual and community, the mastery of emotions, increased resiliency are developed during the therapeutic process (Hanna, 1968, Monterio and Wall, 2011). The shared experience of carrying out cultural values and freedom of expression within a structured setting while adhering to implicit rules, the participants operate in the present, leading to an enhanced experience of the ritual embedded in the therapeutic process (Hanna, 1968, Monterio and Wall, 2011). The force of rhythm, the simplicity of movements, the repetition process, the relation to the ground, the use of play and the duality of movements are the underlying factors that the therapists can draw from when we look at using these tribal forms within the dance movement psychotherapy process (Margariti et al. 2012).

Using the folk forms of Tippani folk dance , we used the tippani sticks, hand and foot movements to create our own movement rhythm as a group which then was improvised to work in dyads as well. We reflected on the multiple ways in which this could be introduced in a community setting like that in my work with at-risk adolescent boys.

Using Bhavai, we went through the different stages of Boas' Model. Bhavai is a dance drama performed only by male members to include issues of social life in a satirical way. The first stage of cultural context was elicited by reflecting on 6 different questions embedded in participants multicultural self. Moving to Concepts stage, the participants were grouped to share their reflections on the cultural question posed to that group. Hofstede's (1991) defined 4 dimensions to understand the differences in their reflections. These 4 dimensions are individualism collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity – femininity and power distance. The participants based on this sharing, extracted a theme which they were to display as a response to their cultural questions. This is the third stage in the transcultural competence model which talks about cognition. Using Bhavai, the male members of the group took up female roles, while the female members tried to embody the male roles of their theme's script. They used



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worked on how women (Masculinity- Feminity dimension) are treated in the Indian society based on their daily experiences. This is the use of the Gujarati folk form to understand the 5th stage, i.e. communication and interpersonal skills. This allows them to shift between different perspectives in an embodied way, to experience the dimension which may or may not be a part of their cultural self . Hence offering to expand their movement repertoire and process the dimensional polarity in their bodies. This helps the client and the therapist to reconcile opposing values, experiences the polarity in drama and role play format while also providing for process material based in everyday life. While the other groups perform their themes, the groups witness them at an embodied level using techniques of kinesthetic empathy, mirroring and kinesthetic attunement. The intentional use of humour was to ease the discomfort that may arise out of the social issues being raised. This latter part forms the last stage of Boas' working model, that is consciousness.

It was important for me to show them how the therapist's own multicultural self can be used in a dance movement therapy setting, where the therapist is aware of how their own background can help guide the process work with the permission of the clients. It is important to understand that the theme for the sessions still comes from the client. The intention of the folk forms and the use of folk forms can be used as a tool and resource to work with the client rather than it defining the therapeutic process.

The closing ritual and grounding at the end of the presentation was based in the folk form Garba. The claps and spiral movements in a circle were used to ground and centre the participants before they left the space. The original intention of garba is the prevalence of good over evil, the prevalence of knowledge over ignorance. Keeping the latter intention in mind, we held the knowledge and awareness of our cultural self within the circle. The circle holds value as seen in the works of Chace (Sandel, 1993) and other Indian tribal forms.



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The following quote from the work of Boas and Reeve resonate with me and I truly believe in the ancestral stories that our movements hold.

“The body reveals its knowledge to the mind. Movement releases trans-generational, cellular memory and it becomes clear that we don’t know how much we know, about ourselves, our ancestors, our stories and our histories. -Boas and Reeve 2003: 21” (Boas 2006 : 123)

The underlying belief is that in the community, mind and body must be incorporated into ritual systems in order to facilitate healing, as well as transform and empower the individual and the group. Our practice may be more ethical when we aim to transcend culture, we relax the boundaries of self ,allow for a mutual exploration of cultural self and clarify assumptions (Boas, 2004). Through this, we will allow ourselves to possibly experience radically different point of views easily in the safe space provided within this therapeutic relationship.

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