

Integrating Theories: Emotionally-Focused Couples Therapy and Contextual Theory

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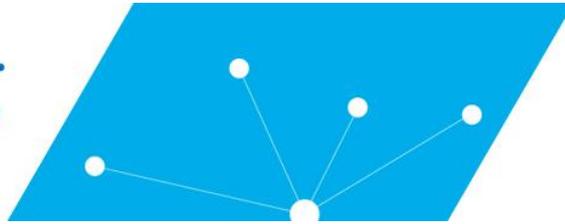
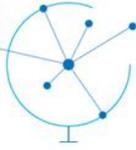
This conceptual paper explores the theoretical similarities of emotionally-focused couples therapy (EFT) (Greenberg & Johnson, 2010), and contextual theory of therapy (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). It provides an overview of the two theories, their similarities and differences, an outline of their integration, and a case study. Implications for practice are discussed, including alternate ways in which the two theories may be incorporated. The purpose of this paper and presentation is to provide a general integration process which supports the common theoretical underpinnings of these theories.

Attachment and contextual theories are connected through the concepts of dialogue, trust, and creating new relational realities (Diamond, Siqueland & Diamond, 2003; Greenberg & Johnson, 2010; Hughes, 2007). EFT and contextual have also been linked (Coppola, 2015; Lyness, 2003) as they possess the same cornerstones of facilitating trust/trustworthiness, vulnerability, and dialogue. Both center trust as the primary relational resource for healing, and prioritize building dialogue in change events and responsible position taking (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986; Greenberg & Johnson, 2010; Stauffer, 2011).

A main goal in EFT is to establish trust through a therapist's safe, unyielding holding environment, however, trust/trustworthiness may be limited without relational accountability. Expanding EFT to include relational accountability and relational ethics may help couples further concretize new patterns of relating.

Contextual therapists hold clients accountable for their actions, and foster systemic relational responsibility while displaying empathy and acknowledgement (Gangamma, Glebova, & Coppola,

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2016). By being partial to all, clients are challenged to consider what they have done and what they can do to prevent unfair relating (Goldenthal, 1993).

Theory integration involves beginning with the structure of the EFT steps and stages (see Johnson, 2004; Greenberg & Johnson, 2010 for review) while assimilating contextual principles such as crediting/earning merit and balancing relational ethics ledgers after a healing attachment experience occurs.

This integration is innovative in that couples may learn to both gauge attachment emotions and notice cycles of interaction and give/receive through concrete actions that build merit and entitlement. Rebalancing relational ethics after an attachment healing equips couples with more skills for facilitating their own healing.

References

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