The Space Between Us: The Experience of Relationship in the Argentine Tango

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THE SPACE BETWEEN US:
THE EXPERIENCE OF RELATIONSHIP
IN THE ARGENTINE TANGO

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in the Argentine Tango

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis project was to gain an in-depth understanding of the various dimensions of relationship experienced by Argentine tango dancers. The project’s underlying aim was to serve as a springboard for developing future applications of relationally oriented tango work for singles, couples, and groups as a form of dance/movement therapy. The participants consisted of three male tango “leaders” and three female “followers” of various experience levels. The research was conducted by video recording the participants dancing tango with one another and then interviewing them separately, using a customized video for each as a prompt to foster discussion of the participants’ somatic and psychological experiences of the dance relationships. The data was collected, analyzed, and examined through phenomenological research methods. Artistic inquiry was used to express the lived experience of the participants by presenting the findings in part through a multimedia performance piece that contained portions of the video and audio data and represented the research process and results through dance performance.
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Introduction

My interest in learning and researching the Argentine tango arose from a desire to expand my ability to connect with others interpersonally while dancing, which had not been a personal preference or affinity until the project’s inception. My penchant had generally been to use dance primarily as an expression of self rather than as a means of socialization. Realizing my need to explore the concept of partnership, both psychologically and through movement, I felt intuitively drawn to the Argentine tango as my teacher. As I began taking tango lessons, I was surprised and inspired by how strongly my patterns of relating to the opposite sex in my personal life were being magnified through the tango experience. This realization immediately required me to process my relationships with some fundamental issues, like trust, power, boundaries, leading and following, and, most significantly, merging and separating. I also came to discover that since the connection between mental and emotional attitudes and subsequent physical execution were so inescapably linked in tango, the dance required internal transformation in order to be externally danced well.

While I was training in both dance/movement therapy (DMT) and tango simultaneously, I found the disciplines to be incredibly complementary to one another, and the symbiosis aided my growth as a dancer, clinician, and interpersonal being. DMT is a form of psychotherapy that aims to integrate body and mind and uses body movement for both diagnosis and treatment. Through tango, I was brought into a more direct experience of body-in-relation (how I experienced my body in relationship to another) than I had previously experienced through DMT alone. Specifically, my internal sensing and body awareness increased greatly through tango. At the same time, my
knowledge of DMT allowed me to understand what I was experiencing in-depth. Through DMT, I was consciously aware of the subtle aspects of my own movement and posture that provided rich insight into my relationships to self and other, and I was sensitive to ways I could consciously make adjustments. For example, the posture required in the tango frame (see appendix A) made use of my knowledge of the DMT concepts of upper-lower connectivity (see appendix A) and engagement of the scapula. While tango made this structural connection accessible to me, my knowledge of DMT allowed me to name it, deepen it, and understand the mind-body implications of it.

Out of my own transformative experiences of tango emerged the desire to investigate how other tango dancers experienced the dance. The purpose of this thesis project was to gain an in-depth understanding of the various dimensions of relationship experienced by tango dancers by asking the question: How is relationship experienced while dancing the Argentine tango?

The project’s subaim was to serve as a springboard for developing future DMT applications of relationally oriented tango work for singles, couples, and groups. Although there are tango teachers who use tango for therapeutic purposes, and a few psychologists and dance/movement therapists who are incorporating tango into their clinical work (Castle, 2008), a framework for using the Argentine tango as a form of DMT has not yet been formally documented. Therefore this research project aims to begin this process by first getting an in-depth understanding and potential assessment of the ways in which the dance in its present form provides a vehicle for relationship. This understanding will inform the subsequent development of a methodology and clinical application of tango as DMT. This thesis will also add to the minimal (English-language)
literature on tango as therapy. My research will be of value to dance/movement therapists, body psychotherapists, and psychotherapists interested in methods of nonverbal communication, who work with clients seeking to improve their interpersonal relationships and expand their capacity for intimacy.

This research has clarified my personal direction as a dance/movement therapist and counselor. Tango has increased my understanding of and interest in Bartenieff Fundamentals (see appendix A) as a core component of DMT. The goal of Irmgard Bartenieff’s work was summed up by Peggy Hackney (2002) as the “lively interplay of inner connectivity with outer expressivity” (p. 34). Bartenieff held the belief that self-actualization was the result of an integrated mind-body system. She also placed great emphasis on individuals’ roles in relationships to others and believed that movement was the integrative link between a person’s internal and external worlds (Levy, 2005).

Bartenieff had a humanistic, clinical orientation, placing her focus on an individual’s potential rather than on pathology. This perspective appeals to my own framework of humanistic/existential psychology, where the goal is to “seek to understand the patient as a being and as a being-in-his world” (May, 1959, as cited in Benner & Hill, 1999, p. 413). This approach has focused on patients improving their awareness of their experience and existence and increasing their sense of personal responsibility for these aspects of their lives (Benner & Hill, 1999).

Another humanistic/existential clinician who informs my work is the psychiatrist and psychotherapist Irvin Yalom (2005). His model of therapeutic factors, including universality, socializing techniques, interpersonal learning, and existential factors in group therapy, guides my interest in group work in DMT. With regard to my interest in
couples therapy, my concept of intimacy was greatly influenced by David Schnarch (2009), a psychologist and specialist in marriage and sex therapy. His approach to deepening intimacy within a partnership involves development of self-in-relation, specifically increasing differentiation (see appendix A) within the partnership.

In addition to movement and psychological theories, I found great value in acknowledging and using creative processes (Hervey, 2000). As a dance/movement therapist who employs other expressive art modalities, using the research method of artistic inquiry supported the importance of the creative process within my clinical work. DMT and creative arts therapies aim to connect people to their expressivity and creativity, which are the sources of vitality and authenticity. Lenore Hervey (2000) adds that dance/movement therapists are well suited to using a creative research process because of their inherent skills as clinicians, which include “flexibility, spontaneity, ease of self-expression in chosen medium(s), playfulness, emotional accessibility, faith in creative process, tolerance of ambiguity, the ability to work without controlling the variables, and the ability to discern patterns in unorganized data” (p. 67).

My foundation as a dance/movement therapist and an artist as well as the work of other clinicians, including Bartenieff, Yalom, and Schnarch, have combined synergistically to create my eclectic approach as a clinician and researcher. Moreover, these theoretical frameworks have served as lenses for my approach to the Argentine tango.
Literature Review

My review of the literature focused on exploring the therapeutic value of the Argentine tango. I began by looking at research on the history and framework of the dance with an eye to discovering what gives tango its potent lure. I then explored the dynamics of the connection between tango partners, including both what fuels and restricts it. After that I investigated the potential for relational growth through tango, including the results of recent therapeutic applications of the dance.

Argentine Tango: Origins and Framework

**The tangueros.** The terms “tango” and “Argentine tango” will be used interchangeably in this paper, but it is crucial to differentiate the Argentine version from its stylized and flashy ballroom counterparts that the general public tends to associate with the name of the dance. Barbara Garvey, a true tanguera (see appendix A), described the differences among the styles in a *Smithsonian* article:

> The American tango is like the beginning of a love affair, when you’re both very romantic and on your best behavior . . . The Argentine tango is when you’re in the heat of things and all kinds of emotions are flying: passion, anger, humor. The International tango is like the end of the marriage, when you’re staying together for the sake of the children. (Santiago & Groisman, 1993, ¶ 20)

The primary difference is that, although hauntingly beautiful to watch, the emphasis of Argentine tango lies not in performing or mastering steps but instead in mastering the relationship between the partners and in the vital expression of emotion. Depth of emotion is essential to Argentine tango, so much so that there is a saying that “you must have suffered in life to dance the tango” (Jaffe, 2007, ¶ 6). Juan Carlos Copes,
one of the most well-known tango dancers in the world, summed up the relational aspect well when he said, “Sometimes there is confusion that the tango is the steps. No. Tango is the feeling. It is one heart and four legs” (Santiago & Groisman, 1993, ¶ 11). Chan Park (2004), author of *Tango Zen*, added that “unlike other social dances danced by a couple, tango is characterized as a dance of improvisation based on mutual communication between two partners moving as one” (p. 13).

**Origins.** There is still much controversy surrounding where and by whom the tango was created. In alignment with popular belief, Simon Collier (1995) argued that the Argentine tango emerged at the end of the 19th century in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Much of the disagreement about tango’s roots lies in the fact that it was created through the meeting of multiple ethnicities in this port city, including Spanish, Italian, and Eastern European immigrants and African slaves. The European polka, Spanish *contradanza* (see appendix A), and Cuban *habanera* (see appendix A) influenced the creation of the popular Argentine dance the *milonga* (see appendix A). The *milonga* was said to have been combined with the African-Argentine dance *candombe* (see appendix A) and then named “tango.” Tango’s path has never been linear, but dynamic. It traveled from the lower classes of its birth to the higher classes of Europe in its revitalization and spread back out internationally to the middle classes. The tango has been adopted and revered by a variety of cultures—like French, Czechoslovakian, Japanese, and Finnish—so much so, that the Finnish, for example, have claimed the tango as their national dance (Martin, 1995). Over the centuries, as tango has traveled through classes and nations, new forms and styles have emerged, and, to this day, scholars have been hard-pressed to find a “pure” tango, even in Argentina (Turner, 2006).
**Framework.** The approaches to dancing and teaching Argentine tango have been just as varied as its origins. With regard to technique, some may argue that more has been written on the differences between styles than on the similarities. For the sake of this literature review, I will focus on the most basic and unifying elements of the dance. The fundamentals can be boiled down to these basic elements: *el abrazo*, or the embrace; *el camino*, or the walk; *the lead*; and *the follow* (see appendix A). The basis of all foot movements in tango is *el camino*, which is similar to a regular walking pattern. The movement is meant to occur almost exclusively in the lower torso, legs, and feet. Not only does the lower body move independently from the upper body, it often also moves independently of the partner’s leg movement (Thomas & Sawyer, 2005).

Each dancer’s weight is shifted forward toward one another with some styles utilizing a merged *axis* (see appendix A), or center of gravity, and others maintaining separate axes between leader and follower. The dancers aim to maintain a consistent *frame* (see appendix A), where the arms in the embrace stay static and the chests stay parallel to one another. *El abrazo*, which refers to the position of the dancers’ arms and upper torsos, can range from closed (where the dancers’ chests are pressed against one another) to open (where the dancers might be at arm’s length). Closed embrace allows for faster footwork and heightened sensitivity to one’s partner, while open embrace allows the space for more individuality, including more turns and embellished footwork (Turner, 2006).

Although leaders are traditionally men and followers are traditionally women, men and women acceptably learn and dance both (Turner, 2006). Irene Thomas and Larry Sawyer (2005) simply and eloquently described the responsibility of the leader as
“leading with confidence and sensitivity” (p. 74) and that of the follower as “following with sensitivity and confidence” (p. 75) in their book *The Temptation to Tango: Journeys of Intimacy and Desire*. They described the exchange between the two as such: “The leader’s intention is a kind of persuasive argument he presents to his partner, and for which he awaits a response” (p. 64). The tango is entirely comprised of a series of these exchanges.

Aside from those basic guidelines and a few basic steps, the rest is based on improvisation. Many teachers offer sequenced steps in order to teach something more concrete and tangible to the beginning dancer. While this helps dancers feel a quicker sense of mastery, it leaves less room for improvisation, which is the true soul of the dance (Turner, 2006). The fundamentals of following, leading, maintaining connection, and maintaining balance are subtle and ironically much more challenging than practicing advanced *figures* (see appendix A) (Thomas & Sawyer, 2005).

**The Lure**

**Intimacy.** What brings people to the tango in the first place and what fuels the pursuit? Thomas and Sawyer (2005) claimed that the expression of emotion and longing for sexual union underlie tango’s magnetic pull. David Turner (2006), author of *A Passion for Tango*, agreed that people come to tango seeking to intimately connect with others within a safe environment. Laurie Hawkes (2003), a French transactional analyst who has run tango therapy workshops, found that many women described feeling euphoric after a well-attuned dance, much like the sensation of being in love. Although fewer men report this same feeling, they do describe feeling a sense of “magic” (p. 298).
**Vitality.** “No one ever invokes the image of tango to describe the dull and sedate,” wrote Thomas and Sawyer (2005, p. 1). Tango whisks the dancer away from the mundane and into a world of romance and glamour. The dance transforms, in that participants need not be physically young or traditionally attractive to be beautiful while dancing the tango. Some elderly *tangueros* have said that dancing tango feels like cheating death (Thomas & Sawyer, 2005). Their feelings speak loudly to the vitalizing effects of this intimate dance. These effects were supported by the findings of a research project studying ballroom dance as therapy for the elderly in Brazil in which the participants reported that partner dancing allowed them to transcend “their physical, intellectual, and emotional limitations, as well as the conventional roles of the elderly in Brazilian society” (Lima & Vieira, 2007, p. 140).

**Spirituality.** Others have claimed that the tango is a spiritual pursuit. Argentine tango requires the dancers to surrender to one another, to the music, to other dancers on the dance floor, and to the possibility of experience within the dance. Aided by deep breathing, tango dancers strive for inner and outer stillness (Thomas & Sawyer, 2005). Park (2004) likened dancing tango to practicing Zen meditation. Some of the parallels Park made between the requirements of tango and the philosophy of Zen included: remaining in the present moment, letting go of attachments and judgments that arise, releasing the ego in order to drop anticipation, adopting a beginner’s mind to be open to new experiences and wisdom, experiencing the oneness of the universe through partnership, moving with confidence by eliminating self-consciousness, and expressing one’s Buddha nature, the true nature of our Self. Many tango dancers have come to
discover that universal truths are revealed through the dance and find that practice is a source of spiritual embodiment.

Some view tango as a tantric practice, that is, a spiritual practice that acknowledges the body and its desires. Brian Dunn and Deborah Sclar (2003), who run “Tantric Tango” workshops in Colorado, described their approach to tango:

For those who are drawn to the integral vision, and who seek transformative practices in their lives, the art of tango offers a pheromone-stoked arena of opportunities to come to terms with some highly charged gross-level issues arising from living in the physical vehicle, such as sexuality, gender dynamics, and personal boundaries. (¶ 22)

**Masculinity/Femininity.** Tango serves as an archetypal representation of idealized male and female energies. Tango makes use of these opposing energies through the movement qualities required of the lead and the follow. While “masculine” and “feminine” energies may be present in one gender over the other, the exploration of these energies is present in and available to either gender.

Many women love the “abandon” they experience while dancing the tango, which provides a chance for women leading powerful professional lives to surrender and explore another side of their femininity. In the same way, men may be drawn to practicing their assertiveness and connecting to their masculinity (Hawkes, 2003). Johanna Siegmann (2000), author of *The Tao of Tango*, connected the tango to the Chinese philosophy of *Tao* (see appendix A) after she found that the balance of male and female energies in the dance replicated the *yin/yang* (see appendix A) balance described in the philosophy. She described herself as a woman full of masculine energy traits—
independent, outgoing, and aggressive—who resisted the idea of being a follower, a phrase that felt synonymous with weakness. On the contrary, what Siegmann found instead while dancing tango was this apparent contradiction:

For the first time in my life, I felt supremely feminine yet awesomely powerful, feelings that until that moment I had never experienced simultaneously . . . I actually experienced the intense joy of being a woman and never once felt the need to apologize for it. (p. 3)

“Tango empowered me in a way that I have rarely felt” (p. 67), she continued. Siegmann explained how our society has aided in disconnecting both men and women from their male and female energies. As an overcompensation for female oppression and in an attempt to function in a “man’s world,” many women have adopted male traits to the exclusion of their feminine qualities. Another result of this has been confusion and ambiguity about what it is to be male. The historical tendency of men to admonish their own feminine qualities has led to an overall imbalance of energy on both sides.

“Tango represents the very essence of the male and female energies; the dancers are the physical representation of these energies in each of us” (Siegmann, 2000, p. 4). As in the concepts of yin and yang, these energies are complementary and equally powerful. The key to balance, both in the dance and in life, is for the energies to work symbiotically. These male and female archetypes, which Carl Jung called anima and animus (see appendix A), coexist in each of us and can be accessed when necessary. Although Siegmann relentlessly pursued this concept intellectually prior to tango, it was only through experiencing it in her own body that she was able to fully integrate and understand it (Siegmann, 2000).
Massimo Habib, a tango therapist in Italy, described his approach to working with male and female polarities in his workshops. First, he lets people experiment with each polarity through movement. Then, “depending on [the participants’] wants or resistances [he] decide[s] which role, man or woman, to let them play.” Finally he attempts to “rebalance with special exercises the male and female parts of each person so they can experience both parts and decide by themselves which one to use, when and, above all, how” (Woodley & Sotelano, 2009, p. 2). Through the tango modality, male and female polarities can be embodied, explored, and expanded, depending on the need of the individual.

**The Tango Connection**

The tango dance is a meeting of two human beings, coming together to explore their physical, psychic, energetic, and emotional connections to one another. Thomas and Sawyer (2005) wrote that in tango

> even the basic movements resemble a caress or a request to engage in a meaningful dialogue. You’ve got to be ready to care for your partner—even love him—for that short period of time. To dance tango well . . . means making yourself vulnerable, vulnerable to the music and vulnerable to your partner, whether leading or following. Making oneself vulnerable means taking emotional risks and allowing exposure to intimacy—at least for three minutes at a time . . . How one handles the tango experience of vulnerability, though, can dramatically influence that dancer’s personal life. (p. 119)

**The sensual touch experience.** Hawkes (2003) described the exploration of the erotic realm as an important aspect of tango dancing. She noted that it is crucial to
differentiate a sexual experience from sensual and erotic experiences, which are more “subtle, rich, and vast” (p. 298). Rarely is tango contact actually sexual in nature or intent.

Aline LaPierre (2007) conceptualized three phases that make up an erotic touch encounter. I have found that these phases are present during the tango encounter, but I will replace the word “erotic” for “sensual” to avoid the connotation of “sexual,” which “erotic” often carries. The first phase, “attunement and energetic bonding” (p. 114), is characterized by exploration and “interactive attunement” (p. 114) to the partner’s desires, expectations, and needs. The partners heighten their awareness of each other’s rhythms, timing, and signals of readiness and begin to synchronize their movements accordingly. This is where the foundation of the connection is assessed—trust and respect in the relationship will enable a deepening in the bond (LaPierre, 2007).

In tango, this first phase is experienced as the two dancers come together in an embrace and begin their dance conversation. The two distinct movement “voices” (Jaffe, 2007) express themselves to one another in an attempt to become one unified voice. The ease of connection will vary greatly due to tango experience, capacity for bonding, and partner compatibility. Inability to trust one’s partner or surrender to the care or needs of the other will serve as major roadblocks to bonding during this stage. As tango dancer Karen Jaffe (2007) pointed out, it takes time to adapt to a partner. Tango dancers may need several dances with a new partner to achieve this level of attunement and bonding, while others may have difficulty attaining it at all.
The second phase in LaPierre’s (2007) model, “intersubjective phase shift and resonance” (p. 115), occurs when the mind drops away and each dancer is immersed in the sensual experience:

Once partners have reached a state of somatic trust and interactive attunement, a shift usually happens in the partners’ respective felt sense, and they each drop into a more acute awareness of each other’s erotic sensations . . . When the partners’ energy fields fall into resonance, both parties become aware of a shift in the depth and intensity of their inner experience . . . In this state of magnified sensory unity, partners surrender to nonverbal experience, and the mind can now let go and ride on the body’s pleasurable sensory currents . . . They are engaged in an energetic fusion often glowingly described as “being one” . . . When in alignment and moving together, couples experience that what pleases one pleases the other, and what is good for one is good for the other. (p. 115)

While difficulties connecting in the first phase discourage many beginning students of the Argentine tango from continuing, those who have experienced this second phase return to the dance in a continuous pursuit to re-experience this “merger bliss” (Hawkes, 2003, p. 299). Some argue that it is this sometimes elusive and transcendent “tango moment” (Thomas & Sawyer, 2005, p. 5) that gives the tango its “addictive” quality. Hawkes (2003) describes the importance of dancing with one another as “at once two persons and one dyad, with two contrasted aspects working together to form a whole yet remaining different so we do not merge into an undifferentiated mass” (p. 291). She adds that the tango is a strong metaphor for the ability to be close but separate, where the
dancers must be intimately connected but clearly maintain their own roles and personal expressions (Hawkes, 2003).

The third phase of a sensual encounter is closure and integration. Once both partners feel a sense of completion in their exchange, another shift occurs in which the intensity dies down, and the two selves within the partnership begin to separate into their own respective entities. The thinking mind now rises to the surface as it tries to integrate the experience with one’s sense of self. The partners may offer loving words or gestures to express their feelings to one another about the exchange (LaPierre, 2007).

In tango, the music clearly signals the completion of the dance. Partners have the option of dancing as many times with one another as they please, until the conversation feels truly complete. Once completed the dancers will express their appreciation to one another, and the man will escort the woman back to the sidelines, often maintaining some amount of physical contact, such as holding hands. This process allows for closure of the intimacy shared within the dance and a chance to collect oneself and reflect on the experience before a new dance begins. Dancers will often take breaks between partners for this reason.

**Tango as a safe container.** While the tango shares some attributes with a sexual encounter (such as close physical contact, attunement, and bonding), it is not one, and for this reason it offers participants the ability to explore intimacy within a safe container. Hawkes (2003) described several ways in which the tango provides this containing function. The structure of the dance and the music, although there is plenty of room for freedom and improvisation, serves to contain the interaction. By dancing tango “in a way that is repeated, foreseeable, and reassuring, we have a possibility of becoming close
(more or less close, according to our choice) and the certainty of separating thereafter as well as the possibility of connecting again” (p. 293). The social aspect of the dance, where the dyad is a part of a larger group, aids in offering even more protection.

Perhaps most importantly, Hawkes (2003) pointed out how the physical boundaries of tango allow for a healthy exploration of connection and separation. She noted,

In tango there is a significant emphasis on each person’s space: respecting the other’s space yet coming into it at times, resisting, keeping one’s space—enough, not too much . . . In dance this is referred to as “the frame” or “keeping your shape/form” by not allowing the leader to “deform” you. (p. 294)

In Hawkes’s experience, one example of the exploration of boundaries was a tango workshop participant who was finally able to relax her whole body once she discovered she could adjust the space between her and her partner with more or less resistance in her arms (Hawkes, 2003).

In addition, while the partners may choose to position their upper bodies in close contact and they may experiment with interlocking legs, the lower pelvises never come into contact, contrary to other partner or Latin dances. This body positioning keeps movement of a sexual nature within boundaries.

**Relational hot spots.** Tango has the ability to magnify a person’s patterns, fears, and conflicts surrounding intimate relationships. As identified in her tango workshops, Hawkes (2003) described the numerous therapeutic issues of relating that may emerge through the tango vehicle. Fear of merging (one’s sense of self fusing with the identity of the other person or of the relationship), fear of the ensuing separation, and issues relating
to guiding, deciding, following, and trusting are a few of the potential conflicts surrounding one’s relational capacity. Hawkes relayed how one of her workshop participants tearfully described the unbearable pain of being separated from one tango partner after another. Julie Taylor, an anthropologist at Rice University who studied the tango in Buenos Aires on a Guggenheim Fellowship, said of tango, “I have never done anything where I’ve felt so emotionally exposed” (Mooney, 2001, ¶ 10).

Jeanne Castle (2008), an American dance/movement therapist, expanded on these ideas by describing her experiences during tango milongas (see appendix A):

Suddenly the substrata of my adult personality begin to shift like tectonic plates underlying my social composure. These deep layers of my psyche and soma are moving with the pressures of desire, fears fueled by my essential loneliness, defenses mobilizing with my unconscious, destabilizing dreads of rejection. Although I appear to be a mature woman—slender, in a form fitting top and skirt with slits up the sides, standing in four inch heels—I am also a baby girl who has not yet consciously become herself, as I softly allow my body to be swept into my partner’s embrace. The embrace of the moment awakens the original embrace of my infancy, along with all the densities that have ever surrounded the longing for that embrace. (p. 22)

Milongas have the added dimension, beyond that of a dance class, of adding the element of being chosen or not chosen for a dance. In addition to issues of rejection and exclusion that may emerge at a milonga, the attachments made during these intimate exchanges can create jealousy as well.
While these experiences offer the opportunity for tremendous interpersonal growth, they also contain the hazard of inhibiting progress or scaring the dancer away entirely. For this precise reason, Hawkes (2003) urged the marriage of psychotherapy and tango, in order to move through and process the emotional blocks and resistances that emerge.

**Tango Therapy in Research and Practice**

The dynamic Argentine tango draws a steady steam of new, worldwide devotees who are transformed by its benefits, many of whom begin to use tango as a philosophy of life and tool for self-discovery. Some of those who have experienced tango’s power in their own lives have proceeded to move tango out of the social setting and have begun utilizing it as a therapeutic intervention to assist others.

**Research.** While DMT itself is young as a profession and an area of research, tango as a form of therapy is in its infancy. The first International Conference on Tango Therapy took place in Rosario, Argentina, in July of 2008 (Castle, 2008). Public Radio International’s *The World* aired a report on the conference describing the event as largely attended by researchers, kinesiologists, physical therapists, and psychologists. Researchers at the conference presented recent findings that showed tango to increase mobility, memory, and cognition and help relieve depression. One such study, conducted by Patricia McKinley, a professor of kinesiology who is considered a pioneer in the field of tango therapy, found that in elderly subjects (Reynolds, 2008) an aspect of cognition called “divided attention” improved dramatically within a short period of time of dancing tango. The dance requires one’s attention to be divided between balance and navigation and therefore increases the dancers’ ability to dual task (Hackney, Kantorovich, &
Another study by Gammon Earhart, a physical therapy professor, found that subjects with Alzheimer’s disease showed more physical improvement overall by dancing tango than by dancing the American waltz or the fox-trot or than by practicing Tai Chi (Reynolds, 2008). Madeleine Hackney, Svetlana Kantorovich, & Gammon Earhart (2007) researched Argentine tango’s effect on those with Parkinson’s disease and found that the participants improved their balance and gait and reduced their falls. They chose to utilize tango because it is

a form of partnered movement that is less prescribed and structured than most social dances, because it involves movement initiation and termination, rotating (both stationary and while traveling), and moving in close proximity to another individual. [They] postulated that these movement characteristics would specifically target and improve the movement ability of [their] participants with PD who have difficulty initiating gait, difficulty turning, and may experience freezing when moving in close quarters. (Hackney, Kantorovich, & Earhart, 2007, p. 113)

Studies on the physical and cognitive benefits of tango have been getting visible recognition, but research on the capacity for psychological growth and interpersonal relating has been lagging behind. Don DeBoer (2006), in his dissertation on the use of partner dancing (salsa) as an adjunct to couples counseling, asserted that there are “almost no studies that specifically study instructed social dance as a form of DMT” (p. 28). Jenny Chafe (2003) added in her master’s thesis, Intimacy in Motion, that there is little to no “documentation of interventions combining movement and touch in dance as
an approach in couples therapy or family therapy” (p. 31). Certainly, dance/movement therapists’ and body-centered psychotherapists’ interventions have long been based in movement and often touch, but the synthesis of these with family and couples counseling is lacking in the literature. Chafe pointed out that even though family and couples therapists, such as Virginia Satir, David Schnarch, and Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks, use spatialization (see appendix A) and touch in their work, the introduction of partner dance as an adjunct is still brimming with potential.

In summary, while some dance/movement therapists or psychotherapists may be using tango in their clinical work, little has been written on it, and even less has been systematically studied. While tangueros are in agreement that the Argentine tango is first and foremost a dance of relationship, the application of this relationship to therapy needs to be further explored and examined by dance/movement therapists and body-centered psychotherapists.

**Practice.** Due to tango’s inherent therapeutic value, an increasing number of programs have emerged using this dance to benefit a wide range of populations. One example is a nonprofit organization in Miami called the Shimmy Club that opened its doors in 2007 with the sole intent of teaching tango to blind and visually impaired teenagers. *NBC News* reported that the teens have benefited tremendously cognitively, emotionally, and socially (Potter, 2007) by utilizing this dance that relies on kinesthetic communication.

There are few practitioners who actually consider themselves “tango therapists,” so the development of a grounded practice is still in progress. Christina Johnson (2008), an American counseling psychologist and body worker, attended the first International
Conference on Tango Therapy in Argentina and reported on the work presented. The presentations included “individuation [see appendix A] through tango; encountering the psyche’s shadow and using the alchemical process of transformation turning darkness into luminous light” (¶ 7); developing full sensory awareness; integration of Feldenkrais® (see appendix A) method with tango to develop body awareness; and the aspect of ritual in tango. Johnson herself presented a workshop entitled “Argentine Tango: The Relationship Dance” about the polarities and complementary functions of masculine and feminine energies (Johnson, 2008). This glimpse into the proceedings of the conference was quite valuable, since very little documentation is available in English.

More common than the dance/movement therapist or psychotherapist practicing tango therapy is the tango teacher who incorporates mind-body methods into the dance instruction. An example of this practice is Brigitta Winkler, an influential and sought-after tango dancer and teacher. She received a degree in Body-Mind Centering® (see appendix A), has studied Authentic Movement (see appendix A), and has incorporated these practices directly into her tango methodology. Arona Primalani (n.d.), who lives and works in San Francisco, created a method called Tango-Kinetics that fuses her certification in The Feldenkrais Method®, training in Body-Mind Centering®, and contact improvisation, with her tango instruction.

In 2006, Federico Trosero, an Argentinean psychotherapist and tango dancer, wrote Tango Terapia, the first book to directly address tango as therapy. However, Trosero wrote in Spanish, and thus his work was not available to English-speaking audiences. In 2009, Karen Woodley and Martin Sotelano, who are the representatives of tango therapy in the United Kingdom, released a book in English, An Approach to Tango
Therapy, that combined their clinical experiences with those of other established practitioners. Massimo Habbib, who is a Gestalt therapist, tango dancer, and director of Tango Therapy Italy, has also been a leader in the emergent field of tango therapy.

Woodley and Sotelano’s book (including a prologue by Habbib) offered basic methodologies and procedures for various formats of tango therapy. While this book is a succinct introduction to tango therapy, there is a need for the application and explanation of deeper psychological and somatic methods of working.

The most relevant work fusing tango, psychoanalysis, and DMT available in English are those of Laurie Hawkes (2003) and Jeanne Castle (2008). Both have run tango therapy workshops and written articles that successfully describe the use of tango as a psychoanalytic tool.

While Hawkes and Castle successfully identified the therapeutic issues of intimacy that present themselves through the Argentine tango, much more room for growth in the field exists. Before moving forward with further clinical tango therapy work, researchers need to gather more detailed, in-depth accounts of the relational experiences of tango dancers. By digging deeper into the individual experiences of the dancers, I will contribute to the research of tango as therapy by presenting a deeper understanding of tango’s relevancy in the fields of DMT, creative arts therapies, and body psychotherapy.

Most importantly, I hope to bridge the disciplines of DMT and tango and highlight the way that they support and inform each other as tools for relational growth. DMT is a psychotherapeutic tool that uses body movement as the modality for both assessment and treatment. The premise of DMT is that outer movement reflects inner
mental and emotional states, and therefore changing movement behavior can lead to change in the psyche and spirit (Levy, 2005). DMT aims to reconnect people with their own bodies—as the body is the most direct vehicle of expression and connection to others and to our environment.

As I entered the world of Argentine tango, I realized that elements of DMT were already present, although they were not being identified as such. Since the Argentine tango is considered the dance of relationship, it serves as an ideal learning tool for people to understand how they relate to others. The improvisational nature of tango requires keen attention to the partner’s subtle shifts in movement. In order to dance the highly interdependent tango, the dancers must have clear communication, sensitivity, trust, and balance—all of which are also the foundations of intimate relationships. Castle (2008) described the clear links between tango, relationship, and psychotherapy:

[Tango is] a dance of relationship made of rhythm, embrace, body touching body, finding acceptance through the meeting of eyes, silent communication signaled through muscles, breath, gesture. Except for body to body in a literal way, this seems to also name organizing forces that fuel the movement of the clinical hour.

(p. 191)

Not only does tango serve as a metaphor for relationship, but also it allows the formation of neuromuscular patterns that allow for healthy psychological and physical connections. In order to perform the tango technique, physical and emotional states must be in alignment.

However obvious the links between DMT and tango were to me as I began my research, I chose to set my hypotheses aside and first understand with openness the
experiences of tango dancers. Thus, this study was an exploration of how average, social tango dancers experienced the dance and whether or not relational concepts entered into their consciousnesses. Without imposing my own views or interventions, I gently assessed how inclined the participants were to discussing the psychological experiences of dancing the tango by asking the question *how is relationship experienced while dancing the Argentine tango?*
Methods

Methodology

In order to get a rich and in-depth understanding of my research topic and present it as such, I employed the qualitative methodology of phenomenological research in combination with artistic inquiry.

Phenomenology. Phenomenology is purely concerned with understanding the research participants’ lived experiences as closely as possible without judgments or presuppositions. The aim of phenomenological research is not to evaluate but rather to understand human experience. Put another way by van Manen (1997, as cited by Finlay, 2008),

Phenomenological understanding is distinctly existential, emotive, enactive, embodied, situational, and nontheoretic; a powerful phenomenological text thrives on a certain irrevocable tension between what is unique and what is shared, between particular and transcendent meaning, and between the reflective and the prereflective spheres of the lifeworld. (p. 345)

As a dance/movement therapist whose clinical orientation is primarily humanistic-existential, this approach to gathering information was a natural affinity. As in the humanistic approach of person-centered counseling, my approach in interviewing the participants was focused on evocative reflection (Rice, 1974), or highlighting and clarifying emotional content as it emerged. While I did have my own conception of the relational aspects of tango through my own personal experiences and through my research, I made a constant attempt to be guided by the emerging truths of my research participants over my own. I assumed the open stance that Dahlberg et al. (2001, as cited
in Finlay, 2008) described as “the mark of a true willingness to listen, see, and understand. It involves respect, and certain humility toward the phenomenon, as well as sensitivity and flexibility” (p. 5).

This research examined two major phenomena as experienced by the participants: the phenomenon of tango and the phenomenon of relationship. Holding a phenomenological stance, my interest was in understanding the essence of how those phenomena were perceived by six particular tango dancers. It was then my task to describe as accurately as possible the essence of tango and relationship as perceived by those dancers.

**Artistic inquiry.** Instead of describing the experiences of the participants through written description, I opted to present the experiences of my participants through methods of artistic inquiry. The arts—dance, music, film, poetry, drama—aim to draw the audience in and explore new ways of seeing, feeling, being in, and understanding the world. Hervey (2004) asserted that “multimedia presentations are often the most powerful” (p. 187). The chance for the audience to hear the actual words of the dancers and the nuances of their voices, and to view the subtleties of interaction and movement through video and live performance, offered a multidimensional and experiential description far beyond the scope of the written word.

In using artistic inquiry, the data analysis needed to be skillfully combined with my own aesthetic determinations. Hervey (2000) notes that, when making aesthetic decisions in artistic research, “not all data speak equally fluently, and for that reason, may not be included in the analysis” (p. 87). Once I determined the essence of the phenomena, I made decisions about what to include based on which pieces of data most effectively
communicated these essential meanings. Since I used video and audio formats to present my data, aesthetic considerations such as visibility, audibility, quality of sound, and coherence of thoughts were also crucial elements of my decision-making process. In editing the video and audio, I deconstructed the data in order to reconstruct and present the deeper and more essential truth of the experiences of the participants. In addition to the presentation of what was seen and heard in the research, I performed dance pieces aimed at deepening the audience’s understanding of the phenomena. The intention of my dancing was to further communicate what was experienced by embodying and expressing the words of the participants, as well as by illuminating and magnifying their experiences metaphorically.

**Procedure**

**Cultural considerations.** Through my personal experience dancing tango in the Chicago area, I have observed that the world’s nationalities and ethnicities are fairly well represented. The tango culture I have taken part in throughout America has been widely multicultural—Asians, Latinos, Europeans, and Americans of various descents, coming together to dance the Argentine tango. While I did not actively pursue a multicultural subject pool, the possibility of attracting diversity was present.

Another layer of richness I have stumbled upon in this tango community is the acceptance of same-sex tango dancing at *milongas*. Some believe learning both the leader and the follower roles makes them understand the dance better, while others simply enjoy having the freedom to dance both. Since role switching in tango is a widely acceptable practice in the United States, the attitude of traditional heterosexual machismo is minimized. Based on my personal experience, I would argue that because of the
acceptance of role switching, there is not a strict heterosexual imperative. In order to include women who preferred to lead or men who preferred to follow, I recruited subjects who considered themselves primarily “leaders” or “followers” regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. However, only male leaders and female followers contacted me during the recruitment.

Recruitment. During recruitment (see appendix B), I initially targeted beginning tango dancers, who had danced for less than two years. I was primarily interested in understanding the experience of beginners because of the steep learning curve of tango. I was interested in finding out more about the psychological processes of beginners and if relational concepts were in their conscious awareness. Since the clinical practice of tango therapy is my eventual goal and most of my clients will be new to tango, I wanted to understand more about how learning the technique affected the mental processes of beginners.

During my recruitment I found that more intermediate and advanced dancers were interested in the project than beginners. While I do not know for certain, the reasons for this phenomenon could be that having more experience made the participants more comfortable with the “performing” and filming required for the experiment. I also suspect that deeper involvement in tango gave rise to greater personal insight and interest in discussing the dance’s complexities. Beginners remain relatively unsure about most things during the early learning stages, and this uncertainty may be heightened by the intricacy of the Argentine tango. I remained flexible and made the choice to recruit all experience levels. This choice was very beneficial to the project, as the enthusiasm and knowledge of the more advanced dancers offered rich and substantial data.
In an effort to delimit, the participants chosen were single—not involved in a committed romantic relationship. Since switching partners is a large component of tango dancing, I was interested in exploring the phenomenon of intimacy in tango often called the “three minute romance.” While married couples or regular dance partners also dance with others in tango, I chose to focus on the experience of those who were not coupled. I was curious how singles approached the intimate, relational component of tango. While this topic was never directly addressed with the participants, it nevertheless served as a backdrop for the experience.

The research participants consisted of three male tango “leaders” and three female “followers” in the Chicago area. The participants were chosen individually and were neither formal dance partners nor romantic partners. Some may have previously danced with each other through their involvement with the local tango community. Two of the participants were in their 30s, two were in their 50s, and the other two were in their 40s and 60s. One participant was Asian-American and the rest were Caucasian-American. Their experience level ranged from five months to nine years of dancing tango. All of them had previous partner-dance experience, such as Latin and ballroom, ranging from one to eight years of dancing. The participant with the least amount of tango experience had 20 years of experience in multiple non-partner dances.

Participants were recruited by posting flyers (see appendix C) and networking for several weeks at five locations that hosted tango classes and milongas in the Chicago area. Digital advertisements were also posted on Chicago’s tango electronic bulletin board (tango-noticias.com) and on various Facebook (facebook.com) tango group web
pages and sent out through the American Tango Institute’s digital newsletter. The selection of participants was based on availability, matching criteria, and level of interest.

**Dance video session.** During the first step of the research, I video recorded the participants dancing tango socially for a single two-hour session. The recording took place at Ritz Tango Café, a venue for tango classes and milongas. Although the café had a few of its own customers, the dance floor was reserved for research participants only. Since the usual dining space was unavailable due to the filming, customers ordered and then left, causing minimal disruption. Because tango dancers are accustomed to dancing in public environments, I did not feel that this factor was an ethical concern. In fact, I aimed to record the participants without completely removing them from the social context in which they were accustomed to dancing. Two cameras were set up on opposite corners of the room. As is customary in tango, the music was arranged into tandas—three to five songs followed by a break. Dancers usually dance one tanda together and either switch partners or leave the dance floor. In keeping with my naturalistic approach, I did not give any guidelines to the participants for interacting with one another, other than that they dance “per usual.” They did, however, mostly switch partners at the end of each tanda and rotate so that all of the followers and leaders danced with each other for at least one tanda.

Over the next few weeks, I reviewed the video data. The video documentation served several purposes: to be used as first-hand data in the final presentation of findings, to allow me to analyze the participants’ interactions and movement behaviors in more depth, and, most importantly, to be a catalyst for discussion during the individual interviews that followed. For the purpose of the interviews, the video was edited into
customized sections highlighting each individual participant. Each participant was shown dancing with all three partners.

**Video-cued interview.** Following the video session, I arranged separate interviews with each participant. The videos went through a lengthy editing process before they were shown to the participants, and therefore the interviews took place a month after the filming. The interviews ranged in length from an hour to an hour and a half, and all took place within the same week. I mostly conducted the interviews in an enclosed study room at Columbia College Chicago’s library, although I interviewed some participants in their own homes to accommodate their schedules and traveling distance. I first showed each participant the customized video, which was about 15 to 20 minutes long. I removed the sound from the videos in order to eliminate extrasensory information and allow for the movement and nonverbal interactions to be the primary focus. The individual participant and I watched the video first without discussion in order for each person to get a sense of the whole. After the first viewing, I began audio recording the interview. We watched the video again, this time discussing the experience of relationship in these specific moments and partnerships. I encouraged the participants to discuss any thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations that either arose in the current moment of watching the video or that had arisen during particular moments of the filming. In accordance with the phenomenological research method, I allowed the content to emerge naturally. Aside from the initial question—“How is relationship experienced while dancing tango, particularly in these specific partnerships?”—other questions emerged as the interview progressed in order to clarify and deepen the content. If a participant’s focus remained largely external, I would ask questions about the
participant’s internal experience. Similarly, if the content became too abstract, I asked the
participants more concrete and specific questions. Such questions included “how did it
feel for you when he/she did that?” and “is that [abstract concept] common in your
personal experience?” As the interview progressed, the theme of relationship in tango
was opened up to include commentary on experiences beyond the research project, such
as past experiences in tango, present tango relationships outside of the study, and general
thoughts on the experience of relationship in tango.

Data Analysis

Video data. Following the first step of Amedeo Giorgi’s (2009)
phenomenological research method (although his method refers to interview transcripts
rather than video), I watched the videos in their entirety in order to get a broad sense of
what was presented. I watched the videos without sound so that my senses were focused
on the visual information, as well as any subsequent kinesthetic responses. I let the
participants’ nonverbal communication be received broadly and attempted to understand
their experiences without defining them. I accessed my kinesthetic empathy (see appendix
A) by bringing awareness to my own body sensations, thoughts, and feelings as I watched
the participants. As they interacted on the video, I identified with them kinesthetically, as
if I was experiencing what they were experiencing, and took notice of this information as
a source of understanding their experiences.

As mentioned previously, for the purpose of serving as video cues for the
interviews the videos were then edited into six individualized movies that highlighted
each person and their three dance partnerships. For example: one participant, who will be
called “leader one” (L1), was shown a 15 to 20 minute video of himself and each of the
three followers (F1, F2, and F3). The main consideration for inclusion of clips into the video was the degree of visibility of that particular participant. Other important phenomena that warranted inclusion were moments that showed a noticeable change in affect or the dynamic quality of effort (see appendix A), moments that were perceived as connection or disconnection, moments of fluidity or abruptness in movement, and moments with an emphasis on both the embrace through the torsos as well as the interaction and movement of the feet.

Audio data. The audio data served as the primary mode for understanding the participants’ experiences. Each video-cued interview ranged from 30 to 45 minutes resulting in approximately four hours of audio data total.

Using Giorgi’s (2009) method of data analysis, the interviews were deconstructed, followed by a development of themes, and then finally reconstructed into a whole. Giorgi’s method served as a guideline but was adapted to accommodate the unique merging of phenomenology, artistic inquiry, and alternative methods of gathering and presenting data.

Following the same approach as with the video data, I first listened to each audio interview in its entirety. Themes, concepts, and ideas began to emerge in my consciousness but were not made explicit at this stage in order for them to fully develop. I then extracted and transcribed specific sentences or phrases that felt significant in each interview. Significant content included expression of emotional, mental, and somatic states, insight, and specificity of personal experience regarding self-in-relation while dancing tango. Each participant was represented with a label—L1, L2, L3, F1, F2, F3—“L” representing a “leader” and “F” representing a “follower.” Each phrase was prefixed
with the participant’s label and the marked time on the audio so that the clip could be
easily located (e.g., L1:114).

As I tried to clarify my extraction process, my method of organization underwent
several transformations. I initially found it necessary to organize the information as I was
extracting, which was actually a hindrance to the process. Judi Marshall (1981) describes
her experience with this process in her article “Making Sense as a Personal Process”: “If
I’m not understanding things but still trying to fit them into categories, that doesn’t work;
or if I am understanding and the other bit is switched off, then I’m not getting anywhere”
(p. 398). In order to move forward I needed to broaden and relax my focus and release
any imposed organization over what I was selecting. This change served a few purposes:
First, it allowed me to transcribe a larger pool of phrases or meaning units (see appendix
A) from which I could then further edit and organize. Second, it deterred me from a
“premature resolution of ambiguity” (Hervey, 2000, p. 66) and allowed the data to
emerge and be understood naturally.

The research question was purposefully so open-ended and the topic at hand so
multilayered that what resulted was the emergence of themes too numerous for the scope
of this project. Regardless, there were four clear themes that emerged from the very
beginning, which I both released and reintroduced throughout the data analysis process.
These four parent themes encompassed all of the content: experience of self, experience
of other, experience of relationship, and experience of tango.

After the meaning units were transcribed, I categorized each statement into one of
the previously mentioned categories: Self, Other, Relationship, or Tango. I created a
separate document for each category but included all six participants’ comments within
them. For example, the “Self” document now contained everyone’s experiences of themselves.

The final step of analysis was to compare and contrast the themes of all of the participants and integrate the themes into a whole. I was concerned with both what was distinct in each person’s experience as well as what was similar among the group.

Qualitative research, especially that which relies on the creative process, allows for meaning making to happen through paths that are not necessarily linear or observable. Marshall (1981) calls the researcher the “ultimate translator” (p. 399)—the medium through which the meaning making occurs. Through this personal medium, I as the researcher was open to creating meaning and order through intuition, creativity (Hervey, 2000), inspiration, impressions, and unconscious data (Marshall, 1981).

**Audio presentation.** The final phase of refinement involved creating an audio piece that threaded the verbal commentary of all of the participants and the various themes in a way that was fluid and cohesive. This was the phase that required the most amount of trust in my personal intuition of what needed to be communicated and how. While playing with the words and sounds, I shaped, reworked, and trimmed down the elements of data using aesthetic determination and a keen focus on the relevancy contained in each piece of information in expressing the essence of relational experience in tango. Some aesthetic factors that contributed to the development of the audio presentation included audible clarity of speech and the use of phrases that were complete and self-contained so that they could be understood outside the context of the entire interview. Their speech was also edited so that pauses and verbal fillers (such as “umm”) were excluded in an effort to clarify and streamline the presentation.
**Video presentation.** As mentioned previously, the video data had several purposes, one of which was to serve a major part in the presentation of results. Once the full audio piece was finished, I edited the video to support the audio. As the participants spoke, I showed portions in the video that visually reflected their commentary. A decision to obscure the participants’ faces is discussed in the confidentiality section below.

**Dance choreography.** Just as the audio piece served as the framework for the video, the presentation’s choreography was based on my embodiment of the audio information. I listened to my completed audio presentation and improvised movement until I developed a choreographic manifestation of what was being expressed by the participants. Along with these movement responses, I also drew from my own personal experience in tango, my knowledge of the technique, and common movement exercises used in tango classes, with the aim of communicating broader concepts concerning tango and relationships that implicitly underscored the experiences of the participants.

The performance contained both choreographed elements and improvisation. Since tango is an improvisational dance, all of the tango performed was improvisational. Somer Surgit, the leader who performed with me, met with me two times before the performance to learn the choreography and so we could accustom ourselves to dancing improvisationally with one another. Six additional tango dancers performed in the finale of the performance, some who had danced with each other for years, and one couple who was paired for the very first time. They practiced with one another immediately preceding the show, thus accurately representing an ordinary, improvisational tango experience.
Confidentiality and Ethical Concerns

Researchers using the method of artistic inquiry are faced with particular ethical concerns because of its aesthetic approach. Hervey (2000) approaches this topic by asking:

Does poetic license give the artist the right to creatively manipulate the verbal or nonverbal statements of coresearchers or participants? What protection do informants or clients have against their words, emotions, and actions being misrepresented by the artist researcher . . . ? (p. 88)

I remained conscious of confidentiality issues related to the artistic and exhibitive nature of the presentation of results. I dealt with this matter by offering full disclosure of the intent of my research at the outset of the project, and, as it unfolded, I gave the participants several more opportunities to consent to the way they were being represented in my work.

Full disclosure regarding the nature of my research was provided during the selection process, and the participants were required to sign the informed consent form (see appendix B) prior to the filming of the tango session. This form communicated that confidentiality could not be guaranteed, due to the inclusion of video and audio footage, however participants’ names would never be identified.

At the end of the audio interviews—after the participants had seen the raw video footage and commented on their experiences—they were required to sign a second waiver (see appendix B) that allowed them to choose among various levels of exposure. The participants all gave consent to grant me full access to include any portion of their
video dancing. The same full consent was generally given for the audio—except for two participants, who consented as long as they approved the final selections.

Even though the participants specified that I could include their faces in the final video, I made the determination that it was preferable to maintain some anonymity and to only show their bodies from the neck down. My decision was partly motivated by my desire to protect the participants from potential repercussions within the local tango community; I did not want the sensitive material that was shared in this project to affect any of the participants’ roles within the dance community. I also wanted to emphasize the experiences, not the individuals having the experiences. While the faces hosted rich affect information, I decided that their exclusion allowed for a stronger presentation of the overall experience.

Close to the end of the process, after I had finished creating the final audio and video pieces, I was caught off guard by what I deemed to be a pressing ethical problem. Right before I showed the completed audio and video presentation to each of the participants, it occurred to me how sensitive this material might be to them. While they may have been comfortable with the information they had disclosed to me in private, they were now going to hear their own words reflected back to them through my filter as a researcher/clinician.

More importantly, they were going to hear the other participants’ thoughts and perceptions of them. Information that was spoken privately was now being presented to the other participants with whom they were involved. Even though they had given full consent to have the information shared in the research, it presented the problem of having the individuals talk about one another without the ability to have a dialogue. In other
words, the information concerning the partnerships was one sided. It is possible that the nature of the commentary might have been different if both partners were present, allowing each person a chance to respond to the other’s perception of them.

Because of my student status, I was very clear of my role as a researcher and my limitations as a clinician and therefore did not design the research to include therapeutic mediation. However, I became very aware of the sensitivity needed to present the information to the participants. I had already made efforts to protect the participants by taking out information that I deemed unnecessarily injurious, such as commentary on another’s body structure. However, it was crucial to maintain the integrity and essential truths contained within their experiences. Before showing them the combined video and audio presentation (which they watched individually online), I prepared them for the possible sensitivity of the material and offered them the opportunity to discuss feelings in response to the material with me personally or to set up a group post-session discussion as a means of closure. As intended from the start, they were also offered the chance to have any part of the audio or video removed from the final piece (see appendix B). While several participants did show an interest in individually getting together with me to discuss the content, no one requested that I discard or rework any of the audio or video within the final piece.

I took great care in making sure that the participants were represented fairly. The three stages of consent gave them the option to have control over what was presented, and at every stage the participants gave me full consent. In addition, all of the participants —except one who was out of town—felt comfortable enough to attend the thesis performance where their experiences were projected to an audience. These responses
from the participants led me to believe that I had successfully represented them artistically and handled the sensitive material ethically.
Results

Summary of Results

The question explored in this research was *How is relationship experienced while dancing the Argentine tango?* The results were presented experientially through a multimedia performance, which is documented in the DVD attached to this thesis. The following is a summary of the way the results were organized and the aesthetic reasoning that guided the work.

**Act I: Self.** “Self” statements were categorized as such when the participants spoke about themselves exclusively. These were self-concepts, reflections, perceptions, or experiences that existed apart from others, including reflections on pre-existing personality traits, thought or behavior patterns, or personal philosophies. One participant remarked on how tango amplified his own personality traits: “I knew I was like this before I started tango; it’s just that tango makes it come out in more obvious ways.” Self-statements also included present-moment reflections but were still distinct from reflections on the other person or the relationship. These statements could be labeled “self-talk”—intrusive thoughts in which we tend to judge or critique ourselves. At times the participants were also responding to the experience of seeing themselves on video.

Some of the major topics discussed concerning the “self” included self-criticism, perception, image, body awareness, comfort with own skill level, emotional vulnerability, and insecurity about being seen by others. The participants ranged from having lower self-concepts to very healthy ones and at times discussed ways in which they work through maladaptive thought patterns. The participants also described moments of transcendence in the dance.
In the presentation, I layered the sounds of the participants’ voices in order to simulate the experience of inner mental chatter. The full commentary was not always audible; just as one thought was ending another began. During this section, I performed a solo dance consisting of movement responses to the commentary. As the participants’ thoughts began to express moments of strength, clarity, or transcendence, the commentary grew more coherent. In response, my body became more vertical, and I moved forward to face the audience head on, expressing the movement from an internal space to an external one.

**Act II: Other.** Statements about “other” involved perceptions of the other person distinct from the participants themselves or the relationship dynamic. These included assumptions, opinions, or projections of pre-existing personality traits, thought or behavior patterns, physical characteristics, or personal philosophies concerning the other person. The participants spoke mostly about the personality of the other person by using words such as “gentle,” “loving,” “playful,” “engaging,” “curious,” “introverted,” “bitter,” “passive,” and “conscientious.” They also remarked on the other person’s perceived technical skill and approach or philosophy in dancing tango. This included commenting on the other’s competency and rigidity or flexibility in approach toward dancing. In addition, I placed into this category assumptions concerning the other person’s mental and emotional states and processes during the dance filming, such as describing the other as “nervous.”

During the live-dance portion of the presentation, the choreography of the “other” highlighted the separateness between me and my dance partner. I used the *molinete* (see appendix A) tango figure—one rotating around the other—as a metaphor for the
observing partner who places his or her opinions and projections onto the other. I also made reference to the interplay of power dynamics.

I made the decision to exclude all verbal commentary in this section and use only my and my partner’s movements to express the experience. This decision was made because the emphasis of the project was on relationship, and the concepts of self and other were ultimately subcomponents contained under this umbrella. It was less necessary to know all of the details of what was said in these sections and more important to understand the idea that the experience of self and other were present and significant. It was also an ethical consideration. The opinions expressed about the other participants were often quite personal and may have been received negatively. Expressing these points of view metaphorically seemed more effective and appropriate.

**Act III: Relationship.** When the participants spoke about the dyad as a unit, the statements were determined to be about “relationship.” The “relationship” category was split into two sections: The first section included discussion solely of the relationships within the research study. The second included experiences of tango outside the study.

One of the major themes revealed by the moment-by-moment dance relationships in the study was ways in which the participants coped with the differences between them. If there was a disparity in experience level, some participants used it as an opportunity to take a mentorship role, while others experienced it as primarily a hindrance to dancing. Connected to this was the importance of receptivity in hearing feedback. Differences in dance styles—more improvisational versus more structured—also needed to be reconciled in the dance partnerships.
The participants also discussed what allowed for a sense of comfort or connection in the dance: primarily familiarity with one another, rapport, and attitude or personality traits of the other person, including forgiveness, curiosity, and receptiveness.

This section shows the edited video presentation of the actual participants during the tango filming. Each of the nine pairings were shown dancing with one another, along with a voice-over of their personal commentary. It was created so that the audience felt as if they were listening to the thoughts of the dancers as they danced. Hearing each partner’s experience in tandem, viewers could become aware of the similarities and differences of the dancers’ perceptions of the partnership. Viewers could also become aware of the changing dynamics in the group and get a sense of how many variables were involved in each dyad.

The second section of the relationship category extended into discussion about the participants’ experiences of relationships in tango at large, beyond the scope of the filming. The participants described the experiences of nonverbal communication, intimacy, collaboration, bonding, leading and following, mentoring, giving and receiving verbal feedback, and feeling connected or disconnected within the tango dance.

The choreography of this section embodied those experiences listed above, guided by the audio clips of the participants as a backing track. As before, this section was danced by me and my partner. Contained in this choreography were several tango exercises used in class, which also served as strong visual metaphors for the themes conveyed. Once we moved into the actual tango dancing, the audience experienced the real, intimate, improvisational nature of tango. The performance slowly built from the beginning, and, at this point, the connectivity in the dyad was at its peak.
Act IV: Tango. The final category documents statements made regarding tango as the vehicle or container of the relationship. This included discussion of the experiences of learning and practicing tango, participants’ personal interests in tango and how the dance serves them in their lives, the “addictive” nature of the dance, and the love of tango music.

Another important topic that was placed into this category involved relationships outside of the dyad, those with members of the larger tango community. The sense of camaraderie experienced, the deep friendships formed over time through dancing with one another and sharing a common passion, was an important part of the participants’ experiences and enjoyment of tango.

To mirror this experience of relationship in tango as a community experience during the presentation, three other couples joined me and my partner for a final, improvised tango dance. The music was celebratory, and the dancers a mix of cultures, personalities, and dance styles rotating around one another on a shared dance floor. The audience experienced the social phenomenon of tango and the dynamism of the group experience.
Discussion

This artistic inquiry was a dynamic reflection of the relational experience in tango. As this study was primarily phenomenological, its main aim was to illuminate the lived experiences of the participants and effectively accomplished this goal through a multimedia performance. Linda Finlay (2008) describes the success of a phenomenological study as “its relative power to draw the reader into the researcher’s discoveries allowing the reader to see the worlds of others in new and deeper ways” (p. 7). Both the participants and the audience of the performance were impacted by the research in meaningful ways.

Participants’ Responses to the Study

The participants expressed both enthusiasm and gratitude for their involvement in this research project. The project sparked an interest in discussing the research further with one another and they made attempts to do so of their own volition. While some impulse to discuss with one another initially occurred after the individual interviews, there was even more discussion sparked among the participants after they heard the reflections of others in the final video.

The research opened a door for emotional self-disclosure of the participants, and the presentation served as a dynamic reflection of their experiences. In several social tango settings after the research, participants approached me wanting to discuss thoughts that arose in response to the process. They shared with me personal information regarding familial dynamics and life experiences and reflected on how they have been shaped by them, and hence how they interact with others in life and during tango.
One participant in particular was eager to communicate with me about how the process had affected him. He was remorseful about the way he spoke about others during the interviews. His awareness of his tendency toward self-criticism (and subsequent criticism of others) was heightened. He shared with me his struggle with what he called a “fine line between an inferiority complex and a superiority complex.” While some other participants were very self-disclosing during the interviews, this particular participant’s self-disclosure happened mostly after hearing the feedback from the others presented in the research. His focus shifted after the presentation of results from being primarily external—thinking about the other person and about tango technique—to a communication of his deeper, internal reflections. Had we been in a therapeutic setting, this would have been a rich topic to explore.

This participant also remarked that he could identify with the range of experiences that everyone else had described. This was a testament to the power of group disclosure in creating a sense of connectedness and universality of experience. The realization that they had all shared similar experiences at some point in their tango journey allowed him to feel connected to the group.

He took the process a step further by initiating a discussion with one of the followers in the study with whom he had had difficulty. He expressed to her that he had some major insights after hearing the reflections of others. This leader told her that if she “had better dances with the other two men then [he] must be doing something very wrong and something major had to change.” He shared with her his sadness that she may not have an interest in dancing with him again. Since then, this dancer has made several
attempts to repair the connection between the two, much to the surprise and satisfaction of the follower.

These were all important shifts for this particular participant, whose behavior often seemed to alienate him from other dancers. Through the facilitation of a mediator, ideally a dance/movement therapist, these group and couple dynamics could be richly explored and worked through further.

**Responses from Attendees of the Research Performance**

The aim of the research presentation was to bridge the disciplines of tango and DMT: introducing the richness of tango to the DMT community and emphasizing the psychological components to the tango community. Consequently, the attendees did represent a cross-section of people from various backgrounds: tango dancers, dancers with other backgrounds, dance/movement therapists, academics, psychologists, friends, and family.

The second half of the presentation consisted of an informal question-and-answer session, giving the audience an opportunity to ask questions about and comment on the research and performance. A head faculty member of the DMT and Counseling program at Columbia College Chicago remarked that although she had seen tango countless times in the media, she never truly understood its subtleties and complexities until seeing this presentation. The performance was regarded as a powerful, intimate reflection of the tango experience. Just as a therapist aims to be a poignant mirror of the clients’ experiences, so did this presentation effectively reflect the inner lives of these six tango dancers.
Tango dancers in the audience were brought into contemplation about their own experiences of intimacy in life and dance. One tango dancer remarked that the presentation gave him a lot to think about, which is the aim of any successful work of art or research project. Another audience member from the tango community reflected that the core of what humans strive for is connection and intimacy, but critique acts as a roadblock. He commented that in his experience most of the time people are either critiquing themselves or critiquing their partner, thus inhibiting the ability to connect. Another tango dancer commented on how the themes of connection and disconnection made an impression on him. The use of physical space in the performance was representative for him of the concept that one must disconnect from the other and reconnect to oneself in order to reconnect again with the other. Indeed, as referred to in the title of this thesis, the concepts of physical and psychological spaces in intimate relationships are major themes of the results.

After the performance, several tango dancers approached me wanting to share their personal experiences. A female tango dancer gave an account of a recent private tango lesson during which she broke down into tears after being asked by her male teacher to simply surrender to him. It was a powerful experience to share with me in passing. Perhaps that teacher was able to hold his student emotionally and physically as she released these emotions, but the addition of grounded therapeutic skills could have deepened the emotional work substantially. Applying the Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) (see appendix A) concept of flow (see appendix A) in a DMT session could have been integrated to explore her movement from bound to free flow.
Application to the Field of DMT

While the primary goal of this thesis project was to understand the experience of relationship while dancing tango, I also wanted to explore the feasibility of using the Argentine tango as a form of DMT. The strong response from the tango dancers in the audience suggested that these experiences are likely on the minds of many tango dancers, and the ground is fertile for discussion. The fact that the participants had taken initiative to actively discuss their thoughts and feelings with one another suggested that there could be a more universal interest in verbally processing internal experiences in a group setting. The participants’ deep insights provided both evidence for the success of the project in stimulating introspection and the rich need for a dance/movement therapist to facilitate the process. All of these outcomes present a strong case for the merging of the worlds of tango and psychotherapy.

This study initiated dialogues between tango dancers, created empathy between participants and the larger tango audience alike, sparked an interest in the psychotherapeutic use of tango dance, increased awareness of the potential of tango as a relational model, demonstrated connections between tango and DMT, and opened doors for future explorations concerning the relational and psychotherapeutic aspects of tango.

The ground is fertile for further research on the therapeutic value of the Argentine tango as a tool for interpersonal growth. This project opens the door for further inquiries, such as: Can the Argentine tango be used clinically as a form of DMT to facilitate healthy, intimate relationships? How effectively does the tango experience reflect one’s interpersonal life off of the dance floor? Is a person’s attachment style reflected in their
physical and emotional attitudes during tango? Does transformation in the tango relationship translate to transformation in one’s personal relationships?

Another important question is: What may be some obstacles to using tango as a therapeutic intervention? The major one may well be that learning tango is hard—some even go so far as to say that it takes a lifetime to learn (Thomas & Sawyer, 2005). During my time taking tango lessons, I have seen many new students come and never return. The elderly Brazilian subjects in Maristela Lima and Alba Vieira’s (2007) study rated tango as having a high degree of difficulty. Further investigation would need to be done on if and how the dance could be modified to lessen the technical learning curve and amplify the relational component in order to widen the scope of populations suited to work within the tango therapy modality.

Thomas and Sawyer (2005) add that tango is not for the faint of heart and that it requires passion, confidence, and the ability to withstand being humbled repeatedly in order to progress. Just as easily as one might choose to leave a difficult relationship, the physical and emotional challenges that arise in the tango relationship may inhibit many from continuing. Alas, just as in psychotherapy, no matter how strongly the therapist believes in the vehicle, ultimately its success relies on the client’s commitment to doing the necessary work. While the Argentine tango holds strong potential as a tool for personal and interpersonal growth, further investigation is needed into ways of facilitating accessible and effective methods of tango therapy.

The next step involves developing a grounded method of practice for use with both groups and couples. Therapeutic goals could include increasing interpersonal communication skills, developing empathy, improving emotional expression, enhancing
personal responsibility in relationship, and acquiring greater personal insight and development. Other potential investigations include the incorporation of psychological theories, such as analytical, existential, self-psychology, emotion-focused, or internal family systems, to further develop the concepts of self, other, and relationship in tango.

The potential for using DMT for physical and psychological integration in tango abounds. The interdependent nature of tango requires that each partner be integrated within themselves or else the dance partnership will suffer. This speaks to Schnarch’s (2009) model of healthy partnership, whereby intimacy and connection are actually increased if each partner is differentiated and has a grounded sense of self. In tango this is physically demonstrated by the requirement that each partner stay balanced on his or her own axis, while creating an additional axis with their partner in order to form the connection. Going along with this idea, Hackney (2002) described Bartenieff Fundamentals’ core philosophy as inner connectivity as the precursor to outer expressivity. Bartenieff’s upper-lower connectivity is the ideal framework for developing the ability to stay grounded yet connected in relationship and in tango. Dancers could further explore the skill of using the lower part of their bodies for both stability and mobility. The exploration of their upper bodies would facilitate both the ability to reach out and further connect to their partners or the need to set firmer boundaries between the partners. The dance frame in tango offers the framework for exploration of yielding, pushing, reaching, and pulling, and the ways in which these enhance or detract from the partnership.

In addition to the development of upper-lower connectivity, there lies the even more foundational exploration of breath and shape flow (see appendix A). Both tango and
personal relationships require that partners attune to each other’s physical and even psychological rhythms. In DMT, breath is understood to be the foundation of all movement. In addition, it is one of the most efficient ways to attune with another person, creating connection, rapport, and empathy. Much of tango is danced in a closed embrace in which the upper torsos are pressed against one another, close enough that the rhythms of one’s heart and breath are easily discernable. DMT offers the perfect opportunity for guided exploration of shaping the torsos and discovery of how one adapts or molds to their partner through their shaping qualities (see appendix A). The tango frame requires the torsos to grow three dimensionally: spreading horizontally, rising vertically, and advancing in the sagittal dimension, all aiding in increasing the connection between partners.

Another way that DMT could be used in tandem with tango is by exploring effort and what effort qualities best support the role of the leader and the role of the follower. In addition, tango is a dynamic interplay of structure and improvisation. This speaks to the principle of DMT that “functional capacities underlie expressive qualities” (Hackney, 2002, p. 19) and the idea that a balance between fighting and indulging efforts (see appendix A) is the key to being integrated interpersonally and intrapersonally.

I have outlined a few of the ways that DMT and tango are beautifully suited to work together as a framework for exploring self-in-relation, but these suggestions are only the beginning of a very rich exploration.

The experience of relationship within the Argentine tango is rich, dynamic, complex, and varied. While styles and personal preferences allow for a multitude of variations, the essence of tango remains: physical connection through improvisation. The
dancers create one unified dance while maintaining each person’s individual role, providing a rich metaphor for the capacity to be intimately connected yet differentiated. The experience of resonant connection with one’s tango partner is experienced by many as blissful and transcendent and some tangueros have even turned tango into their spiritual practice. However, relational and internal conflicts may rise quickly to the surface through tango, and transformation is required in order to progress. The incorporation of DMT in order to facilitate relational growth through tango has enormous potential and is ready for further investigation. Until then, just as one of the research participants remarked, “I hope we all keep dancing.”
References


http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Fire+on+the+dance+floor:+get+intimate+with+Argentine+tango+with...-a0159328729


Appendix A: Definition of Terms

*El Abrazo:* “The hug.” In tango the term refers to the embrace or the dance position of the arms and upper torso.

*Anima/Animus:* Concepts from Carl Jung’s school of analytical psychology. *Anima* refers to universal feminine characteristics or the inner feminine personality in the unconscious psyche of the male. *Animus* refers to universal male characteristics or the inner masculine personality in the unconscious psyche of the female (VandenBos, 2007).

*Authentic Movement:* A method of dance/movement therapy created by Mary Starks Whitehouse and based on a Jungian approach to exploring unconscious material (Authentic Movement Institute, n.d.).

*Axis:* A virtual line representing a central, vertical throughway around which one’s balance is maintained (Guizar, n.d.).

*Bartenieff Fundamentals:* “An approach to basic body training that deals with patterning connections in the body according to principles of efficient movement functioning within a context which encourages personal expression and full psychophysical involvement” (Hackney, 2002, p. 31).


*El Camino:* “The walk.” The foundational movement in tango dance; styles differ in approach, some leading with the heel, the ball of the foot, or with an external rotation of the foot. Regardless, all styles emphasize elegance in movement, and the foot always stays close to the ground (Vandekier, 2004).
**Candombe**: An African-Argentinean dance that preceded the tango. It fused various African dances and involved rhythmic, energetic, and often-improvised steps (Collier, 1995).

**Contradanza**: A Spanish form of dance and music popular in the 19th century originating from the European *contredanse* (Collier, 1995).

**Differentiation**: The psychological balance of connection and autonomy within intimate relationships. Schnarch (2009) defines this well as “the process by which we become more uniquely ourselves by maintaining ourselves in relationship with those we love” (p. 51).

**Effort**: An element of Laban Movement Analysis that refers to the feeling-tone of movement and the inner attitudes toward the motion factors of flow, weight, time, and space (Hackney, 2002). Indulging efforts (indirect space, light weight, sustained time, and free flow) “offer no resistance to the motion factors,” while fighting efforts (direct space, strong weight, sudden time, and bound flow) “move against the motion factors” (Bartenieff, 2002, p. 55).


**Figure**: A predetermined pattern of movements in partner dance; the vocabulary or building blocks of the dance.

**Flow**: Part of the Laban Movement Analysis category of effort that refers to the flowing or binding of movement and emotions (Hackney, 2002).
**The Follow:** The movement response of the designated follower to the initiation of movements from the leader.

**Frame:** The shape of the upper body maintained by dancers in partner dancing (Pittman, Waller, & Dark, 2009). Frame positioning varies depending on the school of thought but is the structural foundation for the communication between the leader and follower. The frame is held “firmly and consistently” (Thomas & Sawyer, 2005, p. 62).

**Habanera:** A Cuban form of syncopated dance evolving from the *contradanza*, popular in the late 19th century (Collier, 1995).

**Individuation:** A critical component of Carl Jung’s psychological theory describing an “instinctual force that continuously pushes us towards wholeness and realization on our particular meaning in life” (Kaufmann, 1989, p. 120).

**Kinesthetic Empathy:** Awareness of one’s bodily, sensory, and emotional reactions while observing others. One of the major clinical methods introduced by DMT pioneer Marian Chace (Levy, 2005).

**Laban Movement Analysis (LMA):** A system of identifying and describing body movement both quantitatively and qualitatively. Developed by Austrian choreographer and philosopher Rudolf Laban. LMA classifies movement within these four major categories: body, effort, shape, and space. (Bartenieff, 2002).

**The Lead:** The initiation of movements from the designated leader in the dance; the communication or suggestion of movements to the follower.

**Meaning Units:** A way of organizing information in Amedeo Giorgi’s Descriptive Phenomenological research method. Sections of information are separated when the researcher deems there to be a shift in meaning (Giorgi, 2009).
Milonga: (1) An event or place where tango or milonga is danced; (2) syncopated music from the Rio de Plata region of Argentina and Uruguay that preceded the tango and is generally faster and more upbeat than tango; (3) a form of dance that uses the same basic elements as tango but is faster, more rhythmic, uses less space, and requires a greater relaxation of the body (Collier, 1995).

Molinete: “Little windmill.” A tango figure consisting of the follower moving in a circle around the leader (Paz & Hart, 2008).

Shape Flow: An LMA concept referring to the patterns of growing and shrinking of the body that “provide a means to express and structure internal feelings about relationships” (Amighi, Loman, Lewis, & Sossin, 1999, p. 225).

Shaping Qualities: An LMA concept that gives “information about the attitudinal process of changing the shape of the body” (Hackney, 2002, p. 222) and the direction in which it is opening or closing. Shaping qualities give information about the person’s relationship to the environment.

Spatialization: An intervention used in family therapy that explores the physical proximity and distance of family members from one another as an expression of psychological closeness or separateness (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981, as cited in Chafe, 2003).

Tanda: Three or four dance songs of a similar style played sequentially (Paz & Hart, 2008), separated by a brief interlude of nontango music. Tandas are generally danced with the same partner; parting from this custom would imply a serious dissatisfaction within the dance.
**Tanguero/Tanguera:** An expert of tango music, dance, or history; one who has a serious passion for any part of tango culture (Paz & Hart, 2008).

**Tantra/Tantrism:** Practices and doctrines within Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. The unifying concept is that liberation can be achieved by accessing divine energy through the body (Reese, 1996).

**Taoism/Tao:** A mystical religion from China based on the *Tao Te Ching* scripture written within the sixth to fourth centuries B.C. The underlying view is that understanding the way of the Tao is unattainable through reason and instead must be understood through one’s whole being (Reese, 1996).

**Upper-Lower Connectivity:** An element of Irmgard Bartenieff’s Patterns of Total Body Connectivity that refers to effective neuromuscular patterning between the upper and lower sections of the body. Psychological implications of this body patterning involve supporting ourselves, moving forward, setting boundaries, and connecting to others (Hackney, 2002).

**Yin/Yang:** Chinese terms referring to the opposing and complementary forces of nature. *Yin* is the feminine, yielding element, while *yang* is the masculine, active element (Reese, 1996).
Appendix B: Consent and Correspondence

Initial Consent Form
June 24, 2009

Columbia College Chicago

Informed Consent Form
Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study

Title of Research Project: The space between us: The experience of relationship within the Argentine tango. A phenomenological artistic inquiry.
Principal Investigator: Greta Polo: [email] : [phone number]
Faculty Advisor: Jessica Young, MA, LCPC, ADTR, GLCMA: [email]: [phone number]
Chair of Thesis Committee: Lenore W. Hervey, PhD, ADTR, NCC, REAT: [email]: [phone number]

INTRODUCTION
I am a dance/movement therapy and counseling graduate student at Columbia College Chicago working on research for my final thesis project. You are invited to participate in my research study which intends to explore the psychological and somatic experience of relationship in the Argentine tango. This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate and any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. You are encouraged to take some time to think this over. You are also encouraged to ask questions now and at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. This process is called ‘informed consent.’ You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

You are being asked to participate because you are an Argentine tango dancer who dances regularly (1–2 times per week or more) in the Chicago area, and whose
relationship status is single. By volunteering to be a part of this project you may have also shown an interest in exploring, discussing, and gaining insight on the relational aspects of the Argentine tango.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of this thesis project is to gain an in-depth understanding of the various dimensions of relationship experienced by novice Argentine tango dancers. The project’s aim is to serve as a springboard for developing future clinical applications that combine tango with dance/movement therapy, counseling, and psychotherapy.

PROCEDURES
- Participants will be selected and screened for the following criteria:
  - 18 or older.
  - Dances the Argentine tango regularly (1–2 times a week or more).
  - Is presently uninvolved in a committed romantic relationship (change of status during the research process will not disqualify the participant).
  - Identifies themselves as either primarily a “leader” or a “follower”
- Participants will meet as a group one time at Ritz Tango Café and will dance tango as per a typical milonga, for approximately 1 1/2 hours. For research purposes, this will be a closed event containing only the participants of the research study. The dancing will be video recorded.
- After I review the video data and select portions that seem relationally important, I will meet with you individually to show you the video data. The video will be used to aid your reflections as I interview you on your experience of relationship in tango. I will audio record our interview. The interview will occur in a private room at Columbia College Chicago and will last for approximately 1–2 hours. This is the end of your involvement with the research.
- The audio interviews will be used to inform the answer to my question “what is the experience of relationship in the Argentine tango?”
- The findings, which will include partial usage of the actual video recordings, audio recordings, and direct quotes, will be used to create a multimedia performance piece that will be presented in front of a live audience.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:
- Participate in one session of dancing tango with other pre-selected participants while being video taped.
- Participate in one audio-recorded in-depth interview that explores your experience of relationship in the Argentine tango with the aid of a video cue.
- Allow permission for the content of the research to be used for a live performance piece.

POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS
I believe there are few risks associated with this research study; however, possible discomfort may involve having your voice, video of you dancing, or your direct quotes presented during my research performance. You have the right to request that any particular piece of data not be used in my presentation. I will attempt to minimize
discomfort by getting your final approval on the research presentation/performance before it is shown. There will be a deadline for approval (yet to be decided) which will require a signed consent.

**POSSIBLE BENEFITS**
The possible benefits of being in this study include the possibility for self-reflection on the relational aspects of tango, and the subsequent chance to be heard, witnessed, and represented in an artistic work. Your participation will also contribute to the emerging field of tango dance therapy.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**
I can not ensure your confidentiality due to the nature of the project which involves video and audio footage. However, your names will remain private. I will change the names of the research participants when writing about you or when talking about you with others, such as my supervisors. No one else besides me will have access to the original data. You have the option of requesting that your original data be destroyed when the study is complete. However, the final product that will include portions of the video and audio will remain in my possession indefinitely. At the conclusion of this study, I may publish my findings or present at conferences.

**RIGHTS**
Being a research participant in this study is voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You may also refuse to participate at any time without penalty. You have the right to withdrawal all and any data from the study up until a month before the project is complete (date will be specified at a later date). If you have any questions about the study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the researcher or the faculty advisor listed above.

**Who do I contact if I have questions about the study?**
I will be happy to answer any question(s) you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the principal investigator Greta Polo at [email] and [phone number] or the faculty advisor. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Columbia College Chicago Institutional Review Board staff (IRB) at 312-369-7384.

**PARTICIPANT STATEMENT**
This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had opportunity to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research or my rights as a research participant, I can ask one of the contacts listed above. I understand that I may withdraw from the study or refuse to participate at any time without penalty. I will receive a copy of this consent form.
<table>
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<th>Participant Signature</th>
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<tr>
<td>Signature of Person Obtaining Consent</td>
<td>Print Name</td>
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Video and Audio Permissions
July 28, 2009

Before continuing with my research I would like to know how much access I will have to the data you have provided in the video and interview. Currently I plan on presenting my thesis at Columbia College Chicago, and at the American Dance Therapy Association conference in Portland. This consent form covers these two events plus the recorded video that will be available to scholars who view my thesis (in digital format). If I am asked to present at any other venue, I will get your permission once more.

Please choose one of the following:

- I consent to having any portion of the video of my dancing used and shown for the thesis project.
- I consent to having sections of the video of my dancing used and shown for the thesis project as long as I am shown and approve of the sections.
- I consent to having sections of the video of my dancing used and shown for the thesis project as long as I am shown and approve of the sections, but I do not want my face shown.
- I do not want any portion of the video of my dancing used and shown for the thesis project.

Please choose one of the following:

- I consent to having any portion of the audio interview used and heard for the thesis project.
- I consent to having sections of the audio interview used and heard for the thesis project as long as I approve of the sections.
- I consent to having sections of the audio interview used and heard for the thesis project but only as reenacted by the researcher in her performance (i.e. your voice will not be heard).
- I do not want any portion of the audio interview used and heard for the thesis project, except for the written portion of the thesis.

Thank you!
Greta Polo

______________________     ______________________     _______________
Name                  Signature                  Date
Final Approval  
Feb. 13, 2010  

From: Greta Polo [email]  
To: [research participants]  
Subject: Video online!  
Date: Sat, Feb 13, 2010 at 5:40 PM  

Good news! I posted the video online so I don’t need to chase you around with my computer. It is password protected and will only be up until you all approve of the content. Also, please refrain from showing others (invite them to the show!).

Go to: [website]  
Password: [password]  

Before you view, a few things: I am so thankful that you all were so candid and spoke your truth during this process. Some of the content may be sensitive for you, but my hope is that you not take it too personally and be able to view it as rich content for discussion. If any of you are interested we can have a get together to bring closure to the process and chat about anything that was sparked in you.

About the video: The first section is audio only (with me embodying your words) and it represents reflections on yourselves. It is representative of mental chatter, so if it sounds confusing...it’s supposed to. The second section is performance only (reflection of the other person). The third part is the video and is the most important for you to view and hear. This is the “relationship” part of the presentation and reflects both the here-and-now experience as well as general thoughts on relationship in tango. I dance with Somer for the second part. Lastly is the “tango” part, which is the fun finale, in which other dancers join me.

If everything is OK by you, just respond by email. If you have concerns, call me—[phone number]

If I don’t talk to you or see you soon, I hope to see you at the performance!

Oh and by the way, [participant names], I still need the following info from you:

> Age bracket (20’s, 30’s, 40’s, 50’s, 60’s):
> Race/ethnicity:
> Years dancing tango (at time of study):
> Previous dance experience?
> Previous partner dance experience?

Tango on,
Greta, your grateful researcher
Appendix C: Marketing Materials

Recruitment Advertisement

INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN

TANGO RESEARCH?

Looking for research participants to be a part of a master’s thesis study on the experience of relationship within the Argentine tango.

PARTICIPANTS MUST:
- be 18 or older
- have been dancing Argentine tango as a “follower” for under 2 years or as a “leader” for under 4 years
- dance regularly (1-2 times a week)
- be single (presently uninvolved in a committed romantic relationship)
- be available to meet on Wednesday June 24 from 5-7pm and schedule one additional meeting at the beginning of July at your convenience
  All sexual orientations and ethnicities welcome

WHAT’S IN IT FOR YOU?
- contribute to exciting research in the blooming field of tango dance therapy!
- be represented in an artistic work
- explore, discuss, and gain insight on the relational aspects of the Argentine tango
- free practical!
- one free beverage from the cafe

The study will involve one evening of video documented tango dancing, and one video-cued and audio recorded individual interview. Greta Polo, the researcher, will use this data to create a multimedia performance piece to present her findings. Greta is a master’s candidate in Dance/Movement Therapy and Counseling at Columbia College Chicago and a humble student of the Argentine tango.

For more info, kindly respond to Greta Polo by June 14 at [email] or [phone]
The Space Between Us

an artistic inquiry into

THE EXPERIENCE OF RELATIONSHIP
WITHIN THE ARGENTINE TANGO

SATURDAY 2/27/10 5:30PM

Join Greta Polo as she presents her dance/movement therapy thesis results through a multimedia and dance performance. She explores how local dancers experience the psychological aspects of relationship while dancing the Argentine tango. She will be joined by one of Chicago’s prized tango leads. Light snacks and refreshments will be served and a Q and A session will follow.

AMERICAN TANGO INSTITUTE
www.americantangoinstitute.com
325 N Hoyne, C-404,
Chicago, IL 60612
ABUNDANT STREET PARKING AVAILABLE
The Space Between Us

an artistic inquiry into
THE EXPERIENCE OF RELATIONSHIP WITHIN THE ARGENTINE TANGO

SATURDAY 2/27/10, AMERICAN TANGO INSTITUTE
Presented by Greta Polo in partial requirement for the Master’s degree in Dance/Movement Therapy and Counseling at Columbia College Chicago
INTRODUCTION

The Argentine tango is an improvisational social dance that consists of two people—possibly strangers or acquaintances—joining in an embrace, and engaging in an intimate non-verbal conversation. The connection between the partners is just as important, if not more than, the technique. The rich exploration of relationship is implicit, but is rarely discussed within the social setting. My attempt to bring this exploration into the therapeutic realm begins by asking the following question in my thesis study: How is relationship experienced while dancing the Argentine tango?

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The participants consisted of three male tango “leaders” and three female “followers,” whose relationship status was single, and lived in the Chicago area. The participants’ ages ranged from 30 to 65 and their experience level ranged from five months to nine years of dancing tango. The participants were chosen individually and were neither formal dance partners nor romantic partners with one another. Some may have previously danced with each other through their involvement with the local Chicago tango community. The selection of participants was based on availability, matching criteria, and level of interest.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research was conducted by first video recording the participants dancing tango socially for one two hour session. As per usual in tango, the dancers rotated partners. In a separate meeting each participant was interviewed and audio recorded individually. During this interview, each participant was shown portions of their documented dancing and asked to describe the somatic and psychological experience of each dance relationship.

The data was collected, analyzed, and examined for psychological relevancy and essential meaning through phenomenological research methods in an attempt to fully understand the participants’ experience. Artistic inquiry was used to express, as accurately as possible, the lived experience of the participants. The following performance is the presentation of the final results.
ABOUT THE RESEARCHER
Greta Polo considered herself a dancer from a very early age and since then has explored various dance forms including modern, contemporary, jazz, street, flamenco, and belly dance. While continuing to dance she pursued her visual interests through a career in graphic design. Feeling the call to return to her true passion of dance and seeking to work intimately with others, she found dance/movement therapy. Through the graduate program at Columbia College Chicago she began to solidify her life’s work as a dance therapist. Since then she has worked with refugees, persons with mental illness and substance abuse, and persons with traumatic brain injury. In 2008, during her second year of study, she began to feel another need—to learn a partner dance. The Argentine tango quickly drew her in with its richness and captured her heart and dedication. The possibilities of the fusion between dance therapy, counseling, and tango seemed abundant. This thesis project was her attempt to begin learning more about how these disciplines could be combined. It also provided the opportunity to communicate through multimodal means by using audio, visual, and movement arts.

THANKS
Huge thanks to Somer, Jorge at Ritz Café, and Netza and Alison at ATI for donating their time and space; all of my volunteers and dancers; my advisors, friends, and colleagues who gave me support and input; and above all my research participants for whom this project would not exist without—their enthusiasm, courage, honesty, and insight were invaluable.
ACT I : SELF
Audio: Nuevo Tango – Astor Piazzolla (excerpt)
Dance: Greta Polo

ACT II : OTHER
Audio: A La Gran Muneca – Carlos Di Sarli (excerpt)
Dancers: Greta Polo and Somer Surgit

ACT III : RELATIONSHIP
PT. 1
Audio: Resurreccion Del Angel – Astor Piazzolla (excerpt)

PT. 2
Audio: Borges Y Paraguay – Bajofondo Tango Club (excerpt)
Dancers: Greta Polo and Somer Surgit

ACT IV : TANGO
Audio: Decollage – Supervielle
Dancers: Greta Polo, Somer Surgit, Albert Chin, Terri Lopez,
Phoebe Grant, Leroy Hearon, Marco Mambelli, Jamila Kekulah Kinney

Q AND A

Donations kindly accepted
Appendix D: Performance Photographs
All photos by Matt Jencik, 2010.