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## **Using Space, Time and Energy**

By Keith Eric Grant, PhD, NCTMB

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*If you can walk, you can dance; if you can talk, you can sing*

- Dinka Sudan proverb

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As a physicist, this title tempts me to lead you into a discussion of the origin and development of the universe.

Instead, I will delve into the ways we perceive and use the personal universes we create. Understanding more about how our clients occupy, move and perceive their bodies can help us to better facilitate their well-being and achievement of their embodied potential.

### **Cultural Perceptions of Space and Time**

From the multicultural perspective of anthropologist Edward T. Hall (*The Hidden Dimension, The Silent Language, The Dance of Life*), there is great diversity in how we create our reality and communicate it nonverbally. Within the range of these cultural differences lie differences of our family backgrounds and personal temperaments. These differences shape our expectations for the use of space, time and energy/effort.

Hall explores the cultural differences in how we surround ourselves with bubbles of individual space. We have distinct separations that we find comfortable for the increasingly close categories of public, social, personal, and intimate contact. Our bubbles can range from being substantial in the United States and northern Europe to being much smaller to almost nonexistent in Mediterranean, Latin American, and Arab cultures. Not surprisingly, frequency of casual touch often varies inversely to the perceived need for separation. Interactions that mix different cultural definitions of personal space can leave one party feeling

invaded, while the other feels unexpectedly rebuffed and dismissed. Respecting boundaries can be far from a simple matter, because the unwritten rules of nonverbal coexistence vary from person to person and culture to culture. Vigilant awareness and the flexibility to respond quickly to nonverbal feedback are often required of us.

Hall also focuses on cultural differences in our use of time. Monochronic time is linear, tangible, and divisible. In monochronic time, events are scheduled one item at a time and this schedule takes precedence over interpersonal relationships. In contrast, polychronic time supports the simultaneous occurrence of many things, intense involvement with people, and an emphasis on completing interpersonal transactions that supercedes fixed schedules. People in polychronic cultures often conduct business in the middle of a central room with multiple interactions intertwined, rather than in private offices. The different views of time and context between monochronic and polychronic cultures create major differences in the steps to establishing rapport and in expectations for how it will subsequently be reinforced - important considerations as the new census reveals the diversity of our potential clients.

### **Personal Embodiment in Space, Time, and Energy**

Now I want to return to a theme that I brushed briefly across last month. Dance instructors Constance Schrader (*A Sense of Dance*) and Sandra Cerny Minton (*Body & Self: Partners in Movement*) both look at the body and movement in terms of space, time, and energy/effort. Schrader illuminates why understanding these concepts is important to our massage work:

The elements of dance are part of daily life because movement is part of daily life. When you think of time, space, and effort remember that these are not just dance elements, they are, in fact, elements we use to make our movements communicate the effect life has on us. What can you learn about yourself by considering the way that you deal with the elements of movement in daily life? You bring this awareness with you to your study of dance. Do you prefer slow, sustained movement? Do you always stand in the same place in class? Do you prefer to move by yourself or with another dancer? Do you prefer to move in straight lines or in curving pathways? Do you change levels easily (go down to the floor or up in the air), or are you most comfortable at one level? Do you move in spurts -- moving very quickly and intensely, holding still, and moving very quickly and intensely again -- or are you more comfortable with an even activity pace? Do you like to take risks when you move, or are you more comfortable moving with complete control at all times? Do you prefer to be watched or do you prefer

to dance just for yourself?

Let's consider working with a partner on the table (female, in this example). What are her feelings and awareness of the space she occupies? (Ask her). How does that differ from what she might like to feel? How can you pace her current sense of space, and how could you, via your touch and movements, lead her toward a new sense of body and space?

Now consider time. What is your partner feeling about time? What tempo and rhythm is she displaying in her breathing and small, unconscious movements. How smoothly does she transition from one movement to the next? How can you convey to her a sense of your understanding and pacing of her current relationship to time? How might you then lead her to a better equilibrium? What tempo do you want to initially approach her with? In the continuum of movement, does her current relationship with time feel chaotic or coherent to you?

As your partner "rests on the table," what is her feeling of energy and effort in lying there? What was the quality of effort in her movements before lying down? How would you communicate your awareness, understanding, and empathy for where she is in her relationship to effort or energy? How might you then lead her, via your touch and nonverbal communication, toward a state of relaxed and focused ease?

None of these questions has a "right" answer, yet they are important parts of how we interact with a client. By such exercises, we focus kinesthetically and interpersonally in our bodies to develop both awareness and skills. It's a process of moving away from our verbal-visual minds into that kinesthetic world of vulnerability, empathy, and ultimately, connection and humanity.

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Click [here](#) for more information about Keith Eric Grant, PhD, NCTMB.



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