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How to Take the Floor as a Couple: Turn-Taking in Lindy Hop Jam Circles

Leelo Keevallik and Anna Ekström

This article analyzes the tacit norms of embodied turn-taking in a specific dance activity, Lindy Hop jam circles. Building on an extensive tradition of scrutinizing turn-taking in conversation, it shows how dancing couples negotiate the right to a next turn by visual means. Using multimodal interaction analysis, the article dissects the behavior of the exiting couple, the next dancing couple, and the spectators. The analysis shows that music is but one factor in turn-taking, and that maximally three publicly visible steps are necessary for a successful entrance: displaying “couplehood,” displaying imminent entrance, and occupying the exclusive central space. In a case of competition the dancers’ speed and determination are decisive.

A jam circle is “when a crowd forms around a dancing couple in order to watch them. Then, one couple after another goes into the circle to perform, each trying to outdo the others.” (Manning and Millman 2007, 262)

Turn-taking is one of the fundamental mechanisms of social organization, characteristic of such diverse activities as everyday conversation, customer service, and board games, among much else. Anthropological and ethnomethodological studies have looked at several turn-organized activities, such as rapping battles (Lee 2009), surfing (Liberman 2015), and entering a roundabout (Laurier 2012). However, turn-organization of human activities was first systematically described in conversation (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), and the

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ensuing stream of research has by now expanded into the vibrant field of conversation analysis (Schegloff 2007). In addition to lexical, grammatical, prosodic and pragmatic features of turn construction, it has been shown that nonspeech resources, such as gaze, nodding, gestures and pointing, can play an important role in who gets a turn in a conversation, and when (e.g. Goodwin 1981; Mondada 2007).

While we have fairly good knowledge about how people organize turn-taking in various speech-exchange activities (Clayman 2013; Hayashi 2013), there seems to be merely one description specifically targeting turn-taking in an activity that is neither conducted through nor organized by the use of spoken language. Ivarsson and Greiffenhagen (2015) have provided a systematic account of the embodied allocation of turns in pool skate sessions. In the current study, we consider another social activity featuring embodied turn-taking, namely jam sessions at swing dance parties. Similar to conversation, these circles clearly display an organization of “one”-at-a-time, even though the “one” is often not a single dancer but a couple. Thus, a jam circle is yet another human activity that is turn-organized. It centrally features a distribution of the valuable show-time in the limelight in front of a spontaneously formed audience. The question is, what are the techniques of turn allocation used by the participants in a jam? As in conversation, neither the allocation of turns nor their length is predetermined, and turn transition thus needs to be locally negotiated. Building on the analyses by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), and also Ivarsson and Greiffenhagen (2015), this study aims to further the understanding of human turn-taking systems, especially in non-speech-organized activities. The present study describes how dance couples negotiate the right to a next turn by purely visual means. By focusing on an activity mainly conducted by couples, the study targets a hitherto undescribed option in turn-taking systems—where the entry has to be coordinated not only with the current actor (such as the speaker, or skater), but also within the couple. We will describe the organization of turn-taking in jam sessions by tracing the visible conduct of dancers to (i) publicly assemble a couple, (ii) display intention to enter the circle, and then (iii) take the floor from the currently dancing couple. By focusing on the local negotiation of turn transfer in jam circles, the study sheds light on how the dancers locally organize this authentic activity, while also contributing to the sociology of embodied turn-organized activities in general.

LINDY HOP AND JAM CIRCLES

Lindy Hop is a swing dance that was developed in the ballrooms of Harlem in the 1920s and 1930s, with roots in authentic jazz, Charleston and several African dances. It almost fell into oblivion after World War II but was revived in the 1980s in Britain and Sweden, first through inspiration from the movies but soon also with guidance from the original dancers from Harlem. Presently the Lindy Hop “community” is rapidly growing not only in most European and North American countries but also in Asia, Australia and South America. Social dances are regularly organized in hundreds of cities around the world, preserving the improvisational and explorative nature of the dance, with a focus on encounters
between dancers and their individual styles rather than on the formal teaching of steps. Classes are likewise available in numerous countries, occasionally incorporated into larger dance-school programs, but peer-to-peer exchanges of ideas and steps are appreciated, especially at higher skill levels.

At a Lindy Hop party people mostly dance in separate couples. A jam circle is something that may emerge at the end of the evening when the band plays a fast song and the energy level is high in the ballroom (according to an ethnographic interview with two professional Lindy Hoppers, Jenny Deurell and Rikard Ekstrand). Jamming is thus not the predominant way of organizing Lindy Hop, as opposed to, for example, sessions of pool skating (Ivarsson and Greiffenhagen 2015). As the story goes, if the music is really fast a jam circle may form because dancers want to have a break or offer space for proper performance of the elaborate and occasionally even acrobatic steps, which is otherwise impossible on the often-crammed dance floor. According to Ekstrand, it may also be that two couples simply start “talking” to each other by showing off their steps and inspiring each other in turns. Then, a circle of clappers forms around them to watch, which sometimes provides an opportunity for further couples to join in. As a performance activity done for others’ appreciation, a jam circle involves clapping and cheering spectators who are instrumental in launching the circle. It is this energy between performers and onlookers and, not least, the music (and musicians), that essentially brings about a jam.

Jam sessions are perhaps best-known from jazz music, as “a small number of self-selected musicians who come together for the primary purpose of playing music which they choose purely in accordance with their own aesthetic standards” (Cameron 1954, 177–78). Alongside an occasional competitive streak (Walker 2010), jazz jams feature turn-taking for solos, which is sensitive to completion by another player. Similarly, the dance forms related to jazz music, including Lindy Hop, feature practices where only a few people dance at a time. The roots of jam circles in Lindy Hop seem to lie in various African (American) traditions, such as home parties arranged to raise money for the rent in Harlem, New York, early in the 20th century. When the music was fast, “someone started getting a little wilder than everybody else, the crowd would back up and form a circle. Everybody would stand around clapping for the people in the middle, who would start shining...” (Manning and Millman 2007, 25). This suggests that the activity was self-organized into turns of dancing by different people, for the aesthetic pleasure of the participants.

At Harlem dance clubs, though, these circles became a common practice, “in order to give some of the better dancers more room” (Manning and Millman 2007, 63), and the idea was to outdo the other dancers. In addition, the same organization was used in formal contests (Miller and Jensen 1996, 44–46), including the venue with the highest profile, the Savoy Ballroom, that basically set the standards for Lindy Hop (Stearns and Stearns 1994, 321–27, 330–31). These jam circles would start with lower-level dancers and move on to the best ones, with the last segment reserved for the current champion. Interestingly, the dancers had no time limit; “they just stopped when they felt like it. Some couples went out there and just did a few steps. Others tore up the floor two
or three choruses” (Manning and Millman 2007, 82). As we shall see, this loose relationship between the musical structure and couple-switch still pertains in present-day jam circles.

Presently, a range of different kinds of jams are practiced, offering a great opportunity for the community to enjoy the performance of the most skilled dancers. They can be competitive or not, more or less spontaneous, and with spectators gathered either in a circle or organized as a regular audience. There is, for example, a tradition of birthday dances, where people would take turns dancing in the middle of a circle with the one celebrating the birthday. Some jams seem to be entirely pre-arranged for the camera, and many of these are studied closely by the community for inspiration. There are also teacher jams where the instructors at an event perform in turns in front of an audience. Furthermore, most Lindy Hop championships are organized as jams, but with pre-set musical phrase limits for the contestants (see Albert 2015, on an improvisational competition). A common feature of all jams is that they are organized in turns, showing an orientation to tacit turn-taking norms within the community of practice. As with many tacit norms of human behavior, the norms in Lindy Hop jams are not formalized and have never been systematically described. In the current study, we will focus on spontaneous jam circles of partnered Lindy Hop that feature no restrictions as to who can enter them or how long a “turn” should be, and where spectators gather in a surrounding circle. As we will show, a couple-switch in such a circle is locally negotiated between the participants through various bodily displays and moves that are only noted through visual perception.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The data of this study consist of video recordings of four jam circles from four different Lindy Hop parties. The participants range from beginners to experienced social dancers. The circles were slightly inspired by us, as we had to make a public announcement for ethical reasons about the recording and our research interests. There were five cameras placed at various angles (including the ceiling in no. 1 and no. 2), but not necessarily all of them continued to run when the circle finally emerged, as this can take off several hours into the night. Table 1 gives an overview of the recordings, including the number of camera angles actually captured.

It makes quite a difference whether the jam is danced to taped or to live music. A live band can cooperate with the dancers by extending the piece if they see that the energy is not dropping. These jams tend to be longer, as can also be seen in Table 1. Toward the end of circle no. 4, the band even moved down from the stage and joined the dancers on the floor, before closing the whole event with a procession to the door.

The overall number of dancers in the jam in Table 1 is supplemented by the number of those returning to perform, sometimes in another dancer role (lead or follow). In Lindy Hop, it is quite common to be able to do both. Switching the dancer role during an ongoing dance was not counted as a turn-transition, because it does not result in people changing their general placement and role
in the jam. The relatively small number of returners reflects the social principle that different people should be able to participate in the jam.

Crucially, the table shows the number of potential transition-relevant places in the music, which are the beginnings of eight-beat patterns. Swing music can be parsed into counts of eight, and each of them is perceivable as a new “unit.” An eight-beat pattern consists of two four-beat bars and is called an “eight” in the dance community. The table also shows the number of musical phrase beginnings—musically stronger transition-relevant places after every four “eights” (32 beats)—in parenthesis. This was counted from the moment when the circle had been properly formed around the first dance couple, which could take place some time into the musical piece.

Finally, Table 1 provides the overall number of turn-transitions in the recordings, as well as transitions to couples, including those from solos/groups to couples. We ended up with 30 instances to study how to take a turn as a couple. This included three transitions after a “gap,” that is, a period of an empty performance space after the previous couple had left. Each transition has been given a code consisting of the recording code (e.g. LPI1, as shown in the table) and the number of the transition in the sequence (e.g. LPI1:4).

The recordings described above are backed up by eight jam circle videos from YouTube that involve highly experienced and even professional dancers who are well accustomed to the practice. We chose the ones that seemed to be spontaneously organized, but we actually lack information about whether or to what extent they were pre-arranged. Furthermore, on YouTube, we only get access to one or two angles, which constrains the analyses of the embodied and spatial aspects of turn-taking. Importantly, however, when comparing the advanced dancers’ turn-taking behavior with that in our recordings, we only spotted a few differences and they were related to the dance itself, such as well-practiced choreographies and longer stays in the spotlight by the more experienced dancers.

As both authors are Lindy Hop dancers with over 20 years of cumulative experience, we have substantial ethnographic knowledge of Lindy Hop classes, exchanges and parties, including experience with jam circles. In order to enhance our understanding of jamming practices, as mentioned, we also interviewed two professional dancers, Rikard Ekstrand and Jenny Deurell, in March 2017.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circle, Code</th>
<th>Camera Angles</th>
<th>The Musical Piece</th>
<th>Dancers (Returning Ones)</th>
<th>Eight-Beat Patterns (Phrase Beginnings)</th>
<th>Turn-Transitions</th>
<th>Transitions to Couples</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>4:30 live</td>
<td>17 (3)</td>
<td>25 (6)</td>
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<td>No. 2 LPI2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2:30 tape</td>
<td>12 (4)</td>
<td>16 (3)</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>No. 3 NRK1</td>
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<td>19 (0)</td>
<td>30 (8)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 4 NRK2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7:15 live</td>
<td>17 (2)</td>
<td>31 (7)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19:15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Overview of the Recorded Jam Circles and the Number of Turn Transitions

...
The method of our study is multimodal interaction analysis of moment-by-moment emergence of coordinated action, with close attention given to details of gaze, gestures, body position, spatial features, object and language use in real time (Mondada 2006, 2007; Streeck, Goodwin, and LeBaron, 2011; Goodwin, 2018). Owing to the visual nature of our focus phenomenon, we will be scrutinizing the participants’ bodies. We will start by general observations on the organization of jam circles, then describe the actions of the different parties in the turn-transition process, and finally analyze what is required to take a turn in a circle.

**BASIC OBSERVATIONS ON JAM CIRCLES**

Turn-transition in jam circles happens according to three basic spatio-temporal patterns:

1. Current couple starts backing out, followed by a next couple entry. This results in the shortest transition, and it is rare in our own recordings. Possibly this is a practice for more advanced dancers, as it requires an ability to analyze and project an exit move (such as an acrobatic lift or dragging or carrying one’s partner).

2. Current couple gets “kicked out” by the next couple. This involves some parallel dancing and usually takes at least two eights. Crucially, in this pattern, we can always document a gaze toward the entering couple by at least one of the partners in the current couple after the entry, a kind of visual discovery of the intruders.

3. Current couple exits, nobody enters. This results in a gap, which can either end the jam or result in a next couple entering after a while.

In the following, we will outline some further facts on turn-taking in Lindy Hop jam circles, paraphrasing the classical account on turn-taking in conversation (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974) and the follow-up study on pool skate sessions (Ivarsson and Greiffenhagen 2015). The ensuing list preserves the original numbering of the observations for conversation and the original phrasing is given in parentheses.

1. Couple-change recurs, or at least occurs. (“Speaker-change recurs, or at least occurs” [Sacks et al. 1974:700].)

Dancers do not dance in a jam circle forever. Differently from the other two turn-taking systems described (conversation and pool-skating), jam circles feature more new entries (as opposed to re-entries by someone who has already taken a turn). The four circles in our data include the following participants (couples, occasional solos and groups) in this order:

1. AB-CD-EF-GH-IJ-KL-MN-OP-GQ-RB
2. AB-CD-AE-FC-GH-DI-JK
4. AB-B-CD-C-E-F-band-GH-BI-JD-KL-EM-NO-AB-P
In the above list, each participant is assigned a letter. Leads (the dancer role of a lead) are marked first within the couple. Note that the same participant may appear in a different dancer role later in the circle and some stay in the circle after the partner exits or while more people enter. These are not counted as turn-transitions.

2. Overwhelmingly, one couple dances at a time. (“Overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time” [Sacks et al. 1974:700].)

Mostly, one couple occupies the floor in the middle of the circle, which is the performance space.

3. Occurrences of more than one couple in the circle are common, but brief. (“Occurrences of more than one speaker at a time are common, but brief” [Sacks et al. 1974:700].)

Two couples often dance in parallel during turn-transition, especially during the dedicated exit and entry moves.

4. Transitions (from one couple to the next) with overlaps are common. (“Transitions (from one turn to a next) with no gap and no overlap are common. Together with transitions characterized by slight gap or slight overlap, they make up the vast majority of transitions” [Sacks et al. 1974:700-701].)

Since it takes time to enter and exit the circle, most transitions feature overlap: when one party initiates an entry the other one is either still dancing or making its exit toward the edge while dancing. (This is systematically different from turn-taking in conversation.) Gaps occur and ultimately lead to the termination of the circle.

5. Turn order is not fixed, but varies. (“Turn order is not fixed, but varies” [Sacks et al. 1974:701].)

There is no predetermined order of couples in a jam circle. However, good dancers and teachers may be expected to enter the circle.

6. Turn size is not fixed but varies, partly affected by the musical phrases. The pressure for transition in a jam increases with the sheer length of the turn. (“Turn size is not fixed, but varies” [Sacks et al. 1974:701].)

The length of a turn is not specified in advance; dancers can choose to occupy the center of the circle for longer or shorter periods. Differently from conversation, there is no counterpart to story-prefaces in the dance that would project a longer turn from its very beginning. The structure of the musical piece guides the dancers in ending a current turn (e.g. at the end of a phrase would be a good time).

7. Length of jam session is not specified in advance. (“Length of conversation is not specified in advance” [Sacks et al. 1974:701].)
The length of a session is not prespecified but contingent on dancers’ enthusiasm. It usually lasts for one song, even though a DJ may also smoothly switch to a next one. Live bands often collaborate with the circle by extending the piece as long as the dancers keep entering. Sometimes the dancers give the musicians a signal to close down, for example by starting clapping toward the band.

8. What parties do is not specified in advance. ("What parties say is not specified in advance" [Sacks et al. 1974:701].)

Each new couple is free to choose their own steps. Occasionally, they reinterpret something performed by the prior couple.

9. Relative distribution of turns is not specified in advance, but there seems to be an orientation to letting many different couples enter. ("Relative distribution of turns is not specified in advance" [Sacks et al. 1974:701].)

Priority seems to be given to couples who have not yet danced, which is a systematic difference as compared to turn-taking in conversation. There are, however, jams where only a few couples “compete” or “converse” with each other.

10. Number of parties can vary. ("Number of parties can vary" [Sacks et al. 1974:701].)

There is no limitation to how many dancers can participate in a jam. A turn may consist of a couple dance, a solo, as well as a group performance.

11. Dance can be continuous or discontinuous. ("Talk can be continuous or discontinuous" [Sacks et al. 1974:701].)

Upon a couple’s exit it may happen that nobody enters. The jam circle is then potentially brought to an end.

12. Turn-allocation techniques are obviously used. Dancers self-select in coupling up and entering. The current couple does not usually select a next couple. ("Turn-allocation techniques are obviously used. A current speaker may select a next speaker (as when he addresses a question to another party); or parties may self-select in starting to talk" [Sacks et al. 1974:701].)

The current couple may initiate the exit, when ready with their performance, or upon noticing a next entry. Spectators may select a next couple by clapping, gesturing, and providing space.

13. Various steps and choreographies are employed. ("Various "turn-constructional units" are employed; e.g., turns can be projectedly "one word long," or they can be sentential in length" [Sacks et al. 1974:701].)

Only an acrobatic trick or an explicit exit move, such as dragging the partner out of the circle, projects the length/end of the current turn. Otherwise the dance is always extendable.
14. Repair mechanisms exist for dealing with turn-taking errors and violations. (“Repair mechanisms exist for dealing with turn-taking errors and violations” [Sacks et al. 1974:701].)

When several couples try to enter simultaneously, one of them will ultimately prevail and the others have to wait for another opportunity.

Given these basics, the question is how the dancers go about taking a next turn in a jam circle, and how a turn-transition is collaboratively organized between the entering and exiting couples.

THE PARTIES IN THE TRANSITION

There are several parties involved in turn-transition in a jam: the music, the spectators in the circle, the currently dancing couple, and the next dancing couple.

The Music

One might imagine that a turn at dancing consisted of one or several musical phrases in swing music. A phrase lasts for $4\times8$ beats, and usually features the structure $aba$ or $aaba$. The couples, however, often dance more or less than this. To show that dancers have considerable choice in their timing of turn-transition to music, we documented the length of the dances in the conventional “eights” (eight-beat segments) not only in our own recorded data (Table 2) but also in high profile jam circles on YouTube (Table 3).

Importantly, entries into the jam recurrently happen somewhere else than at the beginning of the musical phrase: only 6 entries out of 30 in our data, and 38 out of 79 in the high-profile circles occurred exactly at the beginning of a musical phrase. In fact, surprisingly few turns last for four “eights” (4 and 27 in the different datasets, respectively), something that might have been expected from the basic musical structure. In a considerable number of cases, the dance turns even begin or end in the middle of an “eight” (7 in both datasets). If a couple enters at

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of “Eights”</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>1.5</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>2.5</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>3.5</th>
<th>4</th>
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<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>Entries at the Beginning of a Musical Phrase</th>
<th>Total Transitions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
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a strange point in the music, the floor will nevertheless be released to them, as is evident in both datasets and as also mentioned by our professional informant Ekstrand. In short, even though the music guides the activity of dancing, it does not solely determine the moment of turn-transition in a jam circle. In other words, the timing of the entry is visually negotiated among the potential participants in each and every instance.

The Spectators

As a jam circle emerges on a social dance-floor, the people currently dancing in couples have to disengage in order to participate as individual spectators. The spectators form a collective circle, orienting toward the center where one couple is still dancing. In order to guarantee a free view for as many as possible, the inner row may also sit down or squat. The spectator movements are limited to clapping and some bouncing. Clapping on backbeats is normatively expected, but single participants may choose not to clap at all (an example can be found in NRK2). Another way to participate actively as a spectator is to howl in appreciation when the dancers do something fancy, such as an impressive move or a change of the lead and follow dancer roles. Howls can also accompany turn-transitions, which could be interpreted as an ovation to the exiting couple, as well as a celebration of the next one coming in.

A crowded circle can constitute a hindrance for the entering couple, who have to first make their way to the inside edge in order to be able to take a turn. In our data, this happens in NRK2, especially after the band has moved to the dance-floor. On the other hand, when facing the risk of a gap in dancing, the spectators may gaze around for potential next couples or partners. We have also been able to document inviting gestures or clapping toward possible next dancers, and the spectators may also open up the circle for an entry spot

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</table>
(which happens in LPI1). Finding a next couple is thus an optional task for the spectators, though they are not obliged to guarantee entries.

At the exit of a couple, the circle has to adjust its ranks to provide space for them. The dancers are not left roaming around, but choose to exit wherever, owing to the nature of their dance move or the entry position of the next couple. When moving toward the edge or arriving there, the exiting dancers face the center of the circle, organize their bodies to display themselves as spectators (Figure 1) and start clapping, returning swiftly to their spectator roles. The return in Figure 1 takes approximately 1 second to complete. The exiting dancers can, among other things, move backwards toward the circle and start clapping halfway to the edge. Occasionally, the circle gets packed from the inside by those leaving the dance floor and thus has to be actively adjusted by someone to keep sufficient open space for dancing.

The Currently Dancing Couple

In an exit, the currently dancing couple starts moving in a straight trajectory toward the edge of the circle, optionally with a special move, such as one partner carrying the other. An exit also implies ending some more complex dance figure and entering a slower and simpler mode. For example, the couple may start taking steps on every second beat rather than on every beat, or hand movements may become smaller. There are no fancy moves or acrobatics performed anymore. The participants may even stop following the music and just walk out.

An exit can be initiated spontaneously or in response to a next couple displaying readiness to enter (patterns 1 and 2 described above). As it happens, the current couple may find themselves in a situation when another couple has already appeared in the central space of the circle. In our data, we can for most of the cases easily observe at least one partner in the current couple discovering the next couple during a brief gaze. In Figure 2, the current couple to the right gazes toward the couple to the left who have just entered, thereby breaking the orientation to the partner. The current couple then has the option to either finish the ongoing dance pattern or, if possible, initiate the exit immediately.
There are some specific dance moves that allow for backing away from the
dance floor, in which case the dancers will be facing the entering couple all the
way through their own exit. If they choose to exit in any other way, the orient-
tation towards the center is re-established almost before arriving at the edge.
Upon arrival the partners may display mutual appreciation of the completed
dance by smiles, hugs or a high-five. The couple can let go of each other at
various stages of the exiting process and start clapping, which is an essential
part of re-inhabiting the role of an individual spectator in the collective circle.

The Next Dancing Couple

The potential next couple also faces two basic timing options: either the current
couple has launched an exit, providing a prospective empty floor in front of
the entering couple, or they may just begin their entry despite the current cou-
ple still dancing in the middle of the circle. The latter option implies that the
two couples dance at least one “eight” side by side, but both options may lead
to a spatio-temporal overlap, with the two couples occupying the central per-
formance space simultaneously.

The lead in the entering couple nearly always gazes at the current couple
just before taking the first step inward. It is his/her obligation within the cou-
ple to monitor the availability of dance space and establish a trajectory for the
entry. However, from the very first dance step on beat “one”, the gaze will
only be organized by the dance. It is either in the direction of the move,
toward the center/focus of the couple, or on the partner, but definitely no lon-
ger on the exiting couple. In Figure 3, the entering couple to the left dances
with the gaze on their legs toward the direction of their movement. The cur-
rent couple to the right gazes at the entering couple, even though they are not
yet back on the edge of the circle. The next couple thus visibly orient to their

Figure 2 Current couple to the right discover an entering couple (NRK1:4).
own dance and not anymore to other participants in the activity; they are demonstrably disengaging from the surroundings.

In addition, the entering couple usually starts moving at full speed from the very beginning. Their entry may involve certain especially speedy moves, such as throwing the partner in, or spatially extended moves, such as slides or promenades, which enable the dancers to win ground quickly. This constitutes a salient contrast to the physically restrained spectators in the circle. Last but not least, the direction of movement is straight to the heart of the circle. All of these factors—the gaze organization, the speed, the direction, and the full involvement within the dancing couple—result in a visual display of entitlement to enter the circle at this very moment. To arrive at that opportunity however may take quite an effort with carefully timed successive bodily displays towards establishing oneself as the next couple, and occasionally among several contestants. These practices will be dissected in the next section of the article.

HOW TO TAKE A TURN AS A COUPLE IN REAL TIME

Having explained the basic organization of jam circles and the parties involved, we will now analyze the methods of turn-taking from the perspective of the entering couple (Hayashi 2013 discusses the same perspective on turn-taking in conversation). The aim is to describe how the cultural norms of turn-taking are achieved in situ, in real-time behavior. As was detailed above, even though the music provides certain cues and perhaps an entitlement for a transition after a phrase (or 32 beats of the dance, regardless of the musical
phrase), the actual entry is still negotiated with co-present participants, predominantly through bodily practices that are visually available to other participants. Three phases can be maximally discerned: displaying “couplehood,” displaying imminent entry, and occupying the performance space.

Displaying Couplehood

Whether the decision to enter the jam circle as a couple has been pre-planned or not, in order to take the turn-at-jam they first need to display to others that they have formed a dance couple. A display of couplehood involves three visual practices: (i) physical proximity, (ii) spatial positioning, and (iii) dance-specific bodily formations. Standing next to each other or squatting very close to someone can be seen as an indicator of couplehood and thus a sign of possible future entry, especially if the circle is relatively loose (as in Figure 4, showing physical proximity of participants).

In tight circles proximity is not a usable feature, as the huddling participants will generally be seen as just forming the circle (Figure 5). A more convincing display of a couple aiming to take the turn is proximity combined with a spatial positioning on the inner edge of a circle, as seen in Figure 5 (here also combined with a dance-specific formation of the bodies). The sequence of pictures in Figure 6 shows how two persons who are already positioned on the inner edge move closer to each other and gradually become perceivable as a potential couple (timestamp s from the forming of the circle).

The strongest display of being a couple is to use a dance formation: the leader’s right hand on the back of the follower, follower’s left hand on the lead’s shoulder and, optionally, the other hands connected (Figures 5–6). This means that the two dancers have to stop clapping, thus effectively terminating their role as mere spectators. A dance formation is not just a stronger indication of couplehood compared to physical proximity and positioning on the edge; it is also a clear display of intention to take over the dance floor in a not-too-distant

Figure 4 Potential couplehood in loose circles (NRK1:1).
The dance formation could also be considered the pivotal point between displaying couplehood and imminent entry. Two further actions enhance the display of imminent entry: (i) joint bouncing and (ii) taking the start position. After taking hold of each other the couple generally establishes a joint rhythm by bouncing (Broth and Keel 2014). Joint bouncing is markedly different from the relatively static position of most spectators in the circle, even though the clappers may also provide a bodily pulse to the music, mostly with their upper bodies. The bounce may last for a very short time, such as for two beats (as in NRK1:4),
or be extended across several “eights”, while waiting for an opportunity to enter (as in NRK1:3). Bouncing in itself is not yet a start signal but a display of intention. If several couples bounce at the same time and discover each other, some of them may drop out of bouncing to wait for a later chance (see below for a further discussion on two couples competing for a turn). Even though bouncing is regular before a dance it is not absolutely necessary. There are instances when the entering couple are in a hurry (LPI2:1) or when the entry step is not very bouncy (NRK1:5). In fact, the assembly of a couple and the entry can happen almost simultaneously: for it is possible to take hold of a partner and jump into the circle immediately after scanning the circle for alternative entries.

Just before entry, a couple may further take a clear start position—going low with their bodies, with gazes and hands oriented toward the center (LPI2:2). This again is in sharp contrast with the upright posture or sitting/squatting of the spectators in the circle. The low body position is an option and not an obligatory detail in displaying imminent entrance, and in contrast to bouncing it cannot be held across a longer period.

In the four analyzed circles, there seems to be a rough correlation between the length of a display of imminent entrance by the potential next couple and the length of overlapping dance between the current couple and the next couple. When a potential next couple displays an intention to enter the circle well in advance, the overlap between the couples is shorter, as compared with when a prospective couple does not display an intention to enter at all (as in LPI2:1) or does so only a few beats before the actual entry. This is illustrated in Table 4. The shortest (<3s) and longest (>6s) turn-transitions\(^3\) (<3s) in our material are listed together with timestamps for (i) when the next couple’s intention to take the floor becomes visible, (ii) when the next couple takes the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 4</th>
<th>Displays of Intention and Length of Overlap; the Shortest and Longest Cases</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Next Couple</td>
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<tr>
<td>LPI2:1</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>NRK2:3</td>
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Bold turn-transitions were initiated by the current couple.
first steps towards the center, \((iii)\) when the current couple starts moving out of the circle, and \((iv)\) when the current couple is back on the edge of the circle. Comparison of overlaps measured in real time would not make sense unless the tempo of the music was roughly the same across the jams, which is the case in our data \((LPI1, 2 – 92 \text{ beats per minute, } NRK1 – 101 \text{ bpm, } NRK2 – 97 \text{ bpm})\). The calculated overlap, corresponding to parallel dancing, is the time between the next couple’s first steps toward the center and the moment when the exiting couple is back on the edge.

For the shorter overlaps, the current couple is often the one initiating the actual turn-transition by displaying their intention to exit, which is marked in bold in Table \(4\). There are two options here. First, the current couple may initiate their exit independently, without anybody else displaying their intention to enter \((LPI2:1, NRK2:1, LPI2:3, NRK1:5)\). Secondly, a potential next couple may well display an intention to enter but only take their initial steps toward the performance space when the current couple has visibly launched an exit \((LPI2:5, LPI1:4, NRK1:3)\). None of the transitions featuring longest overlaps was initiated by the current couple.

Turn-transitions with longer overlaps happen, for example, when the next couple does not display any intention to enter before heading toward the performance space. In these cases, it is not until the next couple is already in the performance space that the current couple may notice them. In reverse, this provides further proof for the intention displays described above as having been interpreted as such by the participants during shorter turn-transfers. Importantly, and unlike conversation where one can just stop talking, it is not possible to abruptly leave the dance floor. The transition from the performance space to the edge takes time, the exit is normatively danced and aesthetic, before the current dancers resume their spectator roles. This generally results in two couples dancing simultaneously.

There are two deviant cases to the general match between shorter preparation time and longer overlap in our material: \(NRK1:6\) and \(LPI1:5\) (Table \(4\)). In the first instance, the next couple is positioned behind some other spectators and their display of intention, though visible to analysts, is not visually available to the current couple. In the second instance, the current couple clearly gaze toward the next couple who display their intention to enter. When the next couple launch their first steps, however, the current couple is in the middle of a specific dance move (the follower dancer is turning), from where it is difficult to begin an immediate exit. Furthermore, they then do not back off straight to the edge of the circle but do so in a nice curved movement, which results in an extended overlap between the two couples. There are thus a number of options and local contingencies that determine the length of the overlap besides merely the length of the display of intention.

Occupying Space

After displaying readiness to start dancing as a couple, the final task is to occupy the exclusive dance space in the middle of the circle that is currently someone else’s.
There is no organizational rule about from which spatial position a couple can enter or where in the circle they could end up. The couple can either move back to their old spot, or not. If the current couple is still dancing when the turn-transition is initiated, as is most common in our data, the circle is wide open for entries from any direction. If the current couple have started an exit, the next couple may come in from another spot or in parallel with the current couple, which simply results in the two couples dancing very close for a short while (LPI1:3). One frequent pattern is for the current couple to exit (almost) at the opposite side from those entering, resulting in the neatest spatial pattern. Another option is to follow through the logic of the dance-step pattern and its direction. Problems may nevertheless occur with clashing trajectories; we have one case where the current couple insists on exiting back to their old spot while the entering next couple tries to come in from the same place and so has to slightly curve their trajectory (LPI1:3). Likewise Figure 7 shows an instance where the next couple has to split up on their way into the circle because the exiting couple happen to head towards the same spot.

In any case, the next couple aims at the middle of the circle, and this movement trajectory functions as a claim to the exclusive dance floor. In other words, a next couple cannot go along the edges of the circle but has to aim at the central spot with their very first move.

Figure 7 The entering couple split up in order to let the exiting couple maintain their chosen trajectory. (Picture reproduced with permission from The Snowballevent)
Competing for the Turn

Occasionally two or more couples make a claim to the next turn. If several couples prepare to enter at the same time, they can pre-empt the upcoming problem by voluntarily retracting from a display of imminent entry. A couple may, for example, take a step back to the edge, reduce the intensity of bouncing, or even disengage from the dance formation and resume clapping. One partner may point out another imminent entry to his/her partner. It is possible to use bodily actions such as gestures or facial expressions to offer that others go first. Occasionally, however, two couples initiate the entry simultaneously, seemingly unaware of each other. In the analyzed materials the couple who move into the center in a more determined manner, cover the distance quicker or make larger movements eventually get the turn. In Figure 8, the competing couples are highlighted. While the couple on the left is in a dance formation, is bouncing, and is still positioned on the edge of the circle, the one on the right has progressed a couple of steps toward the center (with clappers behind them) and the follower dancer has her hand high up in the air (as pointed out with an arrow). The latter couple end up winning the turn (LPI1:4). Crucially, almost all the spectators are already gazing towards the couple to the right, thus treating them as the entitled next performers.

It may also happen however that a next couple enters before the current couple have finished their turn. As described above, this works as one pattern of turn-taking (number 2), where the entering couple always gets the right-of-way. There are no examples, either in our own recording or in the analyzed YouTube examples, of a current couple holding on to their turn after a next couple have entered the performance space. Neither the timing of an attempt to take the turn

Figure 8 Two couples entering simultaneously.
(e.g. on what beat and where in the musical phrase the next couple enter) nor the length of the current couple’s turn (whether they have danced for a fairly long time or have just begun), seem to influence this. Tables 2 and 3 show great variation in when a turn-transition can occur and how long a turn can be. Our data in this way suggest a strong preference for letting a couple who attempt to take a turn, get to take a turn, thus revealing a cultural norm in the social practice of jam circles. Interestingly, in our interview with Deurell and Ekstrand, we learned that an early next couple entry may in fact be experienced as an interruption. They ascribe the problematic behavior to novice dancers unaware of the norms of the jam circle. Still, these negative feelings are not publicly disclosed nor are the intruders confronted, perhaps because of the joint orientation to a jam as a type of performance for the enjoyment of spectators: the show must go on.

CONCLUSION

This study presented the systematics of the turn-taking organization in Lindy Hop jam circles, which is an intricate cultural practice achieved by participants in a social dance. Turn-taking in this context is achieved purely through embodied and visible practices. Differently from what has been discussed earlier on turn-taking in conversation and at pool-skate sessions, a jam circle functions in relation to musical structure. However, we showed that the dancers are not entirely constrained by the music, as they often choose to dance more or less than whole musical phrases and can also take turns at points not suggested by the music. Turn-taking is thus locally negotiated among the participants by using gaze and various other visible bodily displays. A salient characteristic of the turn-taking system in jam circles is that there are relatively long overlaps between turns. This is regulated by the organization of the dance, which is not supposed to be just abandoned but has to continue in a pleasing manner all the way back to the edge. As long as a couple are positioned in the performance space, they have to keep dancing. We showed however that a longer preparatory display by the entering couple is associated with shorter parallel dancing in the circle.

Further, we argued that, similar to pool-skate sessions, turn-taking in jam circles involves an exiting party, an entering party and a spectator party, who achieve the switch in a collaborative manner by constant mutual monitoring and specific bodily conduct in coordination with the music. We demonstrated the relevance of gaze in searches for a potential time for entering, next entries and exiting couples. Crucially, gaze was instrumental in displaying entitlement to the floor. From the very first dance step, the entering couples were shown to organize their gaze in a dance-relevant manner, largely ignoring the other parties. This strong orientation towards each other between the persons constituting a dancing couple, which was instrumental for the performance in the middle of the circle, generally lasts until noticing a next entry.

We identified three main spatio-temporal patterns of turn-taking in jam sessions: exit starts before entry, entry starts before exit, and turn-transition with a gap. We dissected the embodied and visible steps that are needed in order to take the floor: displaying couplehood by spatial placement and bodily
configuration, displaying intention to enter the performance space by dance configuration and bouncing, and occupying the performance space by heading straight to the central spot at full speed. Higher speed, covering more ground, and large body movements helped dancers compete for the place in the spotlight successfully. Moreover, our data suggest a preference for giving up the turn if another couple initiates a turn-transition.

In contrast to earlier studies on turn-taking, our data involved couples taking turns together, which implies a need to coordinate between themselves to be seen by other participants (i) as a couple, and (ii) as intending to take the floor. They also need to collaborate in their actual dancing, but our focus was on the methods of establishing a couple formation to be seen as intending to take a next turn, which involved physical proximity, dance formation, bouncing and an optional start position. Even though physical closeness and touch may be used for mundane displays of “couplehood,” the displays in our data were distinctly activity-specific, involving only conventionalized forms of dance-relevant proximity and touch. We thus dissected the corporeal knowledge that is needed to enter a dance jam in a spatially and temporally fitting manner, in close collaboration with co-present participants as well as the participants’ visual competence, necessary for detecting an upcoming entry. In this study, we have targeted a human activity of quite a different type than talk-exchange systems, but it nevertheless adheres to the general principles of turn-taking, which emerges as a powerful organizational principle for our society.

NOTES

1. For the sake of simplicity we have here disregarded the alternative blues phrase of 6 × 8 beats as it does not occur in our original recordings.
2. Snowball 2016 last night: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAzJTl7mnUM
   Snowball 2016 all stars: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znxO7OKdZ-c
   Winter Jump 2017 last night: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wljr_1hywQi
   Lindy Focus XI: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6G7SM8xzWc
   Winter Jump 2017 first jam: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=theDLw98wNc
   Lindy Focus XV: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKo6GM-50Ns
   Savoy Cup 2016: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kx0mifMvpN
   Swing-a-dance 2015: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yk8b6qOr4do
3. Turn-transitions with gaps are not included.

Transcription conventions:

- beats – musical beats
- NC – next couple
- CC – current couple
- D – dance connection
- ~ – bounce
- > – movement inwards
- < – movement outwards
- x – dancing in the center
- _ – static on the circle
- TRP – transition-relevant place in music
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