

Couple Stories: Application of Psychoanalytic Ideas in Thinking about Couple Interaction, edited by Aleksandra Novakovic and Marguerite Reid, Routledge, 2018

Reviewed by Vivian Eskin

This is the latest book to be offered by the Library of Couple and Family Psychoanalytical Series of the International Psychoanalytic Association. *Couple Stories'* editors, Aleksandra Novakovic, psychoanalyst, and Marguerite Reid, child and adolescent psychotherapist and psychoanalytic couple psychotherapist, have both also contributed to this collection, Novakovic in a chapter entitled "As my shrivelled heart expanded: the dynamics of love, hate, and generosity in the couple"; and Reid with clinical examples from therapists she had supervised.

Many of the contributors are affiliated to Tavistock Relationships (TR) in London and make fundamental use of the theoretical model that has been developed at TR since the late 1940s. *Couple Stories* provides an introduction to both the Tavistock model and the object relations approach to couple psychotherapy and an exposure to the breadth of this framework. The Tavistock model has a deep root in the understanding of unconscious dynamics in couple relationships and the impact of transference and countertransference on treatment; and the object relations approach looks at the idea that couple relating is based on an ambivalent connection to earlier love objects contained within each partner's history.

The Foreword is by David Scharff, MD, Chair of the International Psychoanalytical Association Committee on Family and Couple Psychoanalysis. An Introduction provides a roadmap of the chapters, which are divided into two parts: Part I "Mainly Theory" presents four theoretical summaries that form the foundation of psychoanalytic work with couples and with families, and Part II "Couple Stories and Clinical Commentaries" presents four cases that are reviewed and analysed by various eminent psychoanalysts and couple psychotherapists.

As Scharff points out in the Foreword, four principles guide the psychoanalytic work with couples; these include an understanding of psychological development, especially on the early shifts from a concrete, paranoid-schizoid view to the capacity to forgive and repair ruptures (the depressive position); the centrality of the oedipal influence as the foundation of triangular thinking that allows us to see ourselves and our relationships from an outside perspective; the mechanism of unconscious communication that uses projection and introjective identification; and the necessity of a personal mind to form a container for the growth and repair of another person's mind. The focus on these four principles as they relate to couple choice and unconscious phantasy is the essence of this book, which offers the theories and then provides the various ways they can be applied in real cases.

In Part I, the chapters on theory reflect the mix of Melanie Klein, Wilfred Bion, contemporary Kleinian theory, and the professional diversity of the contributors. Couple psychoanalytic psychotherapy must rely on a psychoanalytic model of the mind, and the treatment would be influenced by the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis—that being psychic determinism, unconscious communication, the repetition compulsion, and object relations.

Novakovic opens the book with a chapter on the object relations theory of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions first illuminated by Melanie Klein. She summarises Klein's ideas and elucidates post-Kleinian thought on the fluctuation of these two positions throughout life, and the intricate shifts of the regressive and developmental pull of these positions. She skilfully weaves in how these two positions can manifest themselves in a couple relationship, and she offers clinical applications of these core Kleinian concepts, which are at the heart of psychoanalytic couple dynamics and treatment. She cites Halton and Sprince's (2016) four distinct groupings of phantasies of a parental couple that draw on different experiences of the oedipal situation in the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions: the fused attacking couple, the warring couple, the differentiated couple, and the benign couple.

I am intrigued by this typology and how it can be applied in conceptualising the nature of a couple's interaction. What kind of couple phantasy are the partners enacting in their couple relationship and in their relationship with their children, families, or third parties? How much of couple interactions can be thought about with these unresolved phantasies and interactions floating about? The phantasies about what the partners are doing to each other echo their previous relationships and early experience of their respective parents' relationships. Couple psychotherapy provides opportunities for couple growth: to explore how partners give and take; hurt and disappoint the other; to share emotional experiences; and to consider the joint enactments that have an impact on the relationship. The couple therapist sees the couple drama as it unfolds, and is a witness and containing presence to assist the couple in unravelling the past and present and to think together of a different future.

Another chapter to which I was drawn is "Oedipus Killed the Couple" by Viveka Nyberg. It brought together theoretical ideas from Freud on how we understand the oedipal situation, including the more complex psychological longings shared by both genders, and it offered insights into the way primitive anxieties can develop around intrusion and abandonment. The oedipal force is central to individual and couple dynamics, and it impacts partner choice, sexuality, relatedness in couples, work, and how we view the world. This chapter also spoke to the beauty of what can transpire between couple therapist and couple as they learn and grow in treatment.

Mary Morgan's chapter on projective identification is rich with Kleinian and Bionian concepts regarding projective identification as a defence and a means of communication. It is containment that the infant seeks from his/her mother, and Morgan elucidates how complicated the process of reverie and the introjection of degrees of containment can be, depending on the anxiety states of both mother and baby. It is easy to see how a vicious cycle can be created, even with the best of intentions, between an overwhelmed mother and the infant struggling for safety and sanctuary. Without containment, one's lived experience cannot be processed, and the mechanism for bearing, understanding, and metabolising his or her experiences uninitiated. This need for containment is in our minds when working both individually and with couples. Morgan coined the term "couple state of mind", which refers to the couple therapist's capacity to create a sense of the containment for the couple, and it suggests that the therapist be both outside, observing them, and in relationship to them separately and together.

David Hewison's chapter expands on the term "container-contained", a term coined by Bion, but also associated with Carl Jung. Bion looks at the adult in analysis and sees the infant he/she once was and how the early dynamic is repeated with the analyst in the analytic setting. Jung instead looks forward: he sees each individual in a committed couple and the potential for psychic development brought about through relationship. Both of these points of view speak to the potential containing aspect of every relationship. When that relationship breaks down, the normal projective system that used to hold it together begins to be replaced by excessive projective identifications, and the communication stops. The container may come apart when dependency is mutually developmental and not parasitic.

In Part II: Couple Stories and Clinical Commentaries, four anonymous couples tell a "couple story", which is then discussed by various eminent colleagues and contributors to the field of psychoanalytic couple psychotherapy. These discussions establish a foundation of psychoanalytic ideas and offer a lens on technical application. Therapists work alone, for the most part, so these case studies put the reader in the room as an observer and critic. It was a valuable exercise, and a virtual training. I enjoyed this section immensely.

The provision of these clinical vignettes brought to life the clinical techniques and theories that form the foundation of psychoanalysis. I found myself reading these clinical illustrations and commentaries and then going back to the theoretical sections of the book as if figuring out a puzzle. For couple work, it is the contemporary Kleinian and Bionian concepts and theories that are central to understanding the complexities and nuances of working with a bonded pair.

The first commentary focuses on a co-therapy model for couple therapy, and I wish more information on this model had been provided. How does

co-therapy work? What are its challenges with transference and co-transference? Does this method require special training? In which couple situations is co-therapy preferable to the single therapist model, and is that decision made before treatment begins?

Couple Stories will appeal to individual and couple psychotherapists as well as family therapists, psychoanalysts, graduate and postgraduate students in social work, psychology, marriage, and family therapy, or those in psychoanalytic training programmes. This book bridges a gap from thinking about individual psychotherapy to thinking about the complexities of the couple relationship. Importantly, most psychoanalytic institutes do not provide couple psychotherapy training, so the case studies in the second half of the book provide an observational training of sorts. As the book moves from psychic determinism and the individual in couple therapy to the impact of a couple relating sexually and psychically, it provides a basis for thinking about the complexity of object relations, the psychodynamics of couple and family work, and projective identification.

This book is somewhat reminiscent of *Couples on the Couch*, also published by Routledge (Nathans & Schaefer, 2017), which highlights the same concepts with some of the same material and authors. Another limitation, as I see it is that, although it acknowledges that these ideas are applicable to families of same-sex parents, we also need to think about how these ideas can be widened to validate the experience of those who are single mothers by choice; of surrogacy; of those who choose IVF and donor egg/sperm; of those with gender fluidity and LGBTQ issues; racial and cultural diversity amongst couples; and the impact of divorce on the child and the oedipal situation. Might this be the new frontier?

This collection of essays and case studies forms a solid foundation for new students and an opportunity for seasoned clinicians to validate and consider alternatives to their approach. For those psychodynamically trained who would like to get an idea of the theoretical and clinical touch points of practice with couples, this book offers an in-the-room experience.

REFERENCES

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Working with Developmental Anxieties in Couple and Family Psychotherapy: The Family Within, edited by Penny Jools, Jenny Berg, and Noela Byrne, Routledge, 2018

Reviewed by James L. Poulton

In *Working with Developmental Anxieties in Couple and Family Psychotherapy*, Penny Jools, Jenny Berg, and Noela Byrne have edited and written, with the help of five colleagues, a substantial and rewarding (for the reader) review of the psychoanalytic approach to couple and family psychotherapy. Taking as their starting point the assertion that “the emotional growth of a couple or family can usefully be explored using a model of the emotional growth of an infant” (p. 5), the authors first introduce a framework of developmental stages or positions (the authors are careful in their use of these terms) which can be used to characterise the intrapersonal and interactive dynamics of couples or families. They then devote the remainder of the book to offering straightforward explanations of the theoretical tenets that ground their approach, and providing vivid, compelling, and in-depth clinical cases to illustrate the usefulness of those theories in the here-and-now of the therapeutic session.

The developmental framework suggested by Jools and her colleagues is somewhat of an amalgamation: it attempts to bind together commonly recognised developmental positions with theories that focus more exclusively on pathological organisations. Included in their framework, for example, are Ogden’s autistic–contiguous and Klein’s paranoid–schizoid and depressive positions, but to these the authors add an oedipal stage, which they place between the paranoid–schizoid and the depressive, and a stage of narcissistic functioning, which they suggest occupies an area of “borderline” relationship pathology between the autistic–contiguous and the paranoid–schizoid. While readers may question the specifics of this developmental framework (should narcissism, for example, be accorded an intermediary place between the autistic–contiguous and the paranoid–schizoid, or is it a bird of a different feather—one that might find its place in any of the stages or positions the authors propose?), its clinical usefulness in helping therapists organise their thinking about a couple or family is indisputable—as is repeatedly illustrated throughout the rest of the book.

The authors emphasise that their developmental model is non-linear, and that in adults the positions co-exist and operate simultaneously. Moreover, each position contains its own unique anxieties, defences, and transferences that together generate the predominant internal configurations (the “family within”, the “internal couple”, etc.) that each individual brings to the couple or family. Once the authors have discussed the full breadth of their developmental framework, they then describe, in illuminating detail, the ways in which each individual’s internal configurations