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# Interview on Couple Work

Michael Soth

An extended interview exploring how Michael Soth's integral-relational approach to individual therapy translates into couple work — with particular attention to the therapist's embodied experience of sitting with two people whose wounding is enacted in real time between them, and the particular challenges and opportunities this brings.

KEY THEMES

— Adapting the integral-relational approach to couple work
— The therapist's bodymind in the presence of two people
— Parallel process in couple therapy
— Working with the couple's enactment
— The therapist as the third in the couple's field

## The Couple as a System

In couple work, the therapist sits with two people whose wounding is enacted in real time — not reconstructed in narrative or remembered, but actually happening between them in the room. This creates a particular kind of intensity and a particular kind of opportunity.

The couple is a system — a specific relational configuration with its own patterns, its own characteristic ways of managing the tension between closeness and distance, connection and autonomy. These patterns are often the very patterns which brought the couple into difficulty, and they will inevitably be enacted in the therapeutic space as well.

The therapist's job is not to referee or to take sides, but to be present to the system as a whole — to hold awareness of both people's individual wounding as it interacts with the couple pattern, and to remain grounded enough in their own bodymind experience to use that experience as information rather than being swept into the couple's enactment.

## The Therapist's Bodymind in the Couple Field

The integral-relational approach emphasises the therapist's own embodied experience as the primary source of clinical information. In individual work, this means attending to what is happening in the therapist's own bodymind in response to the client. In couple work, this challenge is multiplied: the therapist is receiving the energetic field of two people, and the projective identifications coming from both simultaneously.

The therapist will often find themselves pulled towards one partner more than the other — drawn into the couple's characteristic triangle of positions. Recognising this pull, and not automatically acting on it, is central to effective couple work. It requires the same quality of attention to embodied countertransference that characterises good individual work, but applied in a more complex and dynamic field.

There is also the question of the therapist as the 'third' in the couple's world — the new object, neither fully inside nor outside their system, whose presence creates the possibility of a different kind of relating than the couple has yet been able to generate between themselves.

## Working with Enactment between Partners

One of the distinctive features of couple work is that enactment happens not just between client and therapist but between the two partners themselves, in the therapist's presence. This is at once more vivid and potentially more rapidly transformative than the

gradual unfolding of enactment in individual work — and also more precarious.

The couple's enactment in the room is an opportunity: the wound is live, the parallel process is visible, the wounding dynamic can be observed and engaged with in real time. But it also carries higher risk of re-traumatisation if not carefully contained.

The therapist's task is to remain grounded in their own bodymind experience while attending to what is happening between the partners — using their own somatic responses as information about the field, while maintaining the perspective of the system as a whole. This requires a particular kind of equanimity: the capacity to be moved without being swept away.

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