SUPERVISION NOTES · 2011

# What Do I Pay Attention to in Supervision?

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These notes make explicit what Michael Soth pays attention to as a supervisor — and what supervisees might usefully prioritise when bringing clinical material. They articulate the integrative, relational underpinnings of his supervisory approach, focused on charged moments in the working alliance, gathering the fragments of enactment, and attending to multiple levels of parallel process.

KEY THEMES

— Background ideas underpinning the supervisory approach

— Charged moments in the working alliance

— Gathering the fragments of enactment

— Multiple levels of parallel process

— Ripeness of the therapeutic system

## Background Ideas

There are a few background ideas that set the scene and context for what I pay attention to as a supervisor. Central is the idea that the client's wound enters and pervades the therapeutic space — meaning that the client perceives and experiences the therapist through the wounding, through their character, through the transference (the transfer of the past into the present).

I work with Clarkson's model of multiple dimensions and modalities of therapeutic relatedness as a basis for an integrative relational flexibility and fluidity, which draws the best from all the traditional approaches whilst recognising the shadow aspects of each. I have extended that model (into the 'diamond model of relational modalities') in order to do justice to the tension between 'medical model' relating (objectifying, 'I-it') and intersubjective relating ('subjectifying', 'I-Thou'), with both paradoxically necessary.

These ideas combine into the fundamental notion of the three kinds of contact in the working alliance and the oscillations between these kinds of contact — in the tension between working alliance and enactment (like rupture-and-repair cycles), with both paradoxically necessary. The third kind of contact includes recognition of the dangers as well as the transformative potential of enactment as a highly charged moment of relational neuroplasticity.

## Charged Moments in the Working Alliance

In supervision I am interested in charged moments in the working alliance which constitute moments of uncertainty and conflict for the therapist — starting to become noticeable in Contact 2 of the three kinds of contact, where dissonance is present alongside resonance, and the working alliance is conflicted and ambivalent.

I am then interested in how the therapist has impulses to avoid the enactment, and how these impulses inform their reactions and interventions — typically digging themselves deeper in. The therapist's impulses (both towards avoiding the enactment and acting into it) emerge from their habitual countertransference (their personal history, their training and habitual position as a therapist) as well as the situational countertransference internalised from the client.

A simple formulation for paying attention to the early manifestations of enactment in the therapist's awareness: the client's conflict becomes the therapist's conflict. This formulation alerts us to look for the way the client's internal dynamic has been transferred into the therapist's internal experience.

## Gathering the Fragments

I am then interested in gathering the fragments of the enactment into a two-person systemic whole — a multidimensional configuration that includes both people's body, emotion, imagination, mind and intuition in relationship in the intersubjective here-and-now. The main thing I then pay attention to is the multiple levels of parallel process.

The formula for making it as likely as possible that the enactment will become transformative rather than negative re-traumatisation is: if sufficient levels of parallel process can be held in awareness across all the bodymind levels in relationship in the here-and-now, the enactment is more likely to become transformative.

Practically, this means attending to the client's internal conflict as a relational bodymind pattern (character formation); the multiple levels of parallel process (3 and 5 parallel relationships); gathering the body-emotion-image-mind-intuition fragments of the enactment; the intersubjective versus object-relating tension; and the 'ripeness' of the therapeutic system — an indication of what the possibilities are for making the enactment explicit, and to what extent it needs to remain implicit because intensifying awareness at this point would be re-traumatising.

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