Disillusion in Couple Therapy
Transference and Countertransference Implications

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Types of Transference

- **Contextual Tranference**
  - Related to Winnicott’s ‘environment mother’
  - Revealed in attitude toward frame of treatment and toward therapist as provider of therapeutic environment

- **Focused Transference**
  - Related to Winnicott’s ‘object mother’
  - Therapist becomes a discrete object fashioned according to the patient’s internal object world

(Scharff & Scharff, 1987)
Transference in Couples

- Each partner has, individually:
  - Contextual transference toward the couple and the therapy
  - Focused transference toward the other partner and the therapist
- The couple transference
  - A shared transference toward the therapist
  - Based in both contextual and focused transferences
- Couples move rapidly between multiple types of transference
Transference in Couples

The Therapeutic Relationship

The Couple Relationship

Partner

Focused Transference

Partner

Focused Transference

Focused Transference to Therapist

Shared Transf. Focused & Contextual

Focused Transference to Therapist

Therapist

Contextual Transferences
The Therapist’s Countertransference

- Origins
  - Therapist’s own internal world
  - Patient’s internal world - from projection and projective identification
- Heimann: The therapist’s unconscious understands that of the patient
- Tower: Therapist’s and patient’s unconscious are in continual interaction
The Therapist’s Use of Countertransference

- The therapist takes on the couple’s individual and pooled transferences
- Uses reverie, play, evenly suspended attention, negative capability
- Analyzes the connection between CT responses and the patients’ core dynamics
- Uses this information to illuminate transferenceal processes operating in the relationship
- Primary goal: Help each partner provide a ‘secure base’ and ‘safe haven’ to the other
Working Between the Individual and the Couple

- Couples bring individual and shared transferences toward: each other, the couple and the therapist
- All transferences are in play in any session
- The therapist tracks what transference is active at what point, and focuses the couple’s attention on important transferences whatever their origin
- The therapist has to manage the tensions associated with transferences in all of these dimensions
A Word about Entanglements

- **Enactments:**
  - The acting out of transference or countertransference positions (even if in subtle ways), rather than containing and working them through

- **Entanglements:**
  - The mutually unconscious, interactive enactments between patient(s) and therapist

(Jacobs, 1986; Aron, 2003)
Foundations of Disillusion, I

- Béla Grunberger (1989)
  - The fetus exists in a state of ‘perfect completeness’
  - The narcissist re-seeks this ideal state in the form of fantasized *perfect bliss, absolute sovereignty, omnipotence* and *absence of conflict*
Foundations of Disillusion, II

- Donald Meltzer (1988)
  - The aesthetic conflict
    - The newborn baby is faced with an inherently ambiguous situation
    - The ‘outside’ of mother is beautiful and joy-giving
    - But the ‘inside’ of mother is enigmatic, unknown, frightening
    - “Like ‘K’ (Kafka’s, not Bion’s) [the infant] must wait for decisions from the ‘castle’ of his mother’s inner world.” (p. 22)
Solutions to the Aesthetic Conflict

- Accept ambiguity as the nature of external objects
  - Includes acceptance of one’s own ambivalence toward those objects
- Reject one side of the ambiguity
  - Narcissism - rejection of the other’s internality (re-find the perfect mother with no conflict)
  - Paranoia - rejection of the other’s joy-giving beauty
References