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Response to MacIntosh's Review and Discussion of the Psychoanalytic Couple Therapy Journal Literature: A Self Psychological, Intersubjective Perspective

Carla Leone, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

After expressing my appreciation to Heather MacIntosh and highlighting her article's significant contributions to the field, I comment briefly on some of the implications of her methodology and findings. I then elaborate on her summary of the history of the application of self psychology (Kohut, 1971) and intersubjective systems theory (Stolorow, Brandshaft, and Atwood, 1987) to couple therapy, highlighting the key contributions of both theories and describing the current state of the field.

Introduction

What a great 50th birthday gift Heather MacIntosh's systematic literature review is to the field of psychoanalytic couple therapy. We owe her a significant debt of gratitude for this labor of love and the valuable information it offers couple therapists, teachers, students, scholars, researchers and hopefully journal editors and even funders—as well as, indirectly, couples seeking help. I've said it before (as MacIntosh correctly notes in her review), and I'll say it again, couple therapy is hard. Couple therapists can, therefore, use all the help we can get—and this article can help us and our field in a number of important ways.

Reading this article was a selfobject experience for me in many ways, to use somewhat dated but still useful terminology. I felt affirmed and understood by MacIntosh's referencing of my work and her generally positive presentation of the branch of psychoanalysis that I (and I believe she) most identify with. I also felt admiration for her, her work, and the 50 years of literature and ancestry of authors her review highlights for us—as well as a sense of belonging or similarity with these fellow authors and readers with whom I share a common interest. I believe many readers will have similar reactions, although they may use different language to describe them.

In addition to functioning as a potential source of selfobject experience, MacIntosh's review makes a number of important contributions. Like a Google map or television weather map, it provides an aerial view of psychoanalytic couple therapy as it has evolved over the last fifty years. It also allows us closer, zoomed-in views of certain aspects of the field, including several informative tables and bibliographies, which are a much needed and very valuable resource.

Overall, the article shows us where psychoanalytic couple therapy has been, where we are, what we've accomplished thus far—and missed thus far—and where we might go from here. It also introduces many of us to a particular method of reviewing literature, the Cochrane Review methodology, which will hopefully serve as a model or inspiration for other similar undertakings. All in all, quite a birthday present, for which this article is, in part, a thank-you note.

In this response, I follow the outline of MacIntosh's article section by section, commenting briefly on her methodology and each of her findings, before elaborating and expanding on her section on self psychology and intersubjective systems theory.

Methodology and findings

Reactions to the study's methodology

First, as noted, the article contributes by introducing more members of the psychoanalytic community to the Cochrane Method of reviewing literature. I had never heard of the method before—to my knowledge it is not well known by, or often utilized by, psychoanalytic authors—and was very glad to learn more about it.¹

My next reaction was to wonder about MacIntosh's use of the term *couple psychoanalysis* in the article's title and throughout the article. For me it raised the question of whether MacIntosh in particular, and we as a field in general, see a distinction between *couple psychoanalysis* and other terms, such as *psychoanalytic couple therapy*,² or *psychoanalytically-informed or oriented couple therapy*. Related to this, I understand MacIntosh's stated decision not to include articles about psychodynamic couple therapy, but, given the clear implication that there is a significant difference between psychoanalytic and psychodynamic couple work (beyond the possible differences in numbers of articles published about each), I would have liked some clarification of how she understands the difference, especially because a few papers with the word psychodynamic in the title still made it into the final 113 papers (Feldman, 1982; Willi, 1984), which was confusing to me. These questions are important because they echo similar questions that have been raised in the field of psychoanalysis in general (e.g., Stern, 2009; Aron, 2009), and because we need some consensus about how we define terms and distinguish between them in order to communicate clearly and be accurately understood both within and outside the psychoanalytic community.

In addition, MacIntosh notes that she chose to exclude articles from the larger literature on psychodynamic couple therapy, in part due to concerns that the presumably large number of articles in this category would be unwieldy and too large to allow use of the Cochrane Method. However, a cursory search revealed very few articles on psychodynamic couple therapy that were not already included in MacIntosh's 113 articles. This not to say those additional articles should have been included; I point this out only to accurately situate the 113 articles she did include in their larger context.

Results regarding where papers were published

MacIntosh's findings regarding where articles in her sample were published lend support to a long-standing concern of mine that psychoanalytic couple therapy is currently not doing a good enough job of communicating the benefits of our approach to those outside psychoanalytic circles (Leone, 2016), especially in comparison to currently popular³ nonpsychoanalytic, manualized models of couple treatment such as the Gottman Method (Gottman and Gottman, 2008) or Emotionally Focused Therapy for Couples (Johnson, 2004). Given this concern, I was initially pleased to see that of the 43 journals in which articles appeared (listed in MacIntosh's Table 1), slightly over half (22) were psychoanalytic journals while the remaining 21 were not,⁴ and that of the 113 articles in

¹In fact, I would have welcomed a little more information about the approach—perhaps in a footnote.

²To me, couple psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic couple therapy are interchangeable, except that *couple psychoanalysis* indicates that the treating provider is a psychoanalyst, and the provider of *psychoanalytic couple therapy* might or might not be an analyst (I am not.). Many years ago, I was told that the term *psychoanalytic* should only be used to refer to work conducted by a psychoanalyst, and nonpsychoanalysts should always refer to their work or thinking as psychoanalytically-oriented or informed—even if they were extremely immersed in and knowledgeable about psychoanalysis. I tried to follow that guideline for a while, not wanting to offend, but never heard it again and it does not seem to be a convention currently being followed by many ... I appreciate this, because as the years have gone by, describing what I do as psychoanalytically oriented or informed doesn't feel quite right or accurate to me. These terms, to me, imply something operating faintly in the background, which does not accurately capture the more fundamental, constant, or *in my bones* way I experience psychoanalytic theory operating in me and my work.

³At least in the United States and Canada.

⁴I counted journals as psychoanalytic if the words *psychoanalytic* or *psychoanalysis* appeared in their title or in the brief description of the journal's mission on the journal's web site. All others were considered nonpsychoanalytic. None were difficult to classify as one or the other. Journals classified as Nonpsychoanalytic journals include, for example, *Family Process*, *Clinical Social Work Journal*, *Sexual and Marital Therapy*, and the *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*.



the study, 43, or 38%, were published in nonpsychoanalytic journals, including the very first paper by Dicks in 1967. This means that clinicians outside the psychoanalytic community (who presumably read nonpsychoanalytic journals) are still exposed to occasional articles on psychoanalytic couple therapy. However, a closer look revealed that the number of articles published in nonpsychoanalytic journals has declined over time,⁵ perhaps especially since *Couple and Family Psychoanalysis* was founded. Thus, MacIntosh's findings remind us that psychoanalytic couple therapists need to continue to publish in nonpsychoanalytic journals too, rather than just preaching to the choir of other psychoanalysts.

Her findings also suggest that we are not even preaching to the choir all that well, either. I was surprised and dismayed to learn from Table 1 that so many well-known psychoanalytic journals have published only one or two papers on couple therapy throughout their entire existence. Although I was not surprised to learn, for example, that the *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy* had published only one article on psychoanalytic couple therapy since its inception, I was not expecting the same to be true of *Psychoanalytic Psychology*—the official publication of the Division of Psychoanalysis of the American Psychological Association (Division 39)⁶—or of *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, the *Psychoanalytic Review*, or the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, among many others.

Also, because all ten papers on couple therapy published in *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* appeared in one special issue of invited papers in 2004,⁷ MacIntosh's findings show that, with the exception of the new *Couple and Family Psychoanalysis* journal, no psychoanalytic journals regularly publish articles about psychoanalytic couple therapy—not even one a year, or one every few years. Of course, we don't know if this is because those journals are not receiving submissions on this topic, are rejecting those they do get, or what, but either way I think this is a problem. Many psychoanalysts and psychoanalytically-oriented clinicians see primarily individual patients, and may have only one or two couples on their caseload at a time. They are thus not likely to subscribe to or read (or perhaps even know about) *Couple and Family Psychoanalysis* or a special issue like this one. They can thus benefit from occasional articles on couple therapy in whatever psychoanalytic journals they ordinarily read.

Methodologies used: Case studies versus multiple vignettes versus research

The key findings of this section (i.e., that most articles in MacIntosh's study used a single in-depth case illustration, but a smaller percentage used multiple vignettes and a still smaller group included no clinical material; that only two of 113 articles in 50 years used a quantitative or empirical approach; and that none of this has changed much over the years) were all interesting but not surprising. The same is true for the finding that both empirical articles were authored by analysts from the Tavistock Centre in London, a clinic that receives government funding, as well as government pressure, to demonstrate effectiveness. Surprising or not, I hope these findings will stimulate more empirical research on psychoanalytic couple therapy, especially because part of the draw of the nonpsychoanalytic, manualized models of couple therapy noted previously appears to be that those models can claim empirical support, in addition to being easier to learn.

⁵Of the 43 articles published in nonpsychoanalytic journals, four appeared in the 1960s, nine in the '70s, eight in the '80s, fifteen in the '90s, six in the 2000s, and one between 2010 and 2013.

⁶This was especially surprising because the one article was mine (Leone, 2008). I submitted it to *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, having no idea that the journal had only published one previous paper on couple therapy since its inception in 1981. (That paper was Zeitner, 2003, which was not included in MacIntosh's review, because it didn't meet inclusion criteria.)

⁷Nothing against special issues—I'm certainly happy to be included in this one and think they make an important contribution—but when comparing numbers of publications per journal as MacIntosh does in Table 1, it seems important to compare apples to apples. Publishing one (and now two) special issue(s) on couple therapy, although valuable, is still different than periodically, regularly including papers on the topic.

Characteristics of couples used as case examples

MacIntosh's findings regarding the incredible lack of diversity in the couples presented as case examples in our literature—and the almost complete lack of discussion of the potential impact of any differences between therapists and patients in terms of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation—were striking, somewhat embarrassing, and alarming. I immediately began to think about how I might contribute to rectifying such omissions in the future. In addition, her findings regarding the shifts, over time, in the way gender roles and sexual orientation have been viewed in society and in our literature was a helpful reminder—and made me wonder what we are publishing today that will be held up as an illustration of an earlier, less enlightened period 50 years from now.

Next, because I am among the authors who have sometimes included a footnote in my papers noting that the points made in it apply equally to both married and unmarried, gay and straight couples, I was very interested in MacIntosh's suggestion that statements like these, although well intended, may actually unhelpfully minimize the differences between same-sex and heterosexual couples. Although I still think it is true that many points or concepts do apply pretty equally to both types of couples, I agree with MacIntosh that it's important not to minimize the differences between same-sex and heterosexual couples, including the various forms of social oppression and (in self-psychological language) the particular kinds of misattunements and selfobject failures from caregivers and society in general that LGBTQ individuals suffer and heterosexuals do not.

Finally, MacIntosh's findings draw our attention to the fact that very few articles in our literature address the treatment of couples in which one or both partners has a history of *Big T* traumas, such as childhood physical and sexual abuse, adult sexual assault, and intimate partner violence. Again, I found it quite helpful to have these omissions pointed out and hope to contribute to rectifying them in the future.

Authors' theoretical orientations

This section is a great gift to both students and teachers of psychoanalytic couple therapy, who seek to understand or explain (or both) the differences between the four major branches of psychoanalytic couple treatment—classical, object relations, self psychology/intersubjectivity, and relational—and the defining characteristics of each. MacIntosh has done our field a great service, not only by tallying the number of articles by authors of different orientations, but also by summarizing their key themes or concepts and evaluating (qualitatively) the extent to which articles within each branch seem to provide some consistency or consensus about the causes of couples' difficulties and how to help them change. I predict that her article will end up on many a syllabi for courses on psychoanalytic couple therapy, as it should—it's certainly going on mine—and I hope it will be included on syllabi for general survey courses on couple therapy as well.

I realize this is outside the scope of her article, but both as a reader and teacher I'd love to know which of the articles in each section MacIntosh would recommend most highly for students or those new to psychoanalytic approaches. In light of my concern about manualized, nonpsychoanalytic models being more popular because they are clearer, more straight-forward, and easier to learn, it would be helpful to identify the clearest, most readable, and most accessible papers on psychoanalytic couple therapy for those outside the field.

The finding that the theoretical orientations of the articles published in successive decades generally mirrored the overall trajectory of the field of individual psychoanalysis (first classical, then object relations, then self psychology/intersubjectivity theory, and most recently relational) was, again, interesting but not surprising. The same is true of the findings that more than half of the articles were by object relations authors, that the number of articles using a relational approach have been increasing in recent years, and that it was more difficult to classify articles into one of the four branches over time due to integration or cross-fertilization of the different branches. I agree with her that the latter difficulty, although it may have made her job more difficult for the purpose of this article, is generally a positive development.

I was especially interested in MacIntosh's contention that her results indicate an evolution in the field from simply "applying" psychoanalytic concepts to couple treatment to the "full-bodied, well-articulated, clear and concise approaches" of today. I'm not sure I see the distinction she's making there, because to me the work of Dicks and other early authors still involved a well-thought-out and articulated approach to couple therapy—albeit not in easily accessible, readable language in most cases. (And, unfortunately, I think many present-day psychoanalytic authors are not necessarily "clear and concise," either.) However, I do agree that as more articles were published over time, later authors have been able to draw upon and build on the work of earlier authors, leading to a gradual consensus or to more well-established or fleshed out concepts that can, hopefully, be more easily taught and empirically studied.

Self psychology, intersubjectivity theory, and couple therapy

Although Kohut did not work with couples or write about couple therapy, he did make a number of comments about couples that informed later efforts to apply his ideas to couple treatment. For example, in his second book he noted that "there is no mature love in which the love object is not also a self-object. ... There is no love relationship without mutual (self-esteem enhancing) mirroring and idealization" (Kohut, 1971, p.122). And in a lengthy footnote in his post-posthumously published 1984 book, he encouraged "extensive studies of the great variety of selfobject relations that support the cohesion, vigor and harmony of the adult self," including the "mutual selfobject functions that partners in a good marriage provide for each other" (Kohut, 1971, p. 200n). He noted that although he had quipped early in his career that "a good marriage is one in which only one partner is crazy at any given time," he had only later, with the vantage point of self psychology, come to see how true that joke really was, writing:

The truth to which it alludes is that a good marriage is one in which one or the other partner rises to the challenge of providing the selfobject functions that the other's temporarily impaired sense of self needs at a particular moment.⁸ And who can potentially respond with more accurate empathic resonance to a person's needs than his or her marital partner? And, conversely, who—as every analyst has ample opportunity to observe—can traumatize a person more than a wife or husband who, like the traumatizing parental selfobject of childhood, responds with flawed understanding or, feeling overburdened, refuses to respond at all? This is indeed the stuff of which the breakup of marriages accompanied by the undying hatred of the marital partners for each other (chronic narcissistic rage following chronic disappointments) is made. [Kohut, 1971, p. 200n]

As these quotes reflect, the selfobject concept—including selfobject needs, selfobject transference, and selfobject experience—is an important contribution to psychoanalytic couple treatment, one not offered by the other branches. It helps us understand both what partners are needing and seeking from each other and what they are missing and reacting to so intensely when things go badly between them. Although the concept also has its drawbacks (e.g., the term *selfobject* is jargon, experience-distant, easily misunderstood or used incorrectly, and in some usages can be seen as retaining remnants of a *one-person psychology*), I know of no other term or concept that more richly captures what human beings need and seek in intimate relationships throughout our lives. For this reason, the Kohut quote I think is most useful for couple therapists is this one, perhaps Kohut's best description of selfobject needs and selfobject experience:

Throughout his life a person will experience himself as a cohesive harmonious firm unit in time and space, connected with his past and pointing meaningfully into a creative-productive future, only as long as, at each stage of his life, he experiences certain representatives of his human surrounding as joyfully responding to him, as available to him as sources of idealized strength and calmness, as being silently present but in essence like him, and, at any rate, able to grasp his inner life more or less accurately so that their responses are attuned to his needs and allow him to grasp their inner life when he is in need of such sustenance. [Kohut, 1971, pp. 51–52]

This concept of lifelong needs for relationships and experiences that are affirming, vitalizing, strengthening, comforting, regulating, and growth-promoting to me offers couple therapists a clearer vision or

⁸MacIntosh quotes this sentence at the beginning of her section of self psychology and intersubjectivity theory.

depiction of healthy relationships than do other branches of psychoanalysis. Our job is to help couple get there or get back there—often by engaging in that kind of relationship with each partner ourselves.

Reactions to MacIntosh's section on self psychology and intersubjectivity

I was pleasantly surprised to see that MacIntosh counted 25 articles on the application of self psychology and intersubjectivity theory to couple treatment in the 35 years since the first one appeared in 1981. However, a closer look revealed that she included several articles that I imagine she force-coded as self psychological, per her described methodology, although their authors might not self-identify that way (Graller, 1981; Goldstein and Thau, 2004; Pizer and Pizer, 2006; Solomon, 2009, Solomon and Weiss, 1992⁹). She also included an article of mine that is really more about the individual treatment of patients with relationship complaints (Leone, 2013a) than about couple therapy, although it does make reference to a couples case and to referring individual patients for couple therapy. So, in my mind, the true number is a little lower.

The only additions I have to MacIntosh's bibliography of peer-reviewed journal articles are Solomon (1988a) and Schwartzman (1984). I have no books to add, other than a very recently published book by Nielsen (2016), a psychoanalyst whose approach integrates systemic, psychodynamic, and behavioral theories, the psychodynamic component of which is heavily influenced by self psychology. I also add a book chapter by Doctors (2007) on incorporating attachment theory into a self psychological, intersubjective approach, which includes one fairly detailed couple case among multiple case examples.

In addition, although it is slightly outside the scope of this article, I would like to call readers' attention to the literature on the application of self psychology and intersubjective systems theory to family therapy (Unger and Levene, 1994; Shaddock, 1997; Leone, 2001, 2007)—including parenting-oriented treatment (Eldridge and Schmidt, 1990) and “child-centered family treatment” (Ornstein, 1984–1985, p. 349)—and to group therapy (e.g., Weinstein, 1987, 1991; Bacal, 1992; Stone, 1992, 2001; Harwood and Pines, 1998; Livingston, 1999; Livingston and Livingston, 2006). Many of the ideas from these literatures are easily applicable to couple therapy as well.

For example, both Ornstein (1984–1985) and Eldridge and Schmidt (1990) discussed translating the child’s needs to the parent, much as a couple therapist might translate or explain one partner’s needs to the other. They also note the importance of *not* translating at times—or of refraining from interpreting or trying to educate the parent—when doing so is not experienced by the parent as an attuned response to his or her particular or primary selfobject need of the moment. Instead, these authors suggest that the family therapist or parent-child therapist first and foremost focus on responding in a very empathically attuned manner to the needs of the (even abusive or very misattuned) parent. The parent becomes more attuned to the child not by being directly taught to be, but by experiencing empathic attunement herself in her relationship with the therapist: learning it implicitly, as we might say today. The same holds true for many couples in which one or both partners are not open to being taught anything in the couple treatment; such partners (at least initially) learn how to be in an intimate relationship by being in one with the couple therapist. This is just one example of how the literature on group, family, and parenting-oriented therapy can have implications for couple therapy, as well.

Self psychology and couple therapy: Mid-1980s to early 1990s

As MacIntosh notes, early articles applying self psychology to couple treatment emphasized the theory’s usefulness for understanding and treating particularly narcissistically vulnerable couples

⁹Although Solomon’s earlier work was very self psychology-based, beginning with her 1992 coauthored paper (Solomon and Weiss, 1992), her work has focused more on attachment theory, affect theory, and neuroscience.

or partners—variously described as those functioning at a pre-Oedipal level, unable to view the other as distinct and separate, [having narcissistic transferences (Solomon, 1988b)], and/or as suffering from self disorders (Solomon, 1988a). The idea that self psychological concepts were primarily applicable only to a particular subset of couples was consistent with Kohut's initial distinction between patients suffering from structural conflict versus those with self disorders (Kohut, 1971). However, just as Kohut later asserted that his theory was applicable to all people (Kohut, 1984), later authors applying his work to couple treatment abandoned this distinction as well.

Schwartzman's (1984) article focused on the lifelong need for selfobject experience and the selfobject functions that marital partners serve—or fail to serve—for each other. She asserted that marital discord stems at least in part from a disruption in the selfobject tie between partners, and suggested that more classical formulations of couples, such as those by Ackerman (1958) and Barnett (1971, p. 75) discussing the “obsessional-hysterical” marriage, had overemphasized intrapsychic character structure and missed the significant influence of current self-object failure between the partners. She gave five clinical examples illustrating various kinds of selfobject needs and failures between partners. Regarding treatment, she noted that the therapist may need to function as a selfobject¹⁰ for the partners until they can function that way for each other.

Solomon (1985, 1988a, 1988b) also asserted the normal need for selfobject experience between partners, viewing such needs as healthy as long as they are realistic, limited, and reciprocal. She suggested that healthy marriages make room for occasional regressions by each partner to more infantile or child-like behavior at times, while the other temporarily functions in a more adult or care-taking role, and vice versa when the roles are reversed. Other key points from her work, which have generally been incorporated by subsequent authors, include:

- All couples' difficulties or presenting problems (whether about money, sex, parenting, and so on), reflect some degree of selfobject failure between the partners and need to be translated into the language of unmet emotional needs;
- Partners suffering from the results of early, chronic selfobject failures are less able to see others as separate people with their own needs and are more dependent on their partners to bolster their self-esteem and support their overall functioning. They, therefore, require an approach that takes these more fundamental deficits or difficulties into account.
- People replay or repeat aspects of their early relationships in their marital relationships with the hope of repair. Repair can occur in some cases if the partners are better able to get their needs met in their marriages.
- Treatment goals vary depending on the degree of narcissistic vulnerability of each partner and the history of injury between them, but typically include helping partners learn a “new communicative language” (Solomon, 1988b, p. 219) through which they can hear and respond to the other's selfobject needs, and increasing their ability to tolerate occasional selfobject failures.
- It is crucial that the couple therapist pay close attention to partners' narcissistic vulnerabilities. This often means (temporarily) avoiding interpretations or suggestions for change if these are experienced as narcissistically injurious by one or both partners. Rather, the focus is on making the sessions a safe space or haven for both partners, carefully exploring each one's subjective experience in minute detail, and gradually identifying and normalizing both partners' underlying vulnerabilities and needs. This helps partners gradually drop their defensiveness and begin to understand themselves and each other differently.

¹⁰We would now more commonly say function as a potential source of selfobject experience, using selfobject as an adjective describing a dimension of an experience, rather than as a noun or thing.

The intersubjective turn: Mid-1990s to present

Although Solomon was one of very few authors to apply self psychology to couples treatment during the '80s,¹¹ the advent of intersubjectivity theory as proposed by Stolorow and his colleagues (e.g., Stolorow, Brandshaft, and Atwood, 1987; Stolorow and Atwood, 1992) had an enormous influence on self psychology in general and eventually led to a relative boom of work applying this model to conjoint therapy (Ringstrom, 1994, 1998, 2012; Trop, 1994, 1997; Livingston, 1995, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2007; Shaddock, 1997, 1998; Rubalcava & Waldman, 2004; Leone, 2008, 2013a).¹² The major contributions of intersubjectivity theory and their implications for couple work include the following:

- its contention that misattuned parenting and other traumatic early experiences lead not so much to developmental arrests or self-deficits as Kohut proposed, but rather to unique ways of organizing experience involving unique unconscious organizing principles about oneself, others, relationships and the world, which develop through early and repeated relational experiences. This concept has clear implications for couple therapy, as couples' conflicts or difficulties can be seen as related to the two partners' differently organized subjective worlds interfering with their ability to meet each other's selfobject needs. Each partner's subjective experience and organizing principles thus need to be explored, illuminated, understood and gradually transformed.
- its promotion of the postmodern, constructivist concept of reality as subjective and constructed rather than objective—an important concept for anyone in intimate relationships to grasp and keep in mind (including therapists and patients).
- its redefinition of transference as organizing activity (vs. projection, distortion, etc.), such that current experiences are processed through existing organizing principles, and its proposal of two dimensions of such activity: the selfobject dimension and the repetitive dimension. This contribution was very helpful in understanding couples as both longing for needed selfobject experiences from each other but also expecting and fearing a repetition of previous painful or disappointing experiences—something couple therapists can help them see and understand.
- its contention that selfobject needs primarily involve the need for attuned responsiveness to affect states—or help experiencing, modulating, and integrating affect. In addition to Kohut's proposed three types of selfobject needs, this revision also helps couple therapists understand what intimate partners are needing and seeking from each other.

Each author who applied these concepts to couple work made a unique contribution. Ringstrom (1994) articulated a six-step model of couple treatment, illustrated with a detailed case example, which made the application of these concepts quite clear and accessible.¹³ Livingston contributed a series of articles on self psychological, "multi-subjective" couple work (1995, p. 427) including papers on transference and counter-transference (1995), conflict and aggression (1998), the use of dream interpretation with couples (2001), and helping couples share more vulnerable feelings or sustain longer "vulnerable moments" (2001, p. 3). In a series of presentations, articles, and two books, Shaddock (1998, 2000, 2002) incorporated concepts from nonlinear dynamic systems

¹¹I have always wondered why more people didn't see the obvious applicability of Kohut's work to conjoint work earlier. I can only guess that this was, at least in part, due to the unfortunate historical split between family systems theory and psychoanalytic theory.

¹²To me, MacIntosh's statement that self psychology and intersubjectivity theory are "distinct models of treatment ... born of similar ancestry" (MacIntosh, 2018, this issue, p. 341) is not quite accurate, because it implies that two distinct models derived separately from a third *ancestor*, which (other than both being influenced by Freud as all psychoanalytic models are) is not the case. Rather, much of Kohut's work predicated that of Stolorow and his colleagues, who both critiqued and built upon Kohut's ideas, which he reportedly welcomed (Stolorow, 2010). However, other aspects of intersubjectivity theory emerged independently of self psychology and are broadly applicable to all psychoanalytic models, not just self psychology.

¹³He recently revised this model to incorporate the influence of relational theory (Ringstrom, 2012), especially the concept of enactments—see Ringstrom, this issue.

theory into the intersubjective model and emphasized the ability to facilitate deep individual change within a couple treatment context. Trop focused more narrowly on the influence of each partner's unconscious organizing principles on their experience of each other (Trop, 1994), and discussed countertransference in couple work from an intersubjective perspective (Trop, 1997). Finally, Rubalcava and Waldman (2004) emphasized the difficulties in mutual selfobject responsiveness that can arise secondary to different "cultural organizing principles" (p. 134).

My work on couple therapy (Leone, 2008, 2013b) has highlighted, integrated, and built on the work of these previous authors. I have particularly emphasized the importance of *equal empathic immersion* into the subjective experience of each partner, and of *balanced attuned responsiveness* (after Levene, 1997) to each partners' experience and needs, as well as the importance of recognizing and interpreting the "forward edge" (e.g., Tolpin, 2002, p. 167) of even very dysfunctional behaviors between partners—including infidelity (Leone, 2013b). I have also suggested that directive interventions such as advice, suggestions, or psychoeducation can function as empathically-attuned selfobject responses in some cases, if offered thoughtfully and carefully, with an awareness of transference-countertransference dynamics (Leone, 2001, 2008). Most recently, I have been working on comparing and contrasting the key tenets of self psychological, Emotion-Focused, (e.g., Johnson, 2004) and Gottman Method (Gottman and Gottman, 2008) approaches to couple therapy, and proposing ways that psychoanalytic and manualized models can enhance each other (Leone, 2016).

Integrating attachment theory, infant research, and neuroscience into the self psychological/intersubjective approach: Late '1990s to present

Beginning in the mid to late 1990s, a number of authors began to note the similarities or areas of overlap between attachment theory (e.g., Bowlby, 1988) and self psychology/intersubjective systems theory (Shane, Shane, and Gales, 1997; Doctors, 2007; Hartmann, 2009; Schore, 2002; Carr and Cortina, 2011) and to suggest that attachment theory concepts could be fruitfully incorporated into the self psychological/intersubjective approach to individual treatment. To date only a few have applied those ideas to the treatment of couples in particular (Doctors, 2007; Howard, 2004; Solomon, 2009), however. Framing partners' difficulties in the language of attachment theory—such as viewing aggressive behavior as an *attachment protest* or reaction to feeling insecurely attached, for example—has much in common with the self psychology concept of translating partners' complaints into the language of unmet selfobject needs and seeing forward edge or growth-seeking aspect of even dysfunctional behaviors. In addition, as Doctors (2007) has noted, attachment theory's concept of internal working models has much in common with intersubjective systems theory's concept of unconscious organizing principles. It is noteworthy that because attachment theory is one of the theories undergirding Johnson's EFT (Johnson, 2004), one of the major models of manualized, nonpsychoanalytic couple treatment referred to earlier, it can be seen as one area of overlap between EFT and self psychological/intersubjective approaches.

In recent years, authors have increasingly suggested that results of infant research and neuroscience research can usefully inform individual treatment (Beebe and Lachmann, 2002), but only a few authors (e.g., Solomon, 2009; Fishbane and Seigal, 2013, Shaddock, *in submission*) have begun applying them to couple therapy in particular¹⁴. The considerable interest in this topic among self psychologically oriented couple therapists was evident in a very well-attended online colloquia sponsored by the Couples Therapy Interest Group of the International Association for Psychoanalytic Self Psychology (IAPSP) in April of 2015, in which Shaddock's

¹⁴I am not including Goldstein and Thau's (2004) article on integrating attachment theory and neuroscience here, because although the article was listed in MacIntosh's bibliography as part of the self psychology/intersubjectivity theory literature, I don't consider it part of that literature and doubt the authors would.

article on the application of infant research to couple therapy was enthusiastically received and discussed.

Where to from here?

My hope is that future writing on self psychological, intersubjective approaches to couple therapy will continue to be increasingly clear, readable, accessible, and experience-near, so that readers within and outside the psychoanalytic community will be able to easily understand and grasp the benefits of this approach. This includes using a wide range of couples as case examples and applying the approach to a wider range of populations and problems. For example, although a few self psychological/intersubjective authors have addressed the treatment of aggressive couples (Livingston, 1998), those dealing with the aftermath of infidelity (Leone, 2013b) and those in which one or both partners are trauma survivors (MacIntosh, 2013), to my knowledge none have discussed couples in which one or both partners have a substance abuse disorder, attention deficit disorder, learning disabilities, an autistic spectrum disorder, or suffer from various forms of sexual dysfunction.

I also hope future authors will continue to consider the usefulness of incorporating—although not necessarily integrating¹⁵—concepts from outside psychoanalysis, including those from infant research and neuroscience, as well as some from nonpsychoanalytic manualized models. And I hope more nonpsychoanalytic couple therapists will incorporate psychoanalytic concepts and thinking into their work with couples, which I believe will benefit them and the couples they treat.

Summary and conclusion

Heather MacIntosh's systematic review of fifty years of articles on couple psychoanalysis, as she describes it, or psychoanalytic couple therapy, as I do, does a great service to the field, especially to its students and teachers. In this commentary, I highlighted what I see as the article's most significant contributions, but also raised questions about the use of the term *couple psychoanalysis* and advocated for greater clarity in our definitions and terminology. After commenting on each significant finding MacIntosh reported, I elaborated on the thirty-year history of the application of self psychology and intersubjective systems theory to couple treatment, highlighting the theories' most significant contributions and suggesting possible directions for future work.

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¹⁵See Doctors, 2007, for a discussion of the distinction between the two.

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