

**Ringstrom, Philip A. *A relational psychoanalytic approach to couples psychotherapy*. New York, Routledge, 2014.**

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This book is based on Ringstrom's many years of treating couples, consulting to other clinicians and teaching seminars. His conceptual basis for working with couples, "begins with three themes, representative of qualities that are optimal for the functioning of long-term committed relationships. These three themes pertain to *self-actualisation in a committed intimate relationship, mutual recognition, and the relationship having a mind of its own.*" (p.7) These are discussed in some detail in chapter one which provides his theoretical overview.

The bulk of the book discusses the operationalization of these three themes in Six Steps, which Ringstrom outlines as follows:

- Step One:* How the therapist's attunement to each spouse's subjectivity instills hope, perspective, and the possibility for renewed growth.
- Step Two:* The therapist's assertion that none of the three participants in the therapy has a more correct (i.e., more "objective") view of reality than any of the others, while supporting each one's needs to be seen as the arbiter of what is true (i.e., "fits") within her/his experience in the moment.
- Step Three:* The exploration of how each partner's complaint arises from a multi-variant developmental history that contextualizes what each partner brings to their relationship.
- Step Four:* Awakening of the "slumbering giant": when the "dread to repeat" repetitive transference states shifts into the "dread not to." This step examines how partners reenact their conflictual pasts in the service of "trying to remain the same while changing" (Bromberg, 1998). It further explores phenomena regarding dissociated self-states, finally emerging only after other self-states become actualized by the progress of the treatment. For these dissociated states to emerge, they must be enacted.
- Step Five:* The enrichment of each partner's capacity for self-actualization through enhanced introspection in the presence of the other. This step also accentuates each partner's sense of ownership of the multiplicity of their personality, along with learning to negotiate seemingly irreconcilable aspects of each one's sense of selfhood.

*Step Six:* The facilitation of each partner's capacity to attune to and support the other's introspection and personal growth. It follows the progress of the intrasubjective work of Step Five regarding recognition of and negotiation between multiple self-states, including sometimes having to surrender to that which is non-negotiable. As such, Step Five prepares the couple to engage in comparable processes intersubjectively. Thereafter, Step Six enhances the couple's capacity to negotiate their *relational* conflicts where possible and to come to terms with those that are non-negotiable. All of this builds to the internalization of this conjoint treatment model, allowing for the facilitation of each partner's capacity to attune to and support each other's introspection and personal growth. This then leads to their self-actualization, increased capacity for mutual recognition, and the relationship developing a creative mind of its own. This last idea serves the couple in both maturing and growing old together, while facing the vicissitudes of losses that come with aging and eventually facing their mortality.

Illustrated throughout with case studies, there is also a chapter which provides a case study showing how each of the Six Steps can be implemented. Ringstrom does admit that his stepwise model is a bit "messy" as it implies a linear progression though the therapy. But in practice it tends to be a more non-linear, dynamic process.

The final chapter includes frequently asked questions, e.g. do you see partners separately? or what do you do if there is partner abuse? I have to admit that this one made my feminist hackles rise a bit, but there is also sound advice.

An appendix gives a brief summary of four models of family systems theory and their implications, and practice questions for each of the six Steps.

Both theoretically stimulating and practical this book, to quote Estelle Shane, "...is about couples treatment, to be sure, but more, it provides a basis for understanding and conducting treatment in any modality: adult, child, adolescent, and family. What a gift to the clinician!"