


Adler and Couples Counseling: What to Do When

Renee Segal, MA, LMFT
Judith Pinke, MA, LMFT
Kurt M. Gehlert, PhD, LP

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Foundation of couples counseling

*Interpersonal attractions are not based on
common sense but on private logic*

Dinkmeyer & Sperry 2000

Adlerian Skills & Perspectives

applied to counseling couples



Resolving the clash of interests

Our cultural inability to live with each other as equals. . . is most painfully felt in our closest relationship, in marriage.

Dreikurs 1946



Preserving self-esteem

- Dichotomies
 - always-never
 - higher-lower
 - close-distant
 - safe-dangerous
 - all-nothing
 - yours-mine
- Striving for superiority to maintain self-esteem

Cooperation overcomes discouragement

- Dealing with sense of inferiority

Only the activity of an individual who plays the game, cooperates, and shares in life can be designated as courage.

Adler 1964

- Collaborative Couples Therapy
 - stranger (withdrawn)
 - enemy (adversarial)
 - partner (cooperating)

Wile 2008

Blaming in relationships

- Initial attraction = later conflicts

[Dreikurs' observation] that the qualities that initially attract individuals to each other are basically the same factors that create discord and conflict and lead to divorce .

Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci 2006

- Choose partners based on what we need to heal

Hendrix 2001

- Choose partners based on our neurosis, which keeps the neurosis on stage for the rest of the relationship

Whitaker,

n.d.



How Adlerian lens could distort the work

- Types as a *psychology of possession* instead of *safeguards (psychology of use)*
- Primacy of *individual* wills to be safe, belong, and matter
- Privileging *immutability* of birth-order-based mistaken beliefs and biased apperceptions
- Content or *factophilia* (Dreikurs) versus process (the pull of the telos)

Systemic Perspective

Intrapsychic

bringing change to the individual

Interpersonal

bringing change to the system



Inescapable problem

Love is . . . the most difficult of the life tasks for individuals to master. . . because of the courage and cooperation it requires of both parties.

Sweeney 1998

You need another person.
You can't do it alone.

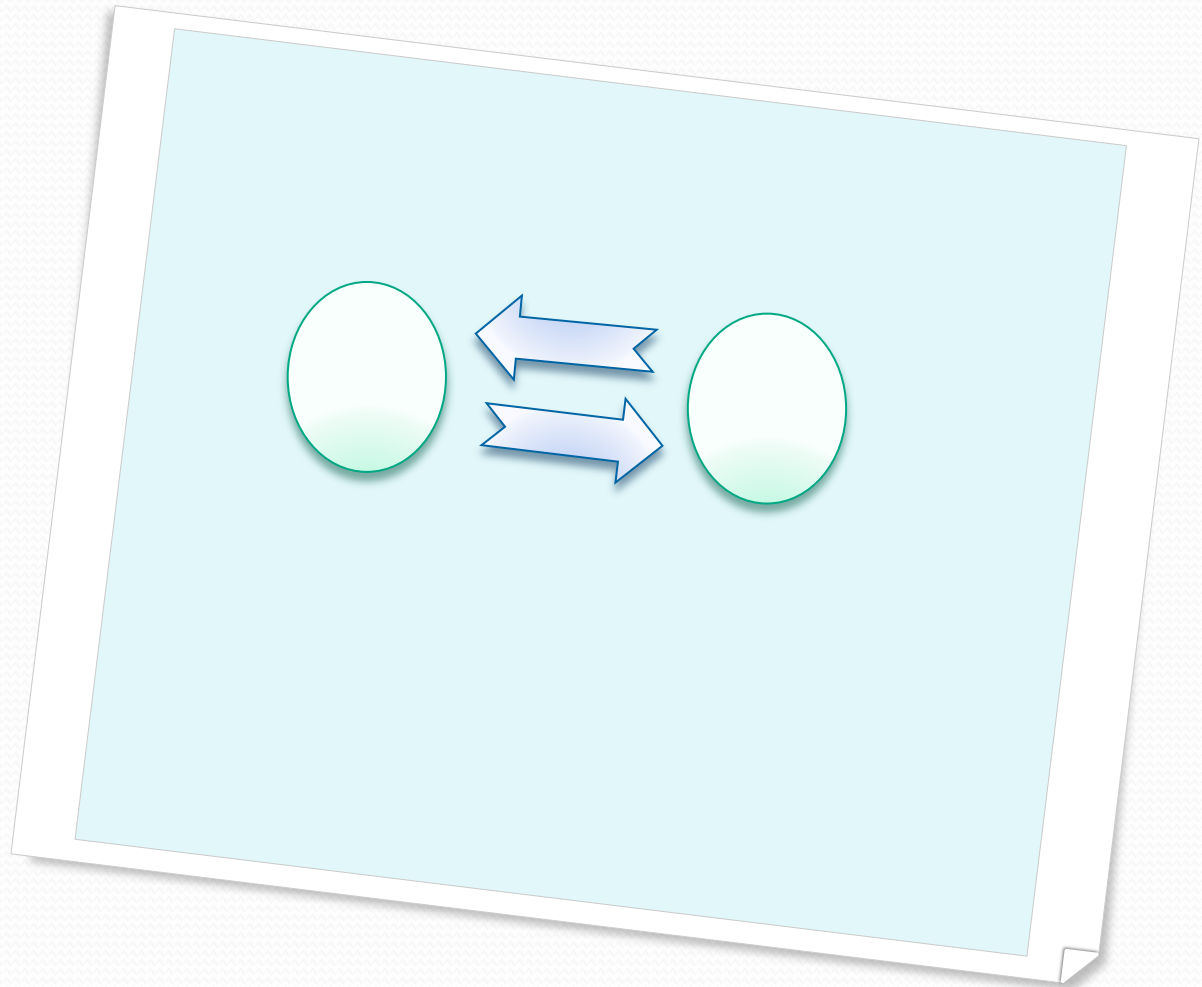


What is a system?

- Meaningful entity
- With parts
- Maintained by interaction of the parts

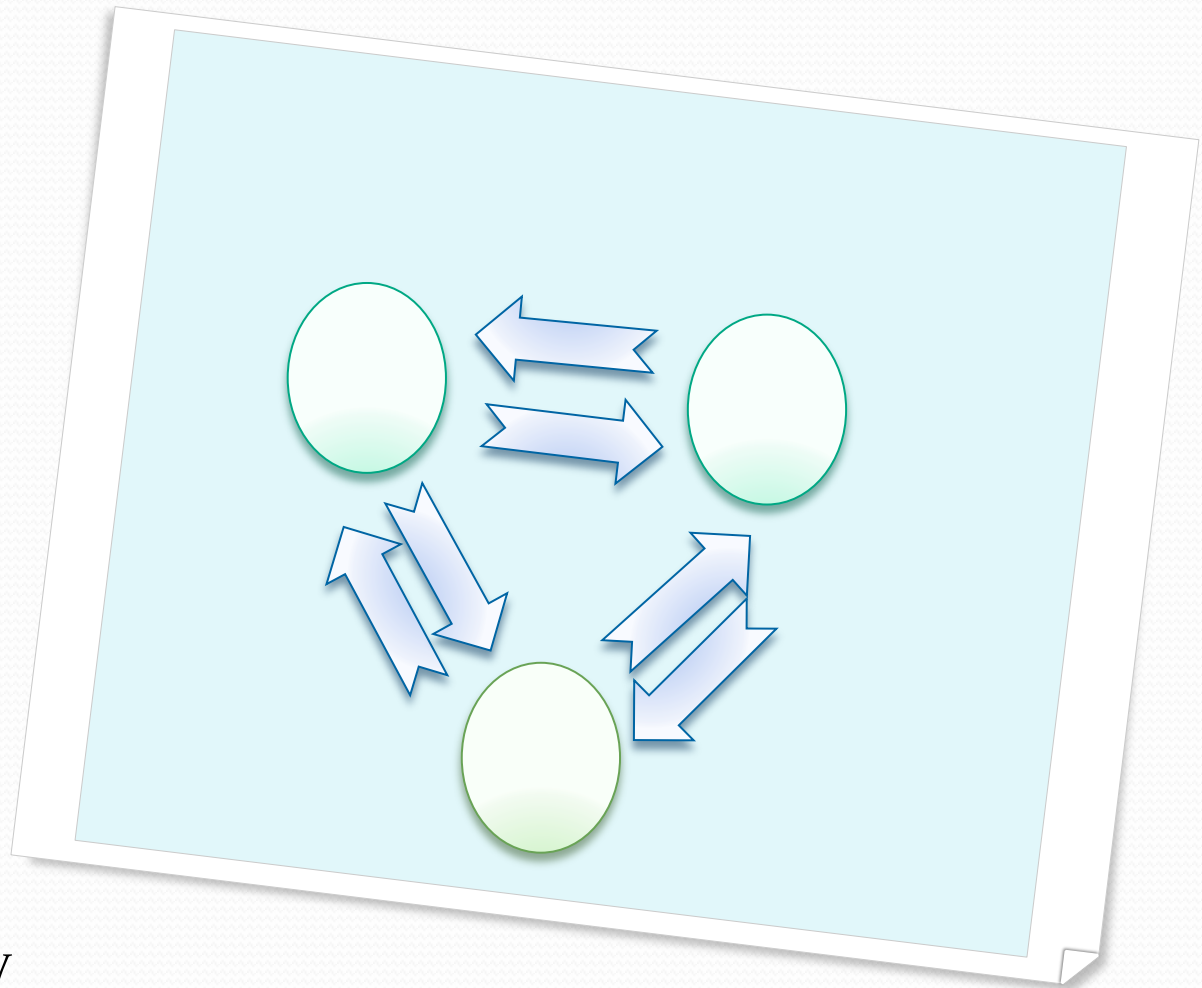
Smith-Acuña 2010

Cooperation in the couple system



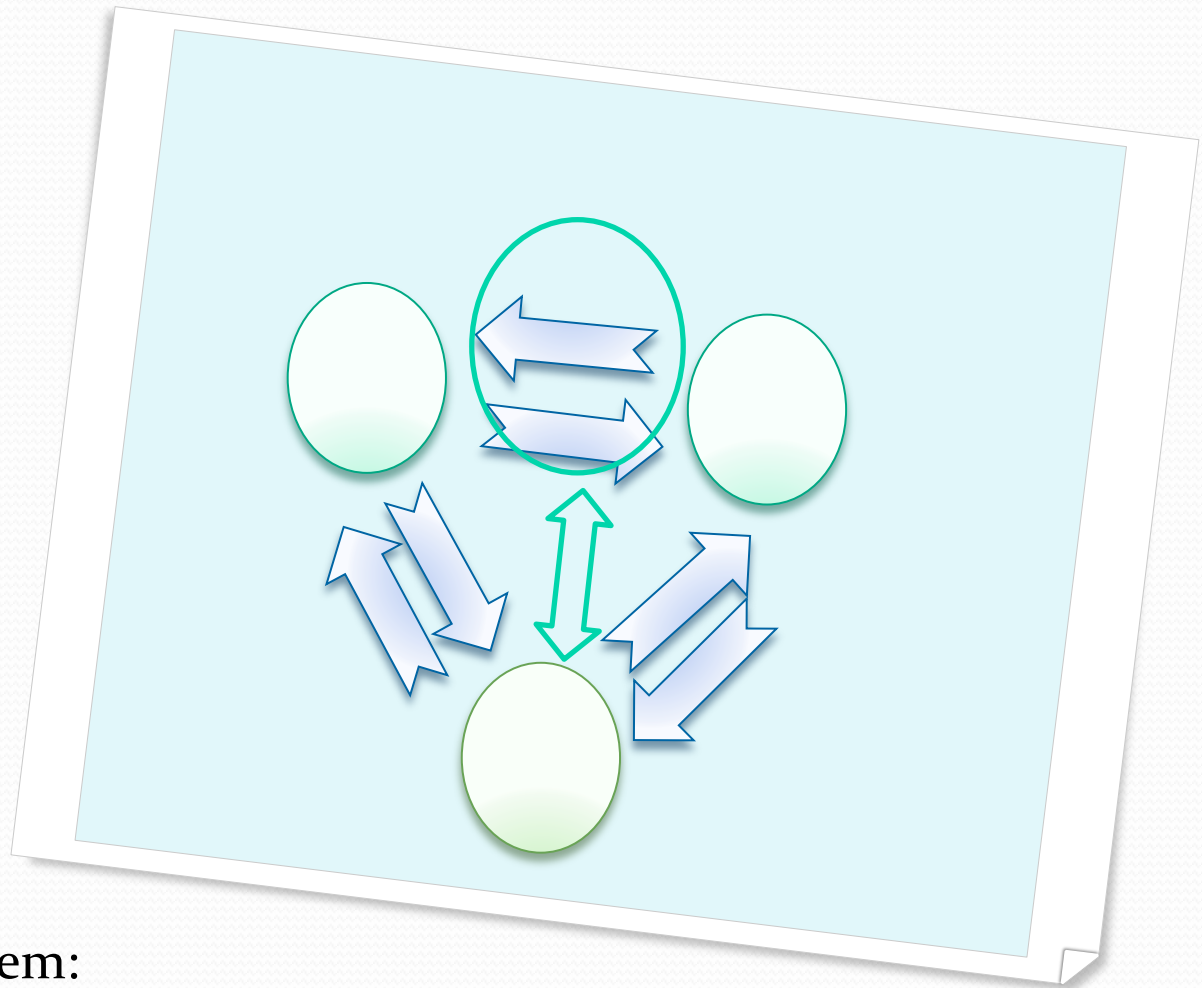
Mutuality

Cooperation in the therapy system



Increased complexity

Cooperation in the therapy system



Attention to the system:
relationship is the client



System is the target of change

- Each one's fictional goal is a performance, not a plan (*trust only movement*)
- Safeguarding creates repeating patterns of interaction that are not useful (reciprocal causality)
- Identify what holds the pattern in place (homeostasis), not diagnose the individual



Key therapeutic moment

- Recognition reflex: when each says “I’m contributing to this pattern we have”
- Allows each to cooperate with the other in his or her efforts to meet the tasks of life

Skills of working with individuals

applied to counseling couples



Translating your skills with individuals to working with couples

- Alliance-building
- Gathering case information
- Emotional deepening for intimacy
- Lifestyle and patterns of movement



These *skills* could trip you up

- Alliance-building: you may try to build two individual alliances or end up triangulated
- Gathering information for too long ignores that they have a systemic crisis—lose the enactment of the system
- Emotional deepening: the interactive movement is in the room
- Lifestyle analysis: identifying one client as the problem ignores the dynamic patterns of the system



These *roles* could trip you up

- Mediator of a compromise
- Owner of the agenda
- Winner of the battle for initiative
- Broker of the relational information exchange

What to Do When: Practical Skills

applied to Adlerian couples counseling



Skills 1

- Work with abusive statements?
- Find relational patterns instead of figuring out “what really happened” in some past event or argument
- Slow down the interaction



Skills 2

- Resist urge to join one of them on the vertical plane
- Repurpose Early Recollections and other projective devices
- Use genograms to identify intergenerational patterns that repeat in the current relationship



Skills 3

- Move from talking to therapist to talking to each other
- Increase the bond through new experiences of their relationship
- Target interactional change



Common Mistakes 1

- Assuming that preserving the relationship is only effective treatment
- Wanting to take the one with the painful past into an individual session



Common Mistakes 2

- Believing insight is enough to overcome the emotional entanglements
- Unintentional slipping into individual therapy



Countertransference interferes

- How a relationship should work
- Childhood experiences
- Biased apperceptions
- Values
 - power
 - affairs
 - abuse and domestic violence
 - sexual preference
 - cultural
 - porn
- Gender roles



WHAT TO DO WHEN ?

What are your questions?
Where do you get stuck?

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Renee Segal, MA, LMFT
Segal Psychotherapy, LLC
segalpsychotherapy@gmail.com

Judith Pinke, MA, LMFT
LifeSeasons Psychotherapy, LLC
couragetothrive@gmail.com

Kurt M. Gehlert, PhD, LP
St. Thomas University
gehl6119@stthomas.edu