

'Help, We're Stuck!': Seeing Conflict, Difficulty and Stuckness as Therapeutic Opportunity.

with David Slattery

I say **'we're stuck'** very deliberately. The relational-reality of stuckness is much more helpful (and more accurate) than an 'isolated mind' view that the problem is the clients' defensiveness or the practitioners' lack of technique/skill/experience.

Feeling stuck in the consulting room often leads to the development of seemingly impossible relational states that demand that the work end; *'I can't go on', 'There's no point', 'I'll always find this difficult', 'Nothing seems to help'; 'Nothing seems to change'.....*and these are just the practitioners comments!

However I have learnt both in my own practice, and in supervising others, that finding a way with these difficult places is often the **point** of the work, rather than a reason to end it. I have felt enormously helped in this by 'Impasse theory' (an elegant way of understanding and working with stuckness, from Intersubjective System Theory) which completely undermines the idea that it is the practitioners job to 'work out' the client. Rather the task is to see any difficulty or stuckness as a co-creation. The task then becomes to try and understand what our part might be in creating this, rather than sorting it out in the client.

In this workshop I will show you, in detail, some casework that demonstrates how by employing this theory the client and I have been able to move from a situation that felt utterly impossible to one that felt rich, creative and fulfilling. There will also be an opportunity for participants to explore their own experiences of sticky-tricky-swampy places in therapy.

Biography

I have been working as a therapist for over 20 years and supervising/training counsellors and psychotherapists for much of this time. Over this time I have changed my method from one where I was taking a lot of responsibility for outcomes, to one where I see the work as coming out of a collaborative relationship. I find the success of this movement both surprising and delightful!

In 2006 I was awarded a 'post qualifying' MA from Middlesex University my thesis was *'Turning Relationship Ghosts into Ancestors: The use of intersubjective systems theory in navigating relational trauma states in couples therapy.'* This research paper helped me see that individual counselling and therapy could learn a lot from the stuckness that couples often experience. By seeing parallels with the 'therapeutic couple' (counsellor and client), an impasse can more easily be seen as a relational creation.

I am currently MA Course Leader on the psychotherapy training and run a thriving private practice offering individual and couple therapy as well as supervision and consultation for counsellors, therapists and organisations.