Doctoral Program in Clinical Psychology  
The Graduate Center of the City University of New York  

Practicum IIIB: Treatment of Severe Personality Disorders  
Course # 80103.16183  

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Course Description  
This practicum is designed to help advanced students master the theory and technique of psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy for patients with both severe and higher level personality disorders (character disorders). The major focus of the course will be on the modifications of standard psychoanalytic technique that have been developed by theorists within the object relations tradition to address the clinical needs of patients within this group of patients. The majority of the theorists represented in the course are from the British and American object relations school, both of who have a long history of treating patients with more severe psychopathology with psychoanalytic psychotherapy, and who have spearheaded some of the most interesting and fruitful modifications of psychoanalytic technique for patients with personality disorders.  

Particular attention will be given to how these theorists have conceptualized the unintegrated, polarized nature of the representational world and the concomitant difficulties with affect regulation that take center stage in the treatment of patients with personality disorders. The course will focus on the modifications of technique that are designed to help the patient to develop a greater capacity for symbolic management of affectively charged mental contents, as well as the capacity to permit integration of defensively fragmented affect states and object relations. We will consider how pre-oedipal and Oedipal issues manifest themselves for patients with personality disorders and how such issues tend to be condensed and expressed in the transference relationship. We will also focus on modifications of the interpretive process with patients with personality disorders, the role of transference interpretation, on the transference-countertransference configurations that develop with such patients and on the nature and uses of the countertransference. We will also consider how the nature of attachment patterns and the limitations in the capacity for mentalization affect the therapeutic process with PD patients. Particular attention will be paid to the ways projective identification and countertransference enactment figure in work with personality-disordered patients. Other topics that will be considered include the issue of technical neutrality, adjunctive treatments (e.g. group, family, substance abuse) which are often necessary with such patients, the use of treatment contracts, technical approaches to the particular problems in love and sexual relations that these patients present. Technical approaches to patients with significant narcissistic pathology will also be covered. The course will also address the strengths and limitations of the object relations approach from a multicultural point of view.
Since patients with personality disorders are high utilizers of both inpatient and outpatient psychiatric and medical services (Bender et al. 2001), the therapeutic modifications of treatment for these patients has enormous social relevance, offering an effective treatment option for an especially challenging group of patients.

Although this course will cover a number of approaches within the object relations framework, we will also explore the ways in which the theory has been translated into tactics and techniques in a manualized psychodynamic treatment: Transference Focused Psychotherapy or TFP. Although TFP makes use of analytic theory and principles, it is characterized by technical modifications designed to meet the clinical needs of a more severely disturbed group of patients who generally do poorly in conventional psychoanalytic psychotherapy. TFP expands the domain of psychoanalytically oriented treatment, and there is now empirical evidence regarding its specific effectiveness relative to supportive psychodynamic and dialectical behavioral therapy (Clarkin et al. 2007; Doerring et al, 2010). Students will learn the fundamental tactics and techniques of Transference-Focused psychotherapy, and we will compare and contrast TFP to other approaches. The course will also cover modifications of TFP to treat both higher-level personality disorders or higher-level character disorders, and those with significant narcissistic pathology.

**Course Objectives:**
The practicum is designed to help students expand their clinical techniques for treating more patients with both severe and higher level personality disorders. The course is designed to explore the ways in which the extensive clinical literature on these patients has been translated into specific clinical tactics and techniques, involving modifications of interpretation, the use of countertransference, the specific types of transference reactions and technical approaches to them, technical approaches to the specific defenses and resistances, the use of the treatment contract to manage destructiveness and self destructiveness, and the handling of negative therapeutic reactions. The goal of the course is to help students develop a better understanding of theory of technique with patients with personality disorders, and to develop the skill to use them effectively in their clinical practice. By the end of the course the students should be knowledgeable about the clinical complexities of treating patients with personality disorders, and should have a greater facility in determining which methods might be useful in a given case and how they can be modified to suit the particular needs of the particular patient.

The major focus of the course will be on the case presentations of the participants and the course is primarily organized around the presentation of clinical cases. Thus, there is not a pre-designated week-by-week reading list. Rather, students will be expected to familiarize themselves with the major texts. The following is a list of required readings that will be referred to throughout the semester and that should serve as resources in thinking about the clinical and theoretical issues under consideration. Chapters from these and other readings may be chosen by the class to discuss in any given week depending on the questions that arise in the course of our discussion of the cases presented.
Requirements and Grading:
Students will be required to present their work in continuous case format and to prepare and distribute process notes to the class. Students will be required to submit a final paper, which will involve discussing their case in the light of two of the object relations perspectives covered in the course. The case should be situated in the context of the theoretical formulations of one of the major theorists covered in the course, and should include A brief history of the case and summary of the clinical process; a description of the technical approach you have used in your work with this patient; an evaluation of the techniques based on how the case has evolved; a description of therapeutic gains, impasses or stalemates, types of transferences, and countertransferences that have developed in work with this patient; a discussion of how the theory has helped to understand the foregoing; a discussion of processes and mechanisms of change with the patient and how they have manifested themselves in the treatment; a discussion of your own evaluation of an object relations perspective in understanding and/or treating the case at hand.

This paper will comprise 40% of your grade. The remaining 60% is based on class participation.

Readings:
Books


**Articles:**


Joseph, B. Transference, the total situation. *Int. J. Psychoanal.* 66, 447-54.


