The Relational Turn: Early Conversations and Controversies

In this course we will study the emergence of Relational Psychoanalysis, focusing on the ideas that propelled this paradigm shift. We begin by delving into the roots of relational thought in the confluence of interpersonal and object relational theories, the psychology of the self, constructivism, and the influence of Ferenczi’s work. We will consider how these various tributaries led to the development of a view of mind as a shifting kaleidoscope of self-states and a theory of therapeutic process that emphasized unconscious dialogue and enactment. The second section of the course hones in on clinical implications of relational theory. We will study the dialogue on: mutuality/asymmetry, the analysts’ subjectivity and use of self, intersubjectivity, self-disclosure, impasse and therapeutic action. In our final meetings, we will trace the expansion of the relational discourse into an interrogation of: gender, sexuality, and race. The course draws extensively on Stephen Mitchell’s writings as well as seminal papers by the founding generation including: Aron, Hoffman, Stern, Davies, Bromberg, Benjamin, Ghent, Harris, Dimen, Pizer, Bass, Altman and others. Throughout the semester we will compare and contrast relational theory and technique with preceding and contributing models, underlining areas of continuity and departure. In addition to weekly readings, candidates will be asked to bring in their own ideas and clinical work to use as a backdrop for discussion.

Part 1: The Relational Turn: Theoretical Tributaries Coalescing in a New Model of Mind and of the Analytic Process

Week 1: Introduction and Overview
We begin with two chapters by Stephen Mitchell, articulating the relational reconceptualization of the patient’s needs and the analysts’ intentions and a brief essay in which Emanuel Ghent explores the meaning of relationality


Goals: Students will gain an overview of the core ideas underlying the Relational turn.

Week 2: Theoretical Antecedents: Object Relations
This week’s readings explore theoretical antecedents of Relational Psychoanalysis in the Object Relations theories of Melanie Klein, Ronald Fairbairn, and Donald Winnicott.


Optional:

Goal: Students will understand the contribution of object relation's theories to the development of relational psychoanalysis.

Week 3: Interpersonal Theory and The Self in Psychoanalysis
Interpersonal theories contributed to the development of relational thought in placing real relationships and the experience of self at the forefront of psychoanalytic inquiry. Self-psychology, though advancing on a separate trajectory, dovetailed with these core concerns.


Optional:

Goals: Students will understand the contribution of interpersonal theory and the psychology of the self to the development of the relational paradigm as well as the tensions between the differing contributing perspectives.

Week 4: The Influence of Constructivism and Ferenczi’s Innovations
Social-constructivism laid the philosophical groundwork for the relational turn by challenging positivism and classical assumptions about analytic knowledge, objectivity, and authority. Ferenczi’s long suppressed writings sketched out a radical model of mutual influence and elasticity of technique.


Optional:

Goals: Students will understand the contributions of constructivism and Ferenzian thought to the development of relational psychology.

Week 5: Multiplicity and Dissociation: A New model of Mind
Consistent with the post-modern ethos, relational theory challenged the notion of mind as unitary and advanced a theory of mind as a kaleidoscope of shifting self-states. Dissociation came to be seen as an organizing factor in normal psychic processes and as a defensive reaction to trauma.


**Optional**


**Goals:** Students will learn how relational theory posited a new model of mind based on multiplicity and dissociation.

**Week 6: Enactment and Emergent Experience: A New Theory of Process**
Relational theory reconceptualized the analytic process as a dialogue between two individuals who are never fully aware of their own unconscious conflicts, blind spots, and contributions. As a result, dissociated and unformulated experiences are inevitably brought to life, or enacted, in the relational matrix.


**Optional**


**Goals:** Students will learn about the role of enactment in relational theory.

**Part II: The Early Relational Conversation: Clinical Implications of the Relational Revision**

**Week 7 Interaction: Mutuality, Asymmetry and the Analyst’s Subjectivity**
This week’s readings explore the relational view of the analytic project as a meeting of minds in an encounter that is mutual, asymmetric, and defined by the irreducible subjectivity of both partners.


Optional


Goals: Students will learn about the relational vision of the analytic dyad as a mutual and asymmetric meeting of minds and will consider the implications of this perspective.

Week 8: Therapeutic Action, Paradox and Negotiations
Relational theory critiqued the notion of objective truth and analytic authority and reconceptualized therapeutic action as a process of negotiating wishes and needs and holding paradox.


Optional:

Goals: Students will learn about the relational view of the analytic encounter as process, paradox, and negotiation.

Week 9: Intersubjectivity: Developmental, Clinical, and Theoretical Perspectives
Jessica Benjamin theorized that the capacity to recognize self and other as separate and equal subjects, or the capacity for intersubjectivity, is a core developmental and therapeutic achievement. Intersubjective self-psychologists theorized that mind is inextricably embedded in an intersubjective field. From yet another perspective, Ogden focused on the analyst’s reverie as she works with intersubjective facts in “the analytic third.”


Goals: Students will gain an understanding of different perspectives on intersubjectivity.

Week 10: The Analysts’ Use of Self
Relational theory posits that it is incumbent on the analyst, as subjective participant/observer, to continually consider her unconscious impact and use of self. We will explore a seminal debate between Joyce Slochower and Tony Bass on “holding” the analysts’ subjectivity and will also have the option to read Susan Kraemer’s important paper on analytic/maternal subjectivity.


**Optional**


**Goals:** Students will understand different perspectives on the analyst's use of her subjectivity.

**Week 11; Self-Disclosure, Expressiveness, Restraint, and the Erotic**

Continuing our focus on the analyst's use of self, we will read articles on self-disclosure, expressiveness and restraint, including a controversial article by Jody Davies on erotic countertransference disclosure.


**Optional:**


**Goals:** Students will understand the relational conversation concerning expressiveness, restraint, self-disclosure, and the erotic.

**Week 12; Working Through Impasse**

From the relational perspective, the analytic process is marked by continual cycles of rupture and repair, stalemates and negotiations in which the “third” or dialogic space is lost and regained. This week's readings explore different conceptualizations of impasse.


**Optional**


**Goals:** Students will learn about relational views on impasse.
Part III: The Widening Scope of Relational Inquiry

The early relationalists came of age in a time of social and political change and they brought their passionate concerns about race, gender and sexuality into the analytic dialogue. In this final section we will study some of the early papers in which relationalists grappled with these topics.

Class 13: Gender


Optional


Goals: Students will gain an understanding of the novel ways in which gender was reconceptualized relationally.

Class 14: Sexuality


Optional


Goals: Students will learn about relational views challenging the pathologizing of homosexuality and exploring the subjectivity of lustful states of mind and the enigma of sexuality.

Class 15: Race


Optional

Goals: Students will become familiar with early papers interrogating race and its role in the transference countertransference matrix.