G89.4585   Psychoanalytic Theory and Technique: Selected Topics

Controversies in Contemporary Psychoanalysis: “Journal Club”

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This is a 1 point course (12.5 hours of class time) sponsored by the Relational Track that will meet for 8 sessions. The course is structured around the careful study of articles selected from current issues of psychoanalytic journals for the purpose of highlighting and elucidating the most pressing and controversial issues being debated in the field. The instructor will select articles, or chapters from the most recent books, in an effort to capture a sampling of contemporary controversies in psychoanalysis. The methodology is based on the assumption that a selection of the most recent issues of a diverse group of analytic journals will include key debates and areas of dispute.

My purpose is to examine with students, through careful and comparative textual analysis, those themes and topics regarding psychoanalytic theory and clinical practice that are at the cutting edge of investigation, discussion, and debate. Careful attention will be paid to precise language and conceptualizations and the varying meaning of these terms across theories. A balance will be maintained between theoretical articles and clinical case discussions as the clinical material will bring the conceptual arguments to life. Articles will be drawn from across the full range of contemporary schools and will cover American and international analytic cultures. My own stance on the various debates and controversies will be spelled out and students will be encouraged to articulate their own reactions to these debates and give voice to their emerging or more developed positions.

The following is a sampling of what I would read with students if the course were taught this semester. Please keep in mind that if it were taught later, I would expect to change the readings. I center each course around very recent articles, often in journals that have just appeared within weeks or months, so as to keep the course always on the cutting edge.

Sample Syllabus:

Week 1:

The following readings are currently in press. I will use them to open up an important area of contemporary psychoanalytic discussion, namely the difference between psychoanalysis and other forms of psychoanalytic psychotherapy and the related issues of frequency, recumbency, and the analytic frame.


Aron, L. (in press), Day, Night, or Dawn: Discussion of Steven Stern’s “Session Frequency and the Definition of Psychoanalysis” Psychoanalytic Dialogues.

Wallerstein, R. (in press), Discussion of Steven Stern’s “Session Frequency and the Definition of Psychoanalysis” Psychoanalytic Dialogues.
Week 2:

The following exchange will further develop ideas about the frame and will open up the topic of the nature and place of interpretation versus inquiry in current psychoanalysis. I would expect that class discussion would take into account the history and schools of thought around these matters, but they would be rooted in the most recent clinical discussions.


Week 3.

This new article will continue the theme developed by extending the discussion of interpretation and frame issues to more “difficult” patients. Gabbard and Horowitz’s position will be challenged vigorously! The clinical work of Antonino Ferro will illuminate issues of interpretation and narrative from a different perspective.


Week 4.

This beautifully narrated case presentation will be used to open up a variety of controversies related to both theory and technique. Special emphasis will be placed on interpretation and the use and management of transference and countertransference in current practice. Issues of trauma, class, race, and culture are highlighted.


With discussions published by:
Sander Abend; Virginia Demos, Stuart Pizer, Adrienne Harris, and Joseph Lichtenberg.

Week 5.

The following paper continues our immersion in clinical case material but introduces the topic of intersubjectivity and an intersubjective understanding of envy. This provides an opportunity to consider differences across schools of thought as well as the most recent developments in intersubjectivity theory and gender theory.


**Week 6.**

*These exciting new articles continue the examination of intersubjectivity and extend the discussion to the nature of witnessing, therapeutic action, and the use of the analyst’s self in psychoanalysis. Special attention will be given to trauma and dissociation and Stern’s work will open up a discussion of the related contributions of Davies & Bromberg.*


Stern’s book, by the same name, should be available and we will also read selections from the book.

**Week 7.**

*In this major contribution, Benjamin extends her thinking on intersubjectivity focusing on clinical technical implications. We will read the full debate: Benjamin, an aggressive critique, and a strong response.*

Benjamin, J (2009), A relational psychoanalysis perspective on the necessity of acknowledging failure in order to restore the facilitating and containing features of the intersubjective relationship (the shared third). p 441-450.

Sedlack, V. Discussion, pp, 451-455.

Benjamin’s Response, pp. 457-462.

**Week 8.**

*The semester will end with a contemporary discussion of termination and on becoming a psychoanalyst.*


Selections from a forthcoming book:
