Clinical Treatment of Specific Disorders—An Object Relations Approach to Personality Disorders II: Narcissistic Disorders & the Use of Transference Focused Therapy

This course will focus on theory and treatment of narcissistic disorders from a contemporary object relations perspective. Clinicians from a variety of theoretical persuasions generally agree that individuals with narcissistic personality disorder and narcissistic traits pose formidable clinical challenges that make them among the most difficult to treat of those in the personality disorder spectrum. Their devaluation of therapy and their therapists, alternating with extreme idealization, their sense of entitlement and expectation of special treatment, alternating with extreme narcissistic vulnerability tax the skills of even the most experienced clinicians. Consequently, individuals with narcissistic disorders can engender powerful countertransference feelings of being incompetent, bored, disparaged, and dismissed, or, at the other extreme, massively and unnervingly idealized. Narcissism encompasses normative strivings for perfection, mastery, and wholeness as well as pathological and defensive distortions of these strivings. Such pathological distortions may present overtly in the form of grandiosity, exploitation of others, retreat to omnipotence or denial of dependency, or covertly in the form of self-effacement, inhibition, and chronic, extreme narcissistic vulnerability. Adding to the difficulties in diagnosing and treating narcissistic disorders is the fact that they can manifest themselves in multiple presentations depending on the level of personality organization, subtype, or activated mental state.

This course will present a specific theoretical and clinical formulation of narcissism based on contemporary object relations that sees narcissistic pathology as emerging from multiple vectors including distortions in the internal world of self and object representations; familial/environmental factors ranging from parents who overvalue and/or exploit the child and who him or her as an extension of their own narcissistic striving; insecure and/or disorganized internal working models of attachment (refs), and deficits in mentalization; neurocognitive deficits such as impairments in empathy, particularly affective responsiveness or resonance with others as opposed to cognitive empathy which for may narcissistic patients may remain intact. The course will include
recent work on empathy, social cognition and trauma as contributors to the development of narcissistic disorders. The course will also cover particular problems encountered in clinical work with narcissistic patients such characteristic problems in love relations, oedipal development and fixations, reactions to interpretation, alliance building, and dream work, as well as the way narcissistic pathology manifests itself at different levels of organization and modes of treatment appropriate for different levels.

The focus will be on the techniques of treatment for narcissistic patients with different levels of personality organization. The course will review therapeutic modifications that can help clinicians connect with and treat patients with narcissistic pathology at different levels of organization in both psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy. Transference focused psychotherapy (TFP), a manualized psychodynamic psychotherapy that has recently been refined to treat patients with narcissistic disorders will be introduced.

Course objectives: Candidates will identify and describe the contributions of five major vectors that lead to narcissistic disorders including: specific distortions in mental representations, insecure/disorganized internal working models of attachment, neurocognitive deficits, patterns of parenting and trauma, and socio-cultural factors. Candidates will demonstrate the relative contributions of each to particular clinical case material, both in the readings and in class discussion of case presentations. Candidates will be able to understand and describe the contemporary object relations perspectives on understanding and treating narcissistic disorders, including its origins in the work of Freud and Klein, as well as elaborations by contemporary Freudians and neo-Kleinians. Candidates will be able to describe the two major presentations of narcissistic disorders (vulnerable and grandiose) and how to design and tailor treatment approaches appropriate for different presentations. Candidates will also describe the way narcissistic pathology manifests itself at different levels of organization (from neurotic to borderline to psychotic) and the modes of treatment appropriate for different levels (psychoanalysis or psychoanalytic psychotherapy). Finally, candidates will demonstrate through presentation of their own clinical case material, the major transferences and countertransferences and resistances that emerge with narcissistic patients in the clinical situation, and describe the analyst’s optimal stance towards them.

Syllabus

Week 1: Overview of Contemporary Object Relations Approach to Narcissistic Disorders


**Learning Objective:** Candidates will describe the origins of contemporary object relations perspectives on understanding and treating narcissistic disorders, in in the work of Freud and Klein.

Recommended:

**Week 2: Overview of Contemporary Object Relations Approach to Narcissistic Disorders: Thick-skinned and Thin-skinned Narcissism**


Recommended:


**Learning Objective:** Candidates will describe the two major presentations of narcissistic pathology (vulnerable and grandiose) and will master how analytic technique ought to be tailored for each.
Week 3: Attachment, Mentalization, and Empathy and Narcissistic Pathology: Clinical, Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives


Recommended:


Learning Objective: Candidates will describe the major patterns of attachment that characterize patients with narcissistic pathology and their implications for analytic treatment. Candidates will describe the deficits in mentalization, cognitive and affective empathy in patients with narcissistic pathology, and demonstrate how these deficits complicate the treatment process.

Week 4: The Interpretative Process with Patients with Narcissistic Disorders


Recommended:


Learning Objective: Candidates will demonstrate technical modifications of the interpretative process in analysis with narcissistic patients across the spectrum of level of organization and will demonstrate this understanding through clinical illustrations.

**Week 5: Transference and Countertransference in Narcissistic Disorders**


Recommended:


Learning Objective: Candidates will demonstrate through presentation of their own clinical case material, the major transferences and countertransferences that emerge with narcissistic patients in the clinical situation, and describe the analyst’s optimal stance towards them.

**Week 6: Narcissistic Resistances**


Recommended:


**Learning Objective:** Candidates will describe the major narcissistic resistances and how they manifest themselves in the clinical situation. Candidates will demonstrate how to address such resistances through clinical illustrations.

**Week 7: Oedipal Issues in Narcissistic Pathology**


**Learning Objective:** Candidates will define the manifestations of oedipal issues in narcissistic patients, and how these affect the transference relationship. Candidates will describe the conflicts around sexuality and attachment for narcissistic patients.

Note: this is the second part of a two part course intended to be taken in sequence. The first part is: PDPSA.4582.002 CARSKY

Clinical Treatment of Specific Disorders—An Object Relations Approach to Personality Disorders I: Borderline Disorders & the Use of Transference Focused Therapy