The question of why people cling to painful states and resist change is a challenge to anyone doing treatment and/or trying to build a theory of development. Repetitive painful states include clinical issues such as recurring depressive episodes, severe anxiety reactions, addictive behaviors, and the inability to form stable and satisfying relationships. In the clinical setting these states may become difficult sources of resistance, manifested in such phenomena as persistent negativity, hopelessness, and a negative therapeutic reaction to progress. This module will consider different theoretical approaches to understanding these states as exemplified in readings by Arthur Valenstein, Betty Joseph, and John Steiner. Particular consideration will be given to contemporary findings concerning early memory systems, early attachment patterns, and emotional memory. Implications for clinical technique will be drawn from these different approaches, and these will be demonstrated through clinical examples.

WEEK 1

Week 1 begins with some of the more classical notions of repetition and negative therapeutic reaction (a form of a repetitive painful state).


WEEK 2

Week 2 takes up Valenstein’s 1973 notion of how repetitive painful states and negative therapeutic reaction relate to faulty early object relations. His view is expressed in drive theory terms, pre-dating current work on these issues. Then Fosshage’s article presents current thinking on implicit and explicit memory systems, linked to early affective and cognitive patterns understood in a relational context, used to understand the notion of repetition as a function of non-conscious motivation.


WEEK 3

Week 3 presents a comparison; Joseph sees these issues as, at times, related to powerful masochistic tendencies and perverse sexual gratification; Steiner views them as retreats from the pain of whole object relations.


WEEK 4

Week 4 discusses the notion of early relational, defensive, and adaptive patterns in an article that is quite thorough in its summary of current data from cognitive, developmental, and neuropsychological perspectives.


WEEK 5

In weeks 5 and 6 we discuss clinical applications of these ideas, along with a final integration.


WEEK 6