Relational Approaches to Sexuality and Perversion
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COURSE SYLLABUS

This course surveys a body of psychoanalytic thought on normative as well as perverse and transgressive sexualities. We will engage questions of normality vs. pathology, trace a history of ideas as to the sexual and as to what counts as the sexual body and track how these issues manifest in the consulting room. But that is only one and, in some ways, not the most important mission of this course. What you can most hope to gain is learning how to bear sitting with this kind of content in the presence of others. That is not a small thing: talking and thinking about sex is almost always accompanied with ecstatic, oftentimes overwhelming, anxieties. Retaining one’s ability to think, let alone think well, while in the presence of sexual material and with other people is a remarkable feat. We will do that slowly and it will be a process: the idea is to create a space with each other which will eventually become an internal space that you, as an analyst, might be able to return to when sitting with a patient and talking about sex (or in noticing that you are avoiding talking about sex) for containment and for respite. In that sense, this course intends to offer two sets of skills: a knowledge base and a collective way of being held by a group that can, in turn, hold you when you are sitting alone with an analysand.

We will start our journey with Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. We will read them twice: once at the beginning and once at the end of the course. The second read will reveal to us an entire underworld of ideas that might have been impossible to access early on. While you will instantly recognize some of the readings as pertinent to sexuality, others will seem more surprising.

In several meetings I have paired seminal psychoanalytic texts with articles less frequently encountered by psychoanalysts. The latter have been formative and highly influential in their respective fields: anthropology, sociology, art, gender and women’s studies, literature. These readings reveal how the intercourse between psychoanalysis and other disciplines can be incredibly generative as well as necessary when it comes to sexuality. This cross-pollination offers some protection against the blind spots and limitations in our field and it will help us think more expansively than we are not accustomed to as analysts. Working in a hybrid way will productively reshuffle some of our assumptions/preconceptions. And since so much of the sexual traffics in the ineffable, you will also find that some weeks include works of literature/weblinks to works of art for you to read/look at to enrich our reflections on the topic.

Reading wise we will generally keep to the syllabus. But as we go through the course we will also develop our own distinctive interests as a group. I have
left Week 14 intentionally blank for those areas we will want to pursue further. We will decide on that jointly and I will then select appropriate texts which I will send to you well in advance so you have time to read them. Through the semester try to keep track of what arises in you regarding your own attitudes/fantasies/experiences when it comes to sexuality: it will be important for you to keep this sort of internal inventory as a way of knowing what it is you bring to the consulting room. Last but certainly not least, clinical vignettes will add texture to our discussion. I will bring several clinical stories and you should also bring yours to the extent you feel able to share them. Clinical material will transform our conversations: it’s one thing, for example, to be open minded in a vacuum and another to be sitting with a patient whose sexuality you find anxiety provoking or, even, frightening. Transference/countertransference are key here. We will spend two sessions discussing these in a focused way but they will likely saturate all our class discussions; true as this may be of all domains of clinical work it is especially relevant in sexuality’s terrain.

1. Introduction, Part I
   a. **Required:**

   b. **Recommended:**

2. Introduction, Part II
   a. **Required:**

   b. **Recommended:**

3. How does sexuality happen?
   Part I: Social construction, social inscription
   a. **Required:**
4. How does sexuality happen?  
Part II, A: The interimplication of attachment and otherness  

a. **Required:**  

b. **Recommended:**  

5. How does sexuality happen?  
Part II, B: The interimplication of attachment and otherness  

a. **Required:**  

b. **Recommended:**  

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b. **Recommended:**  

6. Part III: Thinking the sexual body

a. **Required:**

7. Sexuality as Affect’s Material Expression

a. **Required:**

b. **Recommended:**

8. Sexuality and Trauma

a. **Required:**
   iii. Take a look at the following links to Catherine Opie’s work before reading the piece below-

   ‘Self-portrait/cutting’
http://whitney.org/Collection/CatherineOpie

‘Dyke’ & ‘self-portrait/nursing’
http://www.lacan.com/grancover27.htm

‘Self-portrait/pervert’
http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/artwork/12201

then read:

b. Recommended:

9. Perversion, Part I
a. Required:

b. Recommended:

10. Perversion, Part II
a. **Required:**

b. **Recommended:**

11. Eroticism in the Consulting Room: Transference

   a. **Required:**

12. Eroticism in the Consulting Room: Countertransference

   a. **Required:**

   b. **Recommended:**

13. Sexual Boundary Crossings
a. **Required:**

14. To be determined jointly in class #10

   a. TBA

15. Freud reconsidered

   a. **Required:**