Sexual Desire and Object Choice
(8 weeks; one credit)

This course is about patients for whom love and erotic fascination don’t go together. For example, some patients say they find it easy to fall in love but difficult to stay in love. Others say they are deeply in love with their long-term partners, but have little interest in having sex with them. Other patients wonder why they can’t seem to fall in love with anyone, despite feeling comfortable with their sexuality ---whether that be hetero-, homo-, bi-, or a-.

The course hews closely to clinical practicality and we use case material throughout. Our guiding question is: What do we gain clinically when we understand love and sexual desire as, sometimes, separate personality functions with separate developmental lines? We’ll also explore whether the traditional Freudian distinction between narcissistic and anacritic types of object choice can help us understand and communicate with patients who worry that their sexuality is not helping them find or sustain love.

We will be looking at unconscious determinants of sexual desire—theories of how sexual object choice gets channeled and shaped. Readings will range from Freudian foundations to the contemporary discourse on love and sexuality that is burgeoning internationally among Freudian writers of diverse backgrounds.

Overall course objectives: At the end of this course, candidates will be able to use Contemporary Freudian theory to (1) create useful clinical models for patients who complain of discrepancies between their sexual and romantic desires (2) listen for subtle vicissitudes and interactions of sexual and dependent feelings in the transference/countertransference (3) understand how ordinary forms of repression and dissociation shape Oedipal and post-Oedipal sexuality (4) see the continuities and discontinuities between 20th-Century Freudian theory and contemporary postmodern thinking, and (5) use both bodies of theory in more creative, flexible, ecumenical and context-sensitive ways.

Week 1:  SexualITY, Politics, PrejudICE


Recommended


Learning Objective: At the end of this class, candidates will understand (1) how in Freud's time "narcissism" was considered an aspect of sexual expression and (2) how Freud drew from prevailing ideas in art history, criminology and sexual psychology in formulating his theories about narcissism in human development.

Week 2: Despising and Glorifying the Instinct


Groskreutz, D. J. (2015) The Naturalizing of Narcissistic Neuroses: Delineating the Contribution of Narcissism within the Trajectory of Freudian Thought. IJP Open - Open Peer Review and Debate 2:1-16

Recommended

Learning Objective: At the end of this class, candidates will be able to (1) understand the theoretical distinction between anaclitic and narcissistic types of object choice (2) see how both types present clinically and (3) comment on the ways, both useful and prejudicial, that this distinction can be used.

Week 3: Finding, Losing and Re-finding the Object


Recommended


Learning Objective: At the end of this class, candidates will be able to (1) see the role of autoerotism as an organizing principle in all modalities of sexual experience, and (2) use this idea to better understand conscious and unconscious forms of desire in the transference/countertransference.

Week 4: Desire and Object Choice in Freud, Laplanche and Lacan


Recommended

Learning Objective: At the end of this class, candidates will (1) know the theoretical foundations that link Freud with contemporary theories of sexuality, and (2) consider the clinical utility of Laplanche in Contemporary Freudian practice.

Week 5: The Oedipus Complex and Object Choice 1: Desire, Identity, and the Social


Recommended

Learning Objective: At the end of this class, candidates will know (1) how present-day Freudians use the Oedipus Complex in their thinking about love and sex, and (2) how contemporary psychoanalysts outside the Freudian world think about what is and is not clinically useful in the Oedipal model.

Week 6: The Oedipus Complex and Object Choice 2: The Kleinians and the Great Submission


Recommended
Learning Objective: At the end of this class, candidates will know how contemporary Freudians and Kleinians use the idea of Oedipal authority in the shaping of desire, personality organization and sexual identity.

Week 7: The Oedipus Complex and Object Choice 3: Castration and the Fate of the Infantile


Recommended


Learning Objective: At the end of this class, candidates will know (1) how contemporary Freudians understand the roles of fear, repression, and dissociation in the resolution of the Oedipus Complex, and (2) how to listen for their physical and emotional sequelae in the transference\countertransference.

Week 8: Sexuality in Contemporary Freudian Theory and Practice


Recommended

Learning Objective: At the end of this class, candidates will be able to (1) use contemporary and historical Freudian theory to model an interaction among sexuality, love, and reproduction (2) apply this model to contemporary discourse on gender and (3) consider the moral and intellectual pressures that restrict free thinking about sexuality in psychoanalytic practice.