2014 - 2015

Weekend Core Course: BOUNDARY DILEMMAS

Instructor: Peter Schou, PhD

Session 1: What Boundaries?

The first class will be an introduction to the course. We will start with a general discussion of the notion of boundaries. What is a boundary in psychoanalysis? What is the history of boundaries in psychoanalysis? As some of the readings suggest, the idea of boundary in psychoanalysis often invokes its negative: “boundary violation.” What assumptions are we making when we use the term “boundary”? Are there alternative ways of thinking about the issues that the idea of boundary involves?

The first reading is a poem, “Corsons Inlet,” by A.R. Ammons. I have included it because it, in my reading, playfully examines the notion of boundary.


Session 2: The Ethics of Care and the Psychoanalyst’s Authority.

Psychoanalytic treatment, in its many and varied manifestations, reflects ethical commitments and visions that often remain unarticulated. In this and the following sessions, we will discuss psychoanalytic ethics more broadly. We will begin with a brief review of the concept of “phronesis” from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Phronesis is often translated as “practical wisdom” as opposed to technical knowledge and theory. The ethics of care, as originally developed by feminist thinkers, is often understood as a
form of virtue ethics. Hoffman’s article, “Dialectical Thinking and Therapeutic Action,” can be seen as his particular version of an ethics of care.

Contemporary psychoanalysts have expanded our understanding of the arrangements, role relationships, rules and boundaries that characterize psychoanalytic treatment, often referred to as “the psychoanalytic frame.” Our understanding of these issues must take into account the question of the psychoanalyst’s authority, as discussed by Hoffman.


Session 3: Ethics, The Analyst’s Self-Interest and Money.

The readings for this session are concerned with the analyst’s self-interest and the ways it manifests in our creation of the psychoanalytic frame. This issue is of particular interest with regard to arrangements we make with patients around money.


Session 4: Self-disclosure.

The issue of self-disclosure has been debated by psychoanalysts for decades. We will review self-disclosure with regard to its treatment implications as well as its, mostly unstated, ethical implications. Note the reference in Orange and Stolorow to the techne- phronesis distinction from session 3. Skolnikoff and Levine attempt various ways of classifying form of self-disclosure, Do they make sense to you? Do you find Levine’s idea of the “psychoanalytic persona” helpful?


Session 5: Confidentiality and Touch.

Lear and Furlongh present somewhat different views on the centrality of confidentiality for psychoanalytic treatment. Both touch on the complicated relationship between confidentiality and the need of analysts to communicate with each other about psychoanalysis. Aron discusses this specifically from the perspective of publication of case material. Burka’s article is a dramatic first-person report about the psychic repercussions of breach of confidentiality and sexual boundary violations. Finally, we will address the issue of physical touch as a component of the management of the frame.


Session 6: Boundary Related Issues Suggested by the Group.

In our final session, we will review and discuss topics requested by the group. Based on what we come up with, I will try to find relevant readings.

In the past, suggested topics have included “cyberspace and psychotherapy,” “boundary issues related to control cases,” and “termination.”