Sexuality and Contemporary Psychoanalysis  
ICP Weekday Psychoanalytic Training Program  
Spring 2017

Instructor: Ginna Clark MA LPCC ATR-BC and Lynne Oliva Psy.D  
Times: Thursdays, 12:15 - 2:15 p.m.  
Dates: April 6th, April 13th, April 20th, April 27th, May 4th, May 11th, May 18th  
Total Hours: 2 ½ hours x 7 meetings = 14 hours

I. Course Description

Sexuality lives at the center of psychoanalysis. From the earliest stirrings of psychoanalytic ideas, featured throughout some of Freud's most famous cases, sexuality plays a prominent role in the development of the theory and practice of psychoanalysis. In some very important ways understanding Freud’s ideas about sexuality is essential in understanding the evolution of Freud’s theory, his conceptualization of the mind, of symptoms, and of cure. Beginning with Freud’s seminal text *The Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, this course surveys classic and contemporary writings on sexuality, highlighting multiple psychoanalytic perspectives on a variety of topics ranging from the Oedipus complex, perversion, masculinity and femininity, autoeroticism, and their relevant clinical applications. A special focus will also be given to clinical work that involves sexual material and erotic transference-countertransference.

II. Course Objectives

The overall objective of this course is to provide candidates with a basic overview and introduction to Freud’s ideas about sexuality and to survey some contemporary and revisionist psychoanalytic writings that offer alternative formulations of salient psychoanalytic ideas related to sexuality. Candidates will learn about some of the more radical features of the *Three Essays*, track some of the major shifts in conceptualizing aspects of psychosexual life over time, and consider how the relational turn has impacted therapeutic action as applied to sexual material and erotic transference-countertransference.

While the content (reading and themes) is certainly privileged, there is also an equal and considerable course objective that relates more to the process of talking about sexuality and thinking about the application of these ideas in contemporary consulting rooms. This objective relates to increasing one’s capacity to sit with, bear, and symbolize (think about) this material in the presence of others. This is no small feat. Retaining one's ability to think in the presence of embodied affect and potentially arousing material without dissociating/flooding is essential in working more effectively with sexual issues in psychoanalysis. As such it is our hope that the content of the this course and the discussions that happen here help to create or enlarge a reflective, internal
space for holding potentially overwhelming and distressing sexual material with your patients.

**Specifically, at the end of the course candidates will be able to:**

1) Describe some of Freud’s most salient ideas presented in the Three Essays

2) Discuss at least three ways these ideas are “scandalous” or radical

3) Create bridges between course content and their own clinical work

4) Evaluate Stoller’s ideas about hate, aggression, and perversion

5) Compare Stein and Mitchell’s arguments about the fate of romance over time

6) Explain what is “other” about sexuality

7) Elucidate the differences between lust and libido as defined by Freud and other more contemporary authors

8) Evaluate Dimen’s claim that “Perversion is us”

9) Outline some of the evolving thinking about the disclosure and bracketing of the analyst’s sexuality (erotic transference-countertransference)

10) Describe contemporary revisions of the body and of transgressive sexualities

**Week 1: April 6, 2017**

This week’s class will focus on one of the most seminal texts in the psychoanalytic cannon, *The Three Essays of the Theory of Sexuality* particularly Freud’s first essay on Sexual Aberrations. In this essay Freud makes distinctions between the sexual object and the sexual aim. He discusses pedophilia and bestiality. He asserts that neurosis is the “negative of perversion” and that all perversion can find its origins in the “original and universal disposition of the sexual instinct.”


Week 2: April 13, 2017

This week’s class focuses on the Infantile Sexuality essay in Freud’s seminal text. Here Freud outlines the connections between early, childhood sexuality and adult sexuality. He discusses thumb sucking and other kinds of autoeroticism and then moves into discussing the role of puberty in transforming “fore-pleasures” into the “end-pleasure” of sexual intercourse. Paired with this classical reading are also contemporary commentaries about the scandal of Freud’s early ideas and the historical context from which they emerged.


Week 3: April 20, 2017

This week’s class focuses on the work of Robert Stoller, a psychoanalyst who trained at the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Institute who made significant contributions to the psychoanalytic field by writing about gender identity and perversion. In these selected excerpts, Stoller suggests that perversion is the expression of unconscious aggression, some kind of revenge against a person who in earlier life threatened us either through frustrations in the Oedipal conflict, in the development of our gender identity, or via trauma. In *Sexual Excitement* Stoller offers ways of conceptualizing perverse dynamics on a continuum while also deemphasizing the pathology of sexual behavior.
This week’s class focuses on the dialogue between Stein and Mitchell, two psychoanalysts engaged in understanding better the nature of passion and romance. Both are interested in the split between love and desire, between attachment and novelty. Mitchell suggests that couples often collude and invest in the illusory belief that each is knowable to the other when in reality, he argues, long-term relationships despite the felt stability are inherently risky. Stein aims to develop an experience-near account of sexuality be exploring excess and the work of seminal writers who have focused on the excess of sexuality. Stein continues to develop her thinking in response to Mitchell’s by arguing that the enemies of passion are the friends of attachment.


This week’s class focuses on the work of Muriel Dimen by exploring two of her most significant contributions to the contemporary cannon on sexuality. Here she re-visits Freud’s seminal text and searches the footnotes for additional insights about libido. Ultimately she asserts that sexuality can be re-envisioned in the place between lust and libido. She furthers her thinking by reexamining perversion and suggesting that “perversion is us,” while simultaneously arguing that this is not necessarily pathological.


Week 6: May 11, 2017

This week’s class focuses on the work of Jody Davies, another relational psychoanalyst working with and understanding the clinical implications of the analyst’s sexuality. Here Davies explores erotic countertransference and the ways in which it’s been historically bracketed. Drawing primarily from her work with adult survivor’s of childhood sexual abuse, Davies suggests that disclosing the analyst’s sexual responses to the patient might be advantageous. She then explores in the later 2006 paper the necessity of optimal frustration and the multiplicity of erotic self/other configurations.


Week 7: May 18, 2017

This week’s class focuses on the work of Avgi Saketopolou, a relational analyst who writes about more contemporary sexual issues in present-day consulting rooms. Here she explores in detail her work with a transgender child and explores the necessity of “mourning the body as bedrock” and sufficiently mentalizing the natal body as a necessity in working with what she calls “massive gender trauma.” Her second paper asserts that there is generative potential in perverse or transgressive sexualities.

Saketopolou, A. (2014). To suffer pleasure: The shattering of the ego as the psychic labor of perverse sexuality. Studies in Gender and Sexuality