

Seattle Psychoanalytic Society and Institute
INTERSUBJECTIVE AND RELATIONAL PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORIES
Year Four Psychoanalytic Training
Instructors: John Cardinali PsyD and Bertrand Wicholas, MD
Spring Trimester 2019: 3:30 to 5:00 pm

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW:

Welcome to our seminar on Intersubjective and Relational Psychoanalytic Theories. If you are enrolled in this course you have, for the most part, been exposed to traditional one-person psychoanalytic theories, including Drive and Id Psychology, Ego Psychology, Self Psychology and American and British Object Relations Theory. Though these psychoanalytic schools of thought vary considerably, one thing they have in common is that they place greater, if not exclusive, emphasis on the internal workings and vicissitudes within the individual mind. Ironically, though Kohut's Self Psychology helped to move psychoanalytic theory toward a two-person psychology, many authors have noted, correctly we believe, that similar to traditional psychoanalytic theory, Self Psychology was essentially a "one-person" psychology, in which the emphasis was principally on the mind of the individual. All of these theories moved psychoanalysis in important directions: Self Psychology toward a greater understanding of narcissistic injury and therapeutic empathy or empathic failure; Ego Psychology toward an increased appreciation of the individual's defense mechanisms, as well as the role the environment plays in shaping and influencing ego development; and, Object Relations Theory in elaborating the interaction and clash among internalized representations and introjects.

While many authors within traditional schools of psychoanalytic thought have moved psychoanalytic theory toward a two-person psychology (especially Self Psychology, Interpersonal Theory and those object relations theories stressing environmental factors, e.g., D.W. Winnicott), to date, Relational and Intersubjective theories have taken the most decisive and radical turn toward a two-person model.

The term "Relational Psychoanalysis" was originally coined by Stephen Mitchell (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983) in their classic book *Object Relations and Psychoanalytic Theory*. One major shift that is credited to The Relational and Intersubjective Psychoanalytic movement is that it moved psychoanalytic theory further away from the near exclusive study of the individual mind or psyche, toward the interaction between two "real" people, the client and the therapist or analyst. While this movement was initiated by the American Interpersonalists, some authors, e.g., Irvin Hoffman, assert that Interpersonal Theory remained to some degree, less than a two-person psychology. For example, Irvin Hoffman argues that Interpersonalists, e.g., Edger Levenson, retained conservative notions of analytic objectivity, neutrality, authority and client distortion.

In this seminar, we have selected an array of authors that we view as representative of the Relational and Intersubjective tradition. Similar to Interpersonal Theory and several object relation theories, Relational authors argue that personality emerges out of the matrix of early formative relationships with parents and other significant figures. An important difference between relational theory and traditional psychoanalytic thought is in its theory of motivation, which assigns primary importance to real interpersonal relations, rather than to instinctual drive.

The term "Intersubjectivity" was introduced in psychoanalysis by George E. Atwood and Robert Stolorow in 1984. It is tempting to view Relational and Intersubjective Psychoanalytic Theories as interchangeable, as they are often used that way. While they are closely allied and complementary, there are subtle differences and they are rooted in different philosophical traditions. In this seminar, we hope to flesh out some

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differences. Additionally, it is difficult to discuss Relational and Intersubjective Psychoanalysis without also taking into account such concepts as Social Constructivism (e.g., Irwin Hoffman); Enactment (e.g., Owen Renik and Lewis Aron) and Countertransference (e.g., Karen Maroda and Jessica Benjamin). What all of these authors have in common is that they tend to view, if not fully embrace, the idea that concepts such as transference and countertransference are co-creations carved out of the psychoanalytic dyad of client and analyst. Contrast this to traditional theories that view transference as residing within the client, projected or displaced onto the analyst. Also, while traditional analytic theorists tend to view countertransference-enactment primarily in negative and necessarily avoidable terms, relational and intersubjective authors tend to view countertransference enactment as unavoidable and inevitable. Moreover, relational and intersubjective theorists tend to view enactment as necessary in advancing therapeutic work. Relational analysts are also more likely than traditional analysts to view countertransference as the single most informative source of information about the client. Also, on the whole, relational analysts are more comfortable with authentic spontaneity and judicious countertransference disclosure, e.g., K. Maroda. Additionally, they favor a spirit of egalitarian and interpersonal negotiation between client and analyst over traditional interpretations that can, at times, seem intellectual, stilted and authoritarian (e.g., Stephen Mitchell). When treating clients, relational psychoanalysts stress a mixture of judicious and disciplined restraint, yet they also allow for authentic spontaneity. Some relationally-oriented psychoanalysts deemphasize the traditional focus on interpretation and free association; and, instead, they stress the importance of encouraging a lively, genuine relationship with the client.

The relational perspective was the first major psychoanalytic approach to be influenced by feminism and postmodernism. In addition, queer theory and postcolonial critique have influenced the evolution of relational thinking. Consequently, one of the defining features of relational psychoanalysis is an appreciation of the role of culture in shaping mental life, one's sense of self, and interpersonal relationships. Variables such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality are understood to be necessary considerations in theory building and conceptualization of an individual client and treatment process. Some authors make such consideration explicit, for others it is implicit given the "environmental" emphasis in relational theory. We encourage you to listen and read for the presence or absence cultural factors as we make our way through this course.

Finally, we'd like to say a word about the format of this seminar. As has been the tradition at SPSI, we hope that you will feel free to let us know which articles speak to you and which do not. We encourage you to challenge and critique anything you read and anything we say. Also, to facilitate our discussions of the readings, we plan to email each of you a list of three to five study questions, key concepts, or, better yet, talking points. Hopefully, they will help you organize your thinking while you plow through the many assigned pages. Again, welcome to our seminar.

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OVERALL LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this course, associates will be able to

1. Discuss the general guiding principles of Relational and Intersubjective Psychoanalytic Theories, and how they have evolved from earlier traditional psychoanalytic theories, and recognize the difference between a one and two-person psychology.
2. Compare and contrast Relational and Intersubjective Psychoanalytic Theories, both conceptually and philosophically.
3. Describe Relational and Intersubjective perspectives on enactment, countertransference, therapeutic neutrality and authority. Through case examples, apply the principle that psychic experiences are co-creations or constructions between client and analyst,
4. Develop a greater appreciation for how factors such as race, gender, sexuality identity, ethnicity, and class impact psychological life, personal identity, and clinical process.

By developing these skills, associates' clinical flexibility and case conceptualization skills will be expanded, thereby enhancing both client retention and treatment efficacy.

PART I: INTRODUCTION TO RELATIONAL AND INTERSUBJECTIVE THEORY

Week 1:

Wachtel, Paul (2008). "Chapter 8: Exploration, Support, Self-Acceptance and the School of Suspicion" from *Relational Theory and the Practice of Psychotherapy*, Guilford Press, pp.158-194. [pdf](#)

Wachtel, Paul (2008). "Chapter 9: Insight, Direct Experience, and the Implications of a New Understanding of Anxiety" from *Relational Theory and the Practice of Psychotherapy*, Guilford Press, pp. 195-219. [pdf](#)

Wachtel highlights how Relational and Intersubjective theories differ from classical approaches with respect to therapeutic neutrality and supportive interventions. Wachtel also presents a relational model of therapeutic action that emphasizes direct experience within the therapeutic relationship in contrast to insight only.

PART II: INTERSUBJECTIVITY & RECOGNITION THEORY

Week 2:

Benjamin, Jessica (2018). Chapter 2: "Beyond Doer and Done To: An Intersubjective View of Thirdness," from *Beyond Doer and Done to: Recognition Theory, Intersubjectivity and the Third*, pp. 21-49. [Pdf](#)

Optional:

Benjamin, Jessica (1990). "An Outline of Intersubjectivity: The Development of Recognition." *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 7S (supplement), 33-46. [PepWeb](#)

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In this chapter, Benjamin provides an overview of her model of intersubjectivity. In so doing, she contrasts her model from that of Stolorow, Atwood, and Orange. She also describes the common clinical challenge when patient and analyst get stuck in the fixed positions of “doer and done to.” Benjamin offers a model of thirdness as a way to both understand and to work our way through such impasses. This approach also has application to larger social and cultural impasses that occur when diverse identities come into conflict.

PART III: ENACTMENTS

Week 3:

Stern, Donnel (2010). “Chapter 4: The Eye Sees Itself: Dissociation, Enactment, and the Achievement of Conflict” from *Partners in Thought: Working with Unformulated Experience, Dissociation, and Enactment*, Routledge Press, pp. 71-105. [pdf](#)

Stern discusses the critical role of enactments in therapeutic action and how they are related to unformulated experience and disassociation.

Optional:

Grossmark, Robert (2018). “Chapter 7: The Work of the Narrative and Enactive Co-Narration” from *The Unobtrusive Relational Analyst: Explorations in Psychoanalytic Companionship*, Routledge Press, pp. 125-149.

Week 4:

Bromberg, Philip (2006). “Chapter 5: Potholes on the Royal Road, or is it an Abyss?” from *Awakening the Dreamer: Clinical Journeys*, Routledge Press, pp. 85-107. [pdf](#)

Bromberg discusses how enactments are an inevitable part of psychoanalysis and a key to therapeutic action. He outlines the relationship between dissociation, multiple self-states, and enactments.

PART IV: CLIENT REQUESTS & ANALYST SELF-DISCLOSURE

Week 5:

Mitchell, Stephen (1993). “Chapter 7: Wishes, Needs, and Interpersonal Negotiations” from *Hope and Dread in Psychoanalysis*, Basic Books, pp. 175-201 [pdf](#)

Mitchell provides a relational perspective on the client’s wishes and needs as they are expressed within the therapeutic relationship. He uses this perspective to explore the interpersonal negotiations that occur between analyst and client around client requests.

Week 6:

Maroda, Karen (2012). “Chapter 5: Self-disclosure and Advice: Understanding How and When the Therapist’s Disclosures are Therapeutic” from *Psychodynamic Techniques: Working with Emotion in the Therapeutic Relationship*, Guilford Press, pp 107-135. [pdf](#)

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Maroda explores analyst self-disclosure from classical and relational perspectives.

PART V: THE ANALYST'S AUTHENTICITY

Week 7:

Hoffman, Irwin (1998). "Chapter 9: Ritual and Spontaneity in the Psychoanalytic Process" from *Ritual and Spontaneity in the Psychoanalytic Process*, Analytic Press, pp. 219-243. [Pdf](#)

Optional:

Hoffman, Irwin (1998). "Chapter 8: Dialectical Thinking and Therapeutic Action," from *Ritual and Spontaneity in the Psychoanalytic Process*, Analytic Press, pp. 193-219. [Pdf](#)

In these chapters, Hoffman uses dialectical thinking to explore how analyst spontaneity occurs in the context of rituals of the analyst's restraint. He explores analyst expressiveness through a lens of social-constructivist theory.

PART VI: RACE, GENDER, ETHNICITY, SEXUALITY, & CLASS

Week 8:

Suchet, Melanie (2004), "A Relational Encounter with Race", *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, pp. 14(4) 423-438. [PepWeb](#)

Suchet, who is a white South African, provides a very evocative example of how racial trauma manifested in her work with an African-American patient who was mandated to treatment. She emphasizes the ways in which the analyst's disavowal of race results in a racial enactment.

Leary, Kimberly (2000), "Racial Enactments in Dynamic Treatment," *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, pp. 10(4), 639-653. [PepWeb](#)

Leary uses intersubjectivity theory to consider race and racial experience in analytic work. She explores the phenomena of racial enactments and how they can be addressed within the analytic relationship.

PART VII: THE ANALYST'S INTENTIONS, AUTHORITY & RESPONSIBILITY

Week 9:

Mitchell, Stephen (1997), Chapter 6: "The Analyst's Intentions," in *Influence & Autonomy in Psychoanalysis*, pp. 169-203. [pdf](#)

Optional

Mitchell, Stephen (1997), Chapter 7: "The Analyst's Knowledge & Authority," in *Influence & Autonomy in Psychoanalysis*, pp. 203-231. [pdf](#)

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Mitchell provides a relational perspective on clinical process, exploring what exactly the analyst is striving to do in each session and what special knowledge imbues the analyst with authority vis-a-vis the client.

PART VIII: THERAPEUTIC ACTION

Week 10:

Boston Change Process Group (2010). "Chapter 8: An Implicit Relational Process Approach to Therapeutic Action" from *Change in Psychotherapy: A Unifying Paradigm*, Norton, pp. 192-211. [pdf](#)

The authors explore the idea that there is "something more" than insight or interpretation that is essential to therapeutic action.

Week 11:

Bromberg, Philip (2011), Chapter 5: "Truth & Human Relatedness, " in *The Shadow of the Tsunami*, pp. 91-123

Bromberg discusses therapeutic action from the perspective to two minds coming together, negotiating truth & reality, and integrating dissociated self-states. [pdf](#)

Additional Readings on Intersubjectivity:

Orange, D., Atwood, G.E. and Stolorow, R.D. (2001). *Working Intersubjectively: Contextualism in Psychoanalytic Practice*, Analytic Press, pp. 3-90. [pdf](#)

In this book Orange, Atwood and Stolorow offer a contextualized view of psychoanalytic practice and pathology. They also provide a philosophical, i.e., phenomenological, understanding of Intersubjectivity Theory.