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Course Syllabus

## **Perversion**

Fall 2016

Perversion has been a central interest of analytic inquiry from Freud's early writings in the Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality until today. From its early understanding as a pre-genital fixation, perversion has been made use of to both point to something deviant and clarify what it means to be normal. Psychoanalysis's multifaceted use of the concept of perversion has added to its complex and enigmatic quality which has only increased over the years as a myriad of theories about perversion has made their way through the analytic landscape. With so many important papers and theories to draw from, we could easily spend a year or more with this topic; yet we are asking ourselves to learn something central about perversion in only 9 weeks. No easy feat indeed.

There are of course many ways of approaching this challenge. After considering quite a few of the more important theoretical formulations on perversion we could study, I felt that rather than try to cover all those formulations, (which would amount to a survey course on perversion) I would instead like us to try and strike a balance between dep breadth and depth by following only two or three theoretical threads of our topic so that we can both gain some sense of its breadth, while also having some time to dig into its depth. By limiting the number of papers and theories we will consider, I am hoping we can avoid overwhelming ourselves and so give ourselves a better chance to more fully digest what we do study together.

With this goal in mind, one of the main themes I would like us to focus on to help us understand perversion is that of narcissism. Since the publishing of

Freud's paper On Narcissism in 1914, the role of narcissism has taken on an increasingly important place in analytic theorizing. From Freud's early ideas about the withdrawal of libidinal cathexis and primary narcissism, he went on to see that a dominance of narcissistic relating is the foundation for many types of pathology, including melancholia and various types of perversion. Freud's idea on the importance of narcissism was taken up by a wide range of other theorists, especially the contemporary Kleinian and French Freudian schools, who both saw this theoretical lens as a central tool in their understanding of perversion. Because as a class I know you have not yet studied narcissism specifically, I thought we could take a little time with narcissism before our turning this lens to perversion itself.

Another aspect of perversion we will focus on is the idea of an inherent destructiveness. This idea is also grounded in a variety of Freud's conceptions, but became most clearly articulated his ideas of the death instinct. Through the death instinct, Freud saw a way of understanding self-destructive, sadistic and masochistic behavior that became intricately a part of our views of perversion. While Freud came to see innate aggression as an important component in his later work, it also fell to other schools to more fully develop these ideas. Klein for example came to see that sado-masochism, perversion and addictions represent one way of struggling to develop object relations beyond the paranoid schizoid position, where an excess of destructiveness dominates the personality. By becoming sensitive to the various ways narcissistic and destructive components express themselves in perverse organizations, I think we will be able to better appreciate the complex ways perversion manifests, both in the personality and in the transference/countertransference experience with perverse patients.

Narcissism began its conceptual life as a type of perversion and the two concepts have been closely linked together ever since. One of the goals of this class will be to gain some understanding about how and why these concepts are so linked, including how their relationship to each other has changed, as well as not changed over time. One of the challenges of asking these types of questions is the variety of answers we will encounter, given the wide range of theorizing which exists about perversion and narcissism.

Again, with the goal of striking a balance between depth and breath, I have tried to take a middle course. Starting with Freud's paper On Narcissism as a conceptual foundation, we will then read two very good overviews of both narcissism and perversion. We will then read a very contemporary paper on perversion which I'm hoping can further ground us in our topic by having us think about some current issues. From there we will move into some depth, focusing on a British Object Relations and French Freudian perspectives on perversion. I have chosen these particular theoretical perspectives because I think they provide a cohesive theoretical understanding of perversion which can provide a foundation for your clinical work with perverse patients. I have also chosen these perspectives because I continue to be enriched by my own study of them, as I hope you will as well.

We will finish the course by reading a clinical paper to help us further integrate the ideas we are studying.

# Perversion

Week 1 Freud's beginnings on Narcissism and perversion.

Freud, S. (1914). 'On narcissism: An introduction'. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 14:73-102

Optional:

Freud, S. (1919). 'A Child is Being Beaten' A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 17: 175-204

Week 2 The narcissistic element of perversion.

Pulver, S. (1970). Narcissism: The term and the concept. J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn. 18:319-341

Freud, S. (1938). *Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense*. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, volume. 23:271-8.

Week 3 An overview of Perversion.

Cooper, A. (1991) "The unconscious core of perversion." In *Perversion and Near-Perversion in Clinical Practice*. G. Fogel and W. Myers, Eds., New Haven: Yale University Press, Pp. 17-35

Optional:

Gillespie W. H. (1956) The General Theory of Sexual Perversion. *Int. J. Psycho-Analysis*, 37:396-403.

Week 4 Some contemporary thoughts.

Moss, Donald. (2015) Sexual aberrations: Do we still need the concept? If so, when and why? If not, why not? In *Sexualities, Contemporary Psychoanalytic*

Perspectives. Alessandra Lemma and Paul Lynch, EDs., Hove, East Sussex; Routledge, Pp. 177-188

Optional:

Aisenstein, Marilia, Moss Donald. (2015) Desire and its discontents. In Sexualities, Contemporary Psychoanalytic Perspectives. Alessandra Lemma and Paul Lynch, EDs., Hove, East Sussex; Routledge, Pp. 63-80

Week 5 Rosenfeld's central contribution.

Rosenfeld, H. (1971). A clinical approach to the psychoanalytic theory of the life and death instincts: an investigation into the aggressive aspects of narcissism. *Int. J. Psycho-Analysis*, 52:169-178.

Optional:

Rosenfeld, H. (1964). On the Psychopathology of Narcissism, a Clinical Approach. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 45:332-337.

Week 6 Steiner; The development of the concept of Psychic Retreats.

Steiner, J. (1993). The Relationship to Reality in Psychic Retreats. In *Psychic Retreats*. London: Routledge, Pp 88-102

Optional:

Steiner, J. (1993). Review: Narcissistic object relations and pathological organizations of the personality. In *Psychic Retreats*. London: Routledge, Pp 40-53

Week 7 A French persuasion on perversion.

Chasseguet-Smirgel, J. "Perversion and the universal Law." In *Creativity and Perversion*, Pp. 1-12

Week 8 The French continued.

Chassequet-Smirgel, J. "Perversion and Narcissism." In *Creativity and Perversion*, Pp. 24-34

Optional:

McDougall, J. (2000). *Sexuality and the Neosexual*. *Mod. Psychoanal.*, 25:155-166.

Week 9 A clinical Case.

Carignan, L. (1999). *The Secret: Study of a Perverse Transference*. *Int. J Psychoanal.* 80: 909-928

Optional:

Nos, J. (2014). *Collusive induction in perverse relating: Perverse enactments and bastions as a camouflage for death anxiety*. *Int J Psychoanal.*, 95:291-311.