Sex in Psychotherapy: Sexuality, Passion, Love, and Desire in the Therapeutic Encounter

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Course Description:

Sex, Sexuality, Gender, Gender Identity and Sexual Diversity are daily topics in today’s clinical practice. How does the therapist position her- or himself to listen to the many ways sex regularly presents itself—particularly in transference and countertransference?

Relational psychotherapies today recognize sexuality in both erotic and non-erotic forms to be an essential aspect of the intersubjective field in which personal growth and transformation occur. Taking a developmental approach to an array of relatedness possibilities from more fundamental to more complex levels of desire and fear, Dr. Hedges will discuss how sex and sexuality are a ubiquitous part of transference, resistance, and countertransference development. Spring-boarding from Foucault’s position that sexuality is inevitably infused and fused with social and interpersonal power and that sex itself is an ever-elusive myth, Dr. Hedges will offer a series of case vignettes which pose questions for our understanding of sexuality in psychotherapy. Of special importance are the implications for multicultural/diversity issues for the diagnosis/countertransference/intervention dimensions.

Learning Goals:

- To know eight different perspectives from which to listen to issues of sex and sexuality
- To know how the “ethnosexual frontier” links sexuality and ethnicity
- To learn how post modernism and constructionism affect our understanding of sex and sexuality
- To learn Foucault’s argument regarding the linkage of power and sexuality
- To learn how sexual encounters in therapy reveal transference and countertransference
- To know the implications of early infant-caregiver interactions for the development of later sexuality
• To learn fundamentals of the relational approach to psychotherapy
Course Outline:

A Fable: Boy Meets Girl
Intimacy: An Overview

Part I: Introduction:

The Evolution of the Anthropoids—That’s Us!
The Web of Intimacy—Love, Lust, Attachment, and Intersubjectivity
Intimacy, Sexuality, and Brain Research
Six Views of Brain Functioning
  1. The Split Brain and Localization
  2. The Triune Brain--Paul MacLean
  3. The Re-entry Brain--Gerald Edelman
  4. The Synaptic Brain--Joseph LeDoux
  5. The Cluster Brain--M.-Marsel Mesulam
  6. The Transcendent Brain--J. Chilton Pearce

Intimacy and the Baby Watchers
The Evolution of Human Emotions, Intimacy, and Sexuality
Intimacy and the Human Motivational Systems
  1. The Attachment Motivational System
  2. The Affective-Interactive Motivation System
  3. The Intersubjective Motivational System

Eight Perspectives on Sexuality
  1. Historical Perspective
  2. Natural/Biological/Religious Perspective
  3. Infant-Caregiver/Erotic Interactions Perspective
  4. Personal Identity Perspective
  5. Post-modern/Social Constructionist Perspective
  6. Race/Ethnicity/Sexuality Perspective
  7. Intersubjective Perspective
  8. Relational/Thirdness Perspective

Part II: Published Case Studies

Part III: Three Case Studies

  1. Dora: Eros in Transference
  2. Ted and Lisa: Eros in Resistance
  3. Charles: Eros in Countertransference
The year 2007 marked the 50th anniversary of sex research in North America beginning with the landmark Kinsey studies released by the Kinsey Institute in 1957. Technological advances and major new theoretical developments during the past two decades have brought increasingly new levels of understanding to the complexities of sex, sexual orientations, gender, gender identities, and genetic variability. This course defines eight contemporary perspectives for illuminating sexualities as they appear in various kinds of erotic and eroticized encounters in life and in psychotherapy:


3. Infant Research: The research of Stern (1985, 2005), Fonagy (2001), Beebe and Lachman (2002) and others currently highlights early learned mutual regulatory affective expectancies and attachment representations that effectively form the foundation of adult relationships and sexual engagements. Benjamin (1988) goes so far as to say that “the early experiences of mutual recognition already prefigure the dynamics of erotic life.”


6. Race, Ethnicity and Sexuality: Sociologist Nagel (2003) surveys extensive historical, anthropological and sociological research that demonstrates “the power of sex to shape ideas and feelings about race, ethnicity and the nation and...how sex matters insinuate themselves into all things racial, ethnic and national,” while Butler (1993) considers our disjunctive ordering of identities to be based not only on gender taboos but also on racial injunctions.

7. Intersubjective: Stolorow and colleagues (2002) make clear that sexuality is inextricably enmeshed in the intersubjective field while Benjamin (1988, 2005) outlines the development of mutual recognition that moves sexuality beyond essentialist or naturalist conceptualizations.

8. Relational: Mitchell (1988) reverses the classical position—that internalized object relationships memorialize childhood infantile conflicts—to read that interactive adult sexuality expresses early relational configurations. Dimen (2003) goes even farther in saying, “sexuality has become a relation, not a force. If, with Freud, we thought that your sex is what makes you who you are, now we think that who you are shapes what sex you are and what sex you like.”
About the Instructor:

**Lawrence E. Hedges, PhD., PsyD., ABPP** is a psychologist-psychoanalyst in private practice in Orange, California, specializing in the training of psychotherapists and psychoanalysts. He is director of the Listening Perspectives Study Center and the founding director of the Newport Psychoanalytic Institute where he is a supervising and training psychoanalyst. He is Assistant Professor at The University of California Irvine Medical School, the Department of Psychiatry. Dr. Hedges is author of numerous papers and books on the practice of psychoanalytic psychotherapy including *Listening Perspectives in Psychotherapy; Facing the Challenge of Liability in Psychotherapy: Practicing Defensively; Sex in Psychotherapy: Sexuality, Passion, Love, and Desire in the Therapeutic Encounter; and Relationship: The Essence of Psychotherapy and Supervision.*