

Winter 2012
Wednesdays 3:45-6:15

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522-5514

PSY 525: SELF/RELATIONAL/INTERSUBJECTIVE PSYCHOLOGY

“If the man can begin to feel recognized-- and such recognition may well include aspects of his character which he has not yet recognized himself-- the hopeless nature of his unhappiness will have been changed...”

John Berger, A Fortunate Man

INTRODUCTION & GOALS

The theoretical and clinical writing of Self Psychology (interesting how this name was given and the variety of meanings attributed to it depending on our backgrounds and biases) comes originally from the work of Heinz Kohut, who worked many years as a psychoanalyst in the tradition of Freud, and who began modifying and changing his ideas and his practice slowly but continuously as he felt that the model he had been using did not fit some of the people with whom he worked, or with himself. As he did this, he also taught and wrote about these changes and influenced not only his students, but also psychotherapists from other orientations and psychotherapy generally.

Kohut and his “students” felt strongly that therapeutic work must be “experience near”. That is, therapy and discussions about therapy should be stated in language that fits as closely as possible to the client’s experiential world. (It is my bias that this is also one of the differences between many of the Object Relations theorists and many Self Psychology writers. Both ways of understanding have important things to say. I find the Self/Relational writers speak in ways that are “closer to home” for me.) They also felt that it is imperative for the clinician to try to enter and experience (as much as possible) the client’s world. In fact, some of these clinician-writers speak of themselves as phenomenological psychoanalysts.

I am using Kohut’s life and writing as a starting place for thinking about working with people described as “narcissistic”, “borderline”, and “neurotic” not because I think that he has a corner on the truth, but because his life and writings so clearly come out of a particular historical/cultural/political context that illustrates that we see typically only what is illuminated on our own “horizon”-- and that what is visible to us changes as times change. (That is, our horizon or what is “seeable” to us changes as the

social/political context in which we live and imagine ourselves changes.) So who knows how people will write about our practice of psychotherapy some years from now. Thus his work shows how the larger historical/social/political context is lived out in a particular person's time. Additionally, I like to use his work because it has had a great deal of influence in therapy, and his work feels very much related to our particular graduate program... and besides, I like it.

A note on reading some of the work this quarter: This course will include both familiar words (e.g., transference, defense, resistance, empathy) and words that may be less familiar (e.g., self object, empathic failure, mirroring, idealization). It is helpful to remind ourselves, starting with the Kohut reading and any other reading, that the terms that are used are simply words to "try on"; they are attempts by various authors to make sense of the world as they experience it. They may call out reactions and biases in us that can be useful-- IF we are aware of and notice and talk about our reactions. It may be that you come up with your own words/images that work better for you. That's legal. We will be talking about trying to help our hearing and our being with. This is not about a choice of existential phenomenological vs. some variety of psychoanalytic thought/practice. They go together and they are also different. That's fine. Let's talk and each of us use what is useful to us.

As with much clinically based writing, there will be times as you read through some of the material on narcissism when you will feel that the author is talking about you. I assume this experience will be nothing new to you (and it will continue to go on throughout your clinical lifetime, hopefully, as I can attest). Perhaps you may even welcome this experience as a new piece of information that is at first uncomfortable but then useful.

REQUIREMENTS AND HOW WE WILL PROCEED

First, it is most important to me that we realize that there are many ways to understand ourselves and others. Reading psychology and philosophy are good, but novels, plays, poetry, music, art, dance, nature are equally valid and add greatly to opening and enlarging our sense of ourselves/others/the world. So I want to include poetry and art in what we read and do, and hope you will help by bringing in other forms/materials as we proceed... maybe your dreams, too? The question for me is how to read and reflect on what others have written, created, said while at the same time EMBRACING THE PERSONAL.

1. We will read and discuss the assigned readings in class. Write down for yourself one or two questions that you have on the readings and come to class prepared to talk about them.
2. Reflection Paper on the readings, class discussion, anything that comes to your mind in regards to what we've done so far. 3 pages. Due February 1. Hard copy with your email address on it. Second year meet with me.
3. For second year students, present with a partner to the class, a client you have worked with in your practicum during the year using some of the understandings you have that may and may not fit with our readings. You will have 45-60 minutes to do this presentation and explication so that we have a sense of the person and of your experience in the therapeutic setting. This will happen during one part of each of the last three classes.
3. For the first year students, you will have a choice of one of the following:
 - a. Role play a client as well as being a therapist to such a client. Write a five page paper describing your experience as the client and as the therapist. Also include how any reading helped or didn't help you enter into this experience. Your paper should include what happened; what it was like for you to "be" such a client (How did it feel-- before, during and after? How did you prepare to "be" this?); and how did you feel as the therapist with such a client? You will need to find a partner and study the style of narcissistic injury that you are going to "be" so that you have a felt sense of what it is like to be this person from the "inside" as well as what it is like to sit with this person. And I do want to emphasize feelings/felt sense in you, not simply your thoughts. This is due the Monday after the last class. Or,
 - b. Write a paper of approximately five pages in which you take a character from a movie, play, or novel and describe them in terms of some of the readings and concepts we have used in this course. Describe also how the readings and ideas are helpful in illuminating the person and also where/if they miss the mark. Due the Monday after the last class.

"man can no more survive psychologically in a psychological milieu that does not respond empathically to him, than he can survive psychically in an atmosphere that contains no oxygen."

Heinz Kohut, The Restoration of the Self

SCHEDULE

NOTE #1: January 4 class will start at 3:30 inside the Seattle Art Museum (on 1st between Union and University) and will end back at SU at 7. Do readings beforehand to discuss that day back at SU. Think about transportation.

NOTE #2: Watch videos of “Sunset Boulevard” and “Ordinary People” with partners/small groups before class on January 18 and be prepared to discuss in class. (Scarecrow Video on 50th and Roosevelt has them.)

January 4: 3:30 to 7. Set a context for course materials, see connections in life, art and therapy. Overview. Meanings of narcissism, dependency, caring. Read Cushman, Doi and Stiver (Rebecca has them) BEFORE class.

January 12: no class

January 18: 3:45 to 7. Read and discuss Kohut chapters in course reader and talk about Kohut’s life and changing world. Discuss reactions to “Sunset Boulevard” and “Ordinary People”

January 25: Read and discuss Kahn and Stolorow articles. I’ll present

February 1: Read and discuss Stolorow chapters 4 & 5. I’ll present.

February 8: Read and discuss Stolorow chapter 8 and my article/present.

February 15: Read and discuss articles on Shame by Karen and by Hinton. Exercise.

February 22: Read, discuss chapters (to be announced) in Stern book. Second year presents

March 1: Contemporary Self Psychology: chapters by Donna Orange in Working Intersubjectively. Second year class presentation.

March 8: Donna Orange paper “For Whom The Bell Tolls”. Integration of material, questions, Second year class presentation.