The William Alanson White Institute  
Course #330: Psychoanalysis: Race, Class, Culture, Difference  

Syllabus

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Spring Trimester, 10 Sessions  
Tuesdays, 8:30 – 9:45 p.m., March - May

This course addresses various ways in which issues of race, ethnicity, social class, and difference influence the treatment process.

I  INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE:

These are, indeed, troubled times in which we live. But for those who care to wonder, it is, as well, a world stunning in its elegant diversity. My reflections transport me to a time, almost one hundred years ago, when W.E.B. Du Bois addressed what he believed to be the socio-political challenges confronting America at that moment in time. Listen to Du Bois' (1906) commentary:

“We have a way in America of wanting to be “rid” of problems. It is not so much a desire to reach the best and largest solution. ... To our most sinister social problem, the Negro. ... Of all possible attitudes, this is the most dangerous, because it fails to realize the most significant fact of the opening century, viz.: The Negro problem in America is but a local phase of a world problem. ... The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the Color Line.” [p.42]

Into the depths of meaning enveloped in his “Color Line” metaphor, it might be argued, Du Bois intended to wrestle American political and socioeconomic consciousness, especially given the imminent crossings of boundaries anticipated at the dawn of the twentieth century.

So, here we stand at the edge of Time's moment from which, with the benefit of Time past, we may peer perceptively into Time's future. In this moment the term, “globalization” has gained currency in our lexicon in and out of the academy. “Globalization” has come to inform much of today's dialogues on cultures and difference, on social and political matters, on economic power and supremacy, on national and international morality and responsibility. The term has infused energy into academic, political and grassroots critique of America's policies and actions on its shores and abroad in a manner that echoes Du Bois' remarkably prescient musings of 1906, in which he called attention to impending dissolutions of geographical boundaries and to those “Others” (i.e., peoples and cultures outside America's borders) with whom we would inevitably be forced to reckon.

What would this man, one of America's visionaries, see today were he a ghost among us? Actually, if Bodnar (2004) is correct, and I believe she is, Du Bois is a ghost among us. Have we learned? During the course of his own lifetime, Du Bois was witness to many important shifts in America's social and political landscape, as discussed in some detail in Gates and West (1996). Yet, I think that were he alive today, his soul would weep. His soul would weep for the fact that, though nearly one hundred years later the “Color Line” is less shrouded by the “veil” of secrecy, still we witness concerted efforts by many who wield political power to deny, dissociate from, or even to reject outright, the reality that large segments of our society remain politically and economically disenfranchised, even as these forgotten “Others” remain
“hungry for identity, meaning and self-worth” (West, 1993, p.20). Even so, I believe that Du Bois would also smile with pleasure at the charged voices of protest and dissent among today’s theoreticians, intellectuals and political activists. And to me, a black psychoanalyst in 2003, what is equally important is that I could hold his gaze and inform Dr. Du Bois, with pride of profession, that we, too, have entered this moment of Great Dialogue; and I would present to this ancestral ghost, for his own perusal, his intimate musings, a copy of the July/August, 2000 edition of Psychoanalytic Dialogues (Vol.10, No. 4), which presented its first “Symposium on Race.”

II. THE STATEMENT ABOVE (I), REFLECTS OUR SENSE that, as we consider the patient within the context of the psychoanalytic process, we must consider psychoanalysis within the context of the larger sociopolitical world. It is imperative, I believe, that we analysts examine the motives, attitudes, and yes, the prejudices (Young- Bruehl, 1995), we bring to bear on our work with patients who, because of obvious or implied differences might, wittingly, or unwittingly, be relegated to the status of “Other.” And examining how that process of “Othering” permeates the work, like blood coursing through veins, and how we see it played out in the transference-countertransference action between our patients and us, is one key element to be examined in this course.

III. WE ALL DO IT: We “Other” others, that is. Some may be shocked at this revelation; others may sort of suspect it but may choose to dissociate from its painful truth; and still others may be more openly engaged with the struggle. Whatever the case may be, I choose to believe that those of us who choose to participate in the unfolding of the course, are joined by the desire to explore, to expand, to come to know the many truths and realities we co-create with our patients as intersubjective beings engaged in the process of effecting change.

IV. PSYCHOANALYSIS: THE SOCIAL AND THE POLITICAL: Who is analyzable? To whom is the “talking cure” applicable? Political Analysts?

V. DIALECTICS: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION? OR HUMAN PROPENSITY?: Are familiar dialectics such as “self/other,” “we/them,” “me/not-me” socially constructed categories? Or are they derivatives of natural human tendencies to organize our world into categories?

VI. POST MODERN THOUGHT: From a psychoanalytic perspective, the language of social construction, intersubjectivity, object relations, and

VII. RELATIONAL PSYCHOANALYSIS: In what manner does this way of thinking and related practice, facilitate the conduct of psychoanalysis with individuals who might otherwise be thought to be unanalyzable? How is the “Other” brought into inclusion?

VIII. THE VOICES OF THE “OTHERS”: The nature of our work is such that, even though the statement: “Analysts Are Patients Too” may be applicable to some, if not all of us, rarely do we hear the voices of patients spoken in our literature. No Matter. The socio-political experiences of our patients, their traumas and their hopes, are multiply examined in literature and published personal narratives. We will examine some of those writings not because we will then “know” the patients in our consulting room. It is my hope, rather, that through these readings we will be forced to confront our own internalized prejudices and will, therefore, enter into our intersubjective engagements in a greater state of readiness to embrace surprise: the new, the different, the unexpected in our patients and in ourselves.

WELCOME!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
We Look Forward to Engaging With You in This Dialogue
Week I: Introductions

Weekly Readings:

I: Identity: A Postmodern Perspective
Race, Gender, Ethnicity
Social class in the construction of identity.

Readings:

I


Suggested Readings:


II: Psychoanalysis, Class, Ethnicity
Eurocentricity of Psychoanalytic discourse.
The Ethnicity of Psychoanalysis. Freud’s Jewish identity
Historical Background of psychoanalysis and ethnicity
The classical tradition
The interpersonal tradition
Relational Perspectives
Clinical presentation.

Readings:

II

Altman, N. (2009), Theoretical, historical, and sociological background:

Suggested Readings:

Smith, Laura (2005), Psychotherapy, classism, and the poor: Conspicuous in their absence. Am. Psychol. 7: 687-696.

III: Migration & Exile
Multiethnic Nature of American society
Migration & Identity
Psychosocial variables of migration
Psychoanalysis & Migrants
Clinical Presentation

Readings:

III

Boulanger, G. (2004). Lot’s Wife, Cary Grant, and the American dream:

**Suggested Readings:**


**IV/V: The Psychoanalytic Encounter: Difference, Othering, Transference-Countertransference.**

Issues of Ethnicity and power in the psychoanalytic dyad.

Ethnic barriers to communication, language and gesture.

Clinical Presentation

**Readings:**

**IV**


**V**


**Suggested Readings:**


VI/VII: Transference - Resistance, countertransference and counter resistance in the context of race, ethnicity and social class.
Clinical presentation

Readings:

VI


VII


Suggested Readings:

Abasi, A., (1998), Speaking the unspeakable. In: Blacks and Jews on the


VIII/IX:

Readings

VIII


IX


**X: Reflections: How Do You Stand?**

**X**

*Readings:*