attachment theory in clinical practice

sw721-001
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office hours:

  tuesday 12:15 to 1:30
  some wednesdays 12:30 – 1:45
  others by appointment (this is the easiest option; i am quite willing to meet with you!)

course text

  • wallin, d.j. (2007). attachment in psychotherapy. new york: guilford
  available on e-links through um:

  • h. obegi & e. berant (eds). (2009). attachment theory and research in clinical work with adults. new york: guilford

course description

understanding the implications of childhood relationships on adult functioning can provide a powerful framework for creating goals and intervention in adult psychotherapy. using attachment theory as the foundation, this course will address relationship-based intervention with adults. students will learn the role of attachment in the development and maintenance of strategies that adults use to manage needs for autonomy and connection, in social, family and romantic relationships.

course objectives

by the end of the course, students will understand:

  • the theoretical construct of attachment patterns and styles of attachment
  • the clinical utility of attachment theory
  • an understanding of the cultural norms in development of attachment
  • the clinical correlates of adolescent and adult attachment organization
  • attachment-related defensive processes
  • the neurobiology of attachment
• How to use an understanding of the dynamics of attachment to inform clinical thinking and intervention with diverse populations
• The role of transference and countertransference
• Conscious use of self in mentalization-based practice
• The limitations and gaps in attachment research

Course Design
Designed as an integrative seminar, this course will involve extensive participation on the part of the students. To promote clinical skills including critical thinking, emotional attunement and thoughtfully derived interventions, this course will employ a variety of pedagogical strategies, including experiential exercises, small and large group discussion, didactic lectures, videos, role plays, fishbowl supervisions, and reflective writings.

Links to CSWE Practice Behaviors

Practice Behavior 3
• Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments
• Distinguish, appraise and integrate multiple sources of knowledge, including research-based knowledge and practice wisdom
• Demonstrate effective oral and written communication
• Analyze models of assessment, prevention, and intervention

Practice Behavior 4
• Engage diversity and difference in practice
• Recognize and communicate understanding of the importance of difference in shaping life experiences
• Gain sufficient self-awareness manage the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse groups

Practice Behavior 7
• Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment
• Utilize conceptual frameworks to guide the processes of assessment, intervention and evaluation
• Critique and apply knowledge to understand person and environment

Practice Behavior 10
• Engage, assess, intervene and evaluate...
• Use empathy and other interpersonal skills
• Collect, organize and interpret client data
• Select appropriate intervention strategies

Relationship of the Course to Ethics and Values
Social work ethics and values will be addressed within the course as they pertain to issues related to working with clients in a relationally-based intervention. Awareness of transference, countertransference, and the necessity of reflective supervision will be highlighted as ways to maintain appropriate boundaries and to prevent compassion fatigue. We will look at how attachment is understood across cultures and the role of cultural humility in exploring the attachment-related needs and behaviors of clients.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
If you are in need of an accommodation for a disability, please let me know at your earliest convenience. Any information you provide is private and confidential and will be treated as such. Some aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way the course is usually taught may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make me aware of your needs, we can work with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office to help us determine appropriate academic accommodations. SSD typically recommends accommodations through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. Please present the VISA form to me at the beginning of the term, or at least two weeks prior to the need for the accommodation (test, project, etc.).

For more information, contact:
Services for Students with Disabilities
G-664 Haven Hall | 505 South State St.
(734) 763-3000 | ssdoffice@umich.edu

**Mental Health & Wellbeing**
The Office of Student Service’s Health and Wellness Program provides supportive services to MSW students which promote wellness, self-care, and maintenance of a healthy academic and mental health balance, as well as to increase disability awareness. Students may experience situations or circumstances that impede educational success and/or quality of life. Students may contact Health and Wellness Advocate Nyshourn Price regarding any health, mental health or wellness issue(s). This could include need for advocacy and/or referral to School, university, or community resources, financial resources, or counseling centers. All meetings with students are strictly confidential and can take place in the School, over coffee, or locations where the student feels comfortable and non-threatened.

Nyshourn Price, LMSW
Phone: (734) 763-4261
ndp@umich.edu

You also have access to an embedded CAPS therapist - Megan Shaughnessy-Mogill, LLMSW (mshaughm@umich.edu)

Students can also contact the Health and Wellness Program via ssw.wellness@umich.edu. Additional resources can be found in the MSW Student Guide to Health and Wellness: http://ssw.umich.edu/student-life/health-safety.

**Emergency Preparedness**
In the event of an emergency, dial 9-1-1 from any cell phone or campus phone.

All University of Michigan students, faculty and staff are required to familiarize themselves with emergency procedures and protocols for both inside and outside of the classroom. In the event of possible building closure (i.e. power outages, severe weather conditions, public health notices, etc.) you may contact (734)764-SSWB (7793) for up-to-date School closure information.

Be Prepared. Familiarize yourself with the emergency card posted next to the phone in every classroom/meeting room. Review the information on the emergency evacuation sign (located
nearest the door) and locate at least (2) emergency exits nearest the classroom.

If you are concerned about your ability to exit the building in the case of an emergency, contact the Office of Student Services and/or email ssw-ADAcompliance@umich.edu.

For more information, view the annual Campus Safety Statement at http://www.dpss.umich.edu.
Register for UM Emergency Alerts at http://www.dpss.umich.edu/emergency-management/alert/.

Course Requirements

1. Attend each session (20 points); absences will lower your grade since:
   a. Some material considered essential to the objectives of the course will only be presented in class;
   b. The application of key concepts and student co-learning requires participation in class discussions and exercises
   c. Predictability, reliability and consistency are core to any strong relationship... “being there” is incredibly important to clients, so it is important in this class
   d. Attendance means participating and attending to others. Using computers or mobile devices to text, shop, Facebook, etc. will significantly reduce your attendance points. Unless you have a family emergency, (and please speak to me about it ahead of time) please put your phones away.
   e. I will look for evidence that you have done the reading during class discussions. Students who have clearly read and contribute to the course discussions by asking salient questions or making astute observations will be afforded the highest participation grades.

2. Completion of Five Assignments
   a. Complete the RSQ before class begins. No paper is associated with this but you will need to have completed it in order to reflect upon it in the final paper
   b. Attachment Goes to the Movies (20 points) – in the first class, you will sign up for a week to submit
   c. Discussion Response (5 points) – must post one reply to one other Attachment Goes to the Movies post by last class
   d. Mid-term Paper (40 points) – Due February 18 by midnight
   e. Final Paper (15 points) – Due April 8 by midnight

Assignment Descriptions:

Attachment goes to the Movies (20 points) – Sign up for a due date (all are due by March 25 at midnight). By your assigned date, you must post (in the discussion tab and in the assignment tab) a detailed account of your understanding of a movie or TV character(s). Choose a character/scene (can be an interaction between two or three people) from a movie or TV show (you might have to give some background to set the context). Describe the show/scene fully so the rest of us can get a sense of what is occurring, unless you are posting a clip of it – in that case just give the context. Then write about the scene/person in attachment terms. What nonverbal cues do you notice? What emotion regulation or cognitive tendencies do you see? Is there a clear attachment style? If not, do you have any guesses? Do you notice any defensive
strategies? Describe what you would want to explore if the character were your client. What, if any, barriers due to identity (race, class, culture, gender, religion, sexual orientation) might exist in developing or sustaining a therapeutic relationship with the character? These are only some of the questions you can ponder and respond to – feel free to also elaborate other reactions/ideas/connections.

Each of you must also respond to at least one post, noting your reaction to the clip/post – for instance, did it raise further questions or help you understand a concept? (5 points)

Mid-term Paper (40 points) - Due February 18 by midnight
Using a compilation of the readings so far, provide a detailed example of how you can apply what you are reading to your clinical work. Be specific. For example, how are you listening for attachment themes? Have you thought about any of your clients differently and if so, how? How is Attachment Theory informing your interventions? What has been difficult? Use the chapters to help elaborate your points and use specific examples from your work. You should be able to write at least three pages about application of attachment theory to your work.

Finally, end with connecting what you are learning about yourself in relation to attachment theory and the way in which you think your own relational style may be impacting your clinical work. Again, be specific. For example, if you assume you have a relatively autonomous state of mind regarding attachment, how do you think that plays out in your work? What benefits, specifically, may it afford you? What might be something of a limitation, if any, of having an autonomous state of mind (or any other state of mind)?

I grade papers based on evidence of understanding of markers of attachment-related behavior, and ability to construct a strong therapeutic hypothesis and frame for intervention, as well as evidence of beginning level of understanding of transference and countertransference, including how your own attachment history may impact your work with clients.

- Excellent papers (A papers) will show strong writing, strong clinical thinking and marked evidence of having read and integrated course materials.
- ‘B’ papers will show understanding of same concepts and at least some level of clinical thinking.
- Students’ whose papers that do not show such evidence will be asked to meet with me and to re-write their paper. ONLY Papers under a B- will be accepted for revision and the revised grade can only be as high as the lowest passing grade in the class.

Papers are expected on time. If you have an unavoidable emergency, let me know. In all cases, I will deduct 2 points if turned in with 5 days. Paper submitted more than five days late will not receive any feedback and will be subject to a deduction of 5 points. I will not accept any papers more than 10 days late.

Final Paper (15 points) - Due April 8 by midnight
The final paper is a place for you to pull your thoughts together regarding concepts and application of attachment theory to your clinical work. I will be looking for evidence that you have "digested" and incorporated the concepts you discuss, not just a recap of the concepts. For example, if a core concept for you is becoming a safe base for clients, what actions have you taken to become that?
A general outline of the paper:

A. Where were you when you first started this course?
Some things you can consider: why did you take it, what did you anticipate, what did you know/not know about attachment already, what did you think you knew but perhaps really didn't. How did the RSQ inform or add to your understanding of your style of relating? Did it, and if so how, challenge your understanding of your relationships with others?

B. Where are you now?
What have been your key take aways? What have you applied? What remains to be experimented with? What have you learned about yourself and about your role as a therapist/interventionist? Did you re-take the RSQ? If so, what did you find? (This is not exhaustive nor limiting- just some prompts).

C. Where does this course leave you moving forward? What questions remain? Is there anything specific you would like feedback or comments from me about?

D. Any other miscellaneous aspects you wish to address.

I would prefer 2 pages of honest reflection than 5 pages of BS - write what feels important to you!

Due to the proximity of end of term, papers can only be given a two-day extension for an emergency, and 2 points will be deducted.

COURSE AGENDA

**Class One – January 9 – ORIGINS OF ATTACHMENT**

Introductions
Class orientation
Development of Attachment Patterns

**Reading**

Complete the Relationship Style Questionnaire
[http://www.web-research-design.net/cgi-bin/crq/crq.pl](http://www.web-research-design.net/cgi-bin/crq/crq.pl)

Wallin –
- Ch. 1 – Attachment and Change
- Ch. 2 – Foundations of Attachment Theory

**Class Two – January 16 – ORIGINS OF ATTACHMENT**

Organized Patterns of Attachment
Disorganized Attachment
Class Three – January 23 – ADULT ATTACHMENT

Styles of Adult Attachment

Reading
Obegi and Berant (O & B)
- Introduction - (Beyond pg. 6 is optional),
- Ch. 2 – An Overview of Adult Attachment Theory

Class Four – January 30 - ADULT ATTACHMENT

Therapist as a Secure Base
Attachment and the Developing Self

Reading
O & B –
- Ch. 3 – The Therapist as a Secure Base

Wallin –
- Ch. 5 – The Multiple Dimensions of Self

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Class Five – February 6 – ATTACHMENT IMPLICATIONS

Parallel Process and Non-Verbal Communication

Reading
Wallin –
- Ch. 8 – Nonverbal Experience and the “Unthought Known” – Accessing the Emotional Core of the Self

Canvas

**Class Six – February 13 – ATTACHMENT IMPLICATIONS**
Mentalization and Attachment

**Reading**
Wallin –
• Ch. 9 – The Stance of the Self toward Experience: Embeddedness, Mentalizing and Mindfulness

O & B –
• Ch. 4 – Attachment, Mentalization and Reflective Functioning

**Class Seven – February 20 – ATTACHMENT IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**
Clinical Correlates of Attachment
Assessment

**Reading**
O & B –
• Ch. 5 – Clinical Correlates of Adult Attachment Organization
• Ch. 6 – Using Interviews to Assess Adult Attachment

Wallin
• Ch. 11 – Constructing the Developmental Crucible

**Class Eight - March 6 – ATTACHMENT IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**
Attachment Patterns in Psychotherapy

**Reading**
Wallin –
• Ch. 12 - The Dismissing Patient: From Isolation to Intimacy
• Ch. 13 - The Preoccupied Patient: Making Room for a Mind of One’s Own
• Ch. 14 – The Unresolved Patient: Healing the Wounds of Trauma and Loss

**Class Nine - March 13 – ATTACHMENT IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**
Attachment Patterns in Psychotherapy
Defense Mechanisms

**Reading**
O & B –
• Ch. 10 – An Attachment Approach to Adult Psychotherapy
• Ch. 11 – Transference and Attachment

**Class 10 - March 20 – ATTACHMENT IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**
Verbal and Nonverbal realms
Defense Mechanisms
Reading
Wallin –
  • Ch. 15 – The Nonverbal Realm: Working with the Evoked and Enacted
O & B
  • Ch. 12 – Attachment-Related Defensive Processes

Class 11 – March 27 – ATTACHMENT IN PSYCHOTHERAPY
Verbal and Nonverbal Realms

Reading
  • Wallin –
    o Chapter 16 – The Nonverbal Realm II: Working with the Body
  • O & B
    o Ch. 17 – Attachment Theory and CBT

Class 12 – April 3 – ATTACHMENT IN PSYCHOTHERAPY
Attachment and Romantic Relationships

Reading


Class 13 – April 10 – ATTACHMENT IN PSYCHOTHERAPY
Supervision

Reading
TBD

Class 14 – April 17- ATTACHMENT IN PSYCHOTHERAPY
Termination

Reading

Canvas