

Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Aging: Late Life Curriculum
COPS Study Group on Psychoanalytic Education & Aging
2019

Week 1: Course Overview

Suggested content:

Placing the course into historical context

- Freud & Abraham; widely different experience and conclusions about the aging individual and psychoanalysis
- Ageism exists today
- Ageism is conscious and unconscious
- Ageism is embedded in some cultures
- Ageism is personal and individual
- Result: Premature closure on the treatability of older patients has endured despite growing literature demonstrating the treatability
- U-Shaped curve of Life Satisfaction & Age
- Why now? Worldwide age demographic shift towards late life; fastest growing age demographic group

Introduce late life as a time of change

- Changes in body and functions
- Changes in socio-economic-cultural-interpersonal roles
- Changes in relation to time
- Changes brought by loss

Exploring how change challenges the psyche

- Placing focus on the internal response to external changes
- Psychic adaptation to the changes of life is lifelong
- Psychic development is lifelong

- Late life is a distinct phase on the development continuum

Defining late life from a psychoanalytic point of view

- Old is not a number: Definitions based on chronological age do not work
- Worldwide, age expectancy is increasing over time due to health, environment and economic changes
- Significant heterogeneity between individuals at specified ages.

Overall course Goal:

- Bringing a psychoanalytic perspective to late life and the full developmental cycle, birth to death
- Looking to find the internal issues that characterize this developmental phase
- Introduction to clinical case material of analytic treatment of older adults

Week 2: Brain & Body in late life

Suggested content:

- Diversities/ Heterogeneity of somatic aging
- Somatic change
- Cognitive changes
- Distinguishing between brain and psyche
- Current knowledge from allied fields of gerontology, neuropsychology, geriatric psychiatry and epidemiology
- Explore the role of psychoanalysis as the worldwide age demographics shift towards late life

Week 3: Psychic Responses to Changes of Late Life; Part One

Suggested content:

Somatic & functional changes characteristic of aging as

- Stimulus to grieving process
- Loss of youthful looks and physical capacities
- Shifts in instinctual pressures
- Challenge to established defenses
- Stimulus to psychic adaptation with shift from external activity focus to internal psychic orientation

Loss as over-arching theme: multi-dimensional

- Somatic and functional decrements
- Personal losses through illness and death
- Losses related to diminishing focus on career
- Cultural position; marginalization in youth oriented culture
- Loss of possibilities once experienced as open and infinite

Intimations of mortality

- Death & dying as reality
- Finite nature of time
- Fantasies of death; conscious and unconscious
- How and where is death represented in the psyche
- The role of internal object relations in the experience of personal vulnerability and mortality

Week 4: Psychic Responses to Changes of Life, Part Two

Suggested content:

Comparison of 2 papers on aging

- Lax, R. (2001). Psychic and Social Reality in Aging. *PsaRev*, 88:755-770.
- 2) Lax, R.F. (2008). Becoming Really Old: The Indignities. *PsaQ*, 77:835-857.
- Illustration of the relentless changes of aging impacting the psychic experience of aging
- Psychic destabilization in the experience of aging
- Role of idealized expectations about aging

- Close exploration of the 2001 paper: a search for internal states and beliefs that may anticipate limited psychic adaptation in the course of aging
- Early optimism of 2001 paper has changed dramatically in the 2008 paper. Why?

Week 5: Transference & Countertransference in the Clinical Situation with the Late Life Individual

Suggested content:

Age disparities between patient and analyst

- Do they matter to the patient?
- Do they matter to the analyst?
- The possibility/likelihood of unconscious influence on the transference and countertransference
- Enactments and the role of interpretations of recognized enactments

Timeless nature of transference

- New and old problems in life revealed in the transference

Countertransference issues

- CT to age itself independent of the patient
- CT to the perceived age-enhanced physical and emotional vulnerability of the patient
- CT based on analyst unconscious identification of the patient with his or her own parents
- CT based on evoked fantasies of the analyst's future
- CT to the patient's mortality as an expectation of inevitable loss
- CT to mortality and limited time
- CT arising from unconscious idealized therapeutic goals; Fears of failure

Termination issues

- Finality of endings
- Finality of this ending of the analysis

Transgenerational Issues

- Analyst and patient sharing the experience of encountering mortality, time and limits individually and together in the analysis.
- The consequences of transgenerational avoidance of painful issues of death and mortality from training analysis to training analysis..

Week 6: Opportunities of Late Life

Suggested content:

Psychic growth and development

- a continuous, fluid process from birth to death
- analysis assists the growth process

Motivation factors in late life

- Somato-social changes characteristic of late life press for a shift from an orientation focused on activity and external accomplishment to focus on internal orientation and interpersonal relationships
- The pressure of limited time remaining
- Greater availability of time and financial resources
- Physical dependence on others for transportation can be a challenge to establishing a schedule of analytic frequency
- The role of cognitive decline: from mild to severe and how it influences the work

Formation of treatment relationship and engagement in psychoanalytic process

- new experience
- vitalizing

Timeless nature of transference

- New and old problems in life revealed in the transference and treated analytically

Analytic process

- reshapes internal world
- reshapes fantasies of end of life and the finality of death

Transgenerational impact on children and grandchildren as patient develops in the analysis

Suggested weekly readings to support the course objectives:

These suggested readings cover many decades and many theoretical dispositions. In these papers, the reader is introduced to how the author thinks about their direct experience with older patients from a psychoanalytic point of view. Each paper is intended to stimulate thought and discussion relevant to the weekly topic. Teachers and students will bring their own theoretical orientation to the ideas, theories and clinical material offered in these selections.

Week 1

- ❖ Plotkin, D. (Fall 2017), Historical Psychoanalytic Views of Aging, TAP, 5(3).
- ❖ Abraham, G. Kocher, P. Goda, G. (1980). Psychoanalysis and Ageing. *Int R. Psycho-Anal.*, 7:147-155.
- ❖ Bolgar, Hedda. (2002). When the Glass is Full. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 22:640-651.
- ❖ Hedda Bolgar: The Beauty of Aging , Youtube video

Week 2

- ❖ Cartensen, L. (2006), The Influence of Sense of Time on Human Development, *Science* 312(5782): 1913-1915. Available on NIH Public Access.
- ❖ Neugarten, B. (1979), Time, Age and the Life Cycle, *Am J Psychiatry* 136:7. 887-894.
- ❖ Sandler, A-M (1984), Problems of Development and Adaptation in an Elderly Patient, *PSC* 39: 471-489.

Week 3

- ❖ Klein, M (1940), Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States, IJP 21:125-153.
- ❖ Jaques, E. (1965). Death and the Mid-Life Crisis. IJP, 46: 502-414.
- ❖ Hanna Segal. (1958). Fear of Death – Notes on the Analysis of an Old Man. IJP, 39: 178-181.

Week 4

- ❖ Lax, R. (2001). Psychic and Social Reality in Aging. PsaRev, 88:755-770.
- ❖ Lax, R.F. (2008). Becoming Really Old: The Indignities. PsaQ, 77:835-857.

Week 5

- ❖ Kavka, A., (Fall 2017) Twenty-first Century Perspectives on Aging, TAP, 51(3).
- ❖ Plotkin, F. (2000). Treatment of the Older Adult: the Impact on the Psychoanalyst. JAPA, 48, #4, 1591-1616.
- ❖ Hinze, Eike. (1987). Transference and Countertransference in the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Older Patients. International Review of Psychoanalysis, 14:465-474.

Week 6

- ❖ Quinodoz, D. (2009). Growing Old: A Psychoanalyst's Point of View. IJP, 90: 773-793.
- ❖ Settlage, C. et al (1988). Conceptualizing Adult Development. JAPA, 36: 347-370.
- ❖ Yu, M. (2007). Across Generations, Genders and Cultures: A Young chinese-Born Woman Treats an American-Born Nonagenarian Jewish Man, Contemp Psa, 43: 421-444.
- ❖ Angell, R. (2014). This Old Man. The New Yorker, Feb 17 & 24:60-65.
- ❖ Hall, D. (2012). Out the Window. The New Yorker, Jan 23: 40-43.

Expansion Possibilities:

Option 1: We Age Too

- Our responsibility to attend to our own aging
 - Professional Wills
 - Retirement Planning
 - Colleague Assistance

Option 2: Mid-life

- Defining midlife from a psychoanalytic point of view
- How different is late life?
- How does midlife lead into late life?
- Maturescence

Option 3: Sexuality in Late life

Option 4: Dementia

- Definition
- Facts, fictions and fantasies
- MCI, Alzheimer's Disease, Vascular Dementia, Frontotemporal,
- Is there a place for Psychoanalysis and Dementia?

Option 5: Insights from literature and film

- Wild Strawberries

- Amour

- Portrait of Dorian Gray; Oscar Wilde

