This seminar will examine the concepts of neurosis and neurotic character: their etiology and clinical manifestations. We will start with a review of the basic psychoanalytic understanding of neurosis, character and character organization at neurotic, borderline and psychotic levels. We will then discuss several types of characteristic defenses and character types. The course will be organized around Nancy McWilliams’ book as a basic text. For each of the categories of neurosis and neurotic character, we will read a chapter of this book. It is an excellent synthesis of analytic thought and clinical material and is readable without being simplistic. Participants are encouraged to bring in clinical examples.


Week 1: Introduction. What is meant by neurosis and neurotic character? We will discuss developmental fixation vs. adaptive capacities and defensive organization, and the distinction between neurosis and character disorder.


Learning objective: To examine the concept of character and its clinical relevance. To review the different levels of psychopathology: neurotic, borderline and psychotic and how they fit into psychoanalytic diagnosis.

Week 2: Hysterical Character


Learning objective: To review the manifestations of hysterical character.

Week 3: Schizoid Character


Learning objective: To review the manifestations of schizoid character.
Week 4: Obsessive and Compulsive Characters
Learning objective: To review the manifestations of obsessive/compulsive character.

Week 5: Depressive Neurosis. We will discuss different types of depression; mania vs. manic defenses.
Learning objective: To review the manifestations of depressive character.

Week 6: Narcissistic Personalities and the conflict-deficit controversy.
Learning objective: To review the manifestations of the narcissistic character and narcissistic disorder.

Week 7: Sadomasochistic Character
Learning objective: To review the manifestations of the sadomasochistic character.

Week 8: Paranoid conditions and the paranoid personality
Learning objective: To review the manifestations of the paranoid character.

Week 9: Dissociative Psychologies
Learning objective: To review the manifestations of dissociative disorders.
Week 10: Clinical/Theoretical Synthesis; Developmental Perspective.


Learning objective: To review the various character disorders that we have discussed in the course and examine attempts at a theoretical synthesis.

The seminar is relevant for clinicians in that it provides a review of the psychoanalytic understanding of neurotic character and character pathology. Participants will learn about the various different type of neurotic character, their theoretical underpinnings and clinical manifestations. The seminar will cover both theory and clinical practice and the discussion will be closely tied to clinical observations. Students will be encouraged to relate the theories to their clinical practice.