Soma as Canvas: A Psychoanalytic View of Uses and Misuses of the Body

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This elective will explore the nature of the body ego. We will explore the psychic and somatic underpinnings of ego development as it affects body boundaries and body integrity. We will discuss the uses and misuses of the body to express inchoate psychic states and behaviors such as body modification and eating disorders. We will consider the concrete somatic representations of such themes as taking in, keeping out, power, weakness, clinging to childhood, and identification with illness or death. We will look at the challenges facing the analyst in engaging analytically while simultaneously addressing issues that may, at the extreme, interfere with functioning. In discussing case material, we will focus on transference and countertransference phenomena. Participant vignettes will be welcome.

Week One:

We will identify the nature of the body ego. We will discuss how a sense of containment is achieved in normal attachment, giving the young child a sense of safety and facilitating the development of body boundaries and body integrity. The sense of safety is disrupted in disorganized attachment and traumatized states, leaving the child to construct a "second skin" in self-defense.

Freud, Sigmund (1923): "The Ego and the Id" SE, V XIX, pages 19-27. PEP Web Link

Bick, Esther (1968) "The Experience of the Skin in Early Object-Relations ", The International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 49: 484-486. PEP Web Link


Klein, Melanie (1952) "The Mutual Influences in the Development of Ego and Id- Discussants" The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, 7: 51-53. PEP Web Link

Additional Reading:


Saporta, Jose (2003) Synthesizing Psychoanalytic and Biological Approaches to Trauma: Some Theoretical Proposals, Neuro-Psychoanalysis, 5 (1). PEP Web Link

**Learning Objective:** Participants will be able to describe “primary skin container” and “second skin formation.”

**Week Two:**

We will identify how transient ego states become more permanent traits: somatic representations of taking in, keeping out, agency and identification with illness or death. We will discuss the use of the body as a vehicle of expression for inchoate psychic states.


**Additional Reading:** Bromberg, Philip M., (2012) "Credo", Psychoanalytic Dialogues, 22: 273-278. PEP Web Link

**Learning Objective:** Participants will be able to identify one example of an unmentalized experience that is represented in the body.

**Week Three:**

We will discuss Body Dysmorphic Disorder: in which shame leads to hatred of and misapprehension of one’s body appearance.


**Learning Objective:** Participants will be able to describe one example in which a person might feel shame about their body.
Week Four:

We will discuss issues of taking in and keeping out, body Image concerns, dissociation, and how shame is expressed in Eating Disorders such as Bulimia and Binge Eating:


Additional Reading: Bromberg, Philip (2001) "Treating Patients with Symptoms and Symptoms with Patience: Reflections on Shame, Dissociation and Eating Disorders" Psychoanalytic Dialogues, 11: 891-912. [PEP Web Link]


Learning Objective: Participants will be able to define an example of how shame and dissociation can lead to Binge Eating and Bulimia.

Week Five:

We will discuss the issue of self-destruction and the mechanism of omnipotent denial in, for example, Anorexia.


Willner, Alexandra (2009) "Inaccessibility in Eating Disorders" Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy, 23: pages 89-111. [PEP Web Link]


Learning Objective: Participants will be able to describe how addiction to near death can lead to Anorexia.
Week Six:

Although both involve piercing the skin barrier, why are some people drawn to decorating their skin in acts such as massive tattoos and multiple piercings, whereas others cut themselves repeatedly?


**Additional Reading:**


Knafo, Danielle (2009) "Castration and Medusa : Orlan's Art on the Cutting Edge", Studies in Gender and Sexuality, 10: 142-158. PEP Web Link

**Learning Objective:** Participants will be able to identify one dynamic in piercing the skin through self-decoration and self-injury.

Week Seven:

Why do some people engage in repeated cosmetic surgeries? What are they searching for? We will discuss the issue of self-creation by means of changing the contours of the body.


**Learning Objective:** Participants will be able to identify one need expressed by repeated cosmetic surgery.
Week Eight:

We will discuss the technical implications, including transference and countertransference in working with patients who have disorganized and traumatized attachments. How do they move towards self-contained and mentalized states of being? We will sum up, discuss and evaluate our course.


Additional Reading:


Learning Objective: Participants will be able to describe one transference and one countertransference phenomenon with non-mentalizing patients.