

## Severe Personality Disorders: Psychotherapeutic Strategies

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Psychoanalysis and psychiatry represent major areas of continuous interest, both for professionals, especially specialists of psycho-diagnosis, research and psychotherapy but also for amateurs, people open to therapeutic approaches or the study of human personality. “Editura Trei” publishing, within the collection dedicated to “Psychology-Psychotherapy” proposes among this year's editorial news, a treatise of international reference regarding the above mentioned domains.

The treatise has been conceived through a psychodynamic perspective, and presents therapeutic techniques which are specific to severe pathology, especially borderline and narcissistic, including several clinical illustrations. Otto Kernberg, highly experienced psychoanalyst, also trainer and supervisor, is at the moment professor of psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medical College, known as the author of numerous volumes dedicated to severe personality disorders and organizational psychology.

Within the present-day context of psychoanalysis, the author succeeds to offer highly qualitative theoretical synthesis and nosologic classifications of mental disorders placed at the border between neurosis and psychosis; he also succeeds to integrate the ego psychology and the Kleinian theory among other perspectives regarding object relationships, under a modern theoretical frame, probably one of the most well accepted by contemporary psychoanalysts.

The treatise's structure in the Romanian version includes five chapters and numerous sub-chapters, with a number of 624 pages, and sights two stated objectives: the first consists in continuing theoretical ideas previous to the author's work, emphasizing the diagnosis and treatment of severe borderline and narcissistic pathologies, while the second consists in exploring recent approaches of clinical psychiatry and psychoanalysis being completed by the author's personal review. The major concern of the volume consists in stressing the clinical importance of the exposed papers and offering specific diagnosis and treatment options. Written in a highly documented manner, offering multiple clinical examples and modern theoretical statements, the volume also includes the presentation of the discussed concepts from the

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perspective of diverse psychoanalytic approaches.

The first chapter, “Considerations regarding diagnosis”, brings details regarding methodological and clinical aspects of the structured interview, together with examples and explicit study cases, as the author considers this type of interview to be “the next generation of psychodynamic interview”. The author presents cases of borderline disorder which may bring advantages related to the structural approach in order to establish the diagnosis but also examples of cases in which such approach is not recommended. In this chapter, the author emphasized a specific method of differential diagnosis and a technique of conducting the structured diagnosis interview, useful mostly in the case of the borderline and narcissistic personality disorders.

Among the elements of novelty, extremely important to the structured approach of differential diagnosis in the case of the borderline structure of personality, we notice the tendency to diagnose the patient as a whole individual and to take into consideration the internal life of his object relationship, emerging from the self-conception and the conception of regarding people who are important to him. Despite methodological difficulties, such an approach may bring a strong basis for the research of the personality growth and structure. In this context, the specific areas of the structured interview are pointed out as being “an experimental situation which allows the exploration and testing the integration of the self and the perception of objectified relationships”.

The second chapter, “The therapy of borderline personality” presents details regarding treatment strategies dedicated to the borderline patients, emphasizing severe cases by also examining psychoanalytic approaches – mostly the expressive and the supportive therapy. Theoretical clarifications related to the borderline personality are brought based on professional literature, with multiple examples and additions based on the author's therapeutic experience. Expressive therapy is an intervention which is mostly recommended in the case of borderline personality disorder. An optimized specific approach of expressive psychotherapy is supported, but only by following technical specifications such as: constantly maintaining the analyst's technical neutrality, consequent utilization of the interpretation as a technical instrument and facilitating the full development of transference neurosis and its psychoanalytic elaboration only by interpretation.

The volume offers details related to different types of psychoanalytic approach, while the clinical exemplifications have the purpose of pointing out the specific situations in which they are indicated or not recommended. The result of a pragmatically and critical analysis conducted by the author comes under the recommendation of applying classical psychoanalysis especially for the patients with histrionic, obsessive-compulsive, depressive-masochistic, neurotic and narcissistic personality, among other types.

As the analysis of therapeutic techniques continues, the reader discovers that the expressive psychotherapy (a type of psychoanalytic psychotherapy) is ideal for most of the patients with borderline structures of personality, or narcissistic, schizoid, paranoid, sadistic-masochistic personalities. From this perspective, in order to obtain an efficient approach, several exigencies should be respected, such as the diminishing the number of sessions compared to a classical psychoanalytical cure, maintaining the neutrality and avoiding direct interventions of the therapist regarding the patient's life.

As the author's analysis of approaches comes to an end, he recommends to establish the indication towards psychoanalysis and if whether the patient is suitable for analysis, and also whether expressive therapy is suitable or not; in other case, supportive therapy should be considered, including strictly defined techniques, as the latter approach is considered to be “the ideal solution for the intervention in crisis situations”.

After analyzing the borderline type of personality, we shall discover theoretical and clinical aspects related to narcissistic personalities, while passing through the third chapter of the volume. The author's perspective is brought to discussion regarding a series of basic psychoanalytic concepts such as: narcissism – libido – aggressiveness – internal object relationships, normal – pathological self, Self – Ego, etc. Subsequent analysis are related to particular traits of narcissistic personalities and especially the most important aspect in their psychoanalytic treatment, which is represented by the systematic analysis of the grandiose pathological self, which is pervasively presented within the transference process.

Among the major therapeutic innovations found presented in the volume, we may mention the dual theory of the instinct reformulation which brings a solution regarding the libido's and aggressiveness' development and a psychoanalytic model regarding early human development, offering an arch between Freud's Ego theory and the present information available related to the child's growth. On a therapeutic level, the volume mostly emphasizes technique improvements in approaching severe and pervasive character oppositions.

The following chapter, “Severe regressions: diagnosis and therapy” presents the proper behavior towards the difficult patient who seems to not respond to treatment. The chapter also describes the ways in which obstacles may be approached through therapy, and also different typologies of problematic patients, presenting severe pathologies, which may raise difficulties both in treatment and diagnosis. Among these we may find the patients who threaten to commit suicide, treatable antisocial patients, and patient presenting paranoid regression which might become psychotic. Examples and concrete resolving modalities are included, both regarding negative therapeutic reactions of the patients, difficulties which may occur during therapy but also procedures and therapeutic attitudes recommended in order to overcome them. From the author's point of view, the two dominant indicators of prognosis for the psychoanalytic and

psycho-therapeutic treatment of the patients with borderline and narcissistic personality structure are the quality of the object relationship and the Super-Ego functions.

In the same chapter we may find a description of the Super-Ego pathology spectrum as a result of failing to construct it, namely a continuum of severity of such pathology, from the social untreatable personality to patients suffering from neurotic pathology. Ulterior, details are offered regarding the relations between the Super-Ego pathology, pathology of object relations, pathological narcissism and vicissitudes of the transference among these patients.

Toward the final part of the volume, we will find a modern thematic which refers to hospitalized patients. The author proposes a model of treating the hospitalized patients within a long period of time. Kernberg recommends that the hospital should function as a social and experimental frame in which the patient is able to manifest his predominant internalized object relationship constellations which are pathogenic; such object relationships might be diagnosed and even modified through therapy in the context of individual and group psychotherapy interactions. In this context, the role of therapeutic communities is brought to the surface, as they might contribute to intensifying the individual treatment and understating the patients but also might lead to enriching treatment methods.

After passing through the information offered by the presented volume we might come to the conclusion that, on a conceptual level, new hypothesis are proposed regarding the severe Super-Ego pathology, and the diffuse identity but along with new developments of Ego psychology and the theory of object relationships. On the other hand, the volume offers a set of specific psychotherapeutic techniques, especially useful for patients suffering from borderline and narcissistic personalities, based on relevant clinical data.

Specific analyses of severe cases are presented in detail, along with obstacles and negative reactions which may interfere but also practical modalities of overcoming them.

Presented as a valuable conceptual and methodological synthesis, the treatise remains one of the most important modern contributions of the psychoanalytic and clinical domains. The professional language, elaborate case studies and reach documentation recommends the volume as being very valuable both for diagnosis professionals and psychotherapists.

Kernberg, O. F. (2014). *Severe personality disorders: Psychotherapeutic strategies*. Bucharest: Editura Trei.