



Transference-Focused Psychotherapy (TFP)

This workshop gives an introduction to Transference-Focused Psychotherapy (TFP), which is a psychodynamic treatment for Borderline Personality Disorder. TFP has been manualized and has demonstrated its efficacy in the treatment of borderline patients in randomized-controlled trials. Thus, it can be regarded empirically validated.

TFP was developed by Otto F. Kernberg and is based on psychoanalytic object relations theory. A distinguishing feature of TFP in contrast to many other treatments for BPD is the belief in a psychological structure that underlies the specific symptoms a borderline individual suffers from. In other words, the focus of treatment is on a deep psychological make-up — a mind structured around a fundamental split that determines the patient's way of experiencing self and others and the environment. In such a psychological organization, thoughts and feelings about self and others are split into dichotomous experiences of good or bad, black or white, all or nothing.

TFP is a twice-per-week outpatient individual psychotherapy that combines psychodynamic principles with a structured setting and a treatment contract. The treatment focuses on the transference [the patient's moment-to-moment experience of the therapist] because it is believed that the patient lives out his/her predominant object relations dyads in the transference. Once the treatment frame is in place, the core task in TFP is to identify these internal object relations dyads that act as the "lenses" which determine the patient's experience of the self and the world. It is believed that the information that unfolds within the patient's relation with the therapist provides the most direct access to understanding the make-up of the patient's internal world for two reasons. First, it has immediacy and is observable by both therapist and patient simultaneously so that differing perceptions of the shared reality can be discussed in the moment. Second, it includes the affect (feelings) that accompanies the perceptions, in contrast to discussion of historical material that can have an intellectualized quality.

Suggested reading:

Clarkin JF, Yeomans FE, Kernberg OF. Psychotherapy for Borderline Personality. Focusing on Object Relations. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing 2006.