



COMMUNITY

WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA COMMUNITY
FOR PSYCHOANALYTIC THERAPIES

Syllabus:

Psychoanalysis and the Importance of Meaning-Making

Speaker: Miriam DeRiso, Ph.D.

Date: Monday, September 15, 2025

Time: 6:15 pm – 9 pm

Seminar

2.75 CE Credits

Fee: Free

For general programming questions email: inquiries@wpacommunity.org

Description: This seminar is designed to introduce students to several components of an essential therapeutic stance employed in Contemporary Psychoanalysis. In the film “Lars and the Real Girl” the therapist is a serious, honest, nonjudgemental listener, who is able to provide a calm, accepting atmosphere to allow Lars, the main character, to speak openly about his “love” for an inflatable doll to which he attributes human thoughts and feelings. The therapist provides guidance to the family, and the community, creating room for acceptance of Lars’ version of reality, from which he then “works through” the fundamental crisis that led him to need this delusional version of a relationship. We learn in the film about underlying anxieties, profound loss, and see Lars increasingly able to address his feelings with the subtle, realistic help of the therapist. There are a number of psychoanalytic concepts that can be applied to this therapeutic process, alongside Lars’ personal experience. These will be discussed in the seminar. The principal psychoanalytic premise we will consider is that symptoms have meaning – they are not random. A second psychoanalytic concept concerns the particular therapeutic stance of the therapist which creates a reflective, containing attitude that permits exploration of how “meaning” of symptoms is generated unconsciously and can be deciphered.

Program Objectives:

At the end of the program, participants will be able to:

1. Describe the psychoanalytic premise of “meaning-making”.
2. Describe how a psychoanalytic therapeutic stance is illustrated in the film.

3. Describe the impediments to a psychoanalytic therapeutic stance, both within the therapist, and within mental health systems.

References/Readings/Media

Movie: “**Lars and The Real Girl**” (2007)

On: Amazon Prime Video, Google Play, Apple TV, You Tube, and on DVD at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (many copies)

Please watch the movie before class. Class discussion will be based on the film.

Required Reading:

Shedler, J. (2022) that Was Then, This Is Now: Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy For The Rest Of Us, *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 58:2-3, 405-437

Optional Reading:

Peltz, R. (2020). Activating Liveness in the Analytic Encounter: The Ground of Being in Psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, (30)(3):267-282

Williams, N. (2021) Diagnosis and Its Discontents: Reflections on Our Current Dilemma. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 41: 565-579.

Ogden, T. (2019) Ontological Psychoanalysis or “What do you want to be when you grow up?”. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, (88)(4):661-684.

The Speaker: Miriam DeRiso, Ph.D. is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice. Dr. DeRiso is a member of Division 39, of APA, the Society for Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Psychology and the International Association of Relational Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy. She facilitates the One Year Program, is a member of the Curriculum Committee, and is one of the founding members of the Western Pennsylvania Psychoanalytic Community for Psychoanalytic Therapies. Her clinical interests are the emerging unconscious, dissociation, “being-with” the patient, the authority of tenderness, and the socio-cultural surround to name a few. For additional information on the background and experience of the speaker, or to request the speaker’s CV, please contact inquiries@wpacommunity.org or see our faculty section on our website at www.wpacommunity.org

Who Should Attend and Instructional Level of Activity: Psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, counselors with interest in advancing their understanding and application of contemporary psychoanalytic concepts. Instructional level is suited for practicing mental health clinicians. Intermediate level of instructional programming.

Continuing Education Credits: 2.75 *The Western Pennsylvania Community for Psychoanalytic Therapies is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists. The Western Pennsylvania Community for Psychoanalytic Therapies maintains responsibility for this program and its content.*

Attendance: To receive continuing education credit, you must sign in and be present for the entire seminar. You will be asked to complete an evaluation at the end of the session.

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