Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Addictive Disorders: Integrating Contemporary Theory and Traditional Treatment Approaches

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Overview:

Addiction and substance misuse are considered to be “bio-psycho-social” disorders, and as such, must be considered and addressed from all 3 perspectives, biological, psychological and socio-cultural. This course will place the study of addiction and substance misuse in that context, with an emphasis on the psychological underpinnings and, in particular, psychoanalytic contributions to theory and treatment. Students should complete the class with an improved sense of how treatment of substance use can be integrated into analytically oriented therapy.

This class will introduce students to the historic contributions made by analysts to the understanding of addictive disorders, review the traditional treatment of these disorders, and then will elaborate the recent modifications in both fields that are bringing them closer together. A relational turn in psychoanalytic thinking, an increased flexibility in applying psychoanalytic concepts to a psychoanalytic psychotherapy, along with a development in substance use treatment moving away from the Disease Model abstinence-only approach toward an acceptance of Harm Reduction, has opened the way for communication and cross-fertilization between the fields that has not existed for some time, allowing for a newly expanded role for psychoanalysts in the treatment of substance misuse.

The overarching theme of the course will be the integration of relational psychoanalytic ideas into substance use treatment. The semester will be divided into four sections. In the first, we will review some of the historic psychoanalytic writings on substance abuse and addiction and discuss how they impact our thinking today and what contributions they have made to current treatment approaches. Part 2 will introduce students to various aspects of substance use treatment, including complementary therapies and tools which can aid in recovery, such as group and family therapies, cognitive behaviora l approaches, 12 step programs, and pharmacologic interventions specific to substance misuse. In Part 3, we will review current trends in addiction treatment, with an emphasis on relational psychoanalysis and how concepts such as working with self-states and enactments apply to treating substance misuse. Harm Reduction therapy and its compatibility with relational psychoanalysis will be introduced and explored. Applying this to what we have been discussing over the course of the year will result in an integrated approach to treating substance users that resides within a relational psychoanalytic harm reduction orientation.

Part I – History of psychoanalytic approaches

Class 1: Overview
In the first class, we will explore students’ initial expectations, their experiences with treating substance misusers and some of their preconceptions about it. An overview of the class will be presented.

Reading

**Class 2: Classical Psychoanalytic Perspectives**

Classical analysts wrote about addiction from a drive theory perspective. Freud and Abraham emphasized the sexual component of substance use, Freud calling it a substitute for the primary addiction of masturbation, and Abraham saying that drinking alcohol allows for the disinhibition of prohibited homosexual wishes. Simmel concentrated on aggression, stating, “the victim of a craving is a melancholic who makes his guardian super-ego drunk with the poison with which he murders the object in the ego.” We will discuss these theories in light of the treatment recommendations they led to and if and how their legacy may continue to influence us today.

Reading

Abraham, K. (1954) The psychological relations between sexuality and alcoholism, in *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham* Hogarth Press. Also available in Levin and Weiss, pp.53-59


**Classes 3 and 4: Ego Psychology, attempts at adaptation**

**Class 3:** The writers discussed in class two framed substance use as a maladaptive, regressive behavior understood through a classical drive or structural theory model. Other early psychoanalysts wrote about addiction from a perspective in which substance use was seen as an attempt at adaptation, or as Glover termed it, a “progression” in psychopathological states. These laid the ground for the ego psychological views that led to the “Self-medication hypothesis” which continues to inform much of the analytic thinking about substance misuse today.
Reading

Rado, S. (1933) The psychoanalysis of pharmacothymia (drug addiction), Psychoanalytic Quarterly, 2, 1-23. Also available in Levin and Weiss, pp. 121-134, and in Yalisove, pp.52-68


Class 4: We continue exploring the development of the self-medication hypothesis with a special eye toward understanding the drug of choice phenomenon. Both Wurmser and Khantzian speak about the importance of specific drug preference as a guide to understanding underlying psychopathology. Wurmser comes from a drive theory perspective, while Khantzian sees drug use as an attempt to cope with impaired ego functions, or what he later called psychological vulnerabilities.

Reading


Class 5: Applying Object Relations Theories to the Study of Substance Misuse

The addict’s relationship to the substance of choice and its position as a love object, a transitional object, or a substitute for human relations or functions is a focus of study for several theorists who write about substance misuse from an object relations perspective. We will explore this through the work of Joyce McDougall and Henry Krystal, who talk about addicts’ impaired abilities for self-soothing and self-care through the lens of object relations theories.

Reading


Class 6: The Self Psychology Perspective

Self psychologists believe that most addicts suffer from a failure of internalization, particularly of the ability to soothe oneself and manage emotion. Self psychologists, such as Kohut, Levin, and Ullman and Paul, see the object of an addiction as serving the function of a selfobject which, as Levin put it, “gives at least the illusion of control, power and comfort.” This has implications for treatment and transference expectations. Our readings this week will elaborate these.

Readings


Levin, J. (1991) Alcoholism and regression/fixation to pathological narcissism, Ch. 27 in Levin and Weiss, pp. 370-385

Part II – Complementary theories and treatments

Class 7: Neurobiology and Medical Perspectives

This week we look at the “bio” part of the bio-psycho-social model. In 2011, the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) issued a public policy statement that said, “Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry.” Research has revealed neurobiological and neurochemical correlates of addictive disorders. We will read Nestler and Malenka who review some of the recent research findings and will also discuss some of the implications of the ASAM statement. As research evolves, more recent articles may be added or substituted for the readings below.

Medications used to support the treatment of addictive disorders will be reviewed. (Possible guest speaker)

Readings


Class 8: The Cognitive Behavioral Approach

Cognitive Behavioral approaches have always been central to the treatment of addictive disorders, a condition in which recovery rests on revising behaviors. We will read some of the classic cognitive behavioral literature on treating addictions and discuss how these techniques can fit with a psychoanalytic approach. Marlatt focuses on relapse prevention, recognizing that relapse is a part of most addicts’ journey toward recovery and offering clinicians help in accepting and working with it. Miller and Rollnick’s Motivational Interviewing has become a standard text for the treatment of substance misuse and is now applied to a variety of conditions by cognitive behavioral therapists. We will see how Miller and Rollnick put several of the basic concepts of psychotherapy, and even psychoanalytic practice, into cognitive behavioral language.

Readings


Class 9 – Group and Family treatment

Most structured programs, whether inpatient or outpatient, involve group and family therapy components. These have been found very valuable in the treatment of addictive disorders. Some take a cognitive behavioral approach, teaching skills and concepts, others a more dynamic approach, looking at systems and process. We will read a sampling of the literature about these approaches.

Readings


Denning, P. (2010), Harm reduction therapy with families and friends of people with drug problems, *In Session: Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 66, 164-174

Class 10: Understanding the 12 Step model through a psychoanalytic perspective

The 12 Step approach of Alcoholics Anonymous has become the cornerstone of much of the treatment for alcoholism and many other addictive disorders. AA and AlAnon, as well as Overeaters Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, are just a few of the many Anonymous 12 step groups thriving today. Many of the people we see in treatment will be involved in these groups, or will be close with someone who is. Our readings this week will familiarize us with the model and will explore the foundations of the 12 Steps from a psychoanalytic perspective.

Readings

*Alcoholics Anonymous* (“The Big Book”), Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. Ch.5, How it works, pp. 58-71


Part III – Current Perspectives - Relational Psychoanalysis and Harm Reduction Therapy

**Class 11** – Overview of relational theories and their application to treating substance misuse

This week we consider the treatment of substance misuse from a relational psychoanalytic perspective, beginning with readings that introduce the concepts of dissociation and enactment and reading Lisa Director’s paper that applies these concepts to a clinical case.

**Readings**


**Class 12:** - Applying Relational Psychoanalytic Concepts to the Treatment of Substance Misuse

We continue to explore how relational psychoanalysis is relevant to understanding and treating substance misuse through two articles which present case studies from the relational psychoanalytic perspective. The paper by Burton emphasizes a multiple self-state approach. Director’s paper also derives from this perspective while emphasizing the role of enactments in her work.

**Readings**


Class 13 - Countertransference

Addicts and substance users are the subject of cultural stereotyping and stigmatization and therapists are inevitably affected by these in a variety of ways. Given our culture, being addicted often evokes shame and dynamics even beyond the complex factors that may have led to substance misuse in the first place. These, along with each individual’s personal experience and attitudes toward substance users complicate an already complicated phenomenon, Countertransference in the analytic encounter.

Readings

Selzer, M. (1957) Hostility as a barrier to therapy in alcoholism, Psychiatric Quarterly, 31, 301-305


Class 14 – Harm Reduction Therapy, an Integrative Approach

Several contemporary writers have described a way of treating substance misuse that integrates psychodynamic and cognitive behavioral approaches to create an approach whose stated goal is the reduction of risk or harm. We will read these and see how they fit particularly well within a relational psychoanalytic framework while simultaneously allowing for behavioral interventions. The contrast between this approach and the disease model abstinence-only tradition will be explored.

Readings


**Class 15: Synthesis**

In this final class we will bring together what we have studied over the semester and apply it to cases. Class members will have the choice to read one or more of several different clinical case presentations or to bring a case of their own to class for discussion. We will use this clinical material to integrate and synthesize what we have learned over the year and to explore final questions and concerns. Discussion will also explore how participants’ attitudes and ideas about treating substance misuse may have changed as a result of the class.

**Readings:**

Choose one:


