Co-Dependency

Psychology 470
Introduction to Chemical Addictions
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Background

- Impairment of nonalcoholic family members has three related components
  - Codependency
  - Children of alcoholics
  - Adult children of alcoholics
- Concept is clinically derived
- Has limited empirical support
- Ambiguity has led to lots of confusion

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Concepts Beginning

- Term originated with chemical dependency counselors who were focusing on the spouse of alcoholics
- Used term enabler to describe the spouse who tended to support the alcoholics use
- Next term was co-alcoholic
  - Implied the spouse suffered with their spouse through the relationship
- Late 1970’s, term was replaced by term codependent

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Codependency

- Was useful for explaining the behavior observed in spouses of alcoholics
- Individuals with codependency began to be seen as part of the problem
  - Enabling continued through the relationship with the alcoholic
  - Also provided a framework for spouses regarding their own recovery

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Definition

- Any person living in an ongoing committed relationship with an user
- Person can be
  - Spouse
  - Parent
  - Child
  - Grandparent
  - Other
- Basically it is an individual engaged in the disease process in their own right

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Where Codependent Behaviors Originate

- Are thought to emerge from abuse experienced in the person’s family of origin.
- Thus, there is a theoretical relationship between shame and codependency.
- Problem
  - Defies precision
  - Most authors define it with their own attitudes towards the addiction process
Other Definitions

• Black – Can refer to anyone whose behavior is characterized by numbing of feelings, denial, low self-worth and compulsive behavior
  • “Manifests itself when you give another person power over your self esteem.”
• Whitfield – Any suffering and/or dysfunction that is associated with the results from focusing on the needs and behavior of others so they neglect their true self

Cermack

• Identifies five types of codependency
  • Martyr
  • Prosecutor
  • Coconspirator
  • Drinking or drugging partner
  • Apathetic codependent

Individuals with Codependency

• Lose the ability to distinguish between the needs of others and themselves
• Do not develop a firm sense of self
• Adulthood
  • Have problems managing stress
  • Have problems engaging in mature relationships
  • Are at increased risk for alcoholism
  • Will repeat the cycle with their own children without treatment
• Often called an “Adult Child”

Two Contrasting Models

• Kitchens
  • Addict-Centered Model
  • Comes from Chemical Dependency field
  • Codependent person reacts to the addicted person who is the center of the family
  • Addiction can be
    • Drug
    • Religiosity
    • Work
  • Everyone reacts to the addicted person

Faulty Family Model

• Comes from Mental Health field
• Family is viewed as the core problem
• Everyone is dysfunctional including the user.
• Have problems coping with each other
• Have similar problems as shame-based families

Children of Alcoholics

• Is a related aspect of codependency
• Involves many kids
  • 43% have one or more parents abusing substances
• In such families
  • There is a lack of expression
  • There is a lack of communication
  • Black – expression “Don’t talk, don’t trust, don’t feel” is a way you should be
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Families
- Often have other problems that contribute to the impairment
  - Conflict
  - Stress
  - Violence
  - Child Maltreatment

Children
- Have an elevated risk for substance abuse
- Are more vulnerable to psychosocial impairments than other children
  - Medical problems
  - Psychiatric problems
  - Child guidance centers
  - Juvenile justice
  - Child Abuse
  - Lower academic achievement and verbal test scores
  - Others

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Some are Resilient
- Can resist the problems
- Grow up as well functioning adults
- May view the problem as a challenge
  - Challenge model
- Second group has problems
  - Gets therapy
  - Identifies themselves as damaged
  - With therapy become resistant

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Generally
- Children of substance abusers may need therapy or interventions
- Professionals need to be aware of the problems
- May need
  - Clinical Care
  - Prevention, assessment, interventions, coordination of care,
  - Long-term treatment

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Adult Children of Alcoholics ACOA
- Problems experienced in childhood may continue into adulthood.
- Characterized by
  - Extreme distrust of intimacy
  - Restricted range of affect
  - Internalized sense of shame
- Problem
  - Minimal research
  - Lacks specificity
  - Has not been validated with empirical research
  - Does not mean problems exist

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Conclusion
- Lots of problems related to codependency, children, and maybe adult children of alcoholics
- Still has problems with validity and many parts lack empirical support
- Can still use the concepts, just understand the limitations