



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

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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

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Cermack

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

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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”

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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

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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

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Children of Alcoholics COAs

- 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

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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

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