Leveraging Attachment Needs in Addiction Treatment

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What brought you here today?

- Impact of Addiction on Us
  - Personally
  - Professionally
  - Discuss in small groups

- Family-of-Origin View of Substances, Alcohol
- Culture’s View
- Larger Society
Addiction and Us

- **Dominant Culture in U.S. and Canada**
  - Emotional restraint is valued
  - Use (particularly alcohol) is normalized
  - It’s not ok, to not drink
  - Don’t be vulnerable: “Too Much Information” “Man up” “Toughen Up” or How are you? “Fine”
  - Human doings rather than beings
  - We value individuality; We value intellect; We don’t teach emotions, sharing, emotional regulation.

Addiction and Us

- **Substance Use in the Dominant Culture**
  - Drinking as sign of adulthood, arriving
  - Drinking tolerance as sign of masculinity
  - Drinking, Substance Use as expression of freedom
  - Drinking, Substance Use as way to socialize, connect
  - Drinking exercise - “Not O.K. to not Drink”
In Recovery, what are we recovering?

What’s Happening Here?
Babies and Toddlers

- What do they need?
- The Empathy Checklist
- Why do they need it?
- Emotionally, what are the tears there for?

- A note on recovery and sadness, regret and pain
- Or, coming off cloud nine

“Uh-oh, you are Co-Dependent!”

The Mathematics of Co-dependency

1 + 1 = 1
Men Can be Too Needy Too

We say to people, “You are enmeshed.”
What Is Happening in “Co-Dependence”?

- Is Co-Dependence best understood as an attachment dance?

- Co-Dependent attempts to:
  - Reach
  - Accommodate and accept
  - Cling, Control, Criticize
  - Get Addicts Attention and Affection
  - Change the behavior; point out the problem
  - Protest the emotional distance caused by addiction/use
  - Change my behavior in the hopes of bringing you closer to me
  - Protest the relationship with alcohol/substance pushing us apart

The Behavior of “Co-Dependence” as a way to Understand Attachment

- What motivates or drives co-dependent behaviors and thinking?

- An emotional bond
  - Protests
  - Yearnings
  - Accommodations
  - Exacerbated by the “co-dependents” own attachment style
Merry Go Round of Alcoholism

- Are partner’s behaviors best understood as attachment behaviors rather than pathology, “co-dependence,” etc.

- Partner, often labeled as enmeshed or “co-dependent”
  - Reach
  - Adapt, adjust
  - Cling, Control
  - Get Addicts Attention
  - Change the behavior; point out the problem
  - Protest the emotional distance caused by addiction/use
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Is the addict too dependent on others?

- The evidence indicates that addicts struggle with:
  - Emotional Regulation
  - Emotional intimacy and vulnerability are difficult
  - Have not learned “effective or efficient dependency” (Bowlby)
  - In recovery field, still pockets of this message, “too dependent on others,” and partners of addicts are “co-dependent.” Important for us to be aware of and work with these messages actively.
## Making Sense of Adult Love

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Addiction Says</th>
<th>“Love Sense” Says</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you don’t depend on me, I won’t depend on you</td>
<td>We Depend on Each Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Emotions Are Bad, Negative</td>
<td>Emotions are Essential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability is bad, I need to hide</td>
<td>I Want to See You, Vulnerability is good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When distressed, I turn to Substance or Process</td>
<td>When Distressed, I’ll turn to You (and you can turn to me)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Need You is Weak, Vulnerable</td>
<td>To Need You is Natural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Dependence is Bad</td>
<td>Emotional Dependence is Our Greatest Strength</td>
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## Attachment - We Co-Regulate Each Other
Distance Dysregulates Us

Closeness Soothes (Oxytocin Drip)
Neurobiology of Addiction & Attachment

- Attachment needs, relationships sculpt, shape & can alter the neurobiology & structure of the brain.

- “All of us, from cradle to grave, are happiest when life is organized as a series of excursions, long or short, from the secure base provided by our attachment figures.” - John Bowlby

- This is wired in to us. “We are born with the expectation of being met as a person.” - Jock Sutherland

Neuroscience of addiction

- Attachment and addiction share the same neural pathways in the brain
  - Panskepp - bio-evolutionary theory

- We are driven and compelled to pursue and maintain attachment through this circuitry.

- Addiction hijacks this system
Elegant neurological balance

- Born with a “Natural Balance”
- Dopamine > Compels, motivates
- Oxytocin > Pleasure, love, closeness

Attachment, Stress, Emotions and Use

Leads
- High Stress Responders

To
- Tendency for negative emotional states to endure well beyond precipitating stimuli

Risk
- Greater risk for addiction to mediate against negative emotional states
Secure Attachment & Emotions

► By contrast, healthy control subjects were better able to accept, let go or move on from negative emotions.

Addiction as a self-regulation disorder
Self-medication hypothesis - Edward Khantzian

► An inability to recognize and regulate emotions
► An inability to establish and maintain a coherent, comfortable sense of self and self-esteem
► An inability to establish adequate comforting and comfortable relationships
► An inability to establish adequate control/regulation of behavior, especially self-care
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- Dopamine > Compels, motivates
- Oxytocin > Pleasure, love, closeness
Balance interrupted

Attachment Needs Met > Oxytocin balances Dopamine 😊

Dopamine
- Increased Dopamine Levels
- Agitation 😌

Bonding

Substance
- Substance Use or Addictive Activity > Dopamine Spike 😊

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Addiction as a self-regulation disorder

“It isn’t pleasure that addicts are seeking, rather they are attempting to regulate their emotional states, and escape, even momentarily, from the constant feelings of deprivation, shame and inadequacy that dominates their lives.”

Report from a Family
Grant Study (Vailant, 2012)

- **1938 - 2012** “The best and the brightest”
  268 Harvard men

- Depression preceded Alcoholism

- “Alcoholism is a disorder of great destructive power.” 57 percent of all divorces among Grant Study men involved alcoholism - the main cause of divorce

- Alcohol as the most destructive force in the men’s lives across time

Limbic System - Implicit

- “The limbic brain is another delicate physical apparatus that specializes in detecting and analyzing just one part of the physical world— the internal state of other mammals. Emotionality is the social sense organ of limbic creatures. While vision lets us experience the reflected wavelengths of electromagnetic radiation, and hearing gives information about the pressure waves in the surrounding air, emotionality enables a mammal to sense the inner states and the motives the mammals around him.” (Lewis, et al, 2000)
Alcohol Distorts/Impacts Emotional System

- Social Cues

- Emotional Processing

- Emotional Expression
  - Is that you or the alcohol?

- Lowers social inhibition
  - Increase in Cycle Intensity
  - Acting on impulses, bad judgement leading to Attachment Injuries

Emotional Regulation Problems

- Disruption of regulation of social exclusion

  - Addiction induces adaptations in the brain that:
    - Increase activation in areas eliciting social exclusion
    - Impair the ability to inhibit the intensity of the affect
    - Results in increased inhibition of social contact
    - *Connection becomes more threatening (feeds cycle)*
Addictions Dance of Disconnection

“An inverse correlation between secure attachment and risk of addiction,” Flores
The Hard-Wired Problem -

- High Responders and Difficulty Returning to Homeostatic Baseline, Sapolosky

- “Human beings are social mammals, and social mammals regulate each other’s physiology and alter the internal structure of each other’s nervous system through the synchronous exchange of emotions. This interactive regulatory relationship is the basis for attachment.” - Amini

- Addicts as high responders with avoidant or ambivalent attachment strategies are cut off from the “oxytocin drip” of close human relationship, of attachment and caught in the dopamine arousal but can’t soothe cycle. The substance or process becomes a substitute attachment.

Addiction and Attachment Style

- **EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE: INSECURE ATTACHMENT STYLES & ADDICTION, (M. Rose, 2003, Marinkovic, 2009):**

1) **SUBSTANCE ABUSERS (SA) WERE ASSESSED FOR ATTACHMENT STYLES (AAI).**

2) **Substance Abusers HAD A GREATER PREVALENCE OF INSECURE ATTACHMENT STYLES THAN GENERAL POPULATION.**

2) **INSECURE ATTACHMENT STYLES WERE RELATED TO EARLIER AGE USAGE OF SUBSTANCES.**
Secure Attachment (Flores, Bowlby)

Helps us:

1) Protective factor for risky genes related to alcoholism.
2) Improved early brain development
3) Enhanced capacity to correctly read social cues
4) Increased resiliency to loss, trauma and stress.
5) Increased optimism: “High Placebo Responders”

Secure Attachment (Flores)

6) More flexibility in the regulation of psycho-biological emotional states through interactions with others;
7) Better strategies for self-regulation arise from more history of effective co-regulation.
8) Increased capacity to derive pleasure from human interaction:
   - KEY: Results in more oxytocin and vasopressin receptors in brain - further increasing pleasure from human interaction
9) More satisfying sexual relationships.

Creates a feedback loop pulling us in to human contact, comfort and connection and impact our internal working model.
Secure Attachment

- The synchronous exchange of emotions.
- The interactive regulatory relationship is the basis for attachment.
- Substances, addictive processes interfere or alter the “synchronous exchange of emotions” and attachment process.
- Other social mammals not dealt with substances or process addictions.

Science of Emotional Regulation

- THE BIOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS OF SELF REGULATION “We are the cheetahs of self-regulation,” (Coan, Jim)
- The Central Nervous System is An Open Feedback Loop (Flores)
  - 1. Evidence is unequivocal: our CNS is not a self contained, closed system, “…looking for Self in the wrong place (Coan).”
  - 2. All social mammals require external regulation to keep their CNS up & running at optimal levels.
  - 3. Without external help with affect regulation, we will be vulnerable to CNS dysregulation
Neurobiology - Shared Pathway

- Nature designed a dopamine - oxytocin balance to foster exploration, action and secure attachment

- Addiction interferes biologically with that elegant balance

- We see it in the common report of loved ones, the capacity of the addict to turn away from the most important people in their lives towards the substance or process.

- Substance Abuse represents efforts to replace endogenous opiates and other neuropeptide factors - dopamine, oxytocin, etc. - that are normally provided by attachment relationships and bonding (Maclean and Panseep)

A Take-Away For Us

- The neurobiology of addiction hijacking the attachment system and the impact on implicit processes requires

  - Experience of safety, connection in therapy relationships
  - Experience of safety, connection in groups, milieus, etc
  - Experience of safety, connection with partner, family, loved one
  - Corrective emotional experiences in all 3 arenas

- EFT provides a model for approaching couples and family involvement in interventions, treatment and recovery
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**Addiction Hijacks Attachment System**

- Addiction as a Substitute Attachment

- Addiction is an Attachment Disorder

- Addiction disorders Attachment
Addiction Treatment - Attachment Lens

- Antidote to Addiction:

“Until an addict or alcoholic develops the capacity to establish mutually satisfying relationships, they will remain vulnerable to relapse and the continual substitution of one addiction for another.” (Flores).

Thomas: “White Knuckle Recovery,” E.F.T. gives couples opportunity to achieve mutually satisfying earned secure attachment to move from clean and sober from substance to connected, reaching for comfort and able to call to other when distressed.

Antidote to Addiction - Human Connection
From Fellowship to Intimate Bond with Partner

Sources of Affect Regulation

- Most effective, efficient source of affect regulation is securely attached relationship - a secure emotional bond

- Addiction to substances and process addictions block this

- “The first and foremost instinct of humans...is to seek contact and comforting connection,”
  - p. 19, Love Sense, Sue Johnson
Attachment Informed Treatment:

- The therapeutic relationship as an attachment relationship to bridge to

- Fellowship as a bridge to connection with partner, loved ones

- “Emotional Dependence is not a weakness or pathology; it is our greatest strength.” Dr. Sue Johnson

Unmet Attachment Needs fuel Addiction

- “Unless people develop the capacity to derive pleasure from relationships and attachment, we have accomplished very little in therapy.” Young (2009)

- Attachment-focused or supported treatment of addiction necessitates looking at each person in the system and
  - Their attachment style
  - How they are or are not co-regulating each other emotionally
  - Their attachment history
  - That the behaviors of the addict and those around them might be explained most simply as insecure attachment behaviors
  - Activating the underlying attachment system, emotions offers a new avenue for making sense of, motivation, and treatment
Attachment as Core Resource in Recovery

Relationship as Affect Regulation

Interactive regulation - Attachment System is

- Built in
- Most efficient
- Natural need
- Expectation we are born with
- We feel it’s absence (lonely, longing, fear)
- An implicit, bottom-up process which shapes our explicit, top-down narrative, our working models.
- Elegance of E.F.T., we access and lean in to this wired in, natural system when working with addiction, addictive processes
Emotion Through the Addiction Lens

- Addicts/insecurely attached individuals
  - Difficulty **taking in** comfort and reassurance - interactive regulation difficult
  - Difficulty **giving** comfort and reassurance
  - Difficulty **asking** for closeness, contact and comfort
  - Thus, overwhelmed by others emotions AND search for ways to auto regulate their own needs/emotions

P & Y

- At 12 minute
Clinical Theme of This Workshop

- The parsimonious elegance of Emotionally Focused Therapy when addressing addiction:
  - Safe, secure base
  - Attachment lens: Activates the Limbic System
  - Coherent, cohesive narratives of experience: engages the Frontal Cortex
  - Humanistic view of partners matches research (Stages of Change, Motivational Interviewing):
    - Explore, understand, make sense of rather than
    - Confront, shame, scold

E.F.T. and Addiction

- Couples Get Caught in “Negative Interactive Patterns”
  - Rigid
  - Limit Emotional Expression
  - Lead to Negative Appraisal of Other (and Self)
  - Self-Reinforcing

- My attempt to reach you (demand) results in your moving away (withdrawal)
  - And vice, versa

- Addiction, addictive processes exacerbate this negative emotional dance
  - Feeds fear of rejection; fear of intimacy and heightens shame
  - These then feed the dance leading to more disconnection and move to more use
EFT’s Fit for Addiction Work

- Person and couples dealing with addiction and addictive patterns:
  - Require an experience and an explanation
  - Benefit from soothing presence of an accepting, validating therapist, willing to provide direction, structure to create a safe haven to explore addiction’s impact.

A Take-Away for Us

E.F.T. Offers Within the “Model” a Map - 4 Steps as Key, Repeated Moves:

- Alliance through Empathy for Both Partners Experience and Distress (Step 1)
- Put the Addiction, Behaviors in to the Negative Cycle (Step 2)
- Validate Secondary/Reactive and Go Beneath to Primary Emotion (Step 3)
- Explore the Meaning of the Addiction/Behaviors (Step 4)
Take-Away for Us - Addiction Lens Utility

- Normalizes - Humanizes - the Fred Rogers “of course…”
- Makes Sense of “Crazy Behaviors,” processes and patterns we see
- Offers Us New Tools
- Helps Us with a “missing piece” often in Recovery
- Offers a Narrative of Hope and Humility for Couples and Families
- Shows us the “Antidote,” how to help foster healing and recovery in new ways

For Addiction Treatment Providers

- Programs that foster more secure attachment relationships between partners, family members for the addict and “co-dependent” person will have more robust results & new options for treatment.
- Making sense of attachment needs helps addicts and partners make “Love Sense” of their underlying emotions, vulnerabilities, and addiction itself.
- Couples and family therapy can also serve as a place to intervene by activating underlying attachment emotions in both the addict and loved ones.
- Activated attachment needs create discrepancy, motivation to act for addict.
Emotional Processing and Addiction

- Addicts with Insecure Attachment Styles either:
  - Flooded by Attachment Emotions, using substance, process to self-soothe
  - Shutting down, avoiding attachment emotions

- Emotional Processing impaired
- Lack “Intersubjective” experiencing

Neuroscience of Emotions

- Disruption of attachment bonds at early stage of brain development:
  - Affective Regulatory failures
  - Impaired brain homeostasis in adulthood
Neuroscience of Emotions

Disruption of attachment bonds at early stage of brain development (continued):

- Lends itself toward high HPA reactivity
- High HPA activity leads to increased risk for addiction in adulthood

Neuroscience of Risk

- Increased risk for addiction as an adult is not due to psychological conflicts as much as it is related to neuro-biological deficits produced by sub-optimal environmental responsiveness, nurturing, protection and containment (insecure attachment).
- SAPOLSKY & HIGH STRESS RESPONDERS & DIFFICULTY RETURNING TO HOMEOSTATIC BASELINE.
A.C.E. Study

Wounded Heart of the Addict (and Partner)

- P & Y “Why I drink”
Rest of our Time Together

- We uncover wounded hearts, distance, attachment distress beneath addiction &
- How addiction distresses, disrupts couples (or families) attachment system

- Contra-indications revised

- The hope and promise of E.F.T.
  - With ongoing addiction
  - Early in recovery process
  - After recovery from addiction, but have not experienced secure attachment with partner

Emotions and Addicts

Addicts experience and view emotions differently:
- Judge them negatively
- Fear them
- Can’t access them

- Culture both larger and sub-culture of users will support this view and experience of emotions
Addict Experience of Emotions

► **Mind Flight**: The “phobia” of inner experience (Steele)
  ► avoidance/escape from one’s inner experience
  ► reluctance to remain in contact with painful inner experiences
  ► Based on fear, shame, and
  ► Being overwhelmed by the experience
Emotion Through the Addiction Lens

- Addicts/insecurely attached individuals
  - Difficulty **taking in** comfort and reassurance - interactive regulation difficult
  - Difficulty **giving** comfort and reassurance
  - Thus, overwhelmed by others emotions AND search for ways to auto regulate their own needs/emotions

“Ouch”

- Addiction and the neuroscience of rejection
  - Physical pain and emotional pain of rejection are processed in the same areas of the brain
  - The emotional pain of rejection evolved as a survival mechanism
  - It keeps us connected with the larger group
“Ouch”

Addiction and the neuroscience of rejection

- **Shame** may have evolved as emotion related to rejection from the larger group:
  - Described subjectively as “painful,”
  - Makes me want to “disappear,” “be invisible”
  - Global negative assessment of self
  - Highly correlated with addiction; often shame with, before use, and after recovery begins.

Self-Reinforcing Cycle - Making this Explicit

- Relationships as Unsafe, Invalidating, Dangerous
- Insecurity, Hiding/Pushing Away, Emotional Dysregulation
- Insecure Attachment Style
- Use Impacts Relationships
- Increased Propensity to Use for Emotional Regulation

Printing, sharing and distributing Strictly Prohibited - For Attendee Use Only
With Active Addiction

- Loving Intervention
- Making Space to Discuss without
  - Lectures, Scolding, Pushing for Abstinence
  - Psychoeducation as appropriate to organize couple's experience in E.F.T.
  - E.F.T. as an “Invitation” to explore
  - From Implicit to Explicit
  - Putting Addiction Behavior in to the Cycle
  - Addiction as Problem/Denial to Emotional and Relational
  - Creating Space

After Recovery

- Bringing Addicts Home
- Bringing Partners Home