

Message in the bottle. Process Work with Addictions

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This article explores the connections between spirituality and addiction from a process-oriented viewpoint and presents process work theories and methods applied to clinical work with substance abuse, both from an individual and a system perspective. Case examples demonstrate how process-oriented interventions can be used successfully in the work with addicts and their families to enhance treatment effectiveness.

The author views the common need for altered states as a drive toward transformation and concludes that addiction may be seen as an unconscious attempt at wholeness. Specifically, addiction is seen as an effort to relate to parts of one's personality which the sober lifestyle excludes, which one cannot access and use deliberately.

Beyond the focus on the individual, the article stresses the social and political dimension of addictions and addresses the concept of the "city shadow" (Mindell 1988); the so-called identified patient often mirrors disowned aspects of the family and society at large, altered states of consciousness may offer alternative possibilities to mainstream culture.

A case example illustrates a powerful process-oriented intervention for working with addictive processes: reaccessing the altered state without the substance in order to find and complete the experience the client is missing in reality. A second case example demonstrates how process-oriented family work understands the altered state of an individual member as a role in the field, reflecting qualities the system may need. The article concludes that the psychological, political and spiritual aspects of addictions cannot be separated and that they all need to be addressed for an effective treatment of substance abuse.

Dual Awareness - Elements of Shamanism in Process Work

(unpubl. Article, library)

This article explores the connections between shamanism and psychotherapy and demonstrates how Process Work combines perspectives and tools from both disciplines to create a powerful new synthesis for working with people and the environment. Observational accuracy and precision of psychology, communication and system theory and the use of altered states of consciousness contribute to a dual awareness necessary for individual and collective transformation and healing.

The article compares the worldview and methodology of the indigenous shaman and healer, with examples from the traditional Hmong and the Khmer societies, and the modern psychotherapist. It illustrates how Process Work draws on spiritual, psychological and social factors for awareness and healing. Not unlike the shaman, the therapist enters altered states to facilitate the work while focusing on signals and double signals and observing the client's or the group's feedback. The therapist uses dual awareness, the uniquely human ability to fully participate in and, at the same time, hold distance from events.

Excerpts from a process work session led by Arnold Mindell in a group setting highlight the interactions between psychotherapeutic and shamanic elements and demonstrate its practical applications. In the work, the therapist amplifies his countertransferential reaction and, closely watching feedback, temporarily becomes the figure or ghost that haunts the client. The therapist uses dual awareness to fluidly move in and out of a "possession state" while simultaneously staying detached and facilitating interactions between the client's different personality aspects. The client becomes a channel of the divine singing a message of liberation and healing the community and the environment.

The article elucidates how Process Work facilitates contact with altered states, community, and the spirit that connect the individual and the transpersonal realm. It combines elements of shamanism, psychotherapy and social activism as crucial ingredients for alternative medicines, for healing ourselves, and the planet.

Jung, Taoism, the Sound of a Saxophone and I

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This article explores the theoretical foundation of Process Work and applies it to personal work. It illustrates how Process Work, in the spirit of Jungian psychology and philosophical Taoism, can guide us toward our psychological and spiritual development. By teaching us to welcome and invite all of our disavowed and neglected parts into awareness, Process Work contributes to our rising psycho-ecological consciousness which makes the relationship with ourselves, others and the world more sustainable.

Our trust in nature and our ability to follow the Tao is an important metaphor for the therapeutic and social endeavor and contributes to a new theory of intervention. We find that all the interventions required for a person can be found in the processes occurring. Change arises from following the nature of the client's process itself, of which an intervention is a mere amplification

Process Work shares with Jungian psychology and Taoism a unitary worldview. It is the ancient idea of a pattern which connects not only dream and body phenomena but inner and outer events as well. The author explores this one-world concept and studies how his personal dreaming processes conform to an underlying unitary pattern. The potential connecting factor between a body symptom, a dream, a hexagram of the I Ching, and a near death experience is investigated and the process logic uncovered. When we discover that such diverse events are connected, a sense of meaning and purpose arises which may lead to a compassionate attitude which embraces ourselves, our loved ones and the planet.

Research: Process Work with Addiction

Altered States of Consciousness as a Complement in the Treatment of Addiction - a process-oriented approach

Summary

The article (part I and II) introduces the process-oriented perspective to working with addictions and gives a practical example of a session with a heroin addict in recovery.

Process-oriented psychology - a neo-Jungian approach developed by Arnold Mindell over the past 25 years - proposes that multiple addiction treatment measures are complemented by exploring experientially the addict's urge for altered states. It advocates process-oriented interventions or inner work instructions designed to access the altered state the addict yearns for and discover its meaning and purposefulness relative to the person's usual waking state. A discovery-oriented follow-up study will investigate the occurrence of alternate states as significant in-session events and inquire the interventions presented in this paper for their effectiveness in promoting such experiences.

The present article reviews background relevant to the philosophy and methods of process-oriented psychology. It illustrates the concept of altered states of consciousness as well as current theories on addiction, i.e. the self-medication hypothesis. It further explores the notion of addiction as a search for powerful experiences and elaborates the process-oriented approach with a case transcript. The work illustrates how the altered state can be re-accessed and unfolded with psychological means until the personal meaning of the state is experienced by the client. Process structure analysis demonstrates how these altered experiences are missing in the addict's everyday life and how important they are to complement normal everyday consciousness.

Keywords

Process-oriented psychology, addiction, altered states of consciousness, therapeutic use of altered states, in-session significant moments, spirituality

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Altered States of Consciousness as Adjunct in the Treatment of Addiction - Effectiveness of a single process-oriented intervention - an empirical study with 13 heroin dependent persons.

Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation at Philosophical Faculty, Department of Psychology, Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia, Prof. Dr. A. Heretik

Abstract

One of the central tenets of process work holds that addictions may be understood as potentially purposeful behaviors, as a search for experiences which are missing in an addict's everyday life. The present study researches a single process-intervention: to re-access the state the addict yearns for and to unfold it until a sense of completion or resolution occurs. The intervention facilitates re-experiencing the "high" without drugs, with a sober attitude, and deepens the experience in an interactional process through body awareness, movement and relationship work until some deeply felt personal meanings emerge (Mindell 2000). The idea is that the altered state carries a message which wants to be lived and integrated into the person's everyday life. The goal in the treatment of addiction is not the altered state per se but expansion of awareness and reorientation toward what has been neglected and, toward a spiritual life.

In an AB design, an initial verbal exploratory session was compared to an intervention session (re-accessing the state) with 13 heroin dependent persons. On the SOC-13, a measure of health (Antonovsky 1979, 1987), the empirical results demonstrated effectiveness of the intervention with a significant increase of +7.4 scores from t1 to t2

from 49.23 to 56.62 (t-test $p=.01$; paired samples correlation $r=0.75$, $p=0.003$; Cohen's effect size $d=0.85$). This highly significant increment on top of initial session gains empirically underlines the remarkable potential of the process-oriented intervention (re-accessing the state) to promote movement toward the health end of the ease/disease continuum in opioid dependent persons. An increased SOC stands for an improved attitude in the face of challenges, augmented resistance to stress and more protection of one's health (Lamprecht 1997). The result further indicates that life is perceived as more meaningful which is the most crucial ingredient in health promotion (Frankl 1959).

On the Experiencing scale, a measure of client involvement in the therapeutic process (Klein et al 1969), which is based on ratings of session transcripts and video tapes by trained raters, the increases in the average and the peak scores between sessions were significant too. Average session scores rose by +0.49 from 2.22 - 2.71 ($p=0.006$; $r=0.524$, $p=0.066$ trend; $d=0.91$) and peak scores increased from 3.24 - 3.65 (t-test $p=0.03$; $r=0.57$, $p=0.043$; $d=0.68$). Similarly, on the Process Index, an adaptation of the Experiencing scale to process work, increases were statistically significant in the mode and in the peak, they increased by a full stage from 2.95 - 4.03, which is critical stage 4, the level where clients are able to follow their process and focus on inner experiencing in a meaningful way (t-test $p=0.000$; $r=0.58$, $p=0.039$; $d=2.27$).

Although seemingly modest, increases on both EXP and PI are interpreted as clinically meaningful considering the severity of disturbance (Klein, personal communication 2001). They have a distinct health-promoting impact. This salutogenic benefit derives from the person's increased ability to be in touch with inner felt referents, the basic data from the life process. As demonstrated elsewhere, higher experiencing levels and therapy benefit or outcome correlate (Hendricks 2000).

The qualitative results of the research are somewhat more complex to summarize since every individual has a unique process which needs to accurately and precisely be followed in therapy. Case vignettes and process observations are given in detail for two clients while process structures are analyzed tentatively for all thirteen persons in the study. The qualitative results illustrated a tendency toward some core experiential states revolving around yearnings for self love, intimacy and belonging in relationship as well as expressing social and spiritual messages. In all cases, aggression in the form of a harsh inner critic, a perpetrator or even a killer was found as a threat in the background pointing to the need for more conscious contact with and integration of that power into everyday life, for some to "kill off" addiction rather than themselves. Additional examples illustrate edges to awareness, to experiencing, to believing in dreaming, and to the universe (Mindell 2000). Relapse fears that can come up are addressed and safety measures discussed. Like other cue exposure techniques the intervention may hold promise in extinguishing craving and diminish the urge over time (Childress et al 1993).

In summary, the results demonstrated very significant client progress on a measure of health and improved contact with one's self through accessing and unfolding the altered state the person yearns for. One of the limitations of the study is the lack of follow-up measurements which makes it impossible to draw conclusions about the stability of the results over time. However, from psychotherapy process research we do know that long-term outcomes build on positive changes in each therapy session (Greenberg et al 1986).

Last but not least, accessing the yearned-for state in a sober manner is but one useful intervention and other ingredients are necessary in successful addiction treatment. While all of the current treatment modalities are needed, including risk reduction and substitution programs, it seems crucial to create innovative alternative methods, especially such that use altered states, in the treatment of the addictions.

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