Psychodynamic Therapy for Addictions: But Will Chemical Dependency Counselors Finally Buy It?

Jerome D. Levin

Treatment of Alcoholism and Other Addictions: A Self-Psychology Approach

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Heterogeneity in the backgrounds and training of chemical dependency experts assures wide and spirited disagreements about terminology, the acceptability of different etiological models, and the proper treatment for the addicted individual. Chemical dependency counselors often are themselves recovering addicts who recognize groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) as the most effective means to achieve and maintain sobriety. For this sizable faction of the chemical dependency community, fellowship is seen as the necessary and sufficient condition for positive therapeutic change. Vigilance is high for psychological forays into the treatment arena by nonaddicted professionals conducting any number of group, object relations, transference, gestalt, cognitive, operant, or other analyses and therapeutic approaches. Psychopathology is conceptualized more readily as a sequel, rather than antecedent, to the “disease” of alcoholism. Well-meaning professionals who lack personal experience with chemical dependency may distract attention from the central issues of loss of control over drinking, personal powerlessness, and need for reconciliation with God, self, and others through the 12-step plan and fellowship of AA.

Treatment of Alcoholism and Other Addictions offers a self-psychology theoretical approach to treatment of chemical dependency that seeks acceptance simultaneously from psychodynamic, client-centered, and AA quarters. The author’s emphasis on the therapeutic relationship and his intelligent probing of individual case histories provide a gentle, growth-promoting, and highly effective medium to dissolve resistance and enhance the depth of analysis transacted by mental health professionals in this field, both tutored and untutored in formal psychoanalytic and self-psychology theory.

Levin anchors his approach to treatment of addicted individuals in Kohut’s self-psychology theory, proposing that the addictive syndrome often is a manifestation of futile coping responses summoned to overcome the marked developmental deficits and self-incongruence inherent in narcissistic personality disturbances. Denial of a drinking control problem is viewed as an essential defense of the archaic self against recognition of a major personal defect that could trigger decompensation of the fragile narcissistic personality structure.

Levin emphasizes the consistencies between Roger’s client-centered and Kohut’s self-psychology approaches to psychotherapy. Both tend to de-emphasize the importance of insight, self-knowledge, and self-awareness as sufficient conditions for positive therapeutic change. Instead, both approaches accentuate the importance of the therapeutic relationship as a growth-promoting environment to generate a more cohesive and congruent self through the experience of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and mirroring of the self by the environment. Levin argues convincingly that Kohut’s system offers a more complex analysis of narcissistic developmental roots and the patient–therapist relationship required to mend the fragmented self structure.

Levin’s effort to integrate material from disparate sources deserves notice. His thoughtful, sensitive, and unprovocative writing style is to be applauded in the emotionally charged chemical dependency field. Though his emphasis on narcissism in the genesis of addiction may prompt frank skepticism in many professional circles, few should quibble with the intellectual integrity of his effort or the importance that he places on the therapeutic relationship as a vehicle for promoting conditions rendering positive therapeutic change possible. His reliance on extensive and detailed case histories for describing the treatment of the active alcoholic, the alcoholic in early sobriety, and the stably sober alcoholic should have strong appeal to most, while possibly boring other less process-oriented readers.

Additionally, Treatment of Alcoholism and Other Addictions offers literature reviews on a wide range of scientific topics germane to the chemical dependency field, such as alcohol metabolism, the physiology of tolerance; dependence and withdrawal; theories and psychological correlates of alcoholism; and the role of alcohol in medical illnesses such as peripheral neuropathy, degenerative brain diseases, sleep disturbances, learning phenomena, hepatic encephalopathy, blackouts, liver disease, digestive problems, cardiovascular disturbance, reproductive complications, and depressive and anxiety states.

This is a content-rich and ambitious effort to integrate literature and theory from various sources into an effective ap-
The Delivery of Psychological Services to Children and Adolescents

Sebastian Striefel and Phyllis Cole
Providing Psychological and Related Services to Children and Adolescents: A Comprehensive Guidebook
$24.95 paperback

Sebastian Striefel, director of educational and clinical services in the Developmental Center for Handicapped Persons and professor of psychology at Utah State University (Logan), is co-author, with M. J. Cades, of Serving Children and Adolescents With Developmental Disabilities in the Special Education Classroom: Proven Methods. Phyllis Cole is clinical services program administrator at the Developmental Center for Handicapped Persons and clinical associate professor of psychology and special education at Utah State University. Thomas H. Ollandick, professor and director of clinical training at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Blacksburg), is co-author, with N. J. King and D. Hamilton, of Children’s Phobias: A Behavioural Perspective. Donald P. Oswald, graduate research assistant in the Department of Psychology at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, is author of Planning Community Homes: A Staff Training Manual.

I n this practical guide, Striefel and Cole provide a broad overview of services associated with the delivery of psychological and related services to children, adolescents, and their families. Furthermore, the authors offer a set of recommendations for making management decisions, enhancing staff performance, and delivering quality services. The latter, according to the authors, can be described as those services that reflect state-of-the-art knowledge, are worthy of replication, conform to relevant legal and ethical guidelines, are research-based and validated by peer review, and have been shown to be effective. The delivery of such high-quality services is surely a goal to which we all aspire. The present volume will be of benefit to us in pursuit of this admirable, if oftentimes elusive, goal.

Although the subtitle, A Comprehensive Guidebook, may be a bit overambitious and far-reaching, this book touches on all of the major points to consider when developing such a service system. Moreover, it provides excellent up-to-date references for more in-depth treatment of the various topics. Probably the strongest parts of the book are the first four chapters and the final three chapters. In these introductory and concluding chapters, the authors briefly identify and discuss a host of issues related to the establishment and operation of a psychological services clinic, issues that may be unfamiliar to most mental health professionals. Practical and organized steps are outlined for anticipating and dealing with a broad range of concerns (e.g., the name of the clinic, how to market its services, how to establish its goals, and how to evaluate its volume).

Our own recent experiences with the planning, development, and implementation of a clinic of the sort described in this book highlight the relevance of many of these issues. In retrospect, we feared reasonably well on the Self-Evaluation Checklist for Administrators and Clinicians found in Appendix B, but our task would have been considerably easier and more straightforward had we had access to the many guidelines, forms, checklists, and questionnaires that Striefel and Cole provide in this useful volume.

Although the middle section on assessment and treatment is somewhat less precise and directly useful than the remainder of the book, this should not have been unexpected. In four chapters, the authors attempt to summarize a broad array of information and to recommend effective clinical practices for many child behavior problems, using assessment and treatment strategies drawn from diverse theoretical and philosophical orientations. Quite obviously, many books have been written on each of the problem areas described in this section, and very different recommendations have been offered depending on the specific orientation espoused. Here, the authors attempt to provide an integrated approach that is responsive to the various orientations—a difficult, if not impossible, undertaking!

In attempting to appease the various schools of thought, many compromises have to be made; to wit, in discussing the use of projectives, the authors state, “Whether projective techniques are seen as a viable assessment approach depends largely on the training and psychological orientation of the professionals involved in assessment” (p. 128). Later on, when discussing how to arrive at a given testimony in court, they suggest that the professional should “have supported information available. In essence, we do not rely on projective tests alone but rather, include observations and other objective information that can be substantiated” (p. 281). In this case, however, by attempting to be overly inclusive, the authors may have failed to heed their own recommendations regarding the use of practices that are state of the art and research-based. Whether projective tests are psychometrically sound and clinically useful is open to debate; nonetheless, it should be criteria such as these that guide the selection of assessment devices, not the whim or fancy of professionals. Only by maintaining a firm commitment to scientific principles and empirical validation will we truly provide children and adolescents “quality” services.

In fairness to the authors, however, these points and others related to the complexities of high-quality clinical practice would be extremely difficult to elucidate in the few pages devoted to such purposes. More important, the au-