

THE PSYCHOLOGY COUCH NEWSLETTER

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A LIFE BEYOND ADDICTION

By Clinical Psychologist Rob Hamilton

Over the past 25 years in my therapy practice I have seen many clients struggling with a wide range of addictions. In the past, addiction to substances was most common (e.g. alcohol, crystal meth, marijuana) but in recent years process addictions have become more widespread (e.g. addiction to watching porn, gambling or the internet). I have learned some valuable lessons about what empowers and sustains recovery. I'd like to share nine core insights that helped me to be more effective at alleviating the distress of people grappling with addiction and directing them firmly to the recovery road:

- 1) An **interdisciplinary team approach** will achieve the best results. A team of professionals with complementary skills can address all aspects of addiction, including the body, the mind, social connectedness, and the impact of culture and values.
- 2) Addiction often arises out of unwitting attempts to **self-medicate** or **cope with overwhelming life stressors**. These include undetected mental health issues, such as depression or anxiety. Effective addiction treatment should diagnose all mental health challenges and treat them appropriately.
- 3) We need to **stop stigmatising and shaming** people struggling with addiction, in the false belief that it will persuade them to choose sobriety. Public humiliation merely reinforces addicts' self-loathing and personal shame, driving them deeper into addiction.
- 4) Very often addiction can be linked to **personal trauma** or experience of major stressors such as ongoing unemployment, painful bereavement, divorce, surviving sexual assault or community disaster.

5) Healthy resolution of addiction does not involve just abstinence or sobriety – although both are important – but also **healthy and varied social connection**. Social isolation is the perfect petri dish for growing an addiction. Nourishing relationships of all kinds take away the compulsion to engage in addiction.

6) **Partners, family members and work colleagues** of addicts are also impacted by the addiction. They deserve real and effective support. If we don't invite them to join the recovery process, how can they learn what will support the addict's recovery and how to protect themselves from harm?

7) Recent research regarding the human brain enables us to understand addiction as a form of faulty neurological wiring. **Neuroplasticity** – or the ability of the human brain to rewire itself – is a remarkable asset in recovery. Although the addict's brain might be wired imperfectly, we can help to rewire it, smoothing the way for the addict to pause compulsive behaviours and develop new and healthier habits.

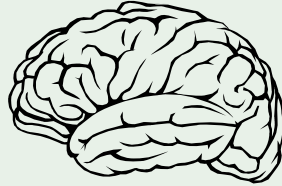
8) Every addict's **journey of recovery is unique to them**. Many paths can lead to sobriety. It is crucial to ask the addict what they find helpful.

9) **Slips and relapses** are often regarded as evidence of personal failure on the part of the addict, and can lead to a downward spiral into greater despair. However, one of the most radical insights of SMART Recovery is seeing any slip or relapse as just another opportunity for the addict to learn more about the complexity of their addiction.



NeuroFrogsticity:

A new approach to addiction

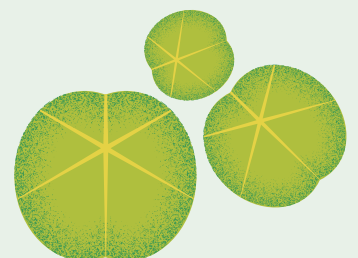


A comprehensive, holistic recovery experience for
those grappling with addiction

At The Psychology Couch, we're excited to introduce the NeuroFrogsticity program, designed to offer a holistic recovery experience, promoting the balance between mind, body and social well-being. Our program is meticulously crafted to guide individuals through a transformative journey of healing, addressing the biological, psychological and social factors that underlie addiction. We provide a supportive and nurturing environment where significant personal growth and recovery are not only achievable but anticipated. The program guides each individual towards sustainable recovery, equipping them with new skills and strategies they can integrate into life, and reach a future beyond addiction.

Addiction involves substance use or repetition of problematic behaviours that the individual can't control despite harmful consequences. Almost 300 million people worldwide have used a drug in the past 12 months. That is 1 in every 17 people, 23% higher than the previous decade. Of that 300 million, less than 20% of people with a substance use disorder have received treatment.

Not why the addiction
but why the pain?
- Gabor Matè



Core components of the program

- Multidisciplinary approach: A collaborative care model integrating various healthcare professionals' expertise.
- Customised care: Individualised treatment plans respecting each participant's unique path to recovery
- Family involvement: Interventions enabling families to understand and engage in the recovery process.
- Developing connection: Group therapy sessions harnessing the strength of shared experiences and support to overcome addiction.
- Trauma-informed care: Trauma is a central factor in treating addiction.
- Emotional regulation: fostering strategies for effective emotion regulation.
- Life skills training: Occupational therapy sessions that empower participants with essential skills for everyday challenges.
- Preparation for a life beyond addiction: Strategies and support systems, and a deep appreciation of the complex interplay between mind, body and social aspects.

We use the biopsychosocial approach which holistically combines neuroscience, psychology, psychiatry, occupational therapy and mindfulness, and harnesses the power of neuroplasticity to shift away from addiction to sobriety.

What is Neuroplasticity?

Neuroplasticity is the ability of neural networks in the human brain to change through growth and reorganisation. Essentially, our brains can be rewired to function differently by “learning, unlearning and relearning” old and unhelpful patterns of behaviour.

What is the Biopsychosocial Model?

The biopsychosocial model reflects the interconnectedness of the biological, psychological and socio-environmental aspects.

The brain is a far more open system
that we ever imagined, and nature
has gone very far to help us perceive
and take in the world around us. It
has given us a brain that survives in a
changing world by changing itself.
- Norman Doidge

Our practitioners

Emily Makhoulf - Occupational Therapist

Emily is an experienced occupational therapist with a focus on neuro-rehabilitative techniques in mental health, working to improve daily functioning and cognitive performance.

Rob Hamilton - Clinical Psychologist

Rob has helped clients with a range of addictions for two decades. He draws on diverse approaches to addiction, particularly neuroplasticity and building resilience.

Yumna Zubi - Clinical Psychologist

Yumna integrates neuroplasticity and trauma-informed practice within traditional psychological treatment, offering a unique approach to mental health care.

Session breakdown

Each therapy session will incorporate techniques and activities focused on neuroplasticity, including but not limited to:

- Cognitive exercises and problem-solving tasks
- Mindfulness and meditation to improve neural regulation
- Stress management workshops to reduce cortisol levels, and
- Lifestyle coaching for sleep, nutrition and exercise to support brain health.

Navigating Trauma Dumping and Emotional Relief

Peace Chimwoyo

BSc human physiology genetics & psychology student

Trauma/ Emotional dumping

In the midst of our daily routines, we grapple with complex emotions that often go unexplored due to the demands of everyday life.

Everyday life necessitates emotional labour, and when we finally carve out space to express our emotions without fear of judgment, it can sometimes manifest as emotional dumping.

Emotional dumping, also known as trauma dumping, is the act of unloading a traumatic experience onto others without warning or invitation. While the act itself might provide a fleeting sense of catharsis, the relief it brings is typically short-lived. Like a double-edged sword, trauma dumping can offer temporary relief while also posing risks to both the dumper and the receiver.

Those on the receiving end of this emotional deluge may feel overwhelmed, burdened, or simply ill-equipped to offer meaningful assistance. The inability to provide adequate support can leave the sharer feeling isolated and misunderstood, potentially exacerbating feelings of anxiety.

Trauma dumping vs Venting

It's important to distinguish between trauma dumping and venting. Trauma dumping is often done to seek validation, sympathy or attention. Venting on the other hand is sharing frustrations with a trusted someone in order to reduce stress. When venting, the sharer is intentional about what they speak about.

In moments of vulnerability, when the heart weighs heavy with unspoken feelings, the act of unloading our emotions can feel like a cleansing rain after a drought.

However, it's crucial to manage expectations surrounding the act of venting. While our confidants may offer empathy and support, they aren't miracle workers capable of erasing our pain.

Managing our expectations involves recognising that venting is but one tool in the arsenal of emotional coping mechanisms. It's a step towards healing, not a panacea for our wounds. Communication is key – articulating our needs and boundaries ensures that the person venting and receiver navigate the terrain of emotional support with clarity and respect.

Sometimes, all we need is someone to listen when we vent. And it's equally important to reciprocate by listening to others. Continuously being on the receiving end of trauma dumping can deplete our empathy reserves and leave us feeling overwhelmed. It's essential to recognize when boundaries are being crossed and assertively communicate our needs.

Setting limits doesn't diminish our capacity for compassion; it safeguards our emotional equilibrium, preserving the integrity of our relationships.



Love, because you're loved.

-The couch x

COUPLES THERAPY

BY ISMAAEEL ADAM (PSYCHOLOGY
HONOURS STUDENT)

WHAT IS COUPLES THERAPY?



Couples therapy is like a conversation helper for you and your partner. It's a special kind of talking therapy that's here to make your relationship better. No matter if you're just starting out or have been together for a while, if your relationship is going through a tough time, couples therapy can be a game-changer. It's all about talking and figuring things out together. Whether you're dealing with arguments that keep coming back, feeling like you're drifting apart, trust issues, or stress from outside stuff, couples therapy is there to help. Think of it as a guide to spot and change the not-so-great things happening in your relationship. The goal is to help you and your partner understand the not-so-great patterns and make things better. You'll learn new ways to make your relationship stronger.

And guess what? It's not just about talking. Couples therapy gives you tools, ideas, and fresh ways to look at things. The aim is to get your relationship back on a good track, where you feel that warm, loving connection with your partner again.

A couples counselor is like a helper who can do lots of things. They keep an eye on how things are going, help with disagreements, and give you feedback that's fair and honest. So, if you're thinking about it, go ahead – it could be just what your relationship needs.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND COUPLES THERAPY?

Recognising the signs that indicate couples therapy might be beneficial for you and your romantic partner is a crucial step toward building a healthier relationship. These signs include escalating conflicts and unhealthy communication patterns, emotional distance, and the feeling of falling out of love. Trust and commitment issues, attachment insecurities, and difficulties in expressing emotions are also key indicators. Other red flags encompass challenges in sexual intimacy, issues with in-laws, friendships, work, or life stressors, as well as instances of abuse, affairs, or addictions. Additionally, differences in parenting styles, financial disagreements, and feelings of unfairness in household chores are common stressors. Couples therapy can also be beneficial when untreated anxiety and depression issues, unequal decision-making, or difficult childhood upbringings contribute to emotional wounds that impact the relationship. If you identify with any of these signs, couples therapy offers a supportive space to address and navigate these challenges together.



BENEFITS OF COUPLES THERAPY

Couples therapy offers profound benefits, providing a platform to understand relationship dynamics, fostering open communication, and promoting empathy. With an impartial sounding board, it creates a safe space, resolves roadblocks, and equips partners with coping skills. It enhances trust, deepens intimacy, improves communication, and fosters personal growth.

UNDERSTANDING THE FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION ERROR: THE HUMAN BIAS THAT SHAPES OUR PERCEPTIONS

BY LELANI MBUKWANE
BACHELOR OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
(PSYCHOLOGY HONOURS STUDENT)



In our daily interactions, we often make judgments about others based on their behaviour. Whether it's observing a colleague's actions at work or witnessing a stranger's behaviour in public, our minds tend to automatically assign their actions to internal characteristics (Personality) or external circumstances. This cognitive phenomenon is known as the Fundamental Attribution Error, a concept that sheds light on the intricacies of human perception and social cognition.

The fundamental attribution error refers to the tendency to attribute people's behaviour to their internal characteristics, such as personality traits or disposition, while underestimating the influence of external factors, such as situational constraints or environmental factors. In essence, we often overlook the context in which a person's actions occur and instead focus solely on their presumed inherent traits.

AN ILLUSTRATION...

One classic example of the fundamental attribution error can be observed in driving behaviour. When someone cuts us off in traffic, our immediate reaction might be to label them as a reckless or inconsiderate driver. We attribute their behaviour to their personality traits, such as aggressiveness or selfishness, without considering external factors that could have contributed to their actions, such as being late for an appointment or reacting to another driver's behaviour.

Similarly, in a workplace setting, if a colleague misses a deadline, we might jump to conclusions about their work ethic or competence, without considering external factors that could have impeded their ability to meet the deadline, such as unforeseen obstacles or conflicting priorities.

FURTHERMORE...

The fundamental attribution error can have significant implications for how we perceive and interact with others. It can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and unfair judgments. By failing to consider situational factors, we risk oversimplifying complex human behaviour and overlooking the nuances of individual experiences.

So, why do we fall prey to the fundamental attribution error? One explanation lies in the way our brains process information and make sense of the world around us. Psychologists suggest that we have a natural tendency to rely on cognitive shortcuts, or heuristics, to make quick judgments and decisions. In the case of the fundamental attribution error, we often default to attributing behaviour to internal factors because it requires less cognitive effort than considering the multitude of external variables at play.

Additionally, cultural factors can also influence the prevalence of the fundamental attribution error. In individualistic cultures, where personal responsibility and autonomy are highly valued, there may be a greater tendency to attribute behaviour to internal characteristics. Conversely, in collectivist cultures, where social harmony and interdependence are emphasized, there may be more consideration given to situational factors and external influences.

Recognizing and understanding the fundamental attribution error is the first step towards mitigating its effects. By cultivating awareness of our tendency to make snap judgments based on incomplete information, we can become more mindful of the complexities of human behaviour. Practicing empathy and considering alternative explanations for people's actions can help us avoid falling into the trap of oversimplified attributions.

Moreover, fostering a culture of open communication and understanding in our interpersonal relationships can help counteract the negative consequences of the fundamental attribution error. By encouraging dialogue and seeking to understand the context behind people's actions, we can build stronger connections and promote mutual respect and empathy.

In conclusion, the fundamental attribution error serves as a reminder of the inherent biases that shape our perceptions of others. By acknowledging its existence and striving to overcome it, we can cultivate a more nuanced understanding of human behaviour and foster healthier, more empathetic relationships in our personal and professional lives.

Thank you for being a part of our Couch Community. Stay tuned for next time as we share the February Edition of the Psychology Couch Newsletter.

Until next time, as always, our wish for you is to heal, learn and grow.

Get involved and stay in touch via our social media platforms:



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