# ARCHETYPES IN ADDICTION TREATMENT: BUILDING NARRATIVES FOR INSIGHT, GROWTH AND RECOVERY

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**Abstract -** Addiction remains a pervasive problem in society, with escalating consequences at the macro and micro levels. Traditional therapeutic interventions continue to report relapse rates of 40-60%. A more holistic approach, with direct relevance to the addict's experience and identity may help sustain engagement in positive recovery activities. The archetypes of addition, as presented by Jungian analyst Linda Schierse Leonard are explored as a roadmap to insight, growth and recovery.

**Index Terms -** Addiction Therapy, Archetypal Therapy, Linda Schierse Leonard, Jungian Therapy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

***If you were queen of pleasure,***
***And I were king of pain,***
***We'd hunt down love together,***
***Pluck out his flying feather,***
***And teach his feet a measure,***
***And find his mouth a rein.***
***- Algernon Swinburne***

Addiction is a serious and ever-increasing problem, with escalating costs both at the macro (society) level and the micro (personal) level. According to the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 21.5 million American adults (aged 12 and older) are battling a substance use disorder [1]. According to the CDC and the National Center for Health Statistics, drug overdoses killed approximately 64,000 people in the United States in 2016, a rise of more than 22 percent over the 52,404 drug deaths recorded the previous year [2].

Similarly, 2012 survey data from The Partnership at Drugfree.org and The New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) indicated that in 10 percent of all American adults, ages 18 and older, considered themselves to be in recovery from drug or alcohol abuse problems, indicating in real numbers that 23.5 million American adults classify themselves to be overcoming an involvement with drugs or alcohol that they once considered to be problematic [3]. However, relapse is common in addiction treatment, with rates reported between 40 and 60 percent, according to the National Institute on Drug Addiction [4]. Clearly, work on building effective, long-lasting treatment programs is important in battling additive disorders. Archetypal narrative therapy represents a comprehensive and holistic approach to conceptualizing the process of addiction and addressing the underlying psychic dialogues that perpetuate the disorder.

## II. JUNGIAN ARCHETYPES

Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung developed a theory of archetypes as complex, universal primordial images based on his observations of repetitive patterns of cognitions and behaviors that manifest repeatedly over time and across cultural and geographic parameters. As part of the collective unconscious he viewed these figures as encompassing the soul of all humanity. He concluded that there must be a trans-conscious disposition in every individual, which is able to produce similar symbols in all times and places. Because of their unconscious nature, Jung argued that the archetypes manifest though images, dreams and myths [5].

## III. ARCHETYPES AND ADDICTION

Jung was the first psychoanalyst to grasp the holistic nature of recovery from addiction. He believed that alcoholism (and by extrapolation, other addictions) involves a spiritual thirst for a sense of wholeness, a view that encompasses the veracious and enduring power of addiction. He thus believed that only a radical conversion to something equally satisfying to the individual at a deep level could promote recovery. In 1961 Jung described an individual's addiction in this way, "His craving for alcohol was the equivalent, on the low level, of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness; expressed in medieval language: the union with God" [6, p. 127]. Other theorists and therapists later embraced the archetypal aspects of both the addiction process and recovery. In the book, Addiction to Perfection: The Still Unravished Bride, Woodman (1982) explained addiction as an archetypal struggle between the two goddesses Athena and Medusa [7]. Sam Naifeh, a psychiatrist and Jungian analyst, wrote, "I hold with Jung that addiction is related to a normal

human drive toward wholeness which has gone awry" [8, p. 133].

## IV. LEONARD'S CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ADDICTION AND RECOVERY

Jungian analyst Linda Schierse Leonard depicts addiction, and its recovery, as a journey involving archetypal images. In her book, Witness to the Fire: Creativity and the Veil of Addiction, she explores "the dark and fiery journey of transformation from the bondage of addiction to the freedom of recovery through creativity" [9]. Traditionally, models of addiction development divide the process into stages according to the following basic trajectory [10}

- Stage 1: Initiation
- Stage 2: Experimentation
- Stage 3: Regular Use
- Stage 4: Problem/Risky Use
- Stage 5: Dependence
- Stage 6: A Substance Use Disorder
- Stage 7: Treatment

Leonard divides the stages of addiction into three narratives of struggle: 1) The Flight: The Initial Seductive Stage of Addiction; 2) The Fall: The Ominous Stage of Possession and Descent into Darkness; and 3) The Creation: The Turning Point of Healing and Transformation [9]. Throughout each stage, strong metaphorical archetypal figures emerge depicting the thoughts and emotions that compose the addiction experience. Leonard outlines a total of 19 figures that manifest from initial seduction through healing.

## V. Leonard's Stages and Archetypes

### A. Stage 1 - The Flight: The Initial Seductive Stage of the Addictive Process [9]

**Hostage:** The archetype of the Hostage represents a metaphor for the addict's feelings of confinement and lack of control both when in the clutches of the disease and corresponding denial and when embarking on the first phase of treatment - detoxification. Like a Hostage, the addict feels stripped of all sense of personal freedom, autonomy and integrity and experiences emotions of terror, anxiety and desperation. Being a Hostage to the disease of addiction represents "the act of giving oneself over to something as one's master so totally that one's entire being and meaning become possessed by it" (p. 4).

**Moneylender:** The Moneylender archetype represents perhaps the most deceitful and sinister aspects of addiction. It encompasses the deceptive nature of the disease analogous to the lure of seemingly fast and easy money which carries a high price when repayment comes due. The exorbitant interest is paid by the addict in terms of time, money, energy, relationships and self-respect. Furthermore, by its very nature, addiction ensures that the individual is so indebted and so dependent upon the Moneylender that his/her life is no longer his/her own.

**Gambler:** The archetype of the Gambler again depicts the seductive nature of the disease of addiction and, as such, is related to the Moneylender archetype. Like the literal reality of gambling in real life, this metaphor for addiction offers deceitful promises and enticements of shortcuts to pleasure and fulfillment which never materialize. The Gambler encourages an escalation of risk-taking and forfeiture which initially seems harmless, but like the Moneylender's game, progresses into something out of control, destructive and ultimately deadly.

**Romantic:** The Romantic archetype is a common and pervasive entity which is affirmed and perpetuated by our culture. The romanticized ideals of Prince Charming and "happily ever after" as well as the seductive lure of a Demon/Ghostly Lover pervade our literature, myths and current media. The Romantic seduces the addict away from reality with promises of attaining meaning through perfect merger of body and soul with a loved one and absolute feeling of being at one with the universe. Much like with the Hostage, the addict gives him/herself over completely to the object of his/her desire only to find endless insatiable longing and despair.

**Underground Man:** This archetype represents the aspect of extreme withdrawal and isolation experienced by addicts. It incorporates the "dark side" aspects of an addict's personality including, extreme sensitivity, overly critical nature, brooding temperament, resentments, pervasive sense of guilt and conflicts within him/herself. Trapped by his/her own isolation the Underground Man spirals deeper into alienation and addiction - his/her only "comfort".

**Outlaw:** The Outlaw archetype represents the seductive and alluring "bad boy" rebel without a cause. He symbolizes a "glamorous, dangerous and romantic figure, symbolizing the human being at odds with society, one who dares to be different" (p. 83). Addiction and its accompanying behaviors represent a cry of rebellion, albeit it a self-destructive and ineffective means of enacting attention and transformation. The Rebel represents the incorporation of this energy into a positive agent for change, while the Outlaw embodies destruction.

**Trickster:** The Trickster embodies the essence of the deceitful agent which initially seduces the addict into addiction and later charms the addict into relapse,

utilizing the tools of denial and self-deception. As such, the Trickster often aligns himself with the other seductive archetypes in order to deceive. Jung described this figure as a "collective shadow figure; a shape shifter who can both wound and heal" (p. 96). The Trickster dupes the addict out of the power and control of his/her own life, but can, through recovery lead the addict to examine relevant issues and progress toward individuation [9].

**B. Stage 2 - The Fall: The Ominous Stage of Possession and Descent Into Darkness [9]**

**Madwoman:** The Madwoman represents the driving force of the addiction process, a metaphor to the insanity which clouds the addicts thinking and directs irrational behavior. "In addiction, the Madwoman is the raving, suspicious figure that drives the addict into the locked ward of loneliness and alienation" (p. 117). This is the highly visible face of addiction - the one that causes others to diagnose, label and withdraw contact from the raving addict. The Madwoman is the chaotic, angry, isolated, suspicious figure of an addict living with inner torment that occasionally escapes and is exhibited.

**Judge:** The Judge is the patriarchal archetype of rationality and calculative thinking who seeks perfection, dominance, power and control. This figure pushes the addict towards substance abuse in order to reduce the pain of incessant criticism, feelings of inferiority, guilt and unrealistic demands. The critical Judge reinforces the basic insecurities of fear of failure or success, self-pity, scorn, envy, resentment, jealousy, perfectionism, low self-esteem, inability to establish priorities, procrastination. lack of discipline, lack of commitment, ambivalence and indecision. as such, this figure tears down the very soul of the addict, rendering him/her weak and vulnerable.

**Killer:** This archetype is the embodiment of the process of addiction. "It devours the heart of creativity with its insatiable hunger and drains it of vitality like the vampire that lives off the lifeblood of its victims" (p. 165) In this way, the Killer wounds the addict's ability to be spontaneous, vulnerable, receptive or intimate. The Killer strips his victim of hope and faith in love and life itself and deeply wounds the inner child. As such, the Killer utilizes various other archetypal figures in the destruction of his victim and represents the inner character that gives up on life.

**World's Night:** The World's Night archetype encompasses not only an individual, but rather a whole epoch of Western civilization. This period is characterized by denial and a "monomaniacal will to control life for the purposes of power, security, comfort and victory" (p. 197). This World's Night facilitates the development and perpetuation of addictions and their accompanying meaninglessness and despair. It represents a type of "Dark Age" of the collective soul of society.

**C. Stage 3 - The Creation: The Turning Point of Healing and Transformation [9]**

**Abyss:** This archetype refers to the darkness and the depth of despair which is reached by an addict. However, it represents also the turning point of the addict's journey - the place where the first steps of recovery can begin. Facing the Abyss, for the addict, means facing all his/her own terror, anxiety, powerlessness and ultimately the mystery of his/her very existence. By confronting these aspects of the Abyss, the addict can transform them into something of meaning. The Abyss is paradoxically the depth of despair and the light of hope and spiritual growth.

**Dark Night of the Soul:** The Dark Night of the Soul is described as the "growing pain" of the process of self-attainment (p. 229). It represents a time of oscillating between inspiring insight and confusing despair and is composed of two phases - The Night of the Senses and The Night of the Spirit - whereby differing parts of the soul are purged and purified. This is a painful period in the journey of addiction where the addict feels imprisoned in the Abyss. And yet, it represents a necessary stage of chaotic and confusing growth which is necessary for the formation of a new way of life.

**Battleground:** The Battleground is the addict's confrontation with all the painful entities which caused, facilitated, maintained and resulted from his/her addictive behavior. It is analogous to Steps Four through Ten in a Twelve Step Recovery Program, whereby the recovering addict confronts the Shadow, takes responsibility for his/her actions and makes amends where possible. The Battleground represents the real "work" of the recovery process.

**Soul on Fire:** The Soul on Fire refers to the power and energy present in an addict's battle with addiction. It refers to the positive momentum of redemption and recovery, rather than the destructive, consuming fire of the descent into the darkness. The Soul on Fire represents the transformation from the death of the Abyss to the life of recovery. A Soul on Fire is a soul that has chosen life.

**Work of the Heart:** This archetype involves directly confronting the question of personal human suffering and the larger question of the meaning of life. It represents the attempt to derive meaning and purpose from the journey of suffering and transformation. It is this process of the Work of the Heart which gives the

struggle significance and validation. It represents a reconciliation of the forces of good and evil which have battled over the addict's soul.

**Healing Fields:** The Healing Fields archetype encompasses the essential element of forgiveness, especially forgiveness of the self in the recovery process. Through this process of making amends the addict regains his/her sense of self and worth. This is a progressive lifelong endeavor of rebuilding and restoring wholeness that finally allows the addict to let go of the past and live in the present and culminates in a sense of peace and belonging.

**Dwelling:** The Dwelling represents a sacred place made available by the healing process. It represents a sense of serenity and bliss and a feeling of "finally being home" (p. 335). It is a place for peaceful meditation and validation for being, and it is also a way of being, a process of learning how to coexist and truly experience existence and relating to the world around oneself.

**Gift:** The gift is a miracle of the restoration of life. It is freedom from bondage, opportunity to live and celebration of life. Because the recovering addict is given this Gift, he/she becomes capable of giving. This is encompassed in the Twelfth Step whereby the Abyss, the Battleground, the Healing Fields and the Gift is shared so that others too might receive the Gift. This is the essence of true recovery [9].

## VI. APPLICATION

Various researchers [11] - [14] have found that the construction and evolution of a narrative identity resulted in those in recovery assimilating experiences by recounting stories internally and to others, and "...ultimately applying these stories to knowledge of self, others, and the world in general" [14, p. 438]. This leads to a sense of cohesion and connectedness in whereby the exercises in therapy become integrated into the flow of everyday life.

Through the process of recovery, individuals interpret narrative content (including archetypes) to extract a sense of meaning and purpose to their lives [15] – [18]. "This combination of narrative processing (the story-making component of consciousness) and autobiographical reasoning (the capacity of the mind to draw inferences from the narratives it creates) defines the critical psychological mechanisms of narrative identity" [19, p. 380] In this way, addiction can be contextualized into the life story and narrative identity and recovery can be worked as a process of resolution of inner dialogue, confrontation and growth.

## CONCLUSION

Clearly, work on building effective, long-lasting treatment programs is important in battling addictive disorders. Archetypal narrative therapy represents a comprehensive and holistic approach to conceptualizing the process of addiction and addressing the underlying psychic dialogues that perpetuate the disorder. Encountering the archetypal figures and challenging the inner dialogues that they facilitate can help an addict understand the inner psychodynamics of addiction. Furthermore, the continuity provided by the stable archetypal characters and their relationship to the unfolding drama of addiction provides an anchor to the unfolding narrative that is the addicts path to recovery.

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