

Headspace

...drugs from the left field

Feeling is everything

The addict *feels* the world, bits at a time. The addict's cognition, his or her executive functions such as reason, planning and choice, are subordinate to the emotional act of using drugs, and its consequences. The addict is moved by emotion, and feels his or her way through the macabre of his or her addicted behavior.

The addict, in moments of clarity, reaches out for help and receives treatment, only to become a victim of a world-view created by the 'mind-body dualism' (that thinking is separate from emotion) philosophy of Descartes. The one-size-fits-all treatment model borne from this world-view forms the basis of the cognitive behavioral therapies (CBT), developed by American psychologists A. Ellis and A.T. Beck; the cognitive modules of the Hazelden foundation, which are ubiquitous in treatment facilities; and the Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous fellowships. Unwittingly, cognitive-behavioral models neglect the

wherewithal of the emotional-feeling aspect of the addict, and treat him or her like a commodity, alienating them even more.

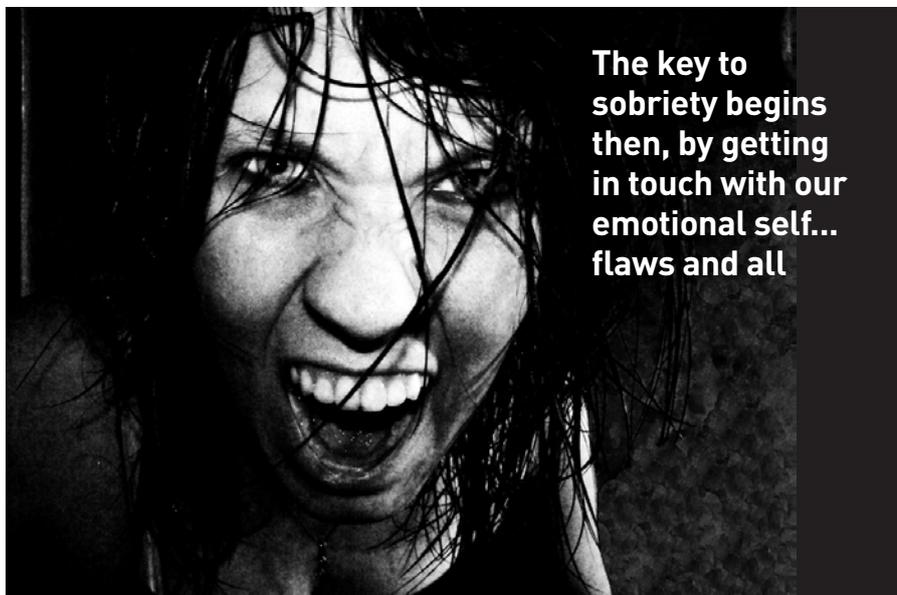
When treating addiction, addiction specialists have placed the carriage before the horse. Until recently, the addiction treatment field did not even recognise this strong emotional component that is so worthy of fresh research. As Antonio Verdejo, from the Department of Clinical Psychology & Institute of Neuroscience at Universidad de Granada, Spain and Antoine Bechara, from the Brain and Creativity Institute, University of Southern California, said: "Growing evidence from neuro-scientific studies shows that core aspects of addiction may be explained in terms of abnormal emotional/homeostatic guidance of decision-making. Behavioral studies have revealed emotional processing and decision-making deficits in substance abusers."

When identifying the addict's

dilemma, the addiction treatment field is in what I call a Counter Dark Age. The Dark Age (500BC to 1500AD) kept people from exploring the mind as a thinking, reasoning entity; imprisoning and executing anyone who said otherwise, and science suffered as a result. It was a religious time, an emotional time to say the least.

Today, it is reversed: science and its preoccupation with cognition as a thinking, reasoning entity keeps us from the true nature of the problem of addiction – the emotional, feeling person underneath all the bad choices and harm caused. There are as many different kinds of addictions as there are people. Twenty-first century addiction treatment professionals must move away from the rational, one size-fits-all-disease-model, and look at the dynamics of the emotional individual and the relational event. It is not the individual addict, nor the drug itself, it is these relational events that should be defining the concept of treating addiction.

We focus on the choices we make and their consequences, because the dark truth of looking too deep into the amygdala's memory will show nothing but a reflection of the looker. So we distract ourselves with a consciousness full of everything else save the truth, focused on the appearance and the phenomena of addiction, rather than the cause. We are set right smack in the center of the universe again. This was equally true for the church in the Dark Age. It used a lot of rituals, prayer beads, confessionals, and the like to stay above the surface of it all. The robotic world-view we've created keeps us at the surface, and in an emotional darkness where we are safe from *feeling*. The key to sobriety begins then, by getting in touch with our emotional self... flaws and all.



The key to sobriety begins then, by getting in touch with our emotional self... flaws and all

■ Sal Ventimiglia