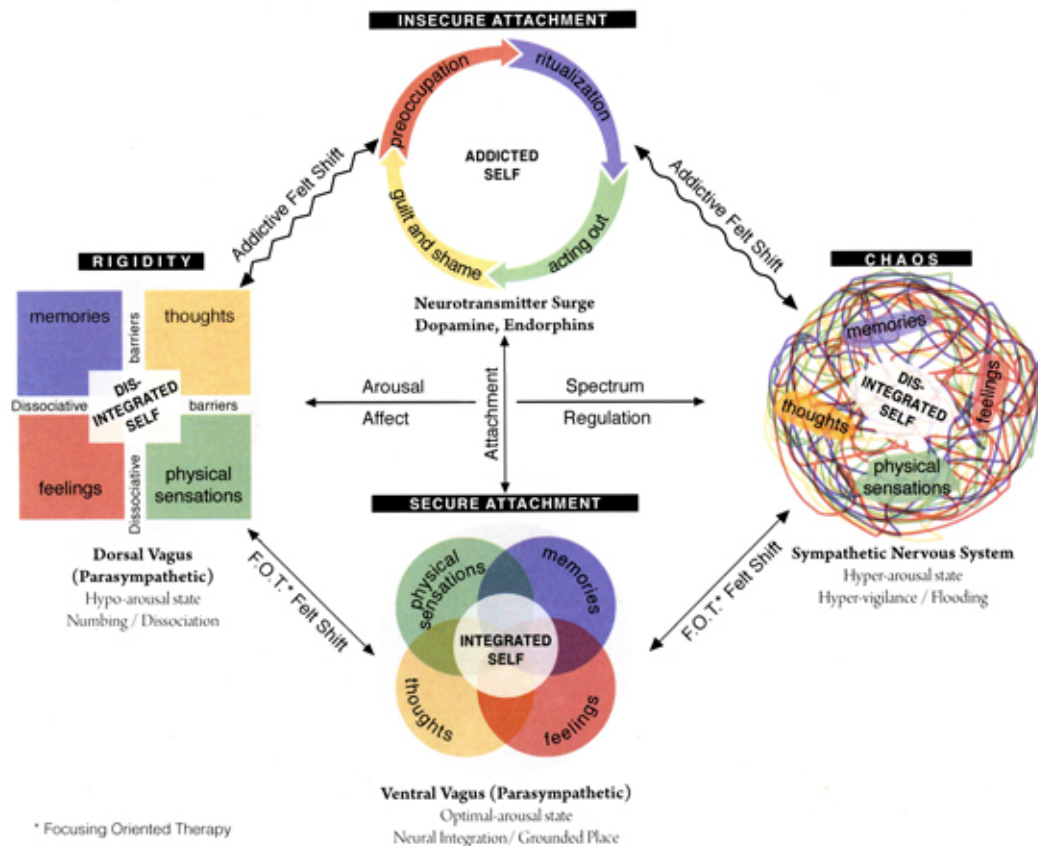


Felt Sense Experience Model of Emotional Regulation



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Jan Winhall

As an innovator in contemporary focusing practice Jan Winhall's latest work *Understanding and Treating Addiction with the Felt Sense Experience Model* has been included as a chapter in the book *Emerging Practice in Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapies: Innovative Theory and Application*. Resulting from her longtime practice as a psychotherapist, Jan Winhall's model has created a way to work with the complexity of behavioral addictions using a focusing approach. The model is useful for understanding how emotional arousal is connected to addiction and wellness. The model is broadly applicable beyond addiction and may be used in teaching focusing and the process of therapy from initial assessment to the longer path to healing.

Winhall's integration of theory into a working model is grounded in Focusing-Oriented Therapy. It includes perspectives from attachment theory, trauma theory, ego state theory, Carnes addiction theory, interpersonal neurobiology, and the neurobiology of addiction. Winhall's model sees addiction as an attachment disorder; when insecure or avoidant attachments are formed through early experiences the client has often learned to self-regulate and soothe through external means such as addictive behaviours. Examining addiction through the lens of trauma theory the addict moves between states of hypo and hyper arousal, dissociated from the memory of painful experiences. Over time the addict learns to regulate uncomfortable arousal states by self-medicating.

Winhall's model graphically represents the felt sense experience using the two axes of attachment and arousal spectrum. Four self-states are created by the division of the axes which may also be seen as the four aspects of experiencing: thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, and memories.

Winhall sees much of the work of therapy as capacity building accomplished through the identification and tracking of ego states; through these states we create internalized representations of aspects of our life and self. The therapist acts to embody and model a grounded place that allows development of a secure attachment and the ability to recognize and shift arousal states without self-medication. In the beginning stages of therapy building a grounded place as a felt sense experience and an ego state helps the client learn an embodied way to access a state of self-regulation.

This process also aids in developing an awareness of triggers that have led the client to addictive behaviours, and also those behaviours that aid in the maintenance of sobriety and health. In the middle stages of therapy a client's personal narrative is developed while expanding the grounded place and the range of feelings a client can tolerate. In the consolidation period of therapy the client learns to integrate all aspects of their experience while self-regulating their arousal state.

Jan Winhall's model is a departure from cognitive behavioural approaches to addiction. Her model has incorporated emerging research in neurobiology with a focusing based approach. This work starts from implicit body wisdom and moves to create the relational climate needed to repair trauma and insecure attachment underlying addictive behaviours and emotional dysregulation.

References

Winhall, J. (2014). Understanding and treating addiction with the felt sense experience model. In G. Madison (Ed.). *Emerging practices in focusing-oriented psychotherapy: Innovative theory and application* (pp. 178-193). London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.