

First Name

Mert

Last Name

Ulusoy

Email

cpmertulusoy@gmail.com

Affiliation

ET school (STUDENTS only)

Affiliation Name

Existential Academy of Istanbul

Affiliation Country

Turkey

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Title

An Existential Approach to Addiction: The Role of the Unconscious

Abstract for

Short Communication

Abstract

This presentation investigates addiction through the existential-hermeneutics framework of Alice Holzhey-Kunz, emphasizing the unconscious as a space of concealed yet meaningful desires and self-protective mechanisms. Addiction is reframed as a mode of being that shields individuals from confronting existential anxieties, such as isolation, freedom, and the finitude of human existence (Heidegger, 1962). Rather than viewing addiction as a mere symptom of pathological dysfunction, we explore it as a distorted attempt to resolve the inherent tensions of Dasein (being-in-the-world) (Holzhey-Kunz, 2014).

Drawing on Holzhey-Kunz's rehabilitated concept of the unconscious, the discussion highlights how addiction acts as an existential retreat—avoiding the vulnerability of engaging with oneself and the world (Holzhey-Kunz, 2015). Freud (1923) describes the unconscious as “the repository of repressed desires and intentions” (The Ego and the Id, p. 14), underscoring its critical role in both mental suffering and its resolution. Addiction, from this perspective, represents not only a pathological behavior but also an unconscious strategy for managing existential anxiety and achieving a tenuous sense of stability.

Through phenomenological exploration and hermeneutic interpretation, therapists can assist individuals in uncovering the existential motivations underpinning their addiction. This approach challenges reductionist paradigms by situating addiction within the broader context of human existence, opening pathways for therapeutic practices that prioritize meaning, relationality, and the reclamation of selfhood. It argues for a therapeutic stance rooted in existential hermeneutics, attending to the unconscious as a site of both suffering and potential transformation.

References

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User ID

Mert Ulusoy