Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors. Addiction is characterized by inability to consistently abstain, impairment in behavioral control, craving, diminished recognition of significant problems with one’s behaviors and interpersonal relationships, and a dysfunctional emotional response. Like other chronic diseases, addiction often involves cycles of relapse and remission. Without treatment or engagement in recovery activities, addiction is progressive and can result in disability or premature death.” (ASAM)

Process Addiction: Any activity that reduces stress (e.g. drug & alcohol use; eating, sex, gambling, exercise, bonding/socializing, etc.) can become an addiction when the individual gets caught in the Stress, Arousal, Satiation, Fantasy, Stress cycle. Unlike drug and alcohol addictions, process (or behavioral) addictions do not involve the use of a mind-altering substance but instead are products of the brain’s natural dopaminergic reward systems. (Milkman & Sunderwirth, 2010)

Love Addiction: Evolves from immature concepts of love that view love in terms of power, possession, protection, pity, and perversion. The immature lover believes love is blind, external, and beyond one’s control. Immature love becomes an addiction when it permeates one’s life, elicits repeated out-of-control behavior, and results in negative life consequences. (Sussman, 2010)

Sex Addiction: There is much debate over the reality of sexual addictions. At present, sexual addiction is not listed in the DSM-5. However, taking into account the ASAM definition of addiction and, more importantly, assessing client functioning and dysfunctions, sex addiction can be defined as a process addiction and be treated as such rather than being treated as an impulse control disorder as was the case under DSM-IV.

References
Holism: Individuals cannot be seen separately from the sum of all their parts and from their experience with the environment. Body and mind are enmeshed. Individuals are viewed contextually and relationally.

Here & Now: The past exists as memories and unfinished business in the present and is constantly being reinterpreted. Healing occurs in the present moment.

Field Theory (Figure/Ground): The world is perceived in the here and now, internally and externally, via salient figures on a fuzzy background. Figures in the field are mutually interdependent and constantly changing in salience. The individual’s personal field is made up of their emotions, thoughts, behaviors, etc, and interacts with environmental fields.

Self Regulation & Homeostasis: Individuals seek self growth and satisfaction of needs based on a hierarchy of importance, in order to maintain homeostasis.

Experimentation: Experiments and exercises are used with clients to help increase awareness.

Gestalt (n): ‘something that is made of many parts and yet is somehow more than or different from the combination of its parts.’ - gestalt. 2014. In Merriam-Webster.com.

Key Terms
- Conscious Awareness: Greater awareness of one’s current fields, emotions, behaviors, and experiences leads to holism, which leads to healing. Individuals are most aware of figures in their fields, rather than background elements, which remain in the unconscious.

- Boundaries: The area where individual’s personal fields meet environmental fields and the fields of others. Individuals either adjust their environments or adjust to them.

- Contact & Withdrawal: Contact is connection with environmental fields, while withdrawal refers to isolation from certain environmental fields. Neither is inherently positive or negative.

- Introjection: Taking environmental elements into the personal field (i.e. societal messages).

- Projection: Forcing personal elements onto environmental fields (i.e. assuming others’ opinions of self based on personal insecurities).

- Confluence: No boundaries between self and environment.

- Retroflection: Suppressing behaviors toward others or redirecting them to the self (i.e. martyr-like behaviors).

- Paradoxical Theory of Change: The more an individual tries to be something that is inauthentic, the more they will stay the same.

Note: Gestalt techniques are particularly effective in issues concerning families, groups, children, trauma, and addiction, due to the emphasis on personal responsibility, interaction with environment, and body awareness (CRC, 2011).

References