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### Chemical Dependency Counselor Interview

I am not entirely interested in becoming a chemical dependency counselor so instead of selecting a specific area of interest I began my search at [www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com). This is a website that provides information of therapists, counselors, and psychologists of all kinds to people. Here I found Pippa BreakSpear, a private chemical dependency counselor who also attended Western Washington University when she was in school. Our interview was conducted over the phone and lasted about a half an hour.

I had intended on beginning this interview with the same general questions (name, agency, position, etc). However, as I already had all of this information on her website and we had communicated a few times in the past, I skipped this part during the interview. I learned from her webpage that she is a private practitioner and focuses solely on addictions counseling. Her experience in the field is vast. She spent about 6 years, while she was in school, at miscellaneous internships around Bellingham; all of which in the chemical dependency arena. After this, she began in the field at a few different agencies before opening up her own private practice. She has been in professional practice for about 7 years.

Looking a little deeper into her professional practice I asked her about services she provides to clients and what populations she serves. I learned she serves everyone with an addiction. Addictions clients face can include alcohol, gambling, sex, food, shopping, money, or internet; any negative addictive habits. She also really enjoys couples counseling and life coaching.

The next question I asked referred to the culture of her practice. After explaining a little bit about what I meant by culture she informed me she works her practice off the quote “the only abnormality is the inability to love” by Anais Ninn. She believes there is nothing wrong with an addict. It’s a natural component of being human. Pippa went on to explain that society today can be discriminatory against people with substance abuse or dependence, that we often resort to locking them up when that may not always be the best case. She herself has experienced substance abuse and dependency and therefor feels she can relate to her clients a little better because of it. She has built her practice off the idea that it is important to build up your sense of self and diminish your sense of shame.

The next question related to typical barriers to client success. She felt the biggest contribution was our culture today. She believes it is a huge problem in the recovery and prevention of dependencies. Today’s society is about having more, whatever it may be (more money is better, more friends is better, more family is better, more food is better, more alcohol is better, more power is better). This is also the foundation of addiction – dependents want more. Our culture today rewards certain addictions. If you work more (workaholic) we love that; if you have more money, we love that; if you make more money, we love that. There is a constant peer pressure and temptation to always be happy and to always strive for more than what you have. Even in our constitution we advertise that we all have the freedom to the pursuit of happiness. Our culture believes that we need to be happy all that time, hence addictions. Addictions are a way to get happy, a way to make us forget about our sorrows and struggles. We also criminalize against people with addictions. As soon as you have a felony you have a more difficult time getting a job, it’s more difficult to get financial aid, to rent without a cosigner, you have more fines you have to pay, et cetera. Pippa explains that instead of focusing on all these concerns she prefers to work off success and acknowledge it in every form it comes in.

I found her response to this question the most interesting. I never thought about how culture played a part in addictions until she pointed it out. This was something we discussed a bit more in depth than other questions. I completely agree with her point of view that culture plays a large role as a barrier to client success. It makes me wonder, where do we draw the line between acceptable addictions and criminal ones?

Next we went into discussing how she spreads word of her private practice. Obviously she really enjoys what she does and has strong opinions toward her profession so I was curious what steps she has taken to spread herself across the community. I was surprised to find out she doesn't do very much advertisement. Mostly she depends on word of mouth, her webpage, and psychologytoday.com. She also informed me that she has produced two documentaries in the past that started her career in the chemical dependency arena. She also depends on the spread of these films to advertise for her business.

Going back to what we discussed in the previous question about culture, I ask her about some other concerns she sees about current treatment practices in the Bellingham community. One big issue she mentioned she was very passionate about was the lack of case management based housing for dependents. Pippa mentioned there used to be one housing unit, years ago, but today there aren't any at all. We discussed how this would be a great model to put in place since there are multiple housing programs in the community.

As I am slightly interested in becoming a counselor of some sort, I asked what characteristics she found important when working as one. The majority of the listed traits I expected to hear. These include a good sense of humor, be able to not stay attached to exactly what your clients do (as some will go into remission, some will leave and never return, some will fully recover from their addiction, it's very unpredictable), and self-care (is essential). The two traits that stood out to me were being spiritual and to have personal experience as an addict. I never thought that my spirituality could play a large role in

my self-care and in my ability to work in the human services profession, but reflecting back on what she mentioned and about how my faith in God has affected my entire life, I see it to be very accurate. Pippa mentioned that spirituality can help reassure you that nothing is really in your hands, there is something greater than us that is in control of what happens and sometimes we can't solve every problem. The other trait she mentioned was being an experienced addict. This was not what I expected to hear because, as she pointed out, it has been drilled into our minds that you don't have to be an addict to work with addicts. However, she states that though this is truthful, it does help to be relatable to your clients in this way. It creates more openness in communication and reduces the shame your clients will feel when coming to you for help, in her opinion, it makes all the difference in the world. The rest of this interview was spent discussing this topic.