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ADDICTION: THE DANCE BETWEEN CONCEPT AND TERMS^a

Robin Room,^{1,2,3} Matilda Hellman⁴ & Kerstin Stenius^{1,5}

¹Centre for Social Research on Alcohol & Drugs, Stockholm University

²Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, Turning Point, Fitzroy, Victoria, Australia

³Melbourne School of Population & Global Health, University of Melbourne

⁴Sociology Department, University of Helsinki

⁵National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health, Helsinki

Abstract: The paper discusses the relation between a concept of addiction and the terminology used for its communication, drawing on and analysing historical citations from the Oxford English Dictionary. The history in English illustrates that terms for a concept change over time, often by an existing word being repurposed. “Addiction” as a term existed prior to the contemporary concept, but with a descriptive meaning which did not carry the explanatory power intrinsic in the modern variant. So its use as a word for the modern conception of the addiction phenomenon was delayed well beyond the emergence of the concept. The experience in English of interplay between concept and terms is discussed in the context of two frames: of influence in both directions between medical and popular concepts and terms, and of cross-cultural variations in the concept and of terms for it.

Introduction: the addiction concept

This paper is concerned with the emergence of the addiction concept in everyday thinking and the terms that are used to express and refer to the phenomenon. We focus on how the usage of terms has developed in the

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English language over the last two centuries. We also consider some issues in the wider frame of the concept and terms in other languages.

The addiction concept involves the idea of habitual heavy consumption. But the concept goes a long step beyond such description; instead, it provides and functions as an explanation for problematic and seemingly illogical behaviour. The behaviour is not just habitual but determined by forces beyond the actor's control: there is a mysterious underlying compulsion (Room, 1987), a "disease of the will" (Valverde, 1998). Thus, Saunders (2013) identifies the main factor "as an 'internal driving force' to substance use". The crucial point of the concept is not the details of how the behaviour and its determinants are characterised, but rather that it adds this explanatory dimension: there is something underlying which is impelling behaviour which is otherwise inexplicable.

In medical hands, the addiction concept becomes a diagnosis of a condition of mental disorder, providing an explanation of what underlies the behaviour (Freeman, 1989). To describe a state or condition involving habitual heavy consumption as a mental disorder is thus another way of invoking the addiction concept.

As markers of when the concept is being deployed, we will therefore take two alternative minimum indications which go beyond a description in terms of habitual behaviour. One is in terms of some indication of mental compulsion or craving; the alternative formulation is the definition of the condition as a mental disorder.

In this discussion, we follow a semiotic tradition that distinguishes between a concept, that is the idea of a phenomenon or thing, on the one hand, and the terminology, the words and signs used to express it, on the other (Eco, 1979). In the case of addiction, we offer evidence that the term "addiction" existed before the concept came into everyday use, and was not initially used in its central contemporary signification. Conversely, the term "addiction" is not always used today in explanatory mode, that is, to indicate behaviour beyond the actor's control, though the explanatory mode dominates. In this paper, the intricate dance between concept and

terminology is explored, primarily in the context of the English language, but also with reference to some other European languages.

Addiction as a post-Enlightenment concept

Thirty-six years ago Harry Levine (1978) published “the discovery of addiction”. The paper argued that the concept of addiction “emerged in American popular and medical thought at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century”, initially with respect to alcohol, creating a new “paradigm” or “gestalt” or (in Foucault’s terminology) “gaze” of the observer concerning habitual consumption.

Levine’s analysis was rooted in the then-emergent tradition of studies of the great shift in the conceptualisation of mental illness in roughly the same period. Thus Levine’s paper has an epigraph from Foucault’s work on this (1975) and its title pays homage to Rothman’s book on *The Discovery of the Asylum* (Rothman, 1971), dealing with the U.S. in this period. Though it is clear that British doctors’ “clinical gaze” on “drunkenness” was discerning an element of compulsion already in the late 18th century (Nicholls, 2009:59-72, Ruuska, 2013), Levine’s dating of the first emergence of the concept as a common and accepted way of thinking about habitual consumption in the general North American culture, initially applied to alcohol, is still substantially apposite (Ferentzy, 2001). Corroborating evidence of a parallel phenomenon in Britain had been provided a few years before Levine’s paper, in an analysis by McCormick (1969) of British fiction. McCormick found that around 1830, alongside descriptions of “the same drinking ... as existed 80 years before” were descriptions of “a new and more desperate kind of solitary, tragic and inexplicable drinking”.

Terms in English for the concept

While Levine’s paper describes clearly the emergence of a concept, and the logic behind it, at a certain point in North American history, he does not point to the use of any particular term for it.^b The words and phrases Levine

^b In a later paper, Levine (1981) considers the rich vocabulary of terms in English for drunkenness. The myriad of terms listed in it is almost devoid of terms which imply the addiction concept, “dipsomaniac” and “dipso” being exceptions, and in some senses “alcoholic” and “alcoholist”.

reports being used concerning the emergent concept in the half-century after 1800 include “paroxysms” of drunkenness, the “necessity” to drink, as contrasted with “free agency”, a “burning withering desire for drink”, a desire which was “overwhelming”, “overpowering”, and “irresistible”. While the concept became commonly understood, there was seemingly not a clear and single term attached to it.

There are a number of terms in English which have become associated with the concept over the last two centuries. Some, like “addiction”, “dependence” or “inebriety”, also had a variety of other meanings, and existed in English with these meanings before becoming used also to express the addiction concept which concerns us here. Others, like “narcomania”, “dipsomania”, and “morphinomania” were new terms invented for the purpose by medical writers. “Alcoholic” and “alcoholism” is a mixed case: “alcoholic” has a variety of other meanings, but then “alcoholism” came into use primarily in a medical meaning in the mid-19th century. It was an Englishing of a Latin term, *alcoholismus chronicus*, put forward by a Swedish doctor, Magnus Huss, in a monograph originally published in Swedish. But Huss’s meaning for the term was not in terms of the addiction concept, but rather, as the *Medical Temperance Journal* noted in 1882, was applied to “cases which come directly from the toxic action of alcohol” (quoted for “alcoholism” in the Oxford English Dictionary) – in other words, in what Ruuska (2013) terms the emergent “consequences problematic” as a medical view, rather than the “behavioural problematic” which included the addiction concept. Huss’s meaning, oriented to long-term physiological consequences, persisted in medical nosology through the 1940s (so that, for instance, the title of a book edited by Jellinek (1942) early in his career as an alcohol scholar was *Alcohol Addiction and Chronic Alcoholism*, as two separate concepts). As we shall see, there are precedents back to the 19th century for “alcoholism” and “alcoholic” to refer to an addiction concept, but this meaning only became dominant after the rise of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Charting the dance between concept and terms in English

The primary reference source for the historical development of words and their meanings in the English language is what is now called the Oxford English

Dictionary, which aims to capture and define every word used in English since the year 1000. Originating as a major project and product of 19th-Century philology (Murray, 1977), the title of the first edition, which appeared piece by piece between 1884 and 1928, was the *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, a title which reflected its strong orientation to the history not only of words but also of their meanings and use. The OED, as it is often affectionately called, is now available by subscription online and continuously updated.

The OED makes an effort to distinguish different senses of a word in a systematic way, and to give quotations from a diversity of written sources exemplifying the development of every sense of the word. Its attention to different senses of a word makes it a useful resource for tracing the interplay between the concept of addiction and the words used for it in English. But the OED also has some limits for this purpose. It is a lexicographical exercise, and the volunteers and editors whose work it reflects are not necessarily experts in the particular topic surrounding a word and a sense. The quotations are chosen to be representative of meanings, particularly new meanings, at different periods in the word's history, but the selection is crucially dependent not only on the lexicographer making or revising the entry but also on the raw material of quotations collected by volunteer readers, often long ago, making their way through their agreed part of the enormous corpus of publications in English. What struck a reader as interesting and worth copying and sending in is not necessarily what a specialist collecting materials for a study of a specific area – such as the addiction concept -- would have chosen. The OED's historical citations are thus by no means a complete record. The emphasis of the lexicography is on when a new word or meaning (or spelling) emerges, and the citations chosen emphasise such changes or additional usages more than stability. OED citations should thus not be taken as indicating much about frequency of usage.

Keeping these limitations in mind, the OED is still a useful resource for our purposes. Table 1 assembles quotations from it for the words (phrases in the case of “dependence” and its variants) when used in the sense of the addiction concept or in senses related to it. In particular, it includes (in parentheses)

earlier uses which seemed to us not to clearly go beyond the sense of heavy habitual use, that is, not to fulfill our criteria for the characteristics of the contemporary addiction concept, with its explanatory burden.

It will be seen that “addict” and its derivatives were in use in English well before the post-Enlightenment period Levine’s paper focuses on. We have given quotations the OED puts under the sense of addiction to a substance, but they are consonant with a broader set of meanings around “committed”, “devoted”, or “attached” which the OED arranges into six other senses of “addicted”. A line from Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, for instance, is quoted for one of these senses: “Being addicted to a melancholy as she is”. One clear lesson from the OED is that the broader use of “addicted” and “addiction” beyond alcohol and drugs in recent decades, discussed below, is by no means a novelty in English, although the application of the full modern addiction concept to a wider range of behaviours may be.

“Addict” and “addiction”, and compound terms such as “alcohol addiction” and “drug addiction”, are used from the 1880s onward to refer to the addiction concept, with the OED giving a citation for each from the last 10 years. Despite considerable flux in professional terminology (Room, 1998), “addiction” has remained a strong choice for reference to the addiction concept for well over a century.

The first quotation with a derivative of “addict” which we have classed as used in the sense of an explanatory compulsion is from 1837. By this time, an alternative cluster of words was being used, primarily referring to alcohol: inebriety and its derivatives, referring to overuse and its consequential states. These words were originally used in English as an equivalent of “drunk”, but often used figuratively; thus the oldest citation in the OED, from 1497, describes the biblical Peter “as a man inebryat in the loue [love] of God”. It seems to have been an initiative from medicine to apply “inebriate” within an addiction concept; thus the first such citation, from 1864, is a reference to the Asylum for Inebriates which had just opened at Binghamton, New York (Baumohl & Room, 1987). As the citations suggest, “inebriety” in the context of psychoactive substances, particularly alcohol, became a semi-technical medical term in the late 19th century. The usage was often ambiguous about

whether a meaning within the addiction concept was intended. The period of medical usage left behind a residue in the longer term in legal language: “inebriates act” [law on treatment for addiction] and “public inebriate” [a person frequently drunk in public]; though the OED does not pick this up, such legal phrases are the primary contexts for current usage of the terms.

In the later 19th century, a wave of medical attention to addiction issues produced several neologisms. “Dipsomania” is first recorded in the OED in 1843, equated at that time with “drunkenness”, but with a notation that dipsomania “is regarded as a temporary form of insanity”. A citation from 1862 describes that a woman “had been for many years excessively given to drinking, and in her case it had developed to actual ‘dipsomania’”, but without further specification of the meaning of dipsomania. The term “mania” (borrowed from medieval Latin) is first recorded in the OED in 1398, meaning “excessive desire”, and having from the first a connotation of mental illness. As a Latin-derived term, it became a common component of new combined forms in medical terminology, as the OED notes, “forming nouns referring to kinds of mental illness, desires, and passions marked by wild excess or delusion”.

It was Norman Kerr, the foremost British addiction doctor of his time, who proposed the term “narcomania”, with a central meaning of an uncontrollable craving for psychoactive substances.^c It has primarily been used more broadly to signify an addicted condition, as in the title of later editions of Kerr’s magnum opus, *Inebriety, or Narcomania* (Kerr, 1894). The OED gives citations from 1976 and 1996, but the term is not in common use today. The latest citation for “dipsomania” in the OED is for 1883; the OED does not pick up that the term is still in some use, but primarily as a comic term describing an “amiable” habitual heavy drinker, as in the 1950 film *Harvey* and its offshoots (Reed, 2012). The OED also misses the term “euphomania”, coined in Danish in 1944 as amphetamines and morphine became more widely used in wartime (Houberg, 2014), but occasionally used as a term in English-language Nordic papers (e.g., Anchersen, 1947).

^c While the OED gives the date 1865 for this, with the reference “*Inebriety* ii. 34”, the reference appears to be to the first edition of Kerr’s book, in 1888.

“Alcoholic” and “alcoholism” were clearly in use, particularly in temperance writing, by the mid-19th Century. A citation from an 1848 allegorical temperance tale (Cowen, 1848) shows the first recorded usage of “alcoholism”, but in the sense of all who are on the side of Emperor Alcohol the Great in the battle against temperance forces. Otherwise, early usage is primarily for habitual heavy drinking or with reference to the usage by Magnus Huss. Thus the OED gives a citation from 1868 which equates the stigmatisation of an “alcoholic inebriate” with that of someone with an “opium habit”. An 1881 citation, however, puts “alcoholism” in a list of conditions with “drug addiction” and “insanity”, and a couple of early 20th-Century citations use “alcoholic” or “alcoholism” within the frame of the addiction concept, long before the switch in official medical nosology in the late 1940s.

The nosological switch to “drug dependence” as preferred over “addiction” in professional circles was initiated by a 1963 WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence (WHO, 1964), with “alcohol dependence” following along in the 1970s (Edwards & Gross, 1976). The new wording was substituted to cover the retreat from an earlier Committee’s untenable attempt to confine “addiction” to drugs which were covered by the international drug treaties (Room, 1998). The choice of word involved an extension beyond a technical meaning of “dependence” in psychopharmacology (“dependence-producing” means that a regular user of a drug will experience withdrawal symptoms on stopping – a meaning which is not recognised in the OED). But “dependence” and its derivatives have a wide variety of other meanings recorded in the OED, some of them with derogatory connotations which might well carry over to drug users (Fraser & Gordon, 1994). The usage of “dependence” and “dependency” to refer to the addiction concept is not recognised by the OED under the terms themselves, but some relevant citations show up in the many compounds (two-word phrases) the OED notes with drug or alcohol as the first word.

Concept and term: an intricate dance

While as we have noted there were precursors, it was primarily in the early 19th Century that English speakers formed the conceptual understanding of habitual psychoactive substance use that we have called here the concept of

addiction. As is presumably common when a new conception is being formed, there was no clearly available semiotic convention for how the concept was to be expressed (Eco, 1979, p. 17). This is apparent from the variety of ad-hoc constructions Levine quotes from the period.

One term, “addict” and its derivatives, was available in English with a meaning, heavy habitual use, which was related to the intended meaning but which did not at the time convey the explanatory power of the concept. It was not until 1837 that a citation can be found in the OED where it is clear that “addicted” is used with the full weight of inability to control use. In the second half of the 19th century, as noted, a number of other terms were invented or put into use to convey the concept.

Eventually, the old connotation of “addiction” as simply describing habitual heavy use was lost, and after the 1880s the term was redeployed with the new meaning signifying the addiction concept -- taking on its modern function of serving as an explanation (Room, 2003). We can hypothesise that it was this lack of explanatory power in the meaning of “addiction” in the early 19th Century English-speaking world which explains why the word was not much resorted to in the early years of the addiction concept. A “burning withering desire” invoked the explanatory power of the concept much more vividly than a word used to describe habitual behaviour. Only when the concept had become well established in the culture, in the historical circumstances explicated by Levine (1978), and when alienists and other doctors were picking up the concept and using it as an explanation rather than simple description of behaviour, did it become workable to revert to applying the existing word in a new sense.

However, a variety of other terms continued to compete with it, particularly concerning alcohol addiction. Reflecting the chasm between alcohol and drugs imposed in thinking about them in the middle of the 20th century, as Courtwright (2005) has documented for the U.S., for some decades “alcoholism” and its derivatives took precedence over “addiction” specifically for alcohol. In the latter part of the 20th Century, the professional establishment made efforts to substitute “dependence” for both “addiction”

and “alcoholism”, but this shift in terminology has had only limited success in changing English-language popular and media discourse.

Is there a common concept across languages?

Conceptualisations of addiction problems, and the political and other forces which influence them, are bound to particular social milieus (e.g. Raikhel & Garriott 2013). Language use surrounding addiction shapes how we think about the matters it refers to, and it also reflects differences in views between different cultures. It seems that the word “addiction” has mostly been used in the Anglo-American world. Italian, Polish and Finnish are examples of languages that have had no exact equivalent for the term “addiction”, but have primarily made do with other words closer to “dependence” or “misuse” in English.

The linguist Guy Deutscher (2010) contradicts the claim that just because a language has no word for a concept its speakers would be unable to understand the concept in question. However, and intriguingly enough, he has shown that what is not present in a language is likely to be something that the speakers in that culture may not have been obliged to think about to a great extent. In the case of the Nordic countries, for instance, there has historically not been a need to rely on a formulation in terms of a disease of the individual will to provide a justification for society and the State to act upon social alcohol and drug problems (Palm & Stenius, 2002). Although the Anglo-American concept of addiction has made a prominent entry into popular lay speech in recent years in Finland, for example (Hellman 2010), a comparison between popular media narratives in the USA and in Finland still shows rather crucial differences in how the addiction phenomenon is conceptualized in the two societies (Hellman and Room 2014).

It is clear that, as a concept in everyday use, addiction presupposes a good deal. Nicholls (2009:59-72) shows how the idea is set within the frame of Enlightenment thinking. Ethnographic studies suggest that it should be viewed also as a post-industrial concept. Thus Levy and Kunitz report that the alcoholism concept only became current in Navajo culture as the idea of time as “spent” and responsibilities measured by the clock took hold.

As the society changes, however, [habitual drunkenness] increasingly come[s] to be seen as maladaptive to the new world where people are expected to be at work on time; where no network of kin is available to help when a husband is out drinking; where bills must be paid; and where all sorts of obligations the dominant society takes for granted must be fulfilled.... The drinker's behavior comes to be defined as sick. He is no longer a man who drinks a lot; he is an alcoholic. (Levy & Kunitz, 1974)

Despite the global diffusion of “Western” ideas through professional channels and popular culture, it is clear that there are still cultural variations in thinking about drug and alcohol intoxication and use (Room, 2006). Even within the narrower cultural range of European societies, there is a wide variety of concepts and terms, and different dances between concept and terminology in different languages. Until the last twenty years or so, for instance, it could be said that neither Swedish nor Finnish popular language distinguished between heavy use and addiction; in Swedish, for instance, “*missbruk*” (misuse) tended to be used to cover both.

“Addiction” as a new common denominator?

Starting in the 1980s the addiction concept, with “addiction” as probably the most common term, has expanded its reach in English to cover a wide variety of other habitual behaviours. The spread and enlargement of scope of both “addiction” as a term and the addiction concept as an idea can be viewed as part of larger sociological trends of globalisation and the emergence and diffusion of individualisation, “risk society” and new media formats across societies and languages (Alexander 2008, Furedi 2004, Sedgwick Kosowsky 1992).

If a 15-year-old spends endless hours on his computer or other electronic gear, “he must be addicted” is offered as the explanation – an explanation that points to particular paths of remediation. The use of the concept and term has expanded in English even to refer to groups and societies – *When Society Becomes an Addict* was the title of a popular U.S. book with a theory of codependence (Schaef, 1988), and it has become a commonplace to describe industrial societies as addicted to oil (Room, 1992). These trends have been picked up in other languages, even where “addiction” or a derivative of it had

not been common in the language. So in both French (Saiet, 2011) and Finnish (Hellman, 2010), for instance, discussions can now be found where “addiction” is routinely used for the expanded territory of gambling, sexuality, internet use, and so on -- although not so much concerning the “home territory” of the concept in English, psychoactive substance use, where existing terms in the language tend to remain in use.

Ironically, trends in American psychiatric thinking point to a similar trend at least in professional terminology in English. The newly-adopted 5th revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association has renounced the term “dependence” in its general meaning, intending to reserve it for its original technical physiological meaning referring to drug withdrawal symptoms (O’Brien, 2011). Instead, the general term replacing it is to be “substance use disorder” – a term which carries little of the explanatory power of an addiction concept. However, against the wishes of the specialist field’s representatives, a derivative of “addiction” is included in the title of the general DSM-5 chapter, “Substance-related and addictive disorders” (Hasin et al., 2013), to convey that the chapter also includes “Gambling disorder” (formerly “Pathological gambling”) and will eventually include other “addictive” behavioural disorders. Taken literally, DSM-5 thus applies addiction terminology to other behavioural disorders but not to the “substance use disorders”.

But DSM’s switch to “use disorders” and avoidance of the terms “addiction” or “dependence” in reference to the disorder may carry little weight in popular thinking. The concept of addiction “belong[s] to the culture as well as to psychiatrists or researchers” (Room, 1989), and the record of use both of terms and of the concept in English reflects some differences in usage between doctors and the general culture, and also that influence operated in both directions.

The future of the addiction concept

In the present era, the development and fate of the addiction concept seems double-sided. On a philosophical basis, it is argued that “the idea that addictive behaviour is compulsive is logically incoherent” (Heather, 2014); on a

pragmatic basis, it is argued that focusing on heavy use and the problems it brings renders an addiction concept superfluous (Rehm et al., 2013). As we have noted, the American Psychiatric Association seems to have abandoned addiction-oriented terminology in describing “disorders” from psychoactive substance use.

On the other hand, at the level of popular culture, the addiction concept remains strong, and has even extended its scope, as in the developments we have noted in French and Finnish. The popular demand to discover the “causes of addiction” drives much of the scientific funding in the alcohol and drug fields, even though the practical advances in curing and caring from biomedical science have primarily come from the “consequences problematic” rather than the “behavioural problematic”. In modern societies committed on the one hand to consciousness, attention and conscientiousness in major social roles, and on the other hand to free markets for consumer preferences as shaped by promotional enticements (Room, 2011), the addiction concept functions as a comforting explanation, resolving the social system’s contradictions by pointing to a postulated defect in the individual, a failure in the expectation of self-control. It has been suggested that through the idea of addiction human beings “understand what it means to be free” (Martin, 2013). As such, this explanatory concept is likely to remain in strong demand.

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Table 1. Expressions of the addiction concept in English -- Abbreviated quotations from the Oxford English Dictionary, <http://www.oed.com>, as of 22 September, 2012
 Quotations are shown which use the listed terms concerning habitual heavy use; those expressing the addiction concept --identified as a mental disease or with an element of compulsion -- are shown without parentheses

addicted, addict, addiction		inebriety, inebriate, inebriation		narcomania, dipsomania, morphinomania/c, morphomania/c		Alcoholic/sm, morphinist, narcotism, opiism		drug/alcohol dependence/-cy/-t	
1612	(to be addicted to the wine or strong drink)								
1716	(his too great addiction to the bottle)								
1741	(they are much addicted to tobacco, opium and coffee)								
1771	(his addiction to tobacco)								
1774	(women addicted to opium)								
1788	(the addicted to frequent intoxication)								
		1791	(during the period of his inebriation, half a century, a quart of gin or whisky per day)						
		1796	(when the inebriate lies in his bed)						
		1801	(habitual inebriety)						
1832	(addiction to ardent spirits)								
1837	a person who is addicted to [opium] can never leave it off								
		1864	[Binghampton] Asylum for Inebriates	1866	dipsomania ... sometimes the peculiar delirium arising from the abuse of alcohol, but ... commonly applies to an insatiable desire for alcoholic drinks	1860	[Huss's] (valuable publication on chronic alcoholism)		
		1868	(the alcoholic inebriate) [equated to the "opium habit"]			1868	(the alcoholic inebriate) [equated to the "opium habit"]		
1881	family history of alcoholism, drug addiction, insanity	1881	Dipsomania, or inebriety, is a fundamental disease of the nervous system	1881	Dipsomania, or inebriety, is a fundamental disease of the nervous system	1881	family history of alcoholism, drug addiction, insanity		
1886	(opium habit [but] alcohol addiction)			1883	dipsomania ... distinct from ordinary and habitual drunkenness ... craving is paroxysmal	1889	(unmistakable tokens of the torpor of opiism)		
1889	Alcohol and drug addictions cured [ad. in NY Times]			1887	The diagnosis of morphinomania	1894	A very short time suffices for the establishment of 'opiism'		
		1893	inebriety is a disease of the nervous system	1898	transformed the dipsomaniac and morphinomaniac into self-controlled and useful members of society.	1894	dipsomaniacs, morphinists and epileptics		
				1899	the so-called dipsomaniac or morphinomaniac	1897	(The children of three morphinist mothers were fairly healthy)		
1901	Imaginary pains ... of addicts ... an excuse for taking their accustomed drug			1909	dipso and narcomania are definite maladies	1909	"chronic alcoholic", and must have a bottle of port a day	1901	drug dependence
1906	alcohol addict							1904	drug dependent
				1912	He's just short of a raving morphomaniac	1910	[title:] The modern treatment of alcoholism and drug narcotism		
								1946	alcohol dependency
								1957	alcohol dependence

