Addiction, Education, and Beyond:
Pathological Patterns and Contexts

Jeffrey W. Bloom
International Bateson Institute
jeff@jeffbloom.net

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Parts of this paper were written in preparation for an International Bateson Institute (IBI) online discussions about addiction. Other parts of the paper were written in reaction to these discussions. I've decided to keep these separate parts in the order in which they were written in order to provide some sense of the IBI discussion and the development of my own ideas about addiction. The first part focuses on the contexts of schooling and the addictions that can develop among teachers and students in reaction to a variety of epistemological issues. Addiction, in these contexts, does not necessarily involve substances. They can involve patterns of thinking, patterns of acting, and various objects. Suggestions for addressing such non-substance addictions are discussed. In Part II, explores the notion of "layers" of addiction and more specific ways to address addiction from a transcontextual perspective, such as, (a) personal psychological contexts; (b) social and cultural contexts; (c) political, economic, and historic contexts; and (d) the contexts of reflection, meditation, and therapy approaches. Part III briefly discusses the nature and issues of pathology, and how addictions seem to arise from pathologies in one or more contexts in which one lives and works.

Part I

Schooling in the United States and elsewhere has been heavily influenced by a factory model of education, where the intent has been to prepare students to work in factories. Obedience and conformity have been central values of factory workers and public school students (Wood. 1990). Even though society has moved away from an industrial model towards a technological and information-based model, our schools are still deeply embedded in the old model. However, this model has changed and has been perfected with the growth of corporate control over society. The agenda is still the same. The corporate agenda wants to produce obedient and compliant workers who conform to the desires of those in authority. They also want to keep most students and future workers from being too thoughtful and analytical, while maintaining a certain level of literacy that will allow workers to function in the workplace (Marshall, Sears, Allen, Roberts, & Schubert, 2007; Sears & Marshall, 1990). At the same time, the pressure on teachers to obey and conform has increased. High-stakes testing, accountability, efficiency, strict curriculum standards, and teacher-proof curricula have changed teaching. In the 1970's, teachers were

encouraged to try innovative and creative approaches to teaching. But, now teachers are discouraged from such practices, and are mandated to march in line with the corporate agenda. And, the increased presence of testing, standards, and strict curricular approaches not only has created a lifeless educational system that exerts tremendous pressure on students and teachers, but also has resulted in massive profits for educational publishers and testing companies (which are often the same companies). This educational situation has created an atmosphere that intensifies a systemic context that is conducive to developing addictions of all kinds. And, neither students nor teachers are exempt from these addictions.

Addiction, according to Gregory Bateson (1972/2000) in "Cybernetics of 'self': A theory of alcoholism" chapter, is a problem with one's epistemological (i.e., framework of knowledge and beliefs) relationship with one's world. Such problematic epistemologies involve symmetrical or competitive relationships between self and some aspect of the world, which in turn is based on a Cartesian duality that sets up this dynamic. Addiction is an attempt at correcting some aspect of the epistemology. However, this whole dynamic is riddled with double binds, which perpetuate the schismogenetic (splitting apart) pattern of the symmetrical relationships. In other words, the people with addictions are faced with numerous "no win" choices (double binds) that intensify the split or divergence between themselves and others, as well as between themselves and the context with which they are in a competitive epistemological struggle (e.g., a struggle for control over the belief or conceptual framework of the context) (Bateson, 1972/2000). A brief overview of such patterns of addiction are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Patterns of addiction.

Person (or group)	Person (or group)	The "thing" to which one is addicted	The "thing" to which one is addicted
↓	↓	↓	↓
addicted to	in epistemological struggle with	is not	is
↓	↓	↓	↓
some "thing"	external system (context or situation)	the primary issue	an adjustment to the epistemological struggle

Addiction and Schooling

In order to provide a context for this discussion of addiction in education, we need to understand the dynamics of classrooms. When you put 20 or 30 students in a room together, the dynamics of the relationships that are forming along with those that have already formed can best be described as a set of sets of complex systems. When we add a teacher to the mix, we add a hierarchical layer of complexity. The students enter into this classroom with certain assumptions and expectations about schooling. But, they also have their own personal and social characteristics and previously established relationships. The teacher also has certain assumptions and expectations, as well as a particular agenda for the classroom. Many of the assumptions and expectations of the students and teacher may be similar. However, some of these ideas may differ and even clash. The overall context of the institution of education promotes a certain vision of what classrooms should be like, how teachers should teach, how students should act, and so forth. This larger encompassing context promotes a view of learning that is structured around discrete factual information that can be "measured" by tests. Efficiency in covering the curriculum and keeping curriculum coverage consistent across classrooms and schools are of primary concern to the institution. Conformity among teachers and students is a necessity to being efficient and to covering the curriculum.

This overall context exerts a great deal of pressure on teachers and students. In order to keep their jobs, not be criticized, and get pay raises, most teachers succumb to this pressure and conform to the institutional pressures. Even though they may have entered the profession with ideas of making a big difference in children's lives, of creating exciting learning environments, and of being a creative teacher, they quickly conform to the status quo or they drop out of the profession. This tension between the institutional agenda and the teachers creates numerous double binds. If teachers teach to the test, they have not succeeded in motivating and exciting children about learning. If they do not teach to the test, they risk being reprimanded or even losing their jobs. Many other double binds plague teachers throughout their careers.

Students also enter the classroom with assumptions and expectations based on what they have experienced previously in their schooling. They expect to be taught to the test, to

be told what to study, to be told how to act, and so forth. Many students just fall into modes that allow them to succeed with minimal effort. The more rebellious students know what the game is, but refuse to play it. These students fall somewhere along a continuum from doing their own thing (e.g., daydreaming, texting, gaming, Facebooking) and just zoning out of the classroom to trying to undermine and disrupt the classroom routine. But, underlying these various ways of manifesting in the classroom are a host of contextually situated double binds. If they conform to the institutional game plan, they lose their individuality and their own passions for what they may have wanted to learn. If they undermine and disrupt this game plan, they get in trouble. Such double binds are ubiquitous throughout the context of schooling.

Such double binding contexts of schooling set up a number of issues that can be described as addictions. Teachers are caught in situations where, on the one hand, they want to control everything so that it is predictable and "safe" (for themselves, psychologically). On other hand, they want to defer control to others, and just want to be told what to do and how to do it. As occupiers of lower levels of the educational hierarchy, they can exert control over those who are at an even lower level, such as students. And, they can do this most easily through classroom "management," a term borrowed from corporate circles and based on old behaviorist approaches to control. But, where teachers should be able to take control over what they do – teaching, they submit to those higher in the hierarchy. But, at the same time, there is a deeper tension. Even though they teach the way they are told to teach, there is a desire to do what they had wanted to do from the beginning, to inspire children.

At the same time, students want to learn, but the older they get, the less interested they are in the way of learning provided by schools. Some children play the success game and do what they are told to do. It's the path of least resistance and a zombie approach. They just need to do what they are told. They do not need to think about it. Other students resist the pressures of the status quo. They either check out of the student world physically or psychologically or they play with they dynamics, testing what they can or cannot get away with. They risk getting into trouble when they disrupt and undermine the status quo. This context sets up the potentialities for numerous cognitive—behavioral addictions.

The addictions that arise among students and teachers are depicted in Table 2. These addictions are in response to the external set of systems that constrain students and teachers from exerting control over their own lives. The addictions are a means to feel more in control and safe despite the overall circumstances. If something occurs that prevents a student or teacher from partaking in the particular addictive activity, there is a reaction much like withdrawal from a physical substance. For instance, I have purposely designed classes for university students to encourage them to take on more control over the content and design of their assignments. Typically, they are provided an outline of exactly what needs to be done for an assignment, including subheadings for papers. However, I had one assignment that could be done in any modality (from a dramatic performance to a multimedia presentation, from a paper to a musical composition). And, students kicked and screamed. They had tremendous difficulty getting past the idea that they could make a decision. But, that was part of the intent of the assignment.

Table 2. Addiction Matrix of Teachers and Students

	Controlled by	**Control of**
Teachers	*Administrators*	*Students*
addicted to	• Lesson Plans • Curriculum Mandates • Teacher-Proof Curricula • Teaching Protocols	• Management strategies (lists of techniques • Static routines • Authority role over behavior
Students	*Teachers*	*Other Students*
addicted to	• Instructions of what and how to do tasks (what's needed to get an "A") • Grades and other rewards • Resistance strategies • Counter-controlling strategies	• Bullying • Cliques

In addition to the addictive behaviors that typically arise out of our current contexts of education, the pressures to conform and succeed in this setting also have led to a variety of chemical addictions, as well. When teachers cannot control a student who "misbehaves,"

they call in the school counselor, a psychologist, or a doctor along with the parents and get an ADHD diagnosis along with the drugs to control this poorly understood "condition." Students give up their creativity that is suppressed by these ADHD drugs and become dependent upon them in order to "succeed" at the school game.

For compliant (zombie-like) students, the issue may be how to succeed, so they take "study drugs" to help them concentrate and stay awake longer to study. These drugs are the same ones used to control ADHD. In decades past, these drugs were called speed, and were often used to cram for exams. Now they are leading to amphetamine addictions among college students and young professionals. As of 2011, 11% of children between the ages of 4 and 17 have been diagnosed with ADHD (see: http://www.amphetamines.com). As a consequence the use of amphetamine and related drugs have increased. About 13 million people in the United States use amphetamines without prescriptions, and about 85% of grade 10 and 12 students have used these drugs (http://www.intheknowzone.com).

Teachers are not immune to chemical dependencies and addictions, either. Although there are very few large scale studies with supporting data, there are indications that many teachers may have problems with alcohol and other substances. Their attempts at negotiating their way through a work environment riddled with double binds can provide a context for substance abuse as a way of coping, especially if the particular cognitive—behavioral addictions (as previously shown in Table 2) are not providing a "safe" context in the workplace.

The addictions discussed thus far are complex. The problems that lead to these addictions are not the fault of any particular person or group, but rather are a problem of the relationships or the dynamics of multiple systems in relation to one another. Students and teachers are affected by their peers, their families, the school culture, the school administrators, the school district, the state and national legislators that control school policies, and the corporations that produce and make money from testing and curriculum standards and materials. Students face increasingly difficult contexts in their classrooms and schools. They also live in contexts with high stakes testing and irrelevant curriculums along with uncertain futures where jobs are harder to get, where jobs that are available are not particularly secure or meaningful, and where environmental and social collapse loom on the horizon.

Alternatives

The addictions in education are part of a web of dysfunctional relations between the institution of education, the politics of our societies, the economic interests of corporations and politicians, and multiple layers of social contexts, as well as the psychological contexts of students, teachers, parents, and administrators at all levels of schooling. There is no *one* solution. However, there are a number of things that need to be addressed before some healing can occur.

Some issues that need to be addressed include the following:

- We need to decrease the influence of politicians over education. At the very least, national politics can promote some very general principles about education, but the more specific guidelines should be left to regional or state and local agencies. However, the bulk of educational decisions should be made by individual teachers, teams of teachers, and schools in collaboration with students.

   In politics, we have people with no expertise in education making decisions about education. There are many instances where state or provincial and local superintendents of education have no expertise in the field. And, even if superintendents have education backgrounds, not all backgrounds are equivalent. Some superintendents seem to be examples of the Peter Principle, while others are exceptional.

- Students need relevant and meaningful school experiences. The curriculums they are experiencing have little relationship to the uncertain futures they face. We need to focus on the real issues that students face and that will provide them with the cognitive, social, and functional tools to deal with the problems and issues they are likely going to face. We also have to do away with specific national curriculums and standards. We can have some general national guidelines, but in order to make learning relevant and meaningful, educators in collaboration with students, must develop curricular emphases that are meaningful and relevant to the local population.

- Students and teachers live in a world of disconnects and fragmentation. Physical and psychological violence are not uncommon and, in fact, characterize much of

schooling in this country. Schools need to emphasize the development of learning communities that value and help develop interpersonal relationships among all community members (teachers, staff, administrators, students, and parents). Such communities need to have authentic purposes, meaningful activities, and ways to engage everyone as participants in the community. Changing the social contexts of schools can have a huge impact on the life experiences of students and teachers.

- Current assessment practices are meaningless in that they try to "measure" learning, which in itself is not something that is measureable. Learning is complex and continually changing. In addition, learning has no dimensions or substance to measure. We can, however, describe some aspects of learning as they manifest in student talk, activities, and artifacts of their work. Assessment practices need to focus on these descriptive approaches and de-emphasize testing.

   As a side note, we are addicted to numbers, measuring, and quantifying almost everything. It's a security blanket that interferes with understanding deeper relationships and issues. We have to get past this addiction before we can change some of these other issues.

   Teacher assessment has been based primarily on student test scores, which is just an exacerbation of the inability to measure learning. Current practices also emphasize conformity among teachers. Such a focus on conformity is problematic. Diversity of personality, background, interests, expertise, and teaching style is the essence of democratic education. Such diversity provides students with a wider array of social-emotional-cognitive tools and a wider variety of perspectives. We need to assess teachers as individuals and how successful they are at manifesting their strengths and how aware they are of their weaknesses and how well they address these weaknesses.

- Ideally, education should be conceived of as a process of improvisation, where the curriculum emerges or arises as students and teachers engage in various activities. Teachers should be encouraged and appreciated for their abilities to improvise. In the same way, we need to cultivate improvisation among students. Improvisation is the manifestation of creativity and confidence in oneself as an improviser (Nachmanovich, 1990).

- Much of education is plagued by an adversarial relationship between parents and school personnel. We need to change the nature of these relationships by communicating clearly the goals and approaches of each teacher and how such goals and approaches help children learn and grow. We also need to promote collaboration with parents and involve them in extending children's learning into their family and other social experiences. This may include parent education and other ways to take learning and growth into the local community.

Each of these problems and the approaches to addressing these problems are directed at changing the contexts that exist around school. We need to decrease the challenging double binds that currently plague students, parents, and teachers. We also need to develop positive relationships within all of the contexts that surround schooling in this country. In working in this way, we can remediate some of the factors that lead to various addictions that permeate schooling.

Part II

Addiction is not a simple problem of a singular cause, but rather is a problem of multiple interacting causal factors that span multiple contexts. In the first part of this paper, I discussed instances of addiction within the context of education. In this second part, I focus again on education, but will draw out connections to other types of addiction. However, in this particular part, the emphasis is on how we can approach addressing addictions of various kinds.

Contexts

Many addictions appear to occur in layers. If we consider the addiction to control discussed in the first paper, that particular addiction overlays addictions to more specific types of behaviors, such as those involving expectations of children and those involving expectations of how teachers should act. And, then there are more specific addictions that fall under the addiction to expectations of children, such as having children walk in lines, sitting in assigned seats, raising their hands to talk, or responding to questions with textbook answers. More specific addictions that fall under expectations for teachers may

include acting and talking in formal ways, asking questions that have one correct answer as determined by textbooks or tests, rewarding children for expected behaviors, and so forth. These layers of addiction have roots in (a) one's own particular psychology, which involves one's fears, uncertainties, prior experiences, confidence, beliefs, epistemologies, and so on; (b) the social norms of schooling and teachers; (c) the political forces that determine much of what occurs in schools; (d) the corporate forces that influence textbooks, curricular materials, teacher development, and testing; (e) the local community and the parents fears, desires, beliefs, etc., and (f) the paradigms and worldviews that encompass much of what is thought, enacted, and written about in our schools, communities, states, and nations.

And, oddly enough, some educational addictions manifests as oppositional binaries. Some teachers may be addicted to controlling students, but also are addicted to relinquishing control to higher authorities. So, while one teacher may assert control over children while teaching, they resist taking control over how and what they teach by submitting to the mandates of the educational system or institution (Bloom, 2002). These kinds of oppositional addictions may be a survival response to the double binds they face. And, these double binds reinforce the addictions and perpetuate their continuance.

Addressing Addictions

In order to address such addictions, we must work across multiple contexts, across multiple layers of addiction, and with the double binds and other demands that are creating the addictive situation. Such complex and intertwined systems of addiction cannot be addressed though simplistic, linear cause and effect approaches. But, rather, must be addressed through transcontextual, multi-layered, and non-linear approaches.

Take for example, teachers with addiction issues involving both controlling of students and relinquishing control. In such cases, there has to be a transcontextual, multifaceted approach. The following points describe a number of relevant contexts and the approaches that may be required.

- **Personal Psychological Contexts** – For any addiction, we need to address the psychological contexts that include personal epistemologies, beliefs, and other

cognitive—emotional aspects. Although there may be a great deal of variability of needs among individual teachers, certain general aspects have to be addressed.

◦ In *addressing personal epistemologies*, teachers need to spend time exploring their own epistemologies or frames of knowledge and meaning, including their beliefs about teaching and learning. Any modifications to their epistemologies must come from their own motivations to do so, through exploration, reflection, and analysis. However, the people who may be facilitating sessions with teachers, must also present viable alternatives from which teachers may choose to select various aspects to explore. But, such efforts may be seen as "playing with possibilities." While working with many deeply held beliefs and assumptions, there is a tendency to make such work to be a *serious* undertaking, but, at this level of embeddedness, there needs to be some sense of playfulness in order to allow for change to begin to occur. Being too serious can risk withdrawal and a solidification of one's belief frameworks. Teachers need to respect their own beliefs and epistemologies, but also need to be willing to evaluate the effects and appropriateness of such beliefs and knowledge. Throughout the reflective sessions, teachers need to ponder a number of general questions. What do I really believe about how teachers should relate to students? What do I really believe about how I should approach teaching? What do I really believe about how children learn best? What is learning? What knowledge is most valuable to learn? How do my actions match to what I really believe? For more deeply held beliefs about teaching and learning that may be problematic in terms of what children actually need, different sorts of questions and activities also may be necessary. In such cases, teachers may need to look at videos of their own students during classes to evaluate how engaged they are, etc. But, teachers also need to be exposed to a variety of different approaches to teaching the same thing through videos or observations of other teachers. Then, they need to explore the same sorts of questions that will help to expose their own epistemologies. In all cases, one's own epistemologies need to be made explicit, so that each individual can explore their own values and beliefs about teaching and learning.

◦ People also need to *recognize their motivations and emotional states and reactions*. We often purely take actions based on our emotional responses. And, we often do not

recognize the motivations we have for doing what we do. So, a teacher may take action based on anger, frustration, or whatever, but the actions taken in response to such emotions may not conform with one's goals or motivations. It is far too easy to fall into reacting purely through emotions, rather than understanding the emotional reaction while also weighing that reaction against a critical rationale. Emotions can provide important insights into situations, but they can lead us astray. We need to see them in a broader context of the issues at hand. To complicate situations even further, as teachers, we may hold contradictory motivations and intentions, and may react in ways that undermine any of our motivations and intentions. We may say that we want children to develop responsibility. And, then we can say that we need to control the children. Then, in the midst of classroom action, we may find that we get angry all too often, which can undermine both the development of responsibility and our control over the classroom.

◦ Fundamentally, both of the previous points describe an *approach to understanding oneself* in our personal and professional contexts. What are our own patterns of interacting, reacting, and acting in one or more contexts? What double binds do we create for ourselves and what double binds are we being subjected to? We need to make these patterns explicit, along with our beliefs, motivations, intentions, and so forth. Once these aspects are made explicit, we can begin to work with ways to be less controlled by our emotions and conflicting beliefs, and to work with ways of dealing with the double binds and other traps that may ensnare us in addictive types of behavior. The specific approaches to working with these situations are probably as varied as there are individuals. However, as a general guide, one needs to (a) make our epistemologies, motivations, and patterns as explicit as possible; (b) begin a process of noting, but not necessarily judging, how we manifest these epistemologies, motivations, and pattern, and noting what results from these actions; (c) we need to be sure not to be a harsh critic of ourselves, but just an observer, who notes what happens, while trying to be kind to ourselves (being a harsh critic may backfire and create double binds that will be difficult to transcend); and (d) slowly try to change the way we act, interact, and react, while inquiring into how such changes in our own actions affects others and how we feel. This can be a slow and frustrating process, but

may work best with one or a few other like-minded colleagues to support one another in the process.

- **Social and Cultural Contexts**
  - ◦ The social and cultural contexts that have to be addressed involve religious contexts, racial—ethnic—cultural contexts, family, friends, school groupings, neighborhoods, and the larger state, regional, and national contexts that affect one's epistemologies and emotional—value alignments and reactions. These overlapping and sometimes contradictory contexts affect individuals in a variety of ways. There is no "one way" of affecting individuals and these contexts may affect a specific individual in different ways depending upon particular circumstances and events at different points in time.
  - ◦ However, if one is looking at one's own multi-contextual influences, the same sort of approach as discussed under the previous solid-bulleted point needs to be taken. We need to identify as many contextual influences as possible and make such influences explicit. In my own family, the hidden and not-so-hidden racism and other biases were insidious influences on my early development. But, once I began to notice and clearly identify each and every bias and how my family propagated these, I began to notice when these almost subconscious and automatic reactions would arise in my own life. By the time I entered college, I was working full force to counter these effects, by noticing them when they stuck out their ugly head, and then just said to myself with some humor, "that's b.s." and just dropped them. I tried not to make a big deal of it, but just noticed and dropped, while realizing these thoughts and reactions were not me, but were the lingering products of my family and some of my social contexts. Blaming oneself and even blaming my family and childhood friends and teachers is not productive and may in fact make change more difficult. Bigotry and bias are handed down socially. They are examples of social learning. To counter such learning processes, one needs to inquiry into the process without seeking blame. It is what it is, but it just is not what one wants to be controlled by or wants to value. For children, the process is similar in that teachers can help children explore their own contexts and the ways in which they value or don't value these influences, much in the way "values clarification" (Simon, Howe, & Kurschenbaum, 1972) approached working with children in the 1960's and 1970's in some classrooms.

- ◦ Any change at this level of deep, symmathesetic learning is a long and arduous process. We need to be patient with ourselves and our students. But, what we are doing is initiating a process that may take years.

- **Political, Economic, and Historic Contexts**

  - ◦ The political and economic contexts in which we live affect our epistemologies and emotional—value systems. They are similar to the contexts discussed previously. However, these contexts are taught in schools in ways that are propagandized and/or are taught in ways that are fallacious, misleading, uncritical, and superficial (Loewen, 1995/2007). In addition, most teachers (encouraged by various forces within schools) may teach about something like "democracy," but never allow children to actually experience the dynamics of democracy in the classroom (Wood, 1990). The result is that as children grow into adults, they operate under a large number of faulty and conflicting assumptions about how our society functions politically and how the economy works and affects our lives in many ways (Marshall, Sears, Allen, Roberts, & Schubert, 2000/2007). We are led to believe that having lots of "things" makes us successful and a standing member of society. And, we are led to believe that the converse also is true: that not having lots of possessions makes us a worthless and a bad member of society. We tend not to even question these assumptions.

  - ◦ Inquiring into a more accurate and deeper understandings of politics, economics, and history in conjunction with personal inquiries and reflections on one's prior knowledge and assumptions is required. In all cases, the contrasts between the two versions (the propagandized and misleading vs. the more accurate and substantial) need to be elucidated and made explicit. At this point, we and our students can reassess our values and opinions based on a more rigorous basis of knowledge.

- **Reflection, Contemplation, Meditation, and Therapy Approaches**

  - ◦ Trying to address the entire transcontextual spectrum of issues that affect our addictions probably requires more than just a rational process of thinking through these issues. For some of the issues, such an approach is required to reveal underlying assumptions and other aspects of our individually and socially constructed epistemologies. However, there are many obstacles that can prevent us from moving forward or getting past these obstacles. When the basis of our identities and our

deeply embedded beliefs, emotions, and values, along with deeply entrenched and habitual patterns, are being challenged, we need some additional approaches that focus on this level of our being.

◦ Issues of ego[1] can be difficult, if not impossible, to address by thinking about them (see endnote #6 for a clarification of this sense of ego from a Buddhist rather than Western psychological perspective). Much of what we do at deeper levels of our being involve clinging to ideas and patterns that reinforce a faulty sense of solidity and continuity. We can't think away these patterns. We need some approach that can short-circuit these automatic and deeply embedded patterns.

◦ *Reflecting* on patterns and ideas may be helpful with certain issues, as discussed previously, but may fall short of having an impact on the more deeply embedded patterns.

◦ *Contemplation* and *meditation* practices of some kind may be effective for many of the more deeply embedded patterns and issues of ego-clinging. In meditation practices, such as mindfulness, one follows the breath (as a mere personality-less, but, fortunately, continuing rhythm to which we can pay attention. At the same time, when one notices one's involvement with a thought, the thought is labeled at "thinking" and then one returns to an awareness of the breath. This is a very simple description of the technique, but what can occur over time is that we become accustomed to dropping our patterns of thinking. We can begin to not believe every thought that pops into our heads.

◦ In still other cases, the nature and embeddedness of certain patterns may require more directed work with a *therapist*.[2] In fact, someone may not be able to meditate, because what arises is so disturbing and frightening. In such cases, a skilled therapist can help one to short-circuit these patterns in ways that are individualized and more directed at specific issues. Hypnosis and a variety of approaches to therapy can help to once again short-circuit some of the more tenacious patterns, while providing a safe and a supporting environment.

Discussion and Implications

Although the continuum of addictions ranges from the life-disabling and life-threatening to the mildly life altering, the fundamental characteristics and patterns are similar. In general, the characteristics and patterns of addiction involve the following:

- multiple contexts that affect the addictive patterns;
- epistemological orientations or allegiances and the conflicts with contradictory contexts, systems, or epistemologies;
- embedded and habitualized patterns of thinking and behaving;
- the "thing" to which one is addicted is likely not the primary issue.

If we wish to address an addiction, the patterns of approach are similar, as well. Whatever we do needs to be recursive. We need to cycle back through the same contexts, patterns, and epistemologies, while adding new connections, new disruptions, and new insights to each iteration. In essence, we need to be rewriting our stories.

As a long-time, but occasionally intermittent smoker, I went through periods of frequently stopping. As in Allan Ginsberg's (n.d.) "Put Down Your Cigarette Rag (Don't Smoke)," I stopped for a few hours or a day, but quickly resumed. I knew intellectually all of the downsides of tobacco, in terms of the physiological and health contexts, the social contexts, the political contexts, the economics contexts, but as with any addict, I was able to rationalize, compartmentalize, and continue smoking, It controlled my life. I had to plan around going outside for a smoke. Travelling by plane became a huge inconvenience. But, then one day walking in the woods, my chest started to hurt… like hundreds of pins sticking into my chest with every breath. When I got home, I jumped into the car, rolled down the window, and, as it turned out, smoked my last cigarette as I drove to the Emergency Room. Several hours later, I departed the hospital, where the doctor could find nothing abnormal. But, I began rewriting my story at the moment I heard the results. The new story did not involve cigarettes or planned excursions to smoke. I focused on how good it felt to take a deep breath, and, after a while, how much better food

tasted, and how I could hike without getting winded as easily. I had no

withdrawal symptoms. The story had been rewritten.

But, there also is a sense of lightness, of playfulness, that can help. Making "things" (whatever they might be) into big deals is rarely beneficial. Even if the stakes are high, it's best to create little gaps, relax, and play (with ideas, techniques, behaviors, and whatever). When we play (Bateson, 1972/2000, 1976, 1979/2002, 1991; Bloom, 2015; Gray, 2011; Weems, 2014; Wright, 2008), we can find creative ways to disrupt the patterns and feedback loops that maintain the addictive context and processes. If we play with our patterns of teaching, we may find that there are other ways of teaching that don't maintain power struggles or the control conflicts that can arise between teachers and students. With play, we have the abilities to experiment, explore, and investigate our patterns and their effects without feeling like we are at the mercy of unseen forces. Our worlds can become playgrounds, where we can change the rules and break the patterns.

The need to reflect on one's contexts, epistemology, patterns, and behaviors also should be a playful process. It's like standing by a lake in the early morning. The fog is beginning to lift. There's not a single ripple in the water that's lit softly by the rising sun. If we look down into the water, we can see ourselves and the foggy background with soft glimmers of light. If we look farther away into the water, we can see the surrounding contexts from a different angle and different perspective. It turns our world upside down, so to speak. Then, we can step back and skim a rock across the mirror-like water. With each bounce, the stone quietly moves off into the distance leaving behind ripples in the glass-like surface. The light touch of these disruptions provide a playful contrast to our mental state, breaking the patterns that continue. Even if water is choppy, we see our reflections and can add further ripples with skipping stones. We can play with our reflections and look at our patterns and contexts from different perspectives. The process of reflecting can disrupt some of the obvious and less obvious feedback loops and self-reinforcing patterns. But, it needs to be done with a light touch, with the sense of quiet meditation or contemplation, where the inner turmoil is in stark contrast to the world around us that is just what it is, where none of our dramas are occurring. A walk on the beach, around a pond, or in a forest is an even better background for reflective sessions where our emotions may be enflamed,

but the context in which we are walking is just there… waves breaking, ripples in the water, or wind gently whistling through the branches of trees. We need the contrast, where there is a space of "nothing special" happening within which our own state of mind is whirling. If we just sit with our racing, tumultuous mental world, it can get quite claustrophobic. It may seem insurmountable and solid. But, if we can notice all the space around us, where nothing in particular is happening, we start to feel like there is some room to breathe. At this point, some of the feedback loops that feed off of our addictive storylines and emotions can begin to crumble little by little… or sometimes crack completely.

Part III. Additional Thoughts on Pathology

Stephen Nachmanovich's introduction of the Tibetan Buddhist representation of the Hungry Ghost Realm into our discussion is an interesting psychological perspective for many of our addictions, such as those involved with the consumption of goods and resources, and with gaining and maintaining power and control. However, I'm not so sure it works with all addictions. Some addictions may not crave more and more, but rather are more concerned with maintaining a status quo, such as smoking. A long time smoker may even smoke less than in years past, but needs to maintain a certain steady state. The Hungry Ghost Realm does involve some sense of a poverty mentality as a background for all the craving. In this Realm, we feel like we lack something that prevents us from being "whole" or being a fully functioning person in some way. As a result, we think that consuming more of something (food, power, whatever), we will move beyond this poverty. Of course, these strategies for getting more don't work. I think that many of the other addictions that don't directly fit into the Hungry Ghost Realm are stuck in a poverty mentality even though the people involved may not be craving more and more of whatever. But, again, I'm not sure that the context of a poverty mentality contributes to all addictions. More research into the dynamics of addictions to all sorts of substances, patterns, actions, and so forth is needed.

In the following paragraphs, I want to describe an overall approach that we take "around" and that I described briefly during our online meeting. However, I'd like to describe what I mean by "pathology" in the following discussion. I also think that we may

want to discuss what "pathology" means and produce some sort of agreed upon explanation/description.

Gregory suggests that pathology has to do with a blockage or confusion in the relationships between messages and the entire system and the whole context, where the system and context are damaged (Bateson & Bateson, 1987/2005). So, from this rather simple definition, where pathology has to do with relational problems that damage the entire context, we seem to be describing a situation where addiction occurs where someone or some group is trying to deal with some pathology or something that is chronically out of balance in one or more of the contexts within which he, she, or they reside. This pathology may involve a poverty mentality that is propagated by the contexts within which one lives or works, or it may involve a context that perpetuates a Hungry Ghost Realm type of existence. In our society, we have propagated a notion that having lots of "things" are an indication of success and value as a person. Yet, at the same time, such a materialistic goals sets up a majority of people for failure within a system that favors the already wealthy. This dynamic seems to be pathological in that it harms the entire social context. It does not promote a sense of healthy equanimity or balance.

In situations where someone is addicted to a substance, the pathologies may lie in one or more contexts. The pathology in the relationships within the social context as just described may contribute to a pattern of substance addiction. The medical context, which has promoted a sense of "quick fix" and a sense of treating symptoms rather than multiple or even singular underlying causes, sets up an expectation of pseudo-health based on eliminating pain. At the same time, the causes of pain are not addressed, and the treatment can begin to cause a rebound of pain requiring positive feedback loop of increasing medications. The corporate pharmaceutical context promotes this quick fix mentality with both medical professionals and patients. Of course, the biological context of the issue causing pain is some pathology in one's biological system. Other contexts can be involved, as well. But, the idea here is that one or more pathological contexts can contribute to a person's learning how to deal with the pathological situation. And, this learning may lead to addiction to a substance, a pattern of thinking, a pattern of action, and so forth.

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End Notes

[1] "Ego" in this particular discussion is focused on the Buddhist perspective, as opposed to a Western psychological perspective. The Western psychological perspective has more to do with personality, self-efficacy, confidence, and so forth, which are certainly part of the addiction contexts. However, in this discussion, ego is discussed in terms of the fundamental processes involved in trying to create a solidified sense of "I" or "me." From this perspective, there is no solid sense of self. There is nothing permanent or unchanging. In order to achieve what appears to be solid is what Buddhists refer to as ego. This ego is comprised of a variety of strategies that essentially create a sense of separation from others and our worlds by filtering, categorizing, and conceptualizing all sensory input and by filling in the gaps in this seemingly solid world with all kinds of entertainment (which includes anger and aggression) and with random thoughts of all kinds. Try walking down a street or sitting in a chair for 10 minutes without thinking. We may last a few seconds, before we find ourselves caught up in these "filler" thoughts, which we may even justify as significant or important (i.e., further embellished thoughts and rationales). And, then try spending one day on a weekend at home without doing anything. Prepare 3 meals of food ahead of time, so you just have to eat. But, do not read, do not watch TV, do not take a walk, do not exercise, do not listen to music – just sit in a chair. You'll probably be climbing the walls within an hour. On the other hand, this sense of ego

does not negate sense of self-efficacy or confidence. In fact, as these attachments to our ego clinging patterns drop away, our senses of well-being and confidence may become more resilient.

[2] Historically, some of the notable therapists have include Milton H. Erickson, Erik H. Erickson, Jay Haley, among others.