Deep Learning in the Sociological Classroom:
Understanding Craving and Understanding Self

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Abstract: Deep learning is a dialectical process; the tension between the intellectual understanding and the emotional experience of a subject matter can result in self-insight that has transformative potential. Insight into the self in relationship to the subject matter is the hallmark of this symbolic interactionist understanding of deep learning. Students in two iterations of a senior-level seminar on symbolic interaction abstained from an object of desire for a two-week period; during this time, they blogged about their experiences abstaining, craving, and relapsing. At the end of the two-week period, these blogs were combined to form a qualitative database that was subsequently uploaded into a qualitative data analysis program for phenomenological analysis. The students used this database to write a seminar paper about the overall structure and process of craving that elucidated both the intellectual and the emotional components of learning. This researcher analyzed the students' blogs and papers for signs of deep learning. In general, the integration of the emotional experience with craving and the associated intellectual learning about craving and the transformation of self, signifies that the dialectical process of deep learning about craving can occur in a college classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Does emotion have a place in learning? Intellectual learning takes center stage in the college seminar; students exert effort to learn the material at hand. Yet, those profound emotional experiences that make up our lives are effortlessly integrated into the very fabric of our being. Is there another way of learning whose focus is not solely the intellectual understanding of information as normally encountered in the classroom? The role of emotion in learning about craving is the focus of this study.

This study is neither an assessment of a classroom exercise nor a research project on craving, per se, although some assessment conclusions and understandings about craving can be clearly gleaned. Rather, this study explores the potential of integrating an emotional experience with the intellectu-

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al learning that is already taking place within the sociological classroom as one way of adding depth to the learning experience. The deep learner emerges with an understanding of one's self in relationship to the subject matter, and this understanding may motivate action.

This paper begins with an overview of the theoretical roots of deep learning as experiential learning, continues with the development of craving as an experiential object, follows with the methodological processes at work, and then elaborates on the results of this exercise in relationship to the intellectual, emotional, and self-revelatory process of learning about craving.

Deep Learning as Experiential Learning

> Imagine that there is a fundamental learning experience. It is at once emotional and intellectual, mental and physical, social and personal, totally unique yet freely shared. There is a communal place where this experience becomes positively energized and charged. This is the kind of experience which I call "deep learning." (Bentz 1992:72)

Deep learning is both intellectual and emotional. According to Bentz (1992), intellectual learning, the first element of deep learning, is a rational, cognitive, "philosophical quest for understanding" (p. 72) that focuses on discovering meaning. The traditional educational seminar is organized around this goal. The second element of deep learning is emotion or feeling that emerges from self-revelatory feedback; however, emotional learning is normally considered to be antithetical to intellectual learning. Bentz (1992) proposes that deep learning is the synthesis of the dialectical tension between these two elements, resulting in the production of a more mature so-

cial actor. The mature individual is one who has an understanding of one's self in relationship to the intellectual material.

Emotion and self are intimately connected. According to Denzin (1984), emotion is at the core of the self; emotions are "self-feelings" and are both the "self-in-feeling" and those feelings directed toward and about the self. An existing emotion provides insight into the self; for example, when one feels remorse about stealing a vehicle, that remorse reveals a self who values upholding the law. Insight about the self is made possible because emotions are at the core of the self and define its very existence.

Experience evokes emotion. This fundamental proposition is the starting point for the sociological theories of emotion (Denzin 1984). Emotional experiences are powerful because they have transformational potential. Not all experiences are transformational or lead to a change in how one views one's self. Those that are directed toward and about the self can have significant consequences for the self; it is these experiences that I refer to as "emotional experiences." Action is made possible through reflexive (Mead 1934) experience that "transforms the impulses, feelings, and desires of concrete experience into higher-order purposeful action" (Kolb 1984:22) that is based upon foresight of consequences. By viewing oneself as the object toward which the community responds, one finds one's place in the social world; this placement brings with it an understanding of one's self, whether good or bad, that evokes emotions; these revelations are the substance of emotional learning and, thus, have the power to change.   Emotional experience is an anti-thesis to the thesis of intellectual understanding. Max Weber's (1968) dictum, "One need not have been Caesar in order to understand Caesar" (p. 5), raises the question of the relationship between experience and understanding (Harrington 2001). First, some argue that one does not have to experience something to understand it intellec-

tually. According to Weber (1968), one can understand another's rational-purposive behavior by understanding its socio-historical context even if one has never participated in such behavior. Second, just because one experiences something does not mean understanding ensues, especially if one is trying to understand another's experience. We cannot actually "feel others' experiences" even while having our own similar experience (Harrington 2001:311); to assume otherwise generates what Harrington (2001) referred to as "naïve empathy view of understanding"(p.311). However, Harrington (2001) argues, and I agree, that there is a "wider legitimate function of feeling and imagination in understanding" (p.313). A more complete understanding emerges from the dialectical tension between our now emotional experience of a phenomenon and our intellectual understanding of the same.

Emotional experiences complement intellectual understanding. Although the exact nature of this relationship between experience and understanding is disputed in the philosophical literature (Ludlow, Nagasawa and Stoljar 2004), it is embodied by the "wow" (Ludlow, Nagasawa and Stoljar 2004) evoked by a new experience. For example, imagine after a lifetime being stereo-blind or unable to see depth, one is able to "see" snow for the first time, even though one is a neurobiologist who technically understands vision:

> One winter day, I was racing from the classroom to the deli for a quick lunch…I stopped short. The snow was falling lazily around me in large, wet flakes. I could see the space between each flake, and all the flakes together produced a beautiful three-dimensional dance. In the past, the snow would have appeared to fall in a flat sheet in one plane slightly in front of me. I would have felt like I was looking in on the

> snowfall. But now I felt myself within the snowfall, among the snowflakes. … I was overcome with a deep sense of joy…. (Sacks 2006:73)

In the above example, Sue Parry, referred to as "Stereo Sue," has a new relationship with snow now that she is able to directly experience it in three dimensions. Joy emerges from her inclusion within the snowfall as an active participant rather than as an observer. Stereo Sue's immersion in snow is an example of experiential learning that is profoundly emotional and, thus, expands her intellectual understanding of stereovision.

Deep learning is experiential learning of another kind, one which directly acknowledges the importance of emotion. Experiential learning on college campuses has typically taken the form of service learning. Within the service learning context, the student learns while providing a needed service to a community-based organization (Blouin and Perry 2009), for example, tutoring at a local children's center. The form the service takes can be research (Marullo, Moayedi and Cooke 2009) like performing a needs assessment, but frequently, it is the fulfillment of organizational tasks such as program oversight. Observation also provides experiences that promote student learning (Meisel 2008) whether it be visiting a prison or doing a police patrol ride-a-long. A crucial element of all these forms of experiential learning is reactive process brought about by the reflection on an experience (Wurdinger 2005) that is frequently generated by journaling or classroom discussion. While deep learning can take place in these more traditional service learning locations, I believe that deep learning is also possible within the seminar setting if the student has an emotional experience with the subject matter.

The seminar experience can facilitate deep learning if it is properly structured. According to Bentz (1992), the ideal group pro-

cess that maximizes intellectual learning or truth-seeking is one in which power is leveled (Habermas 1973, Habermas 1979). Emotional learning emerges when one utilizes Satir's (1983) "leveling" or "congruent communication" that involves understanding of one's feelings and, subsequently, non-aggressive communication. When combined with Lang's (1983) "derivatives" or indirect and/or metaphorical statements about the relationship at hand, one can see how the topics of conversation in the group or seminar context can relay meaning, even if indirectly, about the emotional context of the learning that is taking place. Having a comfortable atmosphere in which self-revelatory feedback emerges and is considered in a non-threatening manner creates an environment where deep-learning can find its place in the classroom.

A seminar on symbolic interaction (SI) provides an ideal opportunity for a deep learning experience because deep learning is rooted within this theoretical tradition. First, SI is premised upon the idea that meaning is not inherent within an object but is socially constructed (Blumer 1998/1969). Second, SI is the sociological perspective that places primacy on the self (Cooley 1956, Goffman 1959). Third, the reflexive nature of SI (Mead 1934) is compatible with the reflection at the core of experiential learning that can result in self-transformation. Fourth, the proposition that emotions are rooted in social experience and have self-transformative potential is a well-accepted tenet of SI (Denzin 1984). Finally, SI is compatible with qualitative inquiry (Blumer 1969), an approach that is amenable to addressing the depth of the emotional experiences and consequences of deep learning for self. Methodologically, the symbolic interactionist is forever trying to understand the perspective of the social actor. The SI seminar provides the ideal opportunity for deep learning, but it needs an object upon which to focus.

CRAVING AS AN EXPERIENTIAL OBJECT

What is a viable object of a deep learning experience? Understanding alcoholism from the perspective of the social actor as presented in Norman Denzin's work, *The Alcoholic Society* (1993) was the focus of the seminar within which this classroom exercise took place. Denzin's (1993) ideas are insightful and challenging. Although I was convinced that the students had a grasp of his ideas on an intellectual level, I wondered whether the students would better understand the predicament of the alcoholic if they had a "deeper" learning experience. How could one deepen the understanding of alcoholism within a classroom-based exercise?

Craving, an integral part of the alcoholic experience, became the focus of this experiential exercise. Desire, the epitome of symbolic representation in action, is a "wanting" of something that at that moment is out-of-reach; "craving" is a form of desire and is a more concrete concept that applied to the seminar's topic of alcoholism (Denzin 1984, Fitzgerald 2010). I settled upon Drummond's (2001) definition of craving as "the conscious experience of a desire to take a drug" (p. 35). Some propose that craving is the core process of addiction (Elster 1999). However, I did not want the students to think that what they were experiencing was the same craving of addiction, especially to alcohol or drugs, but rather an analogous one (Elster 1999). This constraint was talked about extensively in the seminar; however, the experience generated, while not the same craving as in addiction, was an experience of craving with an object of desire.

My interest was not in physical craving (i.e., that which is due to physical withdrawal symptoms) but in symbolic craving (i.e., craving that is not driven by physiology, but by the symbolic representation of the object of desire, something which occurs long after the physical craving is gone) (Denzin 1984, Isbell 1955). This distinction arises in phe-

nomenological accounts of alcoholism (Elster 1999, Fitzgerald 2010, Jellinek 1960, Lindesmith 1975, Ludlow, Nagasawa and Stoljar 2004, Manderson 1995) that are primarily descriptive in nature and that pay attention to the human experience of addiction. Even though phenomenological accounts of addiction that focus unduly on craving and its relationship to relapse are contradicted by a growing body of empirical literature (Adinoff et al. 2007), I did believe that this approach would provide invaluable insight for the students. But is craving an emotional experience?

Emotion and craving are intertwined. Some scholars argue that emotion is the source of all desire (Irvine 2006); we desire those things that will make us feel good. Euphoria emerges upon the realization of the impending fulfillment of desire; dysphonia emerges upon the continued frustration of desire's fulfillment (Elster 1999). Craving, as a conscious desire (Drummond 2001), has the potential to be a profoundly emotional experience. Likewise, relapse has both an emotional basis and emotional consequences as one's view of oneself as being in-control is threatened (Elster 1999).

In sum, integration of this understanding of both deep learning and craving into a theoretical underpinning of an experiential exercise results in the following:

1) At the beginning, a deep learning exercise needs a purposive action as its focus, like abstaining from an object of desire. According to SI, a driver of purposeful action is one's identity or self, and it is the self that makes its appearance in this approach to deep learning.
2) At the surface, reading the relevant scholarship generates an understanding of craving. A fundamental assumption is that a person identifies with the object of desire, even if the person is not aware of such. One reason for this lack of awareness may be that the person does not have a reflexive relationship

with this object.
3) To go deeper, one becomes immersed within the emotional experience of craving. In reflection, an understanding of self emerges within the experience; meaning, one becomes aware of the importance of this object for one's identity. An experience may result in confirmation or rejection of this identity, motivated by pride or self-mortification.
4) As one proceeds, learning becomes deep when the individual is able to integrate one's self experience with the relevant scholarship resulting in a changed self. The statement, "Oh, this is what is meant by ____!" exemplifies an "aha!" moment at the core of deep learning that extends itself to self. Identity changes in this process, even if it is just by the inclusion of a deeper understanding of craving.
5) At the end, the power of deep learning is in its linkage to behavioral change. Behavioral change is not necessary for learning to be deep because changes in identity are necessary but not sufficient for behavioral change as the individual is enmeshed in a social situation wherein change may not be feasible.
6) With this understanding of the theoretical process at work in this classroom exercise, this paper now presents the specific methodology.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

The immediate methodological dilemma was to create the experience. For two weeks, my students refrained from participating in a behavior that they enjoyed and that was a regular part of their daily lives. My classes undertook this process during two semester-long iterations of ten students each. The objects they chose and the number of students that chose them were as follows: smoking (4), eating chocolate (3), drinking Mountain Dew (1), drinking diet soda (1), eating fast food (1), eating fried food (1),

drinking coffee (2), eating bread (1), biting one's nails (2), watching sports (1), using one's IPod (1), using one's cell phone (1), and watching television (1). The twenty students blogged about their experience, using the self-interview described below, for 12 out of the 14 days in the two-week abstention period. For each class, an NVivo database of these blog experiences with craving was utilized by all the students to understand the phenomenon of craving at both an intellectual and emotional level and served as a basis for their seminar papers on craving.

This section on research methods proceeds by explaining the ethical concerns, the limitations of this project, the structure of the seminar, and the qualitative data collection and analytic techniques used to decipher the emotional nature of the craving experience.

Ethical Issues

The IRB chairperson determined that 45 CFR 46 would consider this a classroom exercise at minimum and as research on instructional technique at maximum; the former does not require IRB review, and the latter was considered exempt. An exemption was applied for and received. Human subjects guidelines were nonetheless adhered to in this seminar; the students were informed of the nature of the classroom project at the beginning of the semester, the class was an elective, and students were advised to use the following criteria as they chose their objects of desire: Their objects 1) were legal, 2) did not involve substance abuse, 3) did not create discomfort when blogging or discussing, 4) would not cause harm to themselves or others, and 5) were g-rated. Students chose aliases, and their identities were considered confidential. The students were aware that information from their blogs or papers could be used for conference presentations or for published papers using their aliases. Within this paper, only student aliases are used with some

choosing surnames. No students dropped the class as a result of this project, and all students gave the appearance of being comfortable with the objects of desire that they chose.

Limitations of this Project

Each student's experience with craving is limited by the very nature of this learning exercise. First, knowing that one can return to the object of desire at the end of the two week period changes the experience fundamentally. A number of students commented on this constraint, especially Chris, one chocolate abstainer. Second, the objects of desire in this exercise are not illegal as are many objects of desire, especially those from which one is often asked or forced to abstain. Third, unlike many objects of desire, some of the objects chosen by the students do not have a direct effect on physiology. Given these constraints, this exercise tries to parlay each individual experience with craving, no matter how imperfect, into a collective understanding for the class.

Asking the students to experience the phenomenon they were studying is a direct contradiction to phenomenological approaches that require "bracketing" or distancing of one's prior personal experience (Creswell 2007). Personal engagement with craving is what differentiates this deep learning experience from a research experience. As students were subjects of their own research, I asked the students to utilize the first person voice in the discussion portion of their seminar papers. Even though there has long been pressure for students and academics to remove themselves from their writing, this experiential exercise requires them to be a subject of their own writing that demands their presence.

Seminar Structure

This paper is a result of two separate, semester-long experiences with this class-

room exercise. The first five weeks of each semester were spent introducing the students to the basic concepts of symbolic interaction, the literature on craving, and the qualitative data manipulation process using QSR NVivo. Data Collection in the form of blogging began midway through the semester and continued for two weeks. For each class separately, I combined all of the students' blogs as one database that the students analyzed for the rest of the semester. The seminar itself was discussion-driven rather than lecture-driven in an attempt to "level" the classroom, and students were frequently asked to lead discussion on the intellectual material for the class. These discussions also included the students' experiences with craving when students were asked to "check in" each time the class met during the abstention process. These experiences were the focus of a relaxed and sometimes humorous discussion about the commonality of their experiences.

The Blogs as Primary Data and the Students' Primary Data Analysis

Data useful in qualitative analysis provides a detailed description of the process being studied (Creswell 2007). The students captured the data by blogging about their experiences. In order to evoke the detail necessary for the students to develop an understanding of craving, a blog "guide" was created that asked the students to address the following, using a story-telling style, in their daily entries: 1) the social and physical situation within which craving emerged, 2) the explanation and description of the specific craving event, 3) the emotions before, during and after craving, 4) the thinking process during and after the craving incident, 5) images or symbolic representations that emerged, and 6) the learning about and the reflection upon one's self (This fifth guideline was added on for the second iteration of this exercise.).

Phenomenological Analysis

To begin, students followed Creswell's (2007) phenomenological analysis and representation process by identifying "significant statements" and identifying one's interpretation of that statement or "meaning." Next, the students grouped these statements into themes that will be discussed in the results section, below. Admittedly, the conceptual element of this kind of data analysis was difficult for the weaker students to achieve, but even these students ended up with some "rough" categories; at the most basic level, the students categorized according to the different foci of the self-interview. Finally, the students were asked to utilize structural and textual phenomenological analysis to assess the context and process of craving, respectively. The central textual or process question addressed in their papers was "What is the experience of craving? Describe it." The central structural or situational question was "What were the conditions (e.g. setting) in which craving occurred?" This distinction between text or process and structure or situation followed Creswell's (2007) simplification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of Moustakas (1994).

Students compiled their work in a fifteen-to-twenty page research paper that integrated the scholarly literature on craving and addiction with the students' own structural and textual analysis. These nineteen seminar papers (since one student withdrew mid-semester), with their strengths and weaknesses, formulated most of the data for this paper; in a sense, this paper is an analysis of the students' analyses of craving. I examined these papers and the students' blogs to assess the extent of their learning about craving and their learning about themselves. The results section that follows includes exemplars of these achievements; I tried to be inclusive of all the students' work while being attuned to not focusing solely on the "best" student's work. What follows is not an analysis of craving

but an analysis of the students' "deep learning" about craving as indicated by both an intellectual understanding of the material and an emotionally understood and transformed self.

The Results

The central question is whether deep learning about craving occurred in this classroom exercise. Deep learning emerges from the tension created between intellectual learning and emotional experience; deep learning's creation is the more mature social actor, one who has a better understanding of himself or herself and the material at hand. I believe that deep learning is evidenced by the following: 1) intellectual learning about craving, 2) emotionally experiencing craving wherein self emerges and is transformed, and 4) integration of these two elements in a dialectic of learning. Each of these objectives is examined, below. All excerpts from the students' papers are presented mostly as is, with grammatical errors, typos, and misspellings left intact. Clarifying notations by me are set off in brackets and in bold (e.g. [**bold**]).

Deep Learning Thesis: Intellectual Learning about Craving

What did the students intellectually learn about craving? Indicators of intellectual learning include evidence of an understanding of the structure and process of craving and the linking of such to the scholarly literature. The nineteen seminar papers were the primary source of data for this section. The elements of craving identified by the students were as follows: coping strategies, defining the situation, experiencing emotions, responding to the social environment, visualizing objects of desire, feeling physiological symptoms, predisposing traits of the actor, realizing the importance of the object, relapsing, breaking routines, succumbing to social pressures, and resolv-

ing stress. This section focuses on two primary elements of craving, identified by the students, that illustrate the overall structure and process of craving: understanding the influence of the social environment and recognizing the importance of visualization of the objects of desire, respectively.

The social structure of craving. The students identified the social situation that evoked craving as one comprised of physical, emotional, and behavioral cues. Thomas evoked Drummond's (2001) understanding of craving to understand the power of cues in relapse. Alice defined a cue as a stimulus that is connected to the behavior as exemplified in the connection that Bella has between the physical presence of coffee and wanting to smoke cigarettes or Jamie has between seeing others use an iPod and his desire to use his own. Cues can also be emotions; Joe illustrated this with Thomas's anger and anxiety that motivate his smoking. Socially, Alice thought that those behaviors that have become habitual are believed to be unconscious by the student. If behavior has become part of a routine, Jamie contended that it is the absence of a constant or part of a routine that serves as a cue. For example, Rainbow Bright always reached for a cigarette when snapping on her seat belt at the beginning of a drive. When trying to stop smoking, she had extreme craving when she entered her car, as did Lucas when trying to abstain from coffee. Whereas some students promoted the idea of the unconscious as a behavioral force, most students believed that it was just inattention to the environment and the ritualized way of responding that gave rise to the actor not knowing what caused his or her behavior. Debbie commented on the problematic of ritual for abstaining and confirms Redish, Jensen, and Johnson's (2008) insights.

The other significant influence in the social environment identified by the students was the social pressure exerted by significant others, namely family and peers. The most important form that social pressure

had on craving and subsequent relapse was through the students' desire for social acceptance. According to Rachel, this desire explained both Joe's decision to watch *American Idol* with his new girlfriend's family even though he had vowed to abstain from television and Alex's decision to purchase chocolate at an elementary school fundraiser despite his decision to abstain from chocolate. She connected her observations with those insights on cell phone use by Walsh, White and Young (2009); Rachel touched on the symbolic nature of the cell phone from which she chose to abstain with her statement that "that feeling is a craving for social acceptance" (Rachel's seminar paper). After his own experience with abstaining from TV, Joe recognized that participation or use of the abstained object was a central activity for membership in social groups as seen in McIlwraith's (2008) research on TV addiction.

Notably, the influence of the existing social environment on successful abstention was not a big focus of the students' analyses. Peer and family could be supportive, thereby increasing the probability of success. As an example, Sarah referred to how Alex's wife refrained from buying chocolate for herself. Thomas asserted that these supportive measures could strengthen ties to family and peers, as indicated by Joe's statement: "I also found out how much my friends care, because they helped me through these past 2 weeks" (Joe's Blog). Lucas commented on the importance of his girlfriend's view of him as a motivating force for not drinking coffee. In addition, Bob Frapples initially thought his girlfriend's ripping the cigarette out of his mouth and breaking it in half was a "mood killer" but then thanked her when he realized she was just "trying to help." Debbie connected this positive support as affirmation of Mead's (1934) "me" that propels the "I" to act in a manner consistent with this "me." The lack of support in efforts at change was surprising but may be indicative of the fact that the objects of desire that were forsaken for the two week period were all considered socially acceptable.

Symbolic representations and the process of craving. The students identified the role of symbols as a dominant part of the craving process itself. Images could allow for the satisfaction of a craving, as Jamie asserted using the following example from Alex's blog that illustrated his reflection one evening after the morning's encounter with his forbidden chocolate:

> The muffins were so moist and fresh looking. They had the chocolate chips on top and were sprinkled with some kind of sugar. The shake was cold and heavy like when the window server handed it out to me. (Alex's blog day 1)

Jamie asserted that imagination allowed for vicarious involvement with the object of desire. On his first day, Alex did refrain from the muffins and shake, although he was extremely annoyed at having to do so.

Images of the object that were idealized, wherein the object was "perfect," were often the source of relapse as observed by Sarah. In her seminar paper, she cited Rose's image of a "chilled Mountain Dew freshly opened" (Rose's blog). As Sarah states, "these idealized, images of perfection are a way an individual trying to rationalize giving in to their craving. When something is perfect and special it becomes hard to walk away from knowing that you may not get another chance at it" (Sarah's seminar paper). Alice, who gave up chocolate, linked this insight to research (Rock and Kambouropoulos 2008, Tiggemann and Kemps 2005) that indicated the significance of visual images in generating craving that precipitated relapse. Likewise, Debbie connected Fitzgerald's (2010) work on the power of images.

Images took on a negative quality once the student had been frustrated by failed attempts at abstention. Joe asserted that at their worst moments of craving, these images took on human characteristics, such as

Thomas imagining that the cigarettes at the convenience store were begging him to take them home:

> One image that really stands out in my head was watching a man as I pumped gas smoke outside of the gas station. I could feel my mouth watering and the desire became overwhelming. As I paid for my gas I could see my cigarettes on the shelf, they were begging me to bring them home. It was a very hard for me to walk out without them but I knew that I wouldn't be strong enough to control my urge with the poison at my fingertips. (Thomas's blog)

Negative qualities ascribed to these objects of desire signified the problematic of abstention by emphasizing that they did not have control over their behavior; these items became "poison" for Thomas and "evil chocolate" for Alex. Chris noted that negative visualizations could motivate abstaining by using up visual memory space; he stated that Ann's and Tina's experiences supported this insight by Tiggemann and Kemps (2005).

In this section, the students' connections of their insights into the structure of craving and the symbolic importance of images of the object of desire to the scholarly literature demonstrate the students' intellectual learning about craving. The structure and process of craving include many additional elements, but this section's focus on these two primary elements provides insight into the depth of the intellectual learning at hand. Next, I address evidence of craving as an emotional experience.

Deep Learning Antithesis: Introducing Emotion and Consequences for Self

Does craving represent an emotional experience that can serve as the basis of a deep learning exercise? Two indicators of emotional experience are: 1) the experience of emotion or feelings evoked by the situation; and 2) the experience of the self through reflexivity. Joe's experience with abstaining from TV provided an example of the emotional nature of the experience that generates reflexivity. The general situation was one in which he was meeting his girlfriend's family for the first time on a night they watched *American Idol* together. Excerpts from one day in the life of Joe as found in his blog entry on the tenth day follow:

> **Joe [General Situation]** Today I relapsed! …After dinner we all were sitting in the living room eating chocolate chip cookie bars that her grandmother had made when I saw her grandfather reach for the remote.

> **Joe [Specific Event]** …It was a family event and if I was to be accepted I needed to participate. So I sat through the whole episode of American Idol watching hopeful's belt their vocal cords out while I cried on the inside.

> **Joe [Emotion]** I felt trapped by the situation with no exit strategy. I was flooded with emotions, I was angry at the situation, upset with myself for giving in and depressed for failing the challenge. …All the while I was happy because it was nice to just relax and watch some entertaining television.

> **Joe [Thinking]** My thoughts while watching were at first guilt, yet after a little, I figured the damage had already been done so I enjoyed the program. Afterward I obsessed over possible option of avoiding the relapse situation; I came up with no feasible options.

Joe [Images] My brain was filled with images of my classmates faces as I admit to my defeat. I tried to picture my own face, is it a pained expression, one of joy or sadness. Obviously the images of the performers on the screen fill my thoughts.

The social situation of relapse became apparent when he realized that if he refused to watch television, he might be viewed as an outcast. The reflexive self (Mead 1934) emerged as he saw himself as others might and wondered how this relapse would affect how he and others would view him in the future. Conflicting emotions arose as he struggled with his predicament. Joe "cries inside" at his failure to resist the TV experience; he feels "trapped," "angry," "upset," "depressed," "guilty," and he obsessed over his decision as he reflected on what his classmates might think of him. Joe's experience with craving qualifies as an emotional experience as he was experiencing feelings about the self, as evidenced by his reflection on how others would view him after engagement with craving and relapse. Although Joe's experience is just one example, many other students also had profound emotions as they struggled to abstain from their objects of desire for the two-week period.

Whereas craving itself is emotional, succumbing to one's object of desire is also emotional. The feeling of craving is anxiety-filled; the feeling of relapse releases that anxiety. Ari Davies used the following example by Thomas to illustrate the emotional aspects of relapse:

I enjoyed the smoke penetrating my lungs while fulfilling my exhausted craving… The craving was overtaking my mind. I couldn't think of anything but what it would feel like to have a few drags…My craving is always so strong when it comes on that I really don't know if I will ever be able to give this up without help of some sort…

The joy of relapse was also identified by Joe, who called it the "rush of relapse," comprised of feelings of "happiness, excitement, and physical pleasure" at the thought of using the object of desire again. Remorse follows the joy of relapse, sometimes immediately. As these negative emotional consequences of relapse gave rise to doubt and threats to self-efficacy (Elster, 1999), they have significant consequences for the self.

Overall, as evidenced in the students' blogs and seminar papers, one can surmise that craving is an emotional experience that is suitable for a deep learning exercise. An emotional experience, as understood within the symbolic interactionist framework, is an experience both of "self-in-feeling," and feeling "by-and-about" the self. Did these experiences with craving transform the self? Emotional experiences that are reflexive have the potential to transform the self; this transformation is one indicator that learning has been deep.

A comparison of Bella's blog entry from the beginning of the experience to an entry at the end of the experience provides evidence of Bella's self-transformation as she attempted to abstain from smoking cigarettes:

[Bella: Day 1]: My emotions were all up and down today first of all the change in nicotine level that was being replaced by other things such as self-doubt, failure and questioning whether I would be able to do this or not….

[Bella: Day 10]: Well the day went well no snags or wants and I am feeling very proud of myself on the days that I do not slip. And I am getting the idea that any goal is attainable if you want it bad enough. Will I go back after this project is done who knows?

Through time, Bella became aware that she was able to see herself as one who could abstain, even if only for brief periods. What had been seen as an insurmountable task had become feasible as Bella became more aware throughout this process of the situational and personal obstacles that influenced relapse.

Another example of self-transformation is provided by Jamie, a student who decided to refrain from using his IPod for two weeks as recounted in the following excerpts from his blog:

[Jamie: Day 2]: The rest of my day did not go so well at all. Everything seemed like it was going wrong. But for some reason, my IPod made it all better. It allowed me to ignore any crap that was going on today. This made me realize how dependent I am on my IPod to make me feel better at any given time I please. … Lastly, I told my friend about my relapse and he told me. "I knew you wouldn't last. You have that thing every time I see you." Seems like this will be way more arduous than I thought.

[Jamie: Day 8]: After this exercise is over, I don't think I can ever look at my IPod the same. It was something that was once hard to let go of, but now it doesn't seem as hard to give up or live without. Before the day started, I was determined to get through the day without using my IPod. Little did I know that I would have no urge to use it; I actually disdained the thought of using it! This mental shift in how I think of my IPod disturbs me a little bit because I wonder what I will think of my IPod when I don't have to do this exercise anymore…

[Jamie: Day 9]: After today was finished, I felt great! I guess just knowing that I can abstain from using my IPod makes me feel like I can abstain from almost anything. I feel like I am officially in control of what I want and what I need. …

Sequential excerpts from Jamie's blog demonstrate learning–in-progress about both himself and his relationship to his IPod. Jamie was a student who came to class with an ear-bud that was "hidden" from view unless you looked closely. He started with an over-confidence about his ability to refrain from his object of desire, as did all students. With his first relapse on the first day, he quickly realized that this was not an easy project. Jamie's blog illustrates the struggles he was undergoing and the consequences for his self-image and self-efficacy. For Jamie, it was clear by the end of the seminar that he had a better understanding of himself in relationship to his iPod.

The power of emotional experience is its ability to generate behavioral change. Both Bella and Jamie felt pride in being able to control their behavior. This pride was common amongst all the students who were successful at abstaining, even if it were only for a short time. Many scholars assert that mastery of one's desires is the key to happiness (Irvine 2006). Mastery, as indicated by a feeling of tranquility or peace that is marked by a reduction in anxiety, allows us to embrace the life that we do live. Control of one's conduct is the hallmark of the socialized being (Mead, 1934), and herein lies emotional experience's importance.

With the evidence of intellectual learning, emotional experience, and self-transformation, this paper now addresses the question of the integration of these three elements in a dialectical process of learning.

Deep Learning: Integrating Intellectual, Emotional, and Self Learning

Does an emotional experience with craving combined with an intellectual understanding of craving result in a deep understanding of craving? Evidence of the dialectic of deep learning is found if the student is able to integrate the intellectual experience with craving and the emotional understanding of self. For this section, I utilize two extended examples of the depth of learning about craving and symbolic interaction that resulted from Bob's emotional experience with craving cigarettes and Lucas's emotional experience with craving coffee. Whereas the blogs reflected the experiential encounters with craving, the seminar papers were where the students were asked to specifically integrate these experiences with other students' experiences and the intellectual material of this seminar; for this reason, the seminar papers were the primary data source for this section.

Bob Frapples, a student who abstained from smoking and who was still successful in being a non-smoker some six months after the end of the classroom exercise, reflected on his experience in his seminar paper. Bob Frapples was raised within a family of avid smokers and had unsuccessfully tried to quit a number of times. He commented on how the object of desire became part of the individual's identity through processes of role embracement and the looking glass self, revealing his intellectual learning about SI and the academic literature as it applies to craving. Bob Frapples went one step further and connected his own experience to the academic insights about craving evoked by abstaining:

> This **[abstaining]** in essence made them **[i.e., the students]** undergo a transformation of the self as a result of trying to break ties with an object of desire that they associated them-

selves with. This can also be seen in *The Alcoholic Society* by Denzin for the alcoholic undergoes a transformation which alters their meanings and language associate with their object of desire. The individuals in the sample **[this class]** began to disassociate themselves with the object of desire if they found it to be a bad habit. Those who engaged in eating fast food found themselves wishing they ate healthier. Those with addictions to caffeine began to feel better without coffee and thus their view on how much they needed caffeine in their lives changed. Those who smoked began to feel healthier as a result and began to regard smoking as a bad habit. I know I associated smoking with new terms likely "unhealthy" and "disgusting" for during the abstaining period I could feel myself getting healthier and thus distancing myself from my previous sense of self which was known to me and my friends as a smoker (Bob Frapples' seminar paper).

Bob Frapples makes a clear connection between the understanding of self, identity, and behavior and connects that understanding to his own experience. This connection is similar to Tina's understanding of the power of identity revealed in her statement, "because I identified myself as a fast food addict, it is difficult for me to be around my family and friends **[when they are eating fast food]**" (Tina's seminar paper).

Was Bob's experience an emotional experience? Experiences that give rise to emotions that reflect upon the self are emotional experiences. Insight into the self has transformational potential, and its presence is a necessary condition for deep learning. Bob's abstention from smoking was filled with emotions, mainly anxiety and anger. For example, on day five, Bob went to a drinking

party with his friends and "it looked like it was going to be a good night until I saw all the drinkers outside…I felt a large amount of anxiety…I felt completely uncomfortable and I ended up grinding my teeth all night…I know I can think about how much hold nicotine has over me and just how much I am addicted to it. I have been smoking for quite a while now but I never fully understood how much I was" (Bob Frapples' blog). Bob's distinction between "thinking" and "knowing" provides evidence of the force of emotion in learning. Bob Frapples continues to explain the powerful nature of emotional experience that allows him to abstain, even to this day:

> I have in a sense undergone an **Epiphany** through which I no longer associate myself with smoking. Epiphanies are understood as moments of crisis or revelation that disrupt and alter one's fundamental understandings, outlooks and self-images. I can now label smoking as deviant for it is no longer the norm for me. (Bob Frapples' seminar paper)

The dialectical process of deep learning is revealed in Bob's seminar paper. Intellectual learning about craving is integrated with an emotional experience, together generating an understanding of self in relationship to the intellectual and emotional situation at hand, allowing for the individual to participate in self-directed conduct.

Self-knowledge does not demand behavioral change. Even among some of those who gained great insight into his or her self and craving, behavioral change was not long-term; however, even some of the most reluctant participants seemed to experience deep learning. Lucas, who was notoriously unsuccessful in his attempts to abstain from coffee, initially stated at the end of his two-week abstention, "I wish I had learned something insightful during my time abstaining from coffee, but I feel like I focused

on it so much that it was just a miserable experience from the first day" (Lucas, blog day 14). Whereas he believes he has no insight initially at the end of his experience, his seminar paper, which he wrote in the last four weeks of class, forced him to engage the intellectual material while reflecting on his and his classmates' abstention experiences; his paper revealed deep insight into craving and himself. For example, as recounted in his blog, Lucas felt guilty and ashamed when he succumbed to his craving for coffee when he believes his girlfriend is sleeping. She, however, is not asleep and catches him. He recounts, "As much as I enjoyed the coffee on the long drive back to _____, I still felt guilty. Some part of me felt the initial, untarnished pride of actually abstaining for so long was lost…I had failed in my own eyes, and in A.'s as well…Of course, I only thought of this after I had finished the coffee" (Lucas, blog day 4). In his seminar paper, he refers to this experience:

> I relate this to George Herbert Mead's concept in symbolic interactionism, the "me" and the "I". The "Me" is the part of the self that is learned through social interaction. The "Me" is how the individual sees him or herself through the eyes of the perceived other. In this case, when I relapsed in front of my significant other, I imagined that her image of me suffered. I internalized how I thought she perceived me then, and because of this my self-image suffered. The "I" is how the individual responds to the attitude of the "other". After we act and internalize society's response, the "I" reacts. I believe the "I" in this case was my impression management that took place after this relapse. I took on the attitude that I would not relapse again, and that I did not in fact need coffee.

Lucas's   intellectual   understanding   of

George Herbert Mead's (1934) dialectical process of self emerges from his engagement with craving and subsequent relapse.

The seminar paper requires him to integrate his intellectual learning with the emotional experience of craving and his understanding of self; for the reluctant participant, this may be forced depth. Either way, Lucas sums up his experience with craving as follows:

> Craving was something I initially considered to be the end result of physical/chemical reactions within the body, and nothing more. Under this research method, craving is in fact the result of pre-existing associations between objects of desire and the desirable meanings we attach to them through sustained social interaction. This is why familiar environments, situations and people can bring on a craving for something like nicotine, long after the physical effects of nicotine withdrawal have worn off. The actual process of craving and addiction is not so much chemically based as it is based in the creation of symbols and socialization. (Lucas' seminar paper)

Lucas's seminar paper revealed some of the deepest insights into craving and his self even though he was only temporarily able to abstain and returned to drinking coffee immediately at the end of the two-week period.

Self-transformations do not have to be followed by behavioral changes in order for learning to be deep. The motivation of the abstainer was one important factor in long-term behavioral change even when self-insight occurred. Some students, like Bob Frapples (e.g., Debbie and coffee, Patricia and nail biting), who seriously wanted to make a life change were able to combine their intellectual learning about craving with self-insight and parlay that into lon-

ger-term change. Other students, like Lucas, (e.g., Chris and chocolate), who had little to no motivation to make long-term changes, did not make them; however, these students also evidenced deep insight into craving and self that is indicative of deep learning. In some respects, the reluctant participants gained insight that abstaining from the object of desire was neither an important or desired part of their identities.

Conclusions

Experiential learning of the deep kind is possible within the umbrella of the seminar. Asking the students to be an object of their own inquiry allowed for them to engage with the material in an intimate way. Discussions in the classroom were quite lively as students recounted their experiences with their objects of desire. The objectives of this class were achieved to varying degrees with each of the students. The strongest of the students' works demonstrated the highest level of cognitive understanding into the process of craving, the impact on self of this understanding, and skill at doing thematic analysis. Even the weakest of the students were able to get at a rudimentary understanding of craving although the reflexive understanding of self was definitely not as evident in their transcripts or writings. Adding the experience of craving to the intellectual understanding of craving allowed the students to have an emotional experience that brought them into the learning process.

I think all of the students came away from this experience understanding that desire, experienced as "craving," is a strong social psychological force in behavior. The inclusion of students as their own research subjects allowed for reflexivity, a key component of the kind of consciousness necessary for purposive action (Mead 1934). Vannini (2006) asserts, "if as symbolic interactionists we believe that 'humans will act toward things on the basis of the mean-

ings that the things have for them' (Blumer 1969:2), we should believe that the meanings that an individual has associated with his/her sense of self will significantly shape his or her action, and the meanings associated with action will shape the sense of self" (p. 237). The integration of self with the intellectual material on craving allows for learning to be deep. These experiences that change the self have the potential to change behavior.

Many undergraduates in sociology eventually find employment in the social service sector. Bringing this deeper understanding of craving and his or her relationship to this phenomenon will likely influence their behavior, hopefully in a more tolerant fashion. As one student, who had tried to not text for two weeks, said in her final classroom presentation of her paper, "I will never make light of people and their ongoing struggles to change their behavior again." As many of these students will be working with alcohol and substance abusers in their professional careers, this learning experience will give them a glimmer of an insight into the predicament of these clients. Whereas "one need not be Caesar to understand Caesar" is a dictum of sociology, *verstehen* can be tempered with emotion so that deep learning can find its place in the sociological classroom.

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