

A Contemporary Psychological Perspective on Gambling and Co-dependency in the Works of Charles Dickens

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Abstract

This article considers Dicken's depictions of characters who are gamblers and their helpers in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *Hard Times* in terms of an interplay between literary criticism and contemporary psychological research and theory. Dicken's characters both match and mismatch psychological perspectives about gambling pathology and co-dependency, demonstrating a fairly solid understanding of the topics and at the same time opening space for new perspectives for consideration regarding these disorders. In addition, the growth of Positive Psychology and a growing interest in Emotional Intelligence may provide a basis from which Little Nell can re-gain some of her mid-19th century integrity.

The goal of the writers for this paper is to describe the complexities of "gambling" present within political, personal and spiritual dimensions in Charles Dicken's novels: *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *Hard Times*. They will delineate ways that Dicken's characters reflect much of the complexity of recent theories and research in the field of psychology regarding persons struggling with gambling addictions and co-dependency. Just as importantly, Dicken's character depictions related to gambling often diverge from current psychological theories and perspectives found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, (2000) (DSM VI-TR) about persons with gambling addictions and co-dependency. These differences may demonstrate Dicken's lack of a full understanding of the issues or reflect the times in which he lived, but they may also offer alternative perspectives that could inform future research and eventually alternative treatments with persons suffering from these problems.

More specifically, the writers believe that Dickens presented careful qualitative investigations of larger contexts of pathological gambling and co-dependency than psychologists are typically consider. In his considerations of gambling, Dickens depicted the forces of destiny such as death, industrialization, capitalism and their threats to individual meaning and hope as well as to wholesome relationships. Certainly, Dickens was primarily in dialogue with his own time period, but the authors believe that such an exploration as we are proposing, one that uses our present vantage point in history to understand Dickens and which listens to Dickens profound intuitions about human nature and cultures, will demonstrate both a continuity and discontinuity with the past which has the potential for yielding productive insights. Further, the moment the writers of this paper mention co-dependency and emotional intelligence in regard to Dickens, they find themselves in the maelstrom of a history of literary criticism concerning *The Old Curiosity Shop's* famous self-sacrificing, sentimental character, Nell. Alluding to parallels between Psychology's wars to reintegrate a balance between cognition and emotion and Dickens efforts to safeguard emotion at a time when he believed people were becoming more and more alienated, the

writers attempt to support the value and significance of emotional intelligence in Dicken's novels and in the field of psychology.

Gambling as a State of Being

In the *Old Curiosity Shop*, Trent, Nell's grandfather, gambled and lost borrowed money. They were turned out of their home and shop by Quilp, the usurer. Dickens suggested that Nell's grandfather first began to gamble when he realized he could not save money for Nell's future. But, having started, he acquired a taste for it. Dickens suggested it began for the grandfather as an act of love that was a desperate attempt to obtain money for the care of his grandchild but quickly deteriorated to an obsession.

Dicken's offered a memorable description of the gambling state of being that is substantiated by the most recent research in the area. When Nell saw her grandfather in "action" for the first time, she described a different person than the one she adored and protected. "The child saw with astonishment and alarm that his whole-appearance had undergone a complete change. His face was flushed and eager, his eyes were strained, his teeth set, his breath came short and thick, and the hand he laid upon her arm trembled so violently that she shook beneath its grasp (Dickens, 1841/1988, p. 211 Rosenthal (1985) wrote, "Gambling is a complex activity. The gambling ritual - including the stages of anticipation, playing, and outcome; followed by either triumph or remorse - is an acting out of a meaningful fantasy." Whether the gambler wants to have awareness of his actions or not, there is usually a dis-connect in the ability of the gambler to see the consequences of their gambling behavior. Henslin (1967) wrote, "the gambling experience can result in a distorted perception of space-time, which is the result of an altered state of consciousness and even a loss of sense of self... the gambling sphere is separated from the real world p 163." Dicken's graphically offered readers the minute particulars of a specific character's battle with gambling obsession.

Nell again observed her grandfather's gambling state of being. "The feeling which beset the child was one of dim uncertain horror. She had no fear of the dear old grandfather, in whose love for her this disease of the brain had been engendered; but the man she had seen that night, wrapped in the game of chance, lurking in her room, and counting the money by the glimmering light, seemed like another creature in his shape, a monstrous distortion of his image, a something to recoil from, and be the more afraid of, because it bore a likeness to him, and kept close about her, as he did (Dickens, 1841/1988, p. 220).)." Dickens helped the reader to see the total change of character which overcame Nell's grandfather. Once he heard the "money chinked upon the table" (Dickens, 1841/1988, p. 211), he was possessed to feed on the "action" state of mind which drove his behavior no matter the consequences or his ability to assess the character of those he played with in the card games of chance. Dickens referred to Nell's grandfather's condition as a "disease of the brain." Addictions are now described in this manner by Susan E. Foster, vice president and director of policy research and analysis at the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. "We know beyond doubt that addiction is a complex brain disease with significant behavioral characteristics (Science Daily, 2011).

Characteristics of the Pathological Gambler

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IVTR (DSM-IVTR) (2000)* is the latest version of differential diagnosis of mental distress, which described not the state of being but gambling behaviors. In order for a person to be diagnosed with a pathological gambling disorder, a person must exhibit behaviors indicated by five or more of the following: 1) persistent preoccupation with gambling activities; 2) needs to gamble with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve desired excitement; 3) repeated unsuccessful attempts to stop gambling; 4) irritability when trying to stop gambling; 5) gambling as a way of relieving a dysphonic mood; 6) after losing money gambling, returns to "chase losses"; 7) lies to conceal the extents of his or her gambling; 8) commits illegal acts to finance gambling; 9) jeopardizes significant relationships because of gambling; 10) and relies on others to provide money to relieve desperate financial situations caused by gambling (pp. 671-674). Easily, the grandfather meets all ten criteria at various stages of his gambling

Beginning with Moran (1970) and evolving for the next 40 years, the sub-types of gamblers have been studied. Today the common agreement is there are two basic subtypes of gamblers and types of gambling. The "action gambler" seeks to play games that require some skill and gambles for the excitement of the "action" state of mind. Second, the "escape" gambler plays games of pure chance and seeks to "escape" from life issues or other psychological symptoms. In the 19th century, there would have been one type of gambler; the male action gambler, even if it is questionable how much skill was involved in the games of the day (Flavin, 2003). The purpose and drive for this type of gambler is the excitement of the bet. Again, Nell's grandfather was an "action" gambler and also exhibits characteristics of escapism, as he was driven by his fantasy of winning riches for Nell. Zangeneh, et al. (2010) wrote, "Both action and escape players are escaping from some aspect of their lives, but they are escaping in a different manner. Escape gamblers want to lose themselves in the dream of a better world. Action gamblers want to dream about being big shots, high rollers."

As mentioned above, preoccupation with gambling was listed first as behavior criteria for the pathological gambler. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Nell's grandfather left his granddaughter, Nell, at night by herself, to spend the night gambling. McCormick and Taber (1985), report, "The chronic gamblers observed by Lesieur (1987) appeared to be preoccupied with gambling to the exclusion of normal activities, and were pathetically disabled by their addiction". In *Hard Times*, Dickens shows how Thomas is so preoccupied with his gambling activities that he is willing to use his sister in order to get money. "I was stuck into old Bounderby's bank (where I never wanted to be), and I knew I should get into scrapes there, if she put old Bounderby's pipe out; so I told her my wishes, and she came into them. She would do anything for me. It was very game of her, wasn't it (Dickens, 1966, p. 103).

"Greenberg (1980) further pointed out the pathological gambler's preoccupation with the present moment, ie., the avoidance of the future and the long term consequences of his actions" (Lesieur, 1985). In the *Old Curiosity Shop*, Nell's grandfather was so preoccupied with his gambling and convinced that his reason was to win Nell the inheritance she

deserved, he became blind to the consequences of his actions and lost his house, its contents, which led to the series of events which sent Nell's grandfather and Nell on the road where they could get beyond the reaches of his disease. "Rosenthal (1985) explained the pathological gamblers constant flirting with danger and catastrophe as a continuing testing of self-worth and power" (Lesieur, 1985). Even though the Grandfather convinced himself that his motives were pure, in the long run his preoccupation drove him to gamble and to pursue the venture of gambling as if it was the only way he could provide for Nell. In *Hard Times*, Thomas was so preoccupied with gambling that he failed to consider the ultimate consequences of his robbery, such as the death of another and hardship for himself and others.

In the long run, like all gamblers, the pursuit of money is the venture and the end of all dreams. As the writers of the DSM-IV TR suggested, for the gambler, the excitement of the risk is a driving force but it is money which serves as the actual drug. Nell's grandfather said to Nell, "What money have we? Give it to me"... "I have wronged thee, Nell, but I will right thee yet, I will indeed. Where is the money"? (Dickens, 1841/1988), p. 211). Chasing his losses, having gambled away the money Nell had inherited from her mother's right, he cried, "Forgive me Nell." Then, he stole the rest of the money Nell had saved for the road trip and continued to chase his previous losses. Throughout the novel the grandfather engaged in self-lacerating guilt and self-pity but always began anew his attempts to make money from gambling. McCormick and Taber (2008) argued that guilt and the need to self-punish may be a hidden agenda for the pathological gambler (p. 46).

In *Hard Times*, Thomas, in his pursuit of money not only used his sister, Louisa, but also set up another person, Steven Blackpool, to be framed for his robbery of money from Bounderby's bank. Gambling led to the eventual death of the framed bank robber, Stephen Blackpool. When he returned to Coketown to defend the accusation of robbery, he fell into a mine shaft. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, gambling led to the death of Nell as she suffered the elements while pursuing peace and the absence of gambling represented in the country scenery. Dickens vividly described how gambling destroys relationships and individual lives.

Another key observation of Lesieur (1985) about pathological gamblers is: "...in varying degree, they have difficulty accepting and adjusting to structure of any kind. They prefer not to be inhibited by rules, social conventions, and expectations of others. In *Hard Times*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and *Nicholas Nickleby*, Dickens showed how all of the gambling characters had no regard for generally accepted conventions and social rules. Nell's grandfather borrowed money from the unscrupulous Quilp, who was the equivalent to a current payday loan shark. Thomas defies the rational and scientific mind which his father taught at the local school. And Mulberry Hawk, in *Nicholas Nickleby* defied all conventions of morality in his pursuit of women, drinking, gambling, and seeking revenge on those who would oppose his efforts.

Nell's grandfather's life evolved into a life of lying, growing paranoia and secrecy. The roles that had existed between he and his fourteen year old granddaughter were switched as she began taking care of him. He began not only to neglect her but to cheat her, secretly stealing her mother's right that should have gone to Nell and gambling it away.

Distrust grows between himself and others. His relationships with his fellow gamblers become increasingly combative.

"Estimates indicate that every pathological gambler directly affects the lives of 8 - 10 other people" (Lobsinger and Beckett, 1996). Dickens' three novels show a long list of affected characters from gamblers and the gambling activity. Nell's grandfather affected the lives of many other people. As noted before, the pathological gambler's behavior jeopardized his/her relationships and occupation. Nell's grandfather's gambling placed his granddaughter in dangerous predicaments. Quelp possessed Nell's grandfather's curiosity shop and tried to get him to trade his granddaughter for his debts. In a delusional state, Nell's grandfather persuaded himself that his luck would change, and he would win enough money to secure Nell's future. His madness vacillated between his obsessive drive and inability to rid himself of an urge to gamble and his compassion for Nell. Rosenthol (1985) writes that "intimacy is a frightening problem" for pathological gamblers. Nell's grandfather's obsession with gambling disabled his intimacy with Nell, and Mulberry Hawk's pursuit of Kate is nothing more than his on-going quest to win.

Nell and Co-Dependency

Co-dependency is characterized as being preoccupied with someone else's wants and demands rather than tending to one's own unmet needs, fears, and pain. These persons may fear the disapproval of others and lack confidence about making decisions (DSM IV, TR, 2000) (pp. 721-725). Specific to gambling, Valerie Lorenz (1985) describes three different roles that family members of the gambler may play as co-dependents: 1) The Martyr prays that the gambler will change while continuing to bail them out of trouble; 2) The Perfectionist tries to control all aspects of living while blaming the gambler for their inability to order the household to an ideal appearance; 3) And the Chicken Little plays a passive/dependent role, unable to overcome inertia, ultimately feeling helpless and frustrated. At times, Nell exhibited some or all of these roles, but ultimately transcends all of them.

Nell enabled her grandfather when she allowed him to take her money for gambling purposes. She felt frustrated and helpless telling her grandfather that she had resigned herself to countryside wandering as an alternative to returning him to his former state. And she certainly worked much harder than most of us would at avoiding his disapproval, suffering in silence. She also went to great length to keep others from knowing what her grandfather was doing, never confiding with anyone about his problem gambling.

In today's jargon, Nell would be called an "enabler" or a co-dependent family member. However, Nell was such a delightful character, readers of the Victorian era raised her to an angelic status. In the novel, her grandfather also saw the same characteristics in Nell and considering them as good luck, determined to "pursue this aim together".... confident that her "image sanctifies the game" (Dickens, 1841/1988, p. 222). The Grandfather saw the true nature of Nell, as do others, but his distorted thinking believed that such sanctity would enhance his chances of winning though he rationalized that the winning is for the good of Nell's fortunes, not himself. Whether his intentions were good or not, gambling ultimately outweighs his interest to have a relationship with Nell.

In J.M. Henslin's classic work, *Craps and Magic* (1967), he argued that family members often mirror the symptoms of the gambler. Lorenz (1985) reported that in the end, the physical health of the family members of the gambler may be affected. "The strain affects her physical health, and she suffers from multiple somatic complaints, such as constant headaches, anxiety, palpitations, or arrhythmia, irregularities in menses, gastrointestinal problems, or back problems" (Lorenz 1985). As Nell's grandfather became pale in appearance, did not eat well and had fainting spells so too did Nell's health suffer. Nell's illness and subsequent death may be attributed to her "suffering" from the grandfather's gambling. We may assume that she internalized the distress of her grandfather's illness. Schlike (1985) argued, "From the moment (of her grandfather's theft), Nell's strength fades until she collapses and dies (130).

Children of gamblers typically have issues of acting out behavior. Lorenz (1985) wrote, "The children of pathological gamblers, growing up in an atmosphere of emotional deprivation, isolation, parental abuse, rejection, poor role modeling, and emphasis on money, are very likely to have equally problem-ridden lives". How did Nell defy this trend and stand above the typical outcome? Dickens gave Nell a character who practiced empathy, compassion, and an unflinching will to be of aid to her Grandfather. Nell's unconditional love transcended the label of co-dependent, not only because of her youth, but also because she exhibited the capacity to do the right thing by her loved one. Nell was not always mild in her approach with the Grandfather. Nell said, "Let me persuade you, then-oh, let me persuade you, "said the child", to think no more of gains or losses, and to try no fortune but the fortune we pursue together" (Dickens, 1841/1988, p. 222). Her grandfather responded that his pursuit was "their" pursuit, but Nell convinced him to leave the present scenery and to once again be on the road in the open air. Dickens portrayed the roving country life as the counter or opposing setting to the arena of gambling, usury, and cheats that would take advantage of any willing victim. In agreement with many literary critics, when dealing with co-dependency issues, in general, therapists would tend to reflect a harder and more detached of persons like Nell. Most therapists would likely challenge the silence and self-sacrificing acts of a person like the character of Nell. Some may even interpret many of her acts as "enabling," but Nell rallied to counter the losses and seeks to remove the Grandfather from the large city which was the scene of his obsession.

Possibly the most challenging criticism of Dicken's sacrificial female characters derives from feminism's mistrust of masculine displacements of female heroism (Massey, 1994 & Butler, 1990). However inspiring and transforming Dicken's female characters may be, the fact that so many of them repeatedly take the shape of morally pure, chaste, self-sacrificing persons is disturbing. Nell's unique self-expressions are swallowed as she used all of her time and energy striving to help her grandfather. There is really no way to fully reconcile Dicken's repeated use of this kind of female character with his humanism, though some explanation is called for. Dickens was a person of his times and failed to transcend his culture's views of the roles of women. One might attempt to argue that Nell was a poetic abstraction and especially during the mid- nineteenth century utilizing a female to represent the powerful ideas of emotional intelligence and self-sacrifice is more realistic than using a male character to confront the meaningless indifference of the increasingly alienating life-world during industrialization.

Nell's transcendence of co-dependency

A close reading of Nell illustrated a will and character of resilience and fortitude garnished primarily from her emotional stability and intelligence. Fourteen year old Nell plays the role of the "intimate other" to her grandfather. Like a person beyond her years, she helped remove her grandfather from the temptation of his vices. Nell sought the "open air" and the country life where she believed her grandfather would find fewer opportunities to gamble, and she attempted to remove money from his access so he would not have the means to gamble. These decisions demonstrate that she was far from an enabler. Today, in the treatment of the pathological gambler, the counselor will seek the cooperation of the gambler and a trusted family member to limit the gambler's access to money. Nell removed her grandfather from the scenes of gambling and restricted his access to money. This is no different today than treatment providers asking spouses to manage the finances and get the gambler to agree to forfeit access to money. She was ultimately able to keep her grandfather away from his vices and maintain a relationship in a limited sense with him and affirming herself in the context of the relationship. One cannot ignore the fact that Nell's situation of freedom is extremely enclosed and offers few alternatives. She certainly made far more healthy and courageous choices than Thomas Grandgrind's sister in *Hard Times* who enabled her brother's gambling through treachery.

Still, to defend Nell is to enter into debate with literary critics as well as therapists. Literary critics have argued as early as the first part of the 20th century that many of Dickens' characters, especially Nell, are too sentimental for today's audiences. Reflecting many modern readers' sentiments, Monod (1968) wrote, "Victorian man's pathos tends to become the present day readers bathos (p. 183)." It may be difficult for many of us to respect a character or person who puts all of their energy and time, and literally detours from their own journey of self-affirmation in an attempt to save another from his gambling pathology. Most of us would bemoan the postponement of our personal agendas if we were to choose Nell's path. Still, before we judge Nell too harshly, we might take time to search our own unconscious motives for our judgment of Nell. Most of us simply choose not to add the weight of others' suffering onto our own, or we cannot deal with the control issues that our love ones' addictions issues arouse in us, so we avoid it and rationalize our response with the pop culture phrase of "tough love."

There have been a few literary critics that have defended Nell or for that matter other "sentimental" characters in Dickens. Wagenksnect (1957) wondered if "the fear of sentiment is far less deeply rooted in human feelings than sentiment itself, and approaches closer to the norm... There may not be many incorruptible people born into the world, but (thank God) there are still some p. 113." Northrup Frye (1957) defended what some call Dickens' sensational and sentimental portrayal of Little Nell, explaining that such "pathos" appeals to our sympathy because it is "on our own level of experience" and because of "her inarticulateness." If she had been articulate, he explains, her characterization would be apt to appeal to our self-pity. Her dignified bearing coupled with her lack of expression elicits audience projection of heroism (p.38,9). There have been a few more recent literary critics who have dared risk the laughs that one may encounter in defending Little Nell. Nicola Brown (2007) discussed the emotional risks but also the emotional depths that are possible for a reader to "connect" with Nell. Richard Walsh (1997) wrote about the necessity of

emotional involvement in appreciating Dickens in general and Nell specifically. Robert Soloman (2004) defended Dicken's sentimentality against cynicism. He argued that sentimentality was an integral aspect of his art. An ability to appreciate the art of his sentimentality was requisite to appreciating his novels.

While Dickens is certainly ripe for some of the criticism aimed at him for his sentimentality, it would be incorrect to label him as a wide-eyed innocent. He wrote in *Household Words* that gamblers should be "convicted before a magistrate, and shut up in the House of Correction, to pick a little oakum, and tip a little gruel into their silly stomachs (Wagenknecht, 1970, p. 176)." It is vital that we not over-generalize his belief in the goodness of human beings. In the novels being discussed here, there are many characters that might be characterized as bad or even evil. But then again this view of human nature is not expressed through Nell. Nell opens up her heart to her grandfather's pain and illusions offering nonjudgmental toleration, compassion and generosity. A passage in the *Old Curiosity Shop* described Nell well: "If you have seen the picture gallery of any one old family, you will remember how the same face and figure- often the fairest and slightest of them all- come upon you in different generations; and how you trace the same sweet girl through a long line of portraits- never growing old or changing- the Good Angel of the race- abiding by them in all reverses- redeeming all their sins (Dickens, 1841/1988, 141)." Dickens seemed to have really believed in the healing power of Nell's saintly character, though many today may argue that he did not succeed in portraying her convincingly. In the novel, the relationship Nell had with her grandfather was ultimately the healing force that might address gambling addictions or a variety of other ills. Nell repeatedly attempted to break through into her grandfather's consciousness to break the spell of his disease. There is some indication that she made some impact when one considers his comments about his love for her after she dies.

In characters like Nell, we see a faith in humanity and the world's destiny. This faith is made up of feeling, sentiment, and morality rather than cold reason or dogma. Even as she dealt with despair, she continued to hope. G. K. Chesterton, as quoted by Wagenknecht (1965), wrote about Dickens, "This vulgar optimist... alone among modern writers did really destroy some of the wrongs he hated and bring about some of the reforms he desired (p. 67)." Time and again, Nell's love was tenacious enough to overcome greed and destruction. It may be difficult to believe in the power of such unconditional love overcoming the horrors many people live through today, but Dickens, as did his character Nell, truly seemed to possess a sense of destiny, a belief in a pattern and a purpose in life that hope and love promotes.

The field of psychology too has wrestled with balancing reason and emotion, confrontation and empathy. In reaction to the highly cognitive and "tough love" approaches in therapy, especially in treating addictions, the Positive Psychology (O'Hanlon, 2006) movement began about two decades ago. One aspect of Positive Psychology is its respect for emotional intelligence; that is, the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Persons who possess high emotional intelligence are able to perceive and understand their emotions, use them to facilitate thought, and regulate them. Research has shown high emotional intelligence is associated with more

positive relationships, empathy, self-awareness and emotional stability (Goleman, 1995; Mikolajczake, 2008) and is associated with fewer occurrences of addiction disorders (Gross and Munoz, 1995).

Could the field of psychology, in the pursuit of emulating the hard sciences and emphasizing cognition, lost some of the vital healing elements found in the emotions? Nell filtered her suffering through her heart in contrast to the macho attitude that views any softness in the face of suffering for another who has corrupted themselves as weakness. She showed her vulnerability and fragility in the face of devastation and despair but did not surrender to victimhood or abrogate responsibility. Nell did not shut down or passively yield to the suffering her grandfather's gambling brought to them, but responded as humanly as possible, both cognitively and emotionally. Too easily, we can assume a position of moral superiority and/or engage in avoidance and then rationalize the unnatural distance in our relationships and our own individualism.

Could Dickens have been offering us, through Nell's character, a micro illustration of a widespread problem of alienation that he saw spreading through the England of his time and which continues today in Western civilization? In the city, Dickens describes a dearth in relationships. As Raymond Williams (1973) wrote, describing Dickens' novels in general, "the characteristic movement is a hurrying seemingly random passing of men and women, seen in some fixed expression...These men and women do not so much relate as pass each other and then sometimes collide."(155) In the new social order, Dickens saw people rushing to and fro and failing to make the connections that would provide the customary feelings needed by human beings. In London, where much of the action in *Nicolas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* took place, he described people who for the most part were shut up in buildings engaging in business dealings and impersonal forces of money and shares. In Coketown, in *Hard Times*, political destiny appeared to generalize characters into representative alienated characters. Yet, in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Nell saw the value of trying to get recognition from her grandfather who is in a mystified trancelike obsession. Out of concern for her grandfather, Nell pulled him into the open country to escape from the inhuman and degrading masses in London. In the country, Nell walked in exhaustion until she fell to the ground before a kind school teacher with whom she had an authentic interaction. Nicolas Nickleby repeatedly makes kind choices, taking care to respect others and who dares to engage in open conflict with gamblers like Mulberry Hawk who showed no regard for others and pursued Kate as if she were more an object quest than a human being.

Dickens, through Nell, portrayed a good person who was caught up and overwhelmed by paradoxical thoughts. In spite of Nell's efforts to help him by removing him from the corrupt city to a more harmonious natural environment, her grandfather vacillated and felt remorseful only to become desperate to gamble again. His life was empty, filled only with deeper and deeper inner conflicts, depression and destructive obsession. Gradually he disintegrated in the audience's eyes, though never in Nell's. She continued to see her grandfather as a good man who had succumbed to his inner conflicts. The audience sees a man who has not courageously confronted his destiny, his living predicament. Instead he had blocked it off from his awareness. Embodied in characters like Nell, Dickens

demonstrated his belief that human problems cannot be solved by cold detachment, but only by sympathy and understanding.

Social Construction, Death and Hope

While Dickens may not offer specific digressions explaining his views on destiny and providence, these concepts are operative in most of his novels. In their relation to gambling, readers witness characters responding to their lives as if they had no choice but to relinquish their power to outside influence. Some of the characters allow life to take its own course because they believed nothing could make a difference. They give over to taking what they have and offering it to chance, hoping to better their own or in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, their granddaughter's economic situation. Others, like the investors and usurers like Hawk in *Nicolas Nickleby*, Quilp in the *Old Curiosity Shop* and Bounderby in *Hard Times*, believe they have the power to manipulate reality like it was a business to determine their realities. Some, such as Thomas in *Hard Times*, lived impulsively, with reckless abandon, heedless of consequences. In Dickens's world these gamblers' destinies always end in disaster. If they don't immediately crash and burn, the cumulative weight of their choices determine their ultimate destructive circumstances. Others such as Blackpool in *Hard Times*, Nickolas in *Nicolas Nickleby* and Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* preserved their dignity in spite of difficult external conditions expecting that with sufficient hope and faith, life would become more endurable. These characters demonstrated a belief in the possibility of creating a more flexible relationship with their life circumstances.

Social Construction

For the most part, therapeutic treatment of psychological issues focus on individual clients, sometimes in the context of family, rarely considering the social and political milieu of which they are a part. Dickens wrote in the transitional period of pre-modern and modern eras, or between the traditionalism and Individualism eras. The loss of ritual led by traditional, or religious leaders, left a void that would be filled by the whims of human nature. Giddens (1991) wrote, "The void creates problems for many individuals, such as addictions and their financial and health consequences (p. 112)".

Dickens wrote with a profound awareness of the emergence of contradictions inherent in a new social and economic order born of the Industrial Revolution and its accompanying emphasis on individuality. His profound awareness did not consist of economic theories but in his awareness that human kindness, emotional expressiveness, and authentic relationships were at stake. He described a collective mindset of a culture in which he was born. He saw self-perpetuating patterns of thought and belief about social realities and inter-relationships. In *Hard Times*, Dickens portrayed the extreme forms of rationality and individualism as the source or at least a contributing factor in vices such as gambling and its negative effects on the family members. In their description of the 19th Century in what they call the beginning stages of the era of modernity, Grunfeld, Zangeneh, and Diakouloukas (2010) wrote, "The breakdown of traditional, pre-modern society has contributed to a loss of ontological security, which has resulted in feelings of alienation. To compensate for this, people have been increasingly drawn to rituals that would fulfill that

void". It might be said that gambling, in its separated venues from the rest of society, serves as a ritual to fill the void of traditional rituals.

Again, the writers of this article believe that our own history and social contexts fuse with some of Dicken's 19th century descriptions and that it may be productive to contributing to our contemporary understandings if we can achieve lucidity regarding any living continuity today regarding this association. Dickens juxtaposed descriptions of speculation and gambling in *Nicolas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*. He represented speculation or the joint-stock company and other financial manipulations as immoral. There may be a living continuity to be seen in today's pay-day loan businesses that many gamblers frequent. Ralph Nickleby, the uncle of Nicholas, and Quilp were money lenders and investors. Both seemed to make their living by usury. Making money was more important to them than treating human beings with kindness. Though not gamblers themselves, Ralph Nickleby and Quilp made their money from the poor, disadvantaged, and the type of people who gamble. Further, In *Nichols's Nickleby*, Dickens satired the great Muffin Company, a big business masquerading as benevolent. He exposes the commercial greed hiding behind religious pretension. In *Hard Times*, Gradgrind, economist, having observed the misfortunes of his children, finally saw the failure of the system, and Bounderby, self-made man, turned out to be a moral imposter. The emerging modern commercialism, individualism and industrialism are represented as selfish and cruel. Especially in *Hard Times*, the value of individualism was cherished by the rich who oppressed workers and the poor. Everywhere characters were bribed and manipulated. Flavin (2003) wrote, "Quilp habitually views others as impersonal devices to be utilized and exploited for his own ends. Dickens draws a clear line between good and bad capitalism, with the latter being characterized in part by its association with gambling." Quilp's comments and lies rationalized and inverted values and muddled any clarity regarding the difference between virtue and selfishness. He bragged of his honesty and truthfulness. He offered Nell's grandfather financial help but expected the grandfathers daughter's hand in marriage in return. At one point, a character called him an ugly midget, and Quilp gave him money for his honest comment. Ironically, Nell could not marry without money but can only marry because of money. But honesty in such a world which makes money fundamental is often dishonesty.

While it would be ill advised to suggest that Dicken's philosophy was deterministic in general, in novel after novel, he vividly depicted how the unfairness of economic inequality profoundly influenced the physical and psychological sufferings of the poor and how the calculating nature of capitalism denied spontaneity and natural vitality. Especially in *Hard Times*, the rich who are the heads of the emerging modern commercialism and industrialism were portrayed as selfish and cruel, oppressing workers. The financially poor characters were not blamed for their condition, but were represented as victims degraded by the rich, and ignored by a complacent society. The poor found themselves in predicaments in which their real choices were few. Life was a game of chance like a betting game. Many felt that their one long shot to win freedom might be attained through gambling. So the social environment cultivated a desire to gamble. Blackpool said, "Number of people have been brought heer for to weave, and to card, and to piece out a livin', aw the same way somehows, twixt their cradles and their graves. Look how we live and where we live, in

what numbers and what chances...(Dickens, 1966, p. 114).” Dickens expressed indignation about oppressive measures against which the poor had little power or chance.

What are the social and political implications in regard to gambling? Dickens represented speculation as immoral in *Nicolas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* and conspicuously juxtaposes it with gambling scenes, suggesting a relationship. Ralph Nickleby, the capitalist, acted only according to greed, cruelty and selfishness. Hawk the gambler was a recurrent guest at Ralph’s house. It was in Ralph’s dining room that Hawk made his first bet predicting Kate’s behavior. Ralph did nothing to help her, valuing money interests over human relations. Later, in Ralph’s house, Hawk sexually accosted Kate, showing not even the slightest concern for her dignity as a human being.

Still, it must be said that while the socio-political implications are always a part of the narratives, Dickens seemed to always primarily focus on the character’s personal narrative. Nell and her grandfather were grievously oppressed economically, but they were not solely made by such negative influences. Still, the political aspect of his works are crucial to a holistic understanding of his stories. In *Hard Times*, Dickens represented Bounderby’s heartlessness in his dealings with others as numerical figures and averages. Readers experience the profound emotional expressions of the poor and the downtrodden. He saw many people of his time living in squalor and deprivation allowing them little chance to express their potential. In offering us individual moments of tenderness, intimacy and feeling in the midst of many disappointments and difficulties, Dickens not only compensated (sometimes overcompensated) but sometimes recuperates our belief in human kindness. Miriam Bailin (1999) wrote that the presence of sentimentality in this novel was a means of recuperating the loss of community caused by urbanization.

Death and Gambling in Dickens

The most potent destiny in Dickens’ works was mortality, and it was directly related to gambling. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Nell’s grandfather raced against time to secure Nell’s future, but he was distracted from his relationship with Nell by his neurotic obsession with gambling. His continued efforts via gambling to attain his end, generated irreversible and inevitable consequences, namely his own and Nell’s deaths. Nell’s grandfather in his gambling trance could not transcend his situation enough to gain understanding. With death very near, he continued to think he could manipulate their destinies according to his desires. Without Nell’s hope for ultimate regeneration in this world and the next, the ends of their lives may appear meaningless to readers.

Nell’s grandfather’s neurotic fear of death was linked with his gambling. He was not willing to accept his human predicament of mortality with dignity, even though Nell repeatedly confided her love for him and her acceptance of their downtrodden situation and the contentment she felt in their relationship. But out of his feelings of impotence to establish her future, he entered and re-entered the destructive world of gambling, hoping that through luck, his and his granddaughter’s lives would be secured.

Dickens did not necessarily interpret the downfall of his more evil characters as being the result of failing to live according to some moral Christian code, where persons were punished for their sins. Nowhere in the three novels referenced in this paper, did Dickens

offer a Christian interpretation of the consequences of sin. Instead there appears to be more of a natural law that some characters, many who were gamblers, failed to adhere to, which resulted in negative consequences. Some characters created laws unto themselves which naturally produced disillusionment and a shortening of life. Characters, who attempted to create a life outside these natural laws, denying its limits by losing themselves in gambling endeavors, were ultimately unfulfilled. With few exceptions, natural laws do not privilege those who are not respectful of the harmony of life. It was Nell and Nicolas who enter into circumstance, fully conscious, and with a clear intention to learn from experiences, who evolve into more aware and integrated human beings.

Hope

Nell did not give up hope even in the face of suffering and death. The questions regarding destiny are how do we act within the limits we find ourselves and how do we deal with misfortune and hardship and can our hardship be turned to constructive use? In contrast to her grandfather who cringed before his problems and limitations, bemoaning his destiny, Nell confronted the challenges she faced, exercising creative decision making, summoning great effort and demonstrating a saint's sensitivity. She accepted her situation as though it was her fate and then sought to fulfill her destiny within the confines of her situation. She put herself in positions to make choices in regard to place and morality. Her grandfather fled from his responsibilities, while Nell embraced them. However destiny appeared to have limited her options, Nell chose love, courage and beauty. She was free from cynicism and meaninglessness.

There are two passages in *The Old Curiosity Shop* where there appeared to be a faith in a spiritual providence governing the world. The first occurs in Chapter LIV, where the school master comforted Nell as she grieved over the graves in the church yard:

"And do you think, said the school master, marking the glance she had thrown around, that an unvisited grave, a withered tree, a faded flower or two, are tokens of forgetfulness or cold neglect? Do you think there are no deeds, far away from here, in which these dead may be best remembered? Nell, Nell, there may be people busy in the world, at this instant, in who good actions and good thoughts these very graves- neglected as they look to us are the chief instruments. "Tell me no more," said the child quickly. "Talk no more. I feel, I know it. How could I be unmindful of it, when I thought of you?" "There is nothing," cried her friend, "no nothing innocent or good, that dies, and is forgotten. Let us hold to that faith, or none. An infant, a prattling child, dying in its cradle, will live again in the better thoughts of those who loved it, and will play its part, through them, in the redeeming actions of the world, through its body be burnt to ashes or drowned in the deepest sea. There is not an angel added to the Host of heaven but does its blessed work on earth in those that loved it here. Forgotten! Oh, if the good deeds of human creatures could be traced to their source, how beautiful would even death appear; for how much charity, mercy, and purified affection, would be seen to have their growth in dusty graves (Dickens, 1841/1988, p.329 !"

The other passage refers to Nell herself after she died:

Oh! It is hard to take to heart the lesson that such deaths will teach, but let no man reject it, for it is one that all must learn, and is a mighty, universal Truth. When Death strikes down the innocent and young, for every fragile form from which he lets the panting spirit free, a hundred virtues rise, in shapes of mercy, charity, and love, to walk the world, and bless it. Of every tear that sorrowing mortals shed on such green graves, some good is born, some gentler nature comes. In the Destroyer's steps there spring up bright creations that defy his power and his dark path becomes a way to light Heaven (Dickens, 1841/1988, p 506)."

The above passages pour from the pen of a young Dickens who attempted to make existential sense of apparent dis-order and meaninglessness of mortality. Nell experienced some happiness and expressed a determined optimism in spite of confusion, hardship, dislocation and pain. We are left with the hope that benevolent actions survive. "It is hard to take to heart the lesson that such deaths will teach, but let no man reject it... (Dickens, 1841/1988, p. 506)." Dickens refrained from an appeal to a transcendent reality for the ultimate meaning of Nell's life, but he did suggest that her life inspires a new world, that her acts mattered in the sense that a new ordering of life made more possible with acts of kindnesses such as Nell's life consisted. Instead of meaning discussed in transcendental connotations, it was present within the world and it has something to do with the harmony and interrelations that Nell might awaken and convey to those who will come after her. With the power of his imagination Dickens transmuted Nell's wordlessness in the face of pain, anguish and death. From the destroying gambler's steps there will spring bright creatures who will light the path away from the darkness and lead into the light of the heart, a path that seeks to do the right thing in an honest way.

Again, Dickens sought to appeal to our emotional intelligence. He portrayed three types of characters that drive the point. Some characters like Nell and Nicholas had hearts of unwavering empathy. Their love is unassailable whether the person who they wished to change, did or not. Other characters eventually respond to some extent to empathy and compassion and begin the process of transformation by way of the heart, such as Thomas Grandgrind Sr. and even Nell's grandfather to some extent. Other characters see no need for the heart and prove irredeemable (Quilp, Bounderby, and Ralph Nickleby). Nell and Nicholas Nickleby were true to their hearts' dictates; the second group needed transformation by the heart; and the third group were immune to the hearts' yearnings.

Conclusion

One potential function of great literature is that it transforms our implicit beliefs about any topic we bring to it. The point of this investigation was to see if Dickens might disconfirm rather than simply reinforce some of our perceptions about gambling problems so that we might revise some of our views and approaches about addressing the problems. Dickens challenges us to open up, to put our narrow beliefs into question and to place ourselves in a position to expand and grow. Dickens's works dealing with gambling challenges those of us in the field of psychology to consider our clients in the context of a broader political, ideological and economic system. Gambling is an activity not sealed up in an interior realm divorced from these relations. Persons with gambling problems can also benefit from being

in relationships with others who can help to buffet stress, offer objective and non-judgmental interpretations of experiences and support the person to develop coping strategies. Dicken's works also provide meaningful appraisals that help to give coherence to death and other painful experiences. Dicken's works also remind us that taking care to find a balance between emotional and cognitive intelligence will result in a happier life.

It is hoped that this paper has enriched literary criticism on Dicken's works with its use of inter-textual dialogue with the DSM IV TR, and current psychological theory and research on gambling. The authors especially found it fruitful to consider criticisms of Nell's character as being overly sentimental and the likelihood of therapists viewing her as an enabler. The authors engaged these perspectives foregrounding her emotional intelligence, resilience, and determined optimism, hoping to restore her and her kind to some level of respect.

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