

Introducing the Hero Complex and the  
Mythic Iconic Pathway of Problem Gambling

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Abstract: Early research into the motivations behind problem gambling reflected separate paradigms of thought splitting our understanding of the gambler into divergent categories. However, over the past twenty-five years, problem gambling is now best understood to arise from biological, environmental, social, and psychological processes, and is now encapsulated under the biopsychosocial model. While, the biopsychosocial model brings a great degree of understanding regarding the etiology and process becoming a problem gambler, it is clear that further research is needed to improve theoretical perspectives that identify causal trajectories that underlie gambling related problems amongst sub-groups of problem gamblers. One line of research that has gone understudied with respect to exploring such causal paths is the Mythic Iconic Pathway of problem gambling. Such a pathway conceptualizes gambling pathology as a life-world phenomenon that arises within an individual who filters perceptions of the self and world through a hero's complex. Thus, this paper will outline the Mythic Iconic Pathway, including its phenomenological processes, and describe the key therapeutic insights and implications to consider when adopting such a novel approach toward understanding and treating the problem gambler.

## The Hero Complex and the Mythic Iconic Pathway of Problem Gambling

Across cultures worldwide, stories and myths of perilous journeys have been passed down from one generation to the next (Rank, 1970; Sullivan & Venter, 2005) and although their themes do not carry the same authority in today's societies, it is peculiar to find that some problem gamblers' destinies are cast in the psychology of the "heroes/heroines call" (Becker, 1973; Campbell, 1968). Such a call appears to manifest itself amongst gamblers who hold a blind and chivalrous desire to win intermixed with undying ideas of projecting themselves into a better light, while blindly miscalculating gaming odds and stumbling repeatedly over their own self aggrandizement and self-righteousness. Essentially, the heroes call and its varied "complexes" situate the individual and his/her self in a spiral of cognitive dissonance between searching for not only riches, but for a means to be recognized, valued, and loved by others and yet tragically have no love or little value for themselves (Lee, 2005; Little, 2002).

Unfortunately, gambling rarely provides the best odds toward securing a career that will lead to fortune and fame. The gambler who suffers from a hero complex, and is on a lucky streak, will eventually plummet into a world of chaos, and invariably will be left to relish in the familiarity of being a victim of uncertain circumstances (Lee, 2005). Remarking on the latter process, a former gambler stated:

I would be sitting there playing and if I had enough money and the machines were clear, I would be playing three machines. I would have one beside me, one beside me here, and there. I would be forking the money in all three machines. For a while there I was doing all right, you know people would come up, and they would be seeing me do this. And you know I would have five or six hundred dollars up on these machines, 'Cash out, why

don't you cash out.' Ah, no problem, just money, you know stuff like that, playing the big shot. . . But I just, I just wanted to play, I didn't care about how much life was falling apart or how much I lost. I just wanted to play.

Curiously, despite tales of heroic journeys told to entertain children and adults alike from time immemorial, such a theory of gaming and the concept of the hero's path in the development of gambling problems has been largely ignored and under researched in the gambling field. However, it is the position of these authors that a psycho-cultural Mythic Iconic Pathway (MIP) toward understanding gambling is an important element missing from today's theories and models with respect to the etiology and perpetuation of gambling problems; especially given the climate of our contemporary culture where the "scale and scope with which variously celebrated individuals infuse and inform every facet of everyday existence" (Andrews & Jackson, 2001, p. 3).

Thus, this paper will briefly report on past theories and models regarding problem gambling etiology and motivation, and afterwards will fully introduce the Hero's Complex and Mythic Iconic Pathway with the intention of adding a new dimension toward understanding the problem gambler and his or her subsequent related problems.

#### *The Current Theoretical Climate and Gambling Pathology*

During the past 40 years, the motivation underlying gambling behavior has been studied extensively within a myriad of theoretical paradigms (i.e., moral paradigm, disease paradigm, developmental paradigm, pathological paradigm, and neuropsychological paradigm) (Nixon, Solowoniuk, & McGowan, 2006). Despite the usefulness of these paradigms, it has become obvious that the illusiveness of why one individual became a problem gambler and another did not, no longer could be accounted for by single theories alone (DiClemente, 2003). Furthermore,

because gambling cuts across all barriers of race, class, and culture and has also been attributed to factors such as venue accessibility, age, gender, personality, trauma in childhood, lifespan changes, and biology, to mention a few, understanding gambling through a single lens “spurred some thoughtful individuals to integrate these models” (DiClemente, 2003, p.17). Thus, problem gambling is best understood to arise from biological, environmental, social, and psychological processes, and is now encapsulated under one model: *The Biopsychosocial Model* (Griffiths & Delfabbro, 2003).

The biopsychosocial model “stresses the individual idiosyncratic nature of the development of gambling problems and emphasizes the role of contextual factors internal and external to the process of gambling itself” (Griffiths & Delfabbro, 2003, p. 17). Hence, utilizing a wide breadth of theoretical components the plight of the problem and pathological gambler has been clearly elucidated clinically, helping a great deal of individuals recover from gaming related problems and behaviors. Nevertheless, despite the usefulness of the biopsychosocial model, the prevalence of problem gambling continues to rise (Ladouceur, Jacques, Chevalier, Sévigny & Hamel, 2005). Therefore, it appears that gambling researchers and clinicians alike must be willingly to explore the shifting patterns of society, while equally being vigilant with respect to understanding the complexity of human nature especially when problem gambling motivations are concerned. Thus, a period of change is beginning to occur in the problem gambling field whereby the elements of the biopsychosocial model are not dismissed, but a new focus for research and treatment has been called for that acknowledges, “the existence of specific subtypes of gamblers, each influenced by different factors yet displaying similar phenomenological features” (Blaszczynski & Nower, 2002, p. 487).

According to Blaszczynski and Nower (2002), these subgroups are represented by behaviorally conditioned problem gamblers, emotionally vulnerable problem gamblers and antisocial problem gamblers. The behaviorally conditioned gamblers are those gamblers who periodically meet pathological gambling criteria, but do not have premorbid psychopathological features. The second group also fall victim to behavioral conditioning and gambling fallacies, but also have underlying psychopathology and negative developmental familial backgrounds. Furthermore, Blaszczynski and Nower (2002) suggest that third group of pathological gamblers also exist, and they present with significant psychosocial and biological disturbances along with characterological deficits in terms of impulsivity and antisocial personality disorder. Ultimately, it is hoped that the pathway model will improve diagnosis, treatment interventions and outcomes for those individuals suffering from disordered gambling problems (Blaszczynski & Nower, 2002).

Meanwhile, Shaffer, LaBrie, LaPlante, Nelson, and Stanton (2004) have also proposed a new avenue of epidemiologic study regarding the problem gambler. They suggest that gambling should move toward the study of specific gambling determinants within sub-populations, while equally working toward the improvement of theoretical models “that identify causal paths and clarify the dimensions that underlie gambling-related problems” (Shaffer et al., 2004, p. 514). Two recent qualitative studies demonstrate a theoretical move in the direction suggested by Shaffer et al. (2004) (e.g., Nixon, et al. 2006; Solowoniuk, 2006), whereby the authors have synthesized the historical and psycho-cultural underpinnings of the hero and its many transpersonal, existential, and psychoanalytic dynamics to set forth a novel phenomenological theory with respect to understanding problem gambling (i.e., *The Mythic Iconic Pathway of Problem Gambling*).

## Introducing the Hero Complex and the Mythic Iconic Pathway

While recognizing the reality of other subsets of gamblers such as those who take emotional refuge in a disassociated trance state of mind (Jacobs, 1987; Walker, Schellink & Anjou, 2008), the MIP of problem gambling suggests that the central issue facing the problem gambler is not the rationality or irrationality of cognitive processes, behavioral conditioning, or disease of the mind or body. Instead, the initiation, motivation, and progression of gambling is derived from the gambler's experience of his or her self and world, which is intertwined within a psycho-cultural context imbued by current and past mythic icons (Hero/Heroine, Savior, Warrior, Rogue, Healer, Big wheel, Big dog, Killer, Rockstar, The Beast, Highroller, Undergroundman, Cardshark, Wildman, Roulette Queen, among others) (Bly, 1990; Campbell, 1968; Leonard, 1989; Pearson, 1991; Nixon, et al. 2006; Solowoniuk, 2006).

Essentially, mythic icons serve as powerful motivators and carry with them cognitive-emotional schemas upon which one's personality interconnects with, thereby bringing about subsequent acts of behavior (Campbell, 1968; Nixon, et al. 2006; Sullivan & Venter, 2005). Furthermore, the myth of the hero can be traced back as far as Babylonian times and its etiological roots (i.e., pattern of fall and ascension has been illustrated among folklore and legend across cultures the world over) (Raglan, 1950; Rank, 1970). Today, however, the lure of the hero is not solely based on striving to save the world or damsel in distress, but represents a figure and social system preoccupied with one's persona encapsulated in "an equally solipsistic regime of economic (re)production (consumer capitalism); both of which are nurtured by the supreme technology of hyper-individualization (Andrews & Jackson, 2001, p. 1).

Then again, wagering and gaming is not always the preoccupation of the so-called pathological gambler, because most bettors gamble for more complex reasons than desperation

or subsequent behaviors that arise thereafter (O'Brien, 1998). For instance, the sports fan "attracts some of the most cerebral bettors. . . . A similar breed of gambler inhabits the stock market, where the molten core of the American financial system is at once uniquely innovative and a cauldron of potentially destabilizing speculation" (O'Brien, 1998, p. 5). Speaking of such a cauldron, a recovering gambler shares her past experience with the stock market:

Well the gambling was ah... man oh man, I remember once I had a week I made fourteen thousand in three weeks playing the commodities, pig and cow spreads. I just absolutely loved it. By then, I thought I was such a hot shot. I mean, I was omnipotent, you couldn't stop me eh!

Yet forgotten amongst the former and latter examples, and unconscious to the above the gambler, is the hero and its many complexes that serve to perpetuate the dream of transforming oneself from mediocrity to stardom. From an operational perspective, all mythic icons in one form or another operate along a continuum; each balanced on a pendulum endowed with two extremities. Metaphorically, each pole potentially can provide an overwhelming amount of energy and subsequently influence behavior. For instance, attaching oneself to a warrior like role may engender one to change a career, end a relationship, or seek justice. But becoming seduced by a mythic icon's energetic charge may lead to an overindulgence of that power.

With that said, our experience working with pathological gamblers has revealed that embracing the hero's stature, can give individuals the courage to change his or her stake in life (i.e., break away from traditional role, escape a traumatic past, socialize, etc) but upon winning, they dubiously inherit the notion that by earning their own money they can seize a sense of freedom or serenity, without having to make changes in their lives be it externally or internally (Nixon, et al. 2006; Solowoniuk, 2006). It must be kept in mind then, that the hero's seductive

nature needs to be balanced with rationality, responsibility, and the courage to understand that what the hero is trying to reflect outwardly, can only be found by looking inward. Such a discovery is the key to recovering from pathological gambling disorder, whereby the individual comes to rest in being, releasing themselves from the grip of the hero's complex and ending the destructive counterfeit quest for wholeness (Almass, 1996).

### *Psycho-Cultural Tenets and the Mythic Iconic Pathway*

According to May (1991), myths and heroes are integral to the fabric of society, as they help individuals to find their own ideals, courage, and wisdom; he further adds "we hunger for heroes as role models, as standards of action, as ethics in flesh and bones like our own. *A hero is a myth in action*" (p. 54). However, not all myths and heroic tales begin or end for that matter, with people finding their own ideals nor do they always uphold societal goals and values. It is rare, May (1991) suggests, that we find a "genuine hero;" and most often the individual heroes of today are celebrities. But the "the virtual intimacy created between celebrity and audience often has very real effects on the manner in which individuals negotiate the experience of their everyday lives" (Andrews & Jackson, 2001, p. 2). Thus, past and present icons fill the void and emptiness that some individuals find themselves embodying, further embalming the idea that they must seek to be more than who they already are. One gambler stated:

I quit the music business in 1992, because I couldn't do it anymore. I was exhausted; I started getting eaten up by competitors. And that put the fear into me; I was thinking I would rather die than lose my bands. They used to call me the rock and roll Queen of Alberta right and doing it my way met so much to me. You know at one time that was such a source of pride. I just wanted to rest eh, so I rested. Anyways, in December I go down to the bar, and remember seeing these machines down their and they looked boring,

but I wasn't going to ask anyone how to play them. But, people were phoning me talking to me about these VLT's, one friend told me she won a thousand bucks, now that kind of registered. So I ambled down there, and threw some money in and almost immediately across the machine were five jackpots. The bells are going off and I kind of feel embarrassed, what do I do? And somebody looked over and told me I won five hundred bucks and the beast was born literally. I felt like somehow it was me. I'm a winner, man look at me.

In this case we see how the gambler has already cut herself off from her essence (Almass, 1996). Essence in this respect refers to one's innate qualities (i.e., autonomy, competence, respect, dignity, integrity, and intelligence, among others). Such qualities are not dependent upon one's race, sex, gender, or financial status, nor is essence a concept derived from mental activity, but a phenomenological reality that can be experienced at different levels of intensity through the process of letting go of one's ego identity (Almass, 1988). However, without having knowledge of such a luminous nature, the gambler is predisposed to finding substitutes for an inconspicuous absence of essence. Substitutes come in the form of a big win, or embracing the image that being a hero can manifest. Thus the gambler finds his or her specialness mirrored back through large or small crumbles of validation that is filtered through a societal norm, which holds heroism as the new god.

This notwithstanding, it is our contention that gambling addiction is driven by the desire to find wholeness. Therefore, embarking on a counterfeit quest for wholeness through gambling, although outwardly appearing to be a destructive is better understood as an:

Inner impulse to change calling forth something from deep within that demands we break up, break down, or shatter our solid reality so that growth can occur. This force from within is a natural expression of our own potential for health (Preece, 2006, p. 24).

Consequently, the MIP model of problem gambling asserts that underlying the problem gamblers motivations to gamble and his or her subsequent related gambling behaviors thereafter, are colored amongst mythic introjections (e.g., call to glory; rage against injustice, cruelty, oppression) that are then projected into the world by the problem gambler (e.g., gaming provides me with money/successes, sense of status, escape, new identity, etc.).

Sullivan and Venter (2005) elaborate on the process of introjection and projection and further hold that individuals tend to distinguish others not only on the basis of the qualities a hero possess, but also on the premise that they want to embody these characteristics in themselves. The central issue for the problem gambler then, is his or her unwillingness to release themselves from pre-existing egoic/self structure, which is constructed of two interrelated influential parts, i) the inheritance of a psycho-cultural identity derived from being thrown into the world, and; ii) the egoic identity or self structure that is molded from being in the world, which lends itself to adopting values and ideals that mythic icons set into play. Inheriting a psycho-cultural identity eventually gives rise to individual experience, and as the individual grows, the individual also accedes toward manifesting products that our culture has subscribed to (i.e., learn customs, values, beliefs, roles, pastimes).

Essentially, these products although interspersed with our personal making are nevertheless imbedded with historical experiences and can be considered to be conceptual structures of human consciousness, or mythic structures/icons, which are always relative to culture and history (Heidegger, 1962; Rank, 1970; Wachterhauser, 1986). In congruence with

inheriting a historical past, we also mold an egoic identity and self-structure based on our present existence that together with our inherited mythic self is partly implicated with respect to developing a gambling problem. While developing an egoic identity and self-structure is nevertheless a developmental necessity for psychological health (Almass, 1996), it carries with it a host of potential pitfalls. For instance, relying too heavily on one's egoic identity colors the vibrancy of life and sometimes creates the mindset where happiness is only found in the outside world, which at times is necessary for survival, but essentially cannot placate an ego that is finite (Tolle, 2005). A former gambler highlights such as stance:

I got the first mortgage on my house, 20,000 dollars. And I knew I was getting this money eh, like in June. And I stayed clean two whole months, and I kept on saying I could use the money intelligently and all this. Well, I couldn't get to the bank fast enough from the mortgage place and it was right down to the casino after two solid months of not gambling anyway shape or form. I went through three hundred bucks in fifteen minutes, and I proceeded to go through eight thousand dollars of the mortgage before I finally came to my senses again. But you know, it always all about searching for something, so then I found this relationship. His name was Ernie, so I went out with him one night and told him my life story and fell in love. He was going to save me from myself. He was the King and I was the Princess.

The question remains, however, is why do some gamblers gravitate toward an authentic hero's path (i.e., living a peaceful life with altruistic means) while others go bankrupt, lose their families, or nearly destroy themselves, before they begin to think about relinquishing the counterfeit hero's quest to find fortune fame/fortune and self-respect. The answer to this question according to the MIP framework reflexively points backward to one's egoic/self-

structure, its executive power and permeability within the entirety of the psyche, real or perceived wounds in childhood and adulthood, predisposition, and off course, the strength to which the latter characteristics and associations attract a particular mythic icon or group of mythic icons.

Thus, as we have already stated, the avenue of being a hero through gaming not only provides an optimal source of energy, but it can intermittently reward the individual (upon winning) with self-validation, status, admiration, and self-respect, but more importantly, a pseudo identity (Lee, 2005; Little, 2002). Furthermore, problem gamblers have within them a hero-complex that oscillates between seeking fortune and fame, which placates a sense of self that outwardly displays assertion and confidence. But, below this brazen and rugged exterior, resides a self that feels weak, meager, existentially empty, and ontologically “never good enough” (Almass, 1996; Lee, 2005). Similarly, Little (2002) remarks that gamblers project images onto their world because they are afraid to find out who they are, and out of these fears they create caricatures of themselves filtered through iconic symbols of power.

Conversely, it has also been our experience that despite holding a realistic opinion of oneself the gambler is still vulnerable to the status and mirage that the higher roller icon can engender. As such, these individuals will unconsciously display their new found charisma for all to see and thus relish in the accolades of becoming known for being a wise and crafty gambler (Tippin, 2001). Similarly, John Tippin (2001), a self proclaimed high roller and video jackpot winner of nearly 12 million dollars, prophetically stated:

You only get one or two holes-in one- in your life (and many don't get any at all). Would you rather score an ace during the final round of a major tournament in front of a large

gallery of fans with thousands of dollars at stake-or during a mere practice round, with only your foursome to witness it? (p. 122).

Luckily for some individuals, the glory of riches and notoriety is not held as a primary goal of life and their heroic journey does not take on a counterfeit quest like proportion that often leads to darkness, despair, and bitter remorse (Nixon, et al. 2006; Solowoniuk, 2006). Instead the individual realizes that a true hero is simplistic in his/her dreams and aspirations and because of this insight remain grounded in being; allowing essence to reveal its true character (Almass, 1996; Trungpa, 1984). Then again, there are those individuals for whom their careers, by their very nature, play directly into the energy that a heroic path can engender (Lee, 2005). For instance, star athletes, high profile businessmen/ businesswomen, and Hollywood's elite, stake their living negotiating between the highs and lows of fame and fortune on a regular basis (Andrews & Jackson, 2001; Fletcher, 2001; O'Brien, 1998). Thus wagering large sums of money at a casino/gaming venue is normalized and filtered through a psychological star-lust iconic lense. We assert that this type of lense along with other mythic icons further clouds the problem gamblers perceptions of self and future, and theoretically, can lead the individual on a journey of descent and possible ascension, involving four interrelated processes.

#### Treatment Considerations and the Phenomenological Processes of the MIP

There are four fundamental phenomenological processes to the MIP, i) invitation to a journey, ii) descent, iii) gradual ascension, and; iv) constituting basic trust. Essentially these four processes delineate a psycho-cultural phenomenological etiology by which to understand gambling pathology, levels of gaming progression and cessation, and lastly, demarcate that developing trust in one's own being, is the primary ingredient by which disordered gambling is *authentically* transformed and thus *wholeness* embraced.

*Process I: Invitation to a Journey*

During the first process individuals purposely or inadvertently stumble upon gambling as means to escape from their world and self (current life stressor, trauma in childhood), play for altruistic means (i.e., charity or school bingo), to socialize, and or play to change their status and image of themselves, which is sometimes validated and perpetuated further through a big win or loss (Nixon et al. 2006; Solowoniuk, 2006). In all, the invitation to the journey does not offer an easy route to happiness, fame, or fortune, but has the potential to stir the gambler's psyche with images and energy that inadvertently bring about changes in one's life. These changes usually begin innocently enough, as evidenced by this gamblers disclosure:

I moved to Alberta when I was eighteen. Yeah it was neat, because all my buddies from back home still couldn't get into the casino, because the age was nineteen in B.C., so when I came to Alberta I was the big Hero. I would go back home and tell these guys stories about playing blackjack. . . . It was until later that I became the *Big Dog*.

Hence, the tantalizing effect of being a "big hero" sends ripples through the personality structure that intertwine with salient cultural messages enticing the gambler to seek "outside" themselves for meaning and purpose in life. An invitation of this kind can only be understood as an ontological call, where the gambler tries to fill his or her inner emptiness, which is fueled unknowingly by an egoic self. The existence and revelation of bringing to light the egoic self is illustrated by this problem gambler:

And when I broke through the shame barrier of my gambling, it was like I had got to the very core of who I thought I was. Yup, it's like your big void, yeah. Big void, your either feel empty or you never fit in, which is emptiness in itself.

Ultimately, the MIP model does not delineate one particular process as being responsible for the etiology of disordered gambling. But it does suggest that the heroes call is teleological in its function, thereby creating a crack in one's self-structure unconsciously inviting the individual to embark on a counterfeit quest for wholeness. This journey destructive as it may be, can potentially lead the disordered gambler to confront the symptoms underneath the gambling, bringing the possibility of wholeness with it. However, such a profound transformation does not occur until the mythic journey has burned the individual's foundations to the ground and unfortunately the building of that fire usually begins with a descent.

### *Process II: The Descent*

The second process, descent, and its behavioral phenomena, have been elucidated by past and current gambling clinicians and researchers alike (Aasved, 2002). Such literature has documented the gambler's loss of control, his or her chasing of losses and the continued plummet into chaos fueled by intermittent wins, casting a dark shadow on surmounting losses, and squelching any consequences that sustained gambling binges have engendered. Furthermore, the descent is also analogous with the disease perspective on "hitting bottom," but unlike the former and latter tenets, there is no mention or explanation, beyond cognitive reasoning, as to why the gambler choose darkness over light. However, when an individual is driven by the "Highroller icon," or other mythic icons, the gambler's fallacy, illusion of control, and unconscious forces, theoretically combined; still only speak to reasonably understood assumptions behind one's behavior. Unfortunately, the gambler lacks the wisdom needed to relinquish the self from a seemingly demonic possession, as described by this pathological gambler:

My gambling started to transform, it kind of felt like a bad spiritual thing. Things would go through my head like, 'if I don't gamble something bad is going to happen to my family,' or 'something to me.' I honestly believed that the world was going to be okay around me so long as I continued to gamble, if I lost it was okay, everybody was going to be safe.

At this point, the gambler has surrendered all faculties of reason, and has plunged headfirst into the abyss of mythic lore and fantasy. Darkness then is not a choice, but a rite of passage that can lead to transformation. It is here that the gambler must be listened to; outwardly his or her behaviors may appear to be driven by purely individual or physiology needs, understood correctly, however, such behaviors are movements that have their derivatives at the level of *soul* or *being*. From such a standpoint, gambling behaviors as evidenced above, are acts of reaching out, but a hero's energy built up over centuries is limitless, and with a self-identity that is not firmly grounded in being, the gamblers hedonistic pursuit to change oneself through action or possession of material wealth is tough to relinquish.

This notwithstanding, it has been our experience that talking rationally with gamblers about their behaviors and informing them about the odds of gambling and pointing out that their behaviors are destroying themselves and lives of their significant others can be helpful. Yet, for those who are gripped by the fascinating influence of the heroes' energetic charge and hold introjected ideals of who they believe they should be, the descent or the delivery of the intervention(s) must be ontologically potent enough to disenfranchise one's egoic identity. Such a shift in psychological stature dissolves the energy of the mythic icon so its function can now act as a creative outlet leading to the beholding of authentic presence (Almass, 1996). Because we have the begun the process of dislodging the idealized self's executive power in the psyche, it

then becomes possible to peel away the layers of one's egoic identity opening the door so one can bathe in his or her ashes (Bly, 1990). Cleansing of this kind does cause a significant amount of pain, but it rewards and dispels any shame and resentment for past transgressions done unto oneself and for selfish acts or illicit behaviors committed during one's gambling career.

The introduction into the transformation of one's egoic identity is illustrated by this gambler's vignette:

I quit gambling because I knew it was going to kill me, but there is a lot of pain I haven't been able to deal with, it will probably take me a lifetime. And the emptiness I sometimes feel is like a deep pit; one drop of water coming in, feeling so broken, feeling like death, like I don't have a soul.

### *Process III: Gradual Ascension*

Our third process in the MIP model, introduces the pathological gambler to the killer icon, the phenomena of relapse, and its potential for strengthening the commitment to one's recovery and illuminating the need to love oneself. Thus, the third process stands out as a pivotal milestone in the recovery journey, because it is here where the individual has learned to develop enough trust in his or her own being to choose to live a life (for the most part) devoid of the egoic identity's desires, but more importantly, without the drive for addictive indulgence. Ultimately, the gambler who has chosen the hero icon a personal savior must eventually face the killer icon, who reigns as the lord and master over one's own psychic emptiness. This left uninvestigated, according to the MIP model, will forever be the obstacle that stands between becoming an authentic hero and controlling gambling, or the cycle of continued pathological gambling and prolonged suffering.

Being an authentic hero or *just being* is not a metaphysical notion, for authentic and inauthentic arise both from being alone (Heidegger, 1962). However, inauthentic being or assuming the role of the inauthentic hero does not arise from one's own volition, because a great deal of our lives is spent dedicating ourselves to the introjected voices, whispers, and whims of how society wants us to be and act (Preece, 2006). Such an action creates a chasm between the ability to *be* and having to construct an *impenetrable* and *inflexible* I, that society and its all forces (media, institutions, tradition) produces, which unknowingly provides the breeding ground for psychic emptiness to be spawned. Whereas the ability to just be is found when we are most at home with ourselves and when we have a "deep, concrete experience of 'mineness....'" However, in our more usual, normal, everyday, moments, we do not treat things as affecting us deeply in our 'ownmost' being" (Moran, 2000, p. 240). Therefore, the gambler must confront the inner psychic emptiness so the counterfeit quest for wholeness can be dropped and beingness can surface from beyond the egoic identity.

Such a confrontation began during the *descent* when the one's identity was confronted with its own fallibility, however, it has been our experience that for a sub-set of pathological gamblers, it is the meeting with the killer icon that provides the possibility for the individual to transform gambling habits and thus allow the healing process to begin. Leonard (1989) has described the phenomenology of the Killer motif in considerable detail with respect to addiction in her book "*Witness to the Fire: Creativity and the Veil of Addiction*. On the one hand, she asserts that the killer helps to devour the heart of the addict and perpetually inhibits the individual's ability to be spontaneous, vulnerable, and receptive, while equally destroying one's faith in life itself. While on the other hand, the killer also has an upside to its archetypal intent, which is the revelation of finding love for oneself (Leonard, 1989). But before the individual can

obtain such a healing ingredient, he or she must embark upon killing the killer within, a choice that requires turning toward the light, and telling the truth in the midst of one's darkness and dread.

A former client of one the authors had this to say about slaying his killer within:

So I quit gambling because I knew it was going to kill me and winning a million dollars by that time wouldn't have changed anything. So it was time to confront myself with the reality and conclusion that I wasn't going to win at gambling, not to mention that I had ruined a relationship with somebody who really loved me. But all of it was my fault; I got that after processing my anger. So now I'm in this new space, trying to find something, trying to reestablish. . . I guess love; it feels like I am filling myself up with something real being here, because gambling was fake. It stripped me away from me and now I am left with an empty shell.

In this vignette we are witness to the gambler's conflict and the choice to confront the killer within self. Such a confrontation sometimes ignites a purifying fire within oneself, which not only seeks change, but provides the necessary space in the psyche that can lead toward greater self acceptance and love for oneself.

Interestingly, however, it has been our experience that for a great deal of gamblers the "stripping away of me from me" and the empty shell that remains, brings about too much pain, and the individual usually cannot help but to return to gambling so as to push away the mental anguish that erupts from a fragmenting egoic-identity (Almass, 1988; Preece, 2006). A former client describes such an experience:

So I quit gambling for awhile and but then I started to feel so alone eh and despite having kids and being married I still felt alone, alone, alone, alone. Nobody, could here me,

nobody could understand me and underneath that, was a horrible feeling that I couldn't shake. I felt like it was this beast in me and it was going to rip me apart, for two days I wanted to gamble, and then I eventually succumbed.

In this report, we see the battle that sometimes takes place with the individual even after he or she has sought initial help for a gambling problem and secured a degree of sobriety. However, the gambler does not need to abandon the recovery journey as the killer icon has lost its murderous capacity in the psyche; enabling a degree of love to emerge into the space that was previously occupied by ego structures (Almass, 1988; 1996). Therefore, the MIP model holds that relapse is actually a misunderstood phenomena, and that clients need to sit in their emptiness without escaping, which eventually allows their personal essence to arise in consciousness.

Such an experience of emptiness always will always threaten the ego and render extensive activity for the gambler during recovery, for example, depression, agitation, anger, and anxiety may occur together or present themselves in varying degrees of intensity until the process and freedom from the egoic identity is complete (Almass, 1988). Nevertheless, having an understanding of why this activity is present and how it unfolds helps the gambler contain and hold emerging experiences during the recovery journey. At the same time, having an understanding of emptiness, requires the counsellor then, to contextualize healing from disordered gambling as an evolving process. Here the individual is guided to examine and possibly re-establish a sense of basic trust in the world, which places greater responsibility on the recovering gambler to become actively involved in the healing process toward the further revealing of one's essence. Remarking on these phenomena, a former pathological gambler stated:

A couple of days after my slip I came to a crossroads. I just broke down and told a close friend that I don't think I can get by in life without gambling . . . And then I just surrendered. I just let it go, sobbed through the gambling and told her how I really felt. So today is still a struggle, but I stand in the mirror every morning say I love myself too much to gamble and I pay attention too my feelings but instead of going around them I go through them.

#### *Process IV: Constituting Basic Trust*

The last phenomenological process included in the MIP model of problem gambling is focused on the recovering gambler's constitution of basic trust within self and the world in which he or she inhabits. Thus, this process is more concerned with everyday living, as opposed to being strictly focused on gambling behaviors. However, this is not to say that the individual does not need to be aware of triggers that can lead to gambling binges, but the energy that the mythic icons possess are now realized as creative potentials not images to be seized and acted upon. Almass (1998) in his book entitled *Facets of Unity*, described basic trust as a "nonconceptual confidence in the goodness of the universe, an unquestioned implicit trust that there is something about the universe and human nature that is inherently and fundamentally good, loving, and wishing us the best" (p. 23).

At a personal level, basic trust is a felt sense quality beyond cognition. It is a pervasive intuitive knowing that everything is perfect. Thus, "your life becomes a spiritual journey, in which you know that if you stop trying, stop efforting, stop grasping, stop holding onto to people, objects, beliefs, things will be okay, that they will turn out for the best" (Almass, 1998, p. 23). Speaking about basic trust and its influence on recovery a former disordered gambler stated:

I contracted a skin disease a couple years after quitting gambling and for two years received both western and herbal treatments. Nothing worked. It made me extremely agitated. But now when people suggest to me to go see a particular herbal doctor, I don't bother, I already accepted it as a matter of fact. I can live with it peacefully. So, understanding the motivations behind my gambling was another blessing, which steered me back to a different state of being. I discovered many things I wasn't aware of in the past. And through acquiring a deeper understanding of what it means to be human, I was more able to reflect on myself and be courageous enough to face my skin disease and do something about it without having to escape through gambling.

Here we learn how opening to life can not only help to transform our personal maladies but how the gambler's blood is finally purified. Hence, there is no longer a need to run from ourselves because we realize that nothing other than accepting what "is" can truly ameliorate our suffering (Katie, 2002).

Then again, we must be reminded that the ego is not destroyed in the process of deepening our basic trust, but is usurped as ruler in the psyche and thus is less susceptible to the play of mythic enticements. This does not suggest that the former disordered gambler enters a state of nirvana or that life is without trials and tribulations (Almass, 1998). Because as recovery unfolds, the former disordered gambler will be charged to live a life that is congruent with an emerging basic trust. However, since the former gambler never had a great deal of basic trust to begin with or it was lost at some point during the journey of life, circumstances may occur (e.g., trauma's, losses, stressors, among others) that trigger the individual toward distrusting existence, and escaping back into the world of mythic chaos. A recovering gambler stated:

I knew I was going to be in for thirty-five thousand from inheritance. Not to mention having getting married in June and at the end of November, my little brother's kid fell off the roof. Her picture was in the paper with this great big halo, she almost died. I managed to get through that, and um, a week and a half ago I phoned the lawyers and they said everything was okay. . . I looked back on it and I realize that I was setting myself up for a disaster. A little bit of me wanted to be the big shot still eh, and the closer it came, the more the like the big shot I felt. Well three day's ago I went out and gambled \$1,500, it only took two hours and then I came to my senses. So then I put rest into my business account and started paying bills. So being okay with screwing up, learning that, but awareness saved me . . . Yeah, I'm tremendously grateful that I got back on track.

Consequently, the professional who may be working with the former disordered gambler has to be aware that basic trust is not a metaphysical construct and thus be aware that most people do not have a lot of basic trust or if they do its more likely to be an intermittent faith that acts something more like self-confidence or self-esteem (Almass, 1998). But this is not basic trust. Therefore, it is important to realize that basic trust is not dependent on conditions "it isn't something we either have or we don't have. . . . Its manifestation in everyday life is the way you trust your body based on the physical laws of nature" (Almass, 1998, p. 25).

The secret for the recovering gambler then, is to begin to become aware of how much basic trust is already present in the world (e.g., air we breathe, rejuvenation of sleep, beauty of nature, gravity) and to seize the insight that these qualities are not manifestations of the self-identity, nor are they born from our social cultural history or icons. Trungpa (1984) equates basic trust with basic goodness and suggests that becoming aware of our innate basic goodness is

the key to healing and becoming a true warrior. He further asserts that apprehending such a trust is actually quite simple if we realize that it is not the feeling we get from making a million dollars or finally graduating from college or buying a home. Alternatively, basic trust is about being alive without desiring for what we don't have or being preoccupied with accomplishments. Trungpa (1984) writes:

We experience glimpses of goodness all the time, but we often fail to acknowledge them. When we see a bright color, we are witnessing our own inherent goodness. When we hear a beautiful sound, we are hearing our own basic goodness. . . . These events take a fraction of a second, but they are real experiences of goodness. They happen to us all the time, but usually we ignore them as mundane or purely coincidental. (p. 30)

Then again, what does the recovering gambler do once he or she is in-tune with basic trust or basic goodness? Paradoxically, the answer is nothing, there is nothing to do but enjoy being (Harrison, 2002). This is not to say that the gambler becomes immobile and no longer participates in life. On the contrary, his or her actions become more real and distinctly purposeful because the individual is driven by an energy that is not diluted by archetypal intent or by distorted projections arising from an egoic identity. Thus, in doing nothing the paradox becomes clear, the self-identity no longer grinds on with its demands or pursuits. Yet, nevertheless, the individual continues to advance his or her basic trust in the world and in doing so lives a more enriched life:

But ah, within in the next five years I will be not doing too badly. And I am spending a little more time just hanging out with my daughter, friends, and being alone with myself. . . You know I appreciate the little things and letting go of the little worries, but just like any person I have bills and other stuff comes up, but I put it in perspective now. Life is

too short otherwise, and it needs to be enjoyed more. So that's what recovery looks like today for me.

In all, basic trust helps the recovering gambler to develop the ability to let go and jump into the unknown (Almass, 1998). The individual no longer needs the assurance from any person, object, or desires to adopt a behavior to find purpose and meaning in the world. Such a shift in awareness also allows us to live our lives out of love, out of an appreciation for life and kindness for others, but more importantly for ourselves. Hence, we then take the responsibility of making our lives enjoyable because apprehending basic trust naturally brings forth an ease of being and transparency, which clearly illuminates the moments when we are still striving to become "good enough." This awareness of our striving stands in stark contrast to the trust that being brings and in its shadow we are intrinsically guided to drop our projects and facades and come into tune with our true nature (Trungpa, 1984).

Without basic trust, however, the recovering gambler will continue to fumble and hold a vulnerability that is enchanted by mythic icons, which will serve to infuse the egoic identity with a false sense of security. In addition, the thrills of gambling, the seduction of the easy money and the energy of the high roller status, will ultimately plague the individual for an eternity, lending itself to a life of despair, demise, and denigration. Thus, the importance of becoming aware of basic trust and learning to recognize its qualities will enable the individual to be held by the universe and adopt a caring respect to life. This aids the individual to develop to the fullest capacity of being. A former gambler describes such a manifestation:

At times, I thought I was going to die. I thought I was the most despicable person and then there is the thought that I cannot carry on another moment like this. But then there is the whole other part, spiritual issues came along, certain connections came along within

me, that place where you are. Ah. . . Wholeness, the connection with your heart, your soul, a connection to something bigger than you are, right? I am okay with myself now; I think it is important that a person realizes that about themselves.

### Conclusion

In light of the latter four processes and the phenomenological experiences presented in this paper, the MIP pathway of problem gambling claims that for some individuals gambling may be an inevitable and purposeful journey. Here the egoic identity is dethroned in the psyche and one's preoccupations with mythic introjections are eventually brought into consciousness awareness. Thus, the individual comes to an understanding that the desire to be a hero was a counterfeit quest for wholeness, which essentially deescalates the individual's fascination with gambling and brings an awareness that being is the only authentic pursuit worth "chasing" after. Through this realization, the recovering gambler is led to the rediscovery of basic trust, which provides the ground for living a full life. This is a life that is lived in congruence with the knowledge that everything required to enjoy such an authentic existence has always been present.

As a whole, the MIP pathway sets forth a novel approach toward understanding the phenomena of gambling pathology, yet as educators and clinicians in the field of health sciences, we willingly acknowledge that not all gamblers or clinicians will necessarily see the merit or value in understanding gambling from a mythic iconic lense. We also openly acknowledge other subsets of problem gamblers such as those gamblers, typically women, who use electronic gambling as a form of transforming or disassociating from their pain and suffering (Jacobs, 1987; Walker, Schellink & Anjou, 2008), and that the hero motif may be found in younger and mid-life males attracted to such heroic images as the "James Bond" persona. However, we

believe that the advantage of understanding gambling from a social-cultural, intrapsychic, phenomenological perspective with its existential and transpersonal threads, is that it allows for gamblers to accept their gambling as being part of their participation with and being in the world. The gambler's plight then, is not pathological in the traditional sense (i.e., there is not something wrong or aberrant in one's psyche or mind). In fact, problem gambling is a lifeworld event that when stripped down to its roots, for instance, its etiology, gaming behaviors, consequences, cultural aspects, psychological processes, economic and mythic components, one is able to discern that gambling phenomena needs to be understood from a broader perspective than what is currently included in the bio-psychosocial model.

Hence, the MIP pathway of problem gambling makes it clear that gambling is embedded with fantasy, and at its core, is a hero-complex of socio-historical proportions and influence. As a result, the gambler believes he or she can obtain a mythical fortune while equally assuming an identity that will fulfill all egoic desires and wishes. Yet nevertheless, a middle path is also available to the problem gambler, in which responsibility is assumed and the position taken that the qualities of being a hero or heroine are available right now, paving the road toward true riches that only embracing being can manifest. In summation, such a perspective turns gambling pathology inside out, and by doing so, invites the clinician to facilitate a healing journey where the recovering gambler is guided to transform his or her suffering and find wisdom amongst the ruins of a poorly played hand.

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