

Spirituality, Addiction, and Globalization

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Third Age Learning Waterloo
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Bruce Alexander: Spirituality, Addiction and Globalization

Bruce Alexander and the globalization of addiction

Natasha Dow Schüll and addiction by design

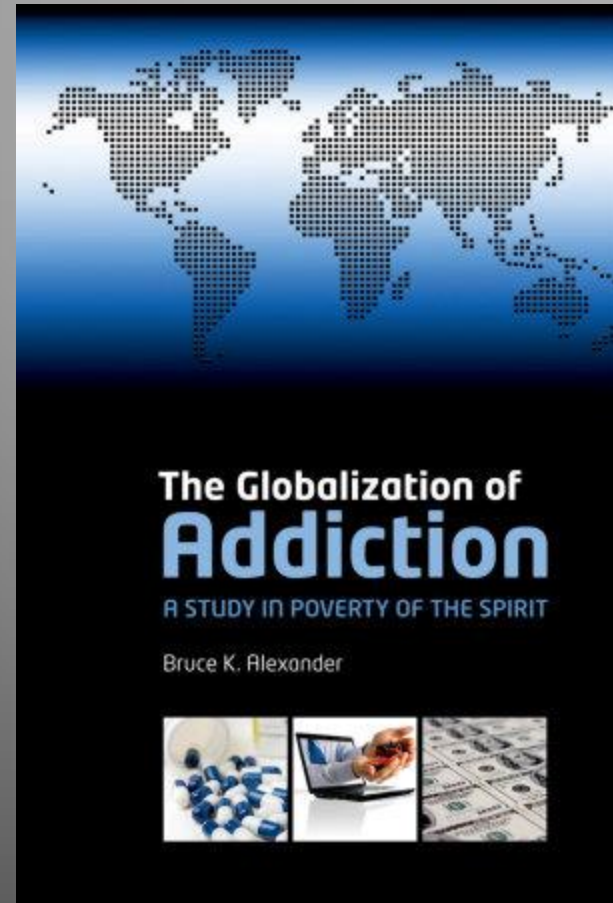
Next lecture (November 28): Alexander and Francis: parallel discourse on globalization and the poverty of the spirit



The Globalization of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of the Spirit

»» Bruce Alexander

The Globalization of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of the Spirit



Understanding Addiction

▶ The Official View of Addiction

- Addictive substance
- Addicted individual
- Harm of addiction

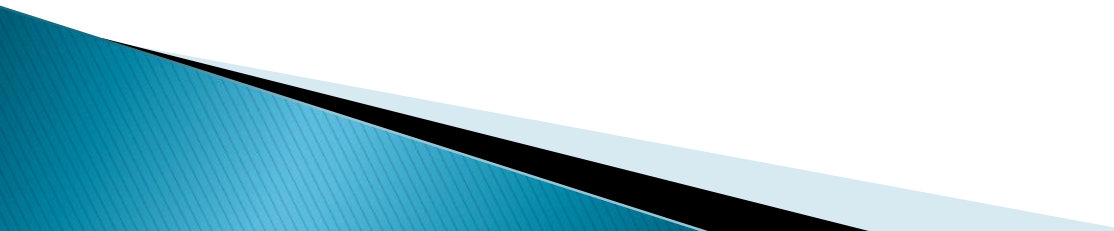
▶ The Medical Model

- Religious roots
- Demon drug + person = addict
- Once an addict, always an addict
- [A Change of Venue for Addiction: From Medicine to Social Science \(2010\)](#)

Understanding Addiction

- ▶ The Rat Park Perspective
 - Addiction comes from context not substance
 - Social determinants of addiction
 - Addiction as adaptive response
- ▶ Scientific evidence for official view is weak to non-existent
 - Most people use addictive drugs safely
 - Natural recovery is more common than recovery under treatment

Social Dislocation Theory

- ▶ Psychosocial integration is a necessity (Erik Erikson)
 - ▶ Free-market society undermines psychosocial integration (Karl Polanyi) and prolonged dislocation is unbearable
 - ▶ Addiction is a way of adapting to dislocation
 - ▶ Globalization spreads social dislocation
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Karl Polanyi on social dislocation

The Great Transformation, 1944

▶ The Market Society

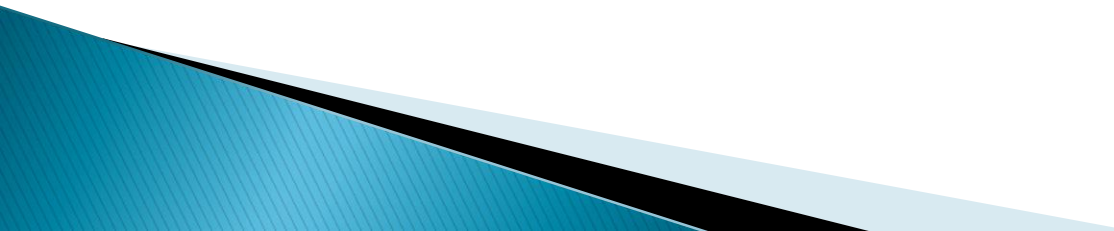
- Modern nation–state
- Unregulated market system
 - Supply–Demand–Price mechanism

“Disembedded” market is totalizing

- ▶ But what makes a market economy is its **self-regulation character**. This springs from the inclusion of the factors of production, labour, and land into the system. No society before our own ever permitted the fate of labor and land to be decided by the supply-demand-price mechanism. Once this is the case, society is economically determined. Why? **Because labor is only another name for man, and land for nature**. Market economy amounts to the handing over of man and his natural habitat to the working of a blind mechanism running in its own grooves and following its own laws.

- Karl Polanyi, “Economic History and the Problem of Freedom”, in *For a New West* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2014), p. 41.

Polanyi of social dislocation

- ▶ Because market is totalizing and self-regulating, everything is submitted to market discipline
 - Nothing should interfere with the Supply–Demand–Price mechanism.
 - Sacrifice culture, custom, tradition, family, religion, ethics, aesthetics, etc.
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Addiction as response to social dislocation

- ▶ “Overwhelming involvement in any pursuit whatsoever (including, but not limited to, drugs or alcohol), that is harmful to the addicted person, to society, or to both.” (*GoA*, p. 29).
- ▶ For the addict, addictive behavior is about controlling subjective states, by regulating relationships and **narrowing attention**.


Alexander on addiction

“Gambling, love, power-seeking, religious or political zeal, work, food, video game playing, Internet surfing, pornography viewing, and so forth can take up every aspect of a severely addicted...person’s life—conscious, unconscious, intellectual, emotional, behavioural, social, and spiritual—just as severe drug and alcohol addiction can.”

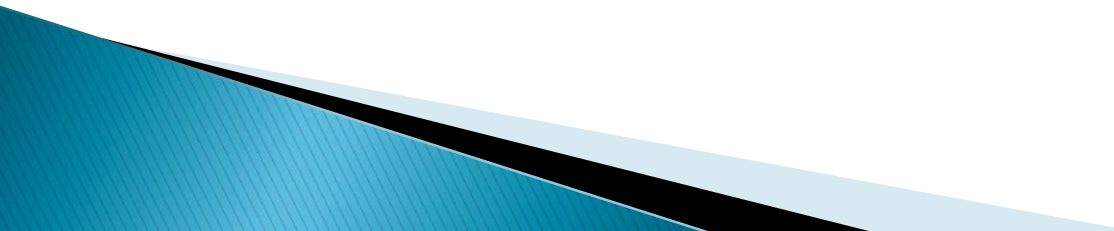
“Addiction can be short-lived or life-long, mild or severe, situational or constitutional, socially acceptable or unrespectable, episodic or constant, overwhelmingly destructive or just restrictive.”

- *Globalization of Addiction*, p. 35

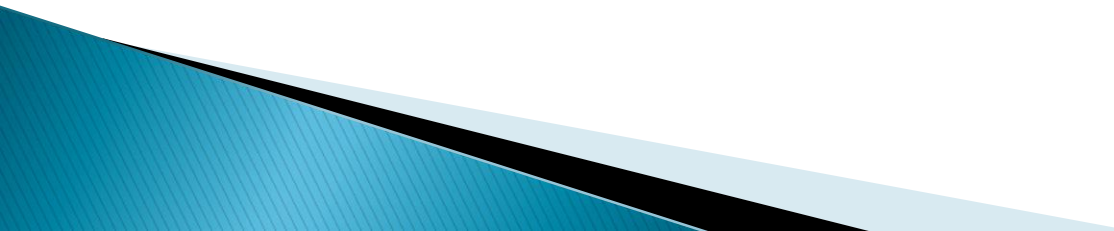
Addiction as adaptive behaviour

- ▶ Addiction gives the addict an identity, purpose, and a community
 - ▶ Substitutes for psychosocial integration
 - ▶ Adaptive but not desirable
 - Compulsive element of addiction means enslavement (may lead to criminal activity, harm to others, etc.)
 - Narrowing causes addict to neglect responsibilities to self and others
 - Harm to self and society is denied
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A Study in Poverty of the Spirit

- ▶ “The subtitle of this book is meant to signal that its ambition extends well beyond the conventional limits of psychology and social science. To be fully comprehended addiction must be analysed in spiritual as well as psychosocial terms.” (p. 4)
 - ▶ Alexander is “not a theist of any kind,” but he is part of a civilization profoundly shaped by Christianity
 - ▶ “As I dig deeper and deeper into the topic of addiction, I find it necessary to draw on the strengths of this Christian heritage, and of other spiritual traditions, as well as to point out their limitations.” (p. 4)
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Poverty of the spirit and addiction

- ▶ Material poverty can be borne with dignity in an integrated community; however, wealth cannot cure social dislocation.
 - ▶ “In contrast to material poverty, dislocation can be called ‘poverty of the spirit.’ This phrase is suggested by Jesus’ words in the Beatitudes, ‘blessed are the poor in spirit, for there is the kingdom of heaven.’”
 - ▶ Not a promise of wealth, but a spiritual community to which they could truly belong. (p. 60)
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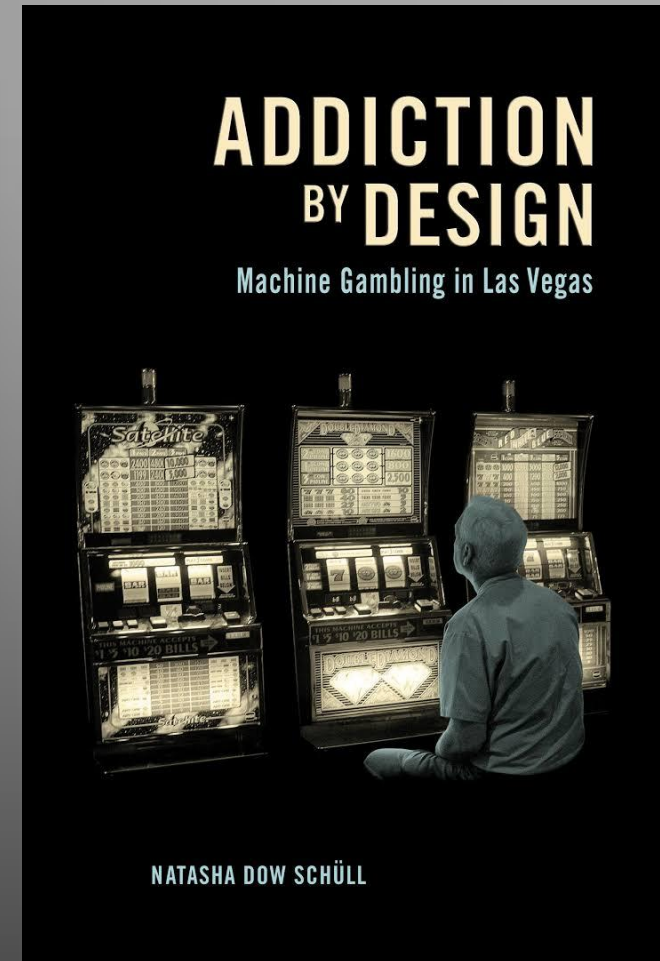
Poverty of the spirit and addiction

- ▶ The spiritual harm produced by addiction is absolutely real, whether or not drugs are involved. It can be described in the languages of many secular and spiritual traditions. In this book, it will be described in the psychological language of Erik Erikson, the social science language of Karl Polanyi, the rationalist language of Socrates, and the Buddhist language of Vipassana meditation, as well as the Christian language of St Augustine and St Paul. (*GoA*, p. 41)

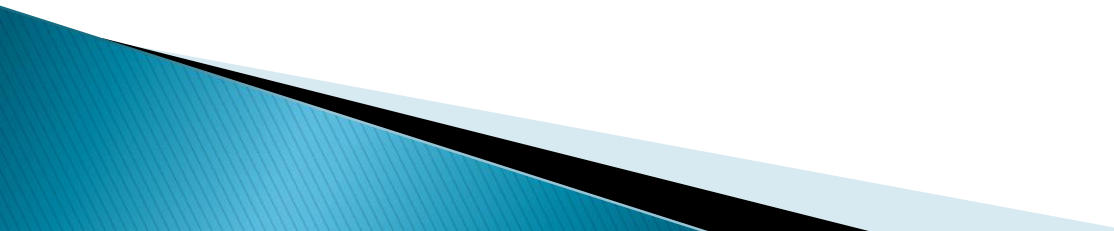
Cashing in on Addiction

»» Natasha Dow Schüll: *Addiction by Design*

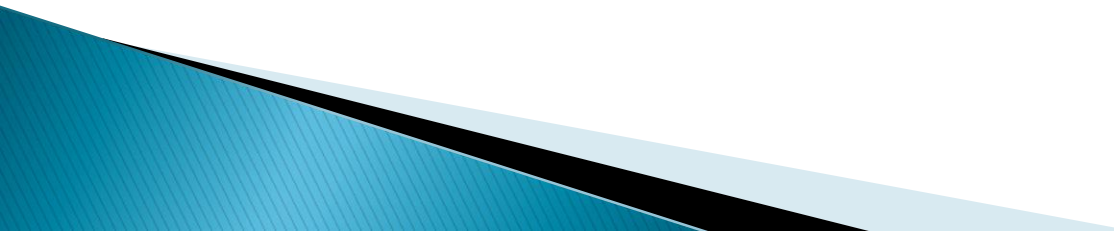
Addiction by Design



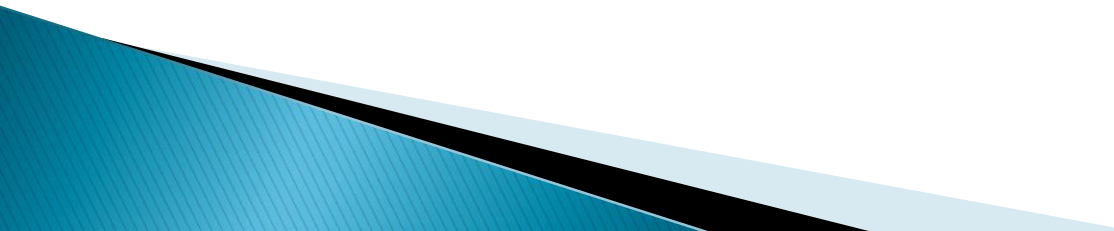
Stephen Paddock and Las Vegas shooting

- ▶ Oct 1, 2017, Stephen Paddock killed 59 people and injured over 500
 - ▶ Retired business person, who gambled as a job.
 - ▶ “It’s like a job for him. It’s a job where you make money,” said Eric Paddock, adding that his brother could lose \$1 million and still have enough to live on. “He was at the hotel for four months one time. It was like a second home.”
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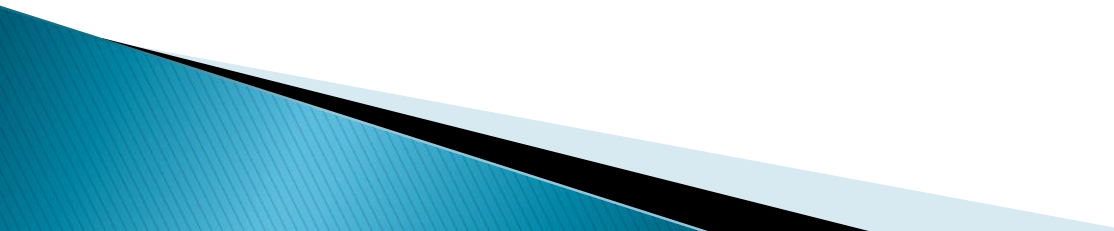
Stephen Paddock: a study in disconnection

- ▶ Owned several houses but rarely lived in them
 - ▶ Moved constantly
 - ▶ Spent 4 months at a casino hotel at one time
 - ▶ Not connected to any community or family
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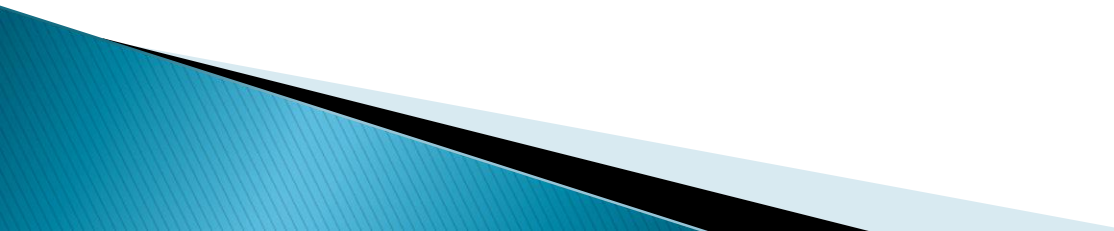
Gambling Addiction

- ▶ Not playing to win, but “playing to win to play”
 - ▶ “To keep playing—to stay in that machine zone where nothing else matters.”
 - ▶ Both the industry and the players are aiming for Time on Device (TOD): the player to escape, the industry to win.
- 


Natasha Dow Shüll on Addiction

- ▶ Addiction is “located” neither solely in both “subject” and “object” of addiction, but rather in the **relationship** between the two.
 - ▶ Quotes Howard Shaffer: addiction is repeated interaction with an object or array of objects that “reliably produces a desirable subjective shift” (p. 17)
 - ▶ It means that the object of addiction can be manipulated to make them more addictive, that is, more likely to reliably produce a “desirable subjective shift.”
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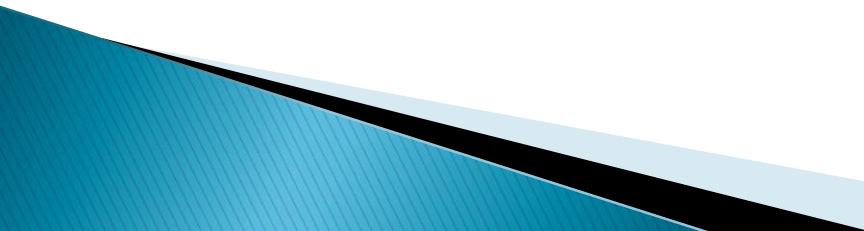
Prevalence of Gambling Addiction

- ▶ APA and Industry: 1 to 2 percent of the general population is prone to pathological gambling and 3–4 percent meet the criteria for “problem gambling”
 - ▶ 20 percent of those who gamble regularly (p. 15)
 - ▶ Studies show that 30 to 60 percent of gambling revenues derive from problem gamblers. (p. 16)
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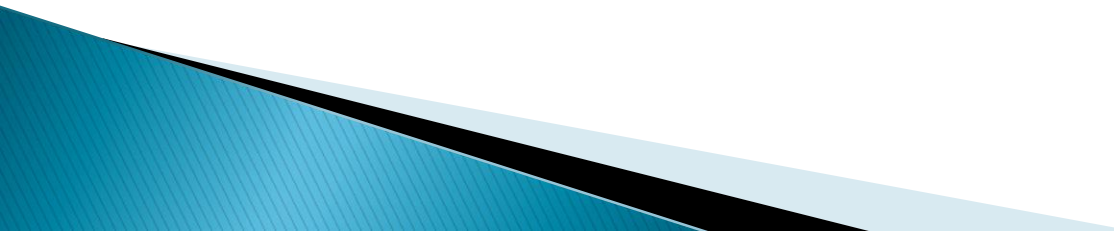
Designing for Addiction: Outside of Machine

- ▶ Casino design
 - Architecture, ambience, affect
 - No clocks, no view of outside world
 - No intersections
 - ▶ Game design
 - Screens, sounds, lights, touch-back
 - Chairs, consoles, etc. battle fatigue
 - ▶ Tracking players to incentivize them
 - Machines as data collectors
 - Loyalty card programs
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Addiction by Design: The Inside

- ▶ Hooking players: Gaming machines as Skinner boxes
 - ▶ Intermittent positive reinforcement
 - ▶ Techniques of manipulation
 - “Near misses”
 - False wins: LDW (losses disguised as wins)
 - Multi-line play
 - Stop-buttons (give players perception of control)
 - Hiding the odds
- 

Gambling and Maximization of Profits

- ▶ Maximizing machine productivity
 - ▶ Industry seeks to maximize REVPAC (“revenue per available customer”)
 - “How to get people to gamble longer, faster, and more intensively?”
 - How to turn casual players into repeat players?”
 - ▶ But designers are not even thinking about players. They are thinking about outsmarting their competitors: other game manufacturers, other casinos, etc.
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Addiction and Neoliberalism

- ▶ More focus on **subject** of addiction
- ▶ Context is battle v. Official View of demon drugs
- ▶ Analysis of neoliberal capitalism focuses on dislocation
- ▶ More focus on the **object** of addiction
- ▶ Context is battle v. manipulative behaviour of gambling industry
- ▶ Analysis of neoliberal capitalism focuses on maximization of profits

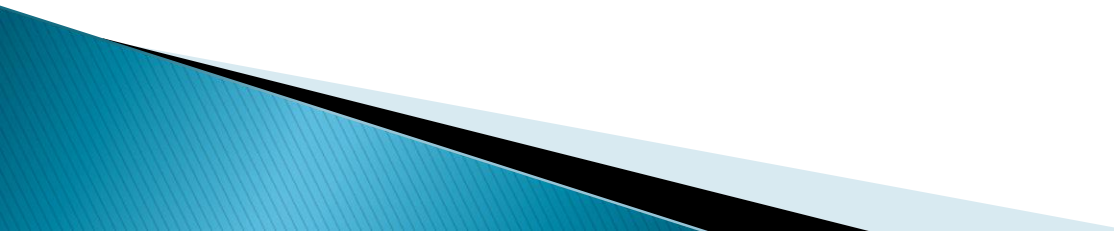
Dislocation Theory

Addiction by Design

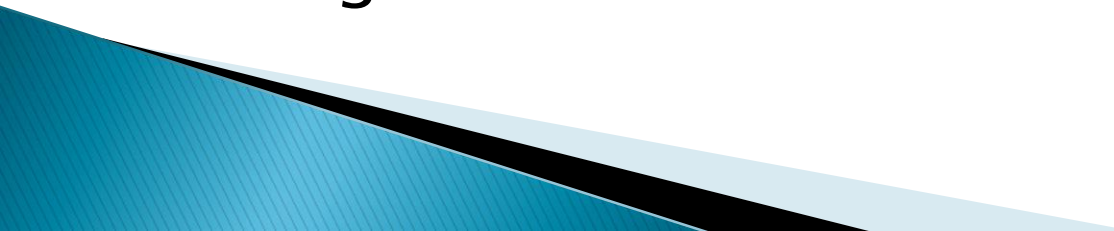
Definition of addiction

- ▶ Overwhelming involvement in a substance, behaviour, or relationship
 - In fact, every addiction involves all of these
 - ▶ Addiction allows us to narrow our life–world in order to combat anxiety and other negative subjective states
 - ▶ Addiction gives us a substitute identity, purpose, and community
 - We assert our autonomy and agency in a distorted way
 - Addiction allows us to regulate relationships (even by isolating ourselves)
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Definition of addiction

- ▶ Because certain substances, behaviours, or relationships are especially powerful subjective–state shifters, this allows profit-seeking institutions to encourage addiction
 - Done in the name of marketing
 - Disguised by the vocabulary of consumer choice
 - Disguised by ethos of self-definition through consumption
 - To be extreme is to be special, “passionate”
 - Responsibility is downloaded to the individual
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Addiction by Design and Spiritual Crisis of Neoliberalism

- ▶ Pope Francis: absolutization of market system means search for maximum profits without thinking of negative impact on others
 - ▶ Addiction by design is part of natural functioning of market
 - ▶ Poverty of spirit is evident both in “push” of social dislocation and “pull” of addiction by design.
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Other factors in addiction

- ▶ Biological/genetic factors
- ▶ Cultural factors: cultural framing of alcohol, drugs, sex, work, etc.
 - Provides meaning
- ▶ Manipulation of cultural factors by marketing industry
 - Jean Kilbourne, *Deadly Persuasion* (documentary)
 - <http://www.medialit.org/reading-room/deadly-persuasion-7-myths-alcohol-advertisers-want-you-believe>

Crisis of the Spirit and the Globalization of Addiction

»» Conclusion

Alexander and Francis: parallel discourses of transcendence

- ▶ Shared human impulse for seeking identity, purpose, community
 - ▶ Defense of human dignity and freedom
 - Humanism of Erikson, Polanyi, etc.
 - Dignity of the human person
 - ▶ Social analysis v. individualistic moralizing
 - ▶ Protest against absolutization of market–society
 - ▶ Interpretation of consumerism (and ecological crisis) as response to social dislocation
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Horizontal v. Vertical Transcendence

- ▶ Alexander wants a this-worldly or immanent transcendence

- ▶ Francis wants a this-worldly transcendence that leads to an experience of or a participation in an other-worldly transcendence

“Horizontal”

“Vertical”

Thank you!



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