

A Brief Comparison of Addictive and Sober Systems

FEATURES OF ADDICTIVE SYSTEMS

Addictive systems are essentially **political**, invested in relationships of **power** and **control**, and are characteristically:

][**righteous** - concerned with allocating *blame* and *credit*.

][**hierarchical** - invested in *chains of command*.

][**linear** - understanding all processes in terms of *causal links*.

][**anti-intimate** - avoiding intimacy through *distancing* (we are irreconcilably different) and/or *merging* (our individuality is unimportant).

][**boundary referential** - establishing descriptions of self through *differentiating boundaries* of the "us vs. them" variety (black or white, rich or poor, Protestant or Catholic, American or foreign, etc.).

][**dependency polarized** - allowing only for *independent* and *dependent* modes of being and relationship.

][**cognition/affect schismatic** - seeing the relationship between thinking and feeling as antagonistic, and even adversarial. (Which of these is exalted - affect or cognition - varies from case to case.)

In sum, addictive/political systems are organized around the epistemological parameters of **Control** and **Sensation**. It should be recognized that:

1) Control and sensation are axes, and that expressions of addictive systems manifest all along the continua of these axes, including extremes of being in *and out* of control, and, extremes of sensual stimulation (excitement) *and* deprivation (numbness).

2) The goal of control is antagonistic to the formation of intimate relationships, because intimacy involves vulnerability, and vulnerability compromises effectiveness in control. However, since *meaning* derives from *relationship*, the participant in an addictive system ends up meaning-impooverished. Thus the parameter of sensation takes on exaggerated value by default. Sensation is, in effect, the consolation prize; since everything is meaningless - Sartre's "absurd" existence - you might as well wring all you can get out of your senses.

FEATURES OF SOBER SYSTEMS

Sober systems are essentially **ecological**, invested in relationships of **meaning** and **function**, and are characteristically:

][**appreciative** - proceeding from *good-will* to apprehend patterns of *responsibility* (ability to respond), *accountability* -- and *grace*.

][**sybiotic** - invested in relationships of *fit*, *complementarity* and *mutuality*.

][**recursive/resonant** - understanding/appreciating events and processes through *metaphor*, *poetic correspondence*, *patterns of wholeness*.

][**pro-intimate** - facilitating reciprocal *knowing* and *sharing* of distinctive individual *selves*.

][**identity referential** - promoting realization and actualization of *uniqueness*, thus reducing need for being "special" -- at the expense of others.

][**dependency synthesized** - promoting and manifesting *interdependent systems* of being and relationship.

][**cognition/affect complementary** - feelings seen as the voices of vital internal centers; cognition the ability to reflect on, mediate, and act on behalf of, the needs and interests of these inner aspects.

The sober/ecological system, then, is organized around the epistemological parameters of **Integrity** (wholeness; integration) and **Meaning**. Three considerations are noteworthy here:

1) Using the various technologies of addiction, one accesses experiences which artificially *approximate* the experiential features of sober systems.

2) While this presentation suggests an either/or dichotomy between the two systems, in fact the sober/ecological system is "meta" the political system, in the sense that relationships of power and control, causal links, etc., are an integral *part* of the larger ecology. The problem-domain of addiction emerges insofar as the consciousness is *limited* to the political description.

3) Conversely, when the addictive technologies are "working", as described in 1) just above, then the addictive/political description is "meta" the ecological description, in that a linear process (addictive technology) is seen to be the instrument for achieving holistic, non-linear experience states. The fact that this represents a logical contradiction matters not at all, until the technology begins to bankrupt itself.