A College Psychology Teacher's Experience of Cell Phone Addiction in the Classroom: Autoethnographic Reflections

By Elliot Benjamin

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Keywords: autoethnography, humanistic education, cell phone addiction, humanistic antidotes.

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I. Introduction

Social media addiction in the form of the inappropriate and excessive use of cell phones is prevalent in college classrooms all across the United States[1]. However, the lived experience of this phenomenon from the perspective of the college instructor has not been the focus of research on this topic. On the other hand, there have been a number of firsthand accounts of what it is like for college instructors to live in the world of academia (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013; Bochner, 2014; Douglas and Carless, 2013; Dutta and Basu, 2013; Pelias, 2000; Richardson, 1997). These firsthand accounts make considerable use of qualitative research in the form of auto-ethnography (Chang, 2008; Denzin, 2013; Ellis, 2004, 2009; Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013).

Autoethnography was developed in the last few decades of the 20th century, largely through the efforts of sociologist Carolyn Ellis (2004, 2009), and focuses upon the researcher's firsthand experiential account in relation to the social dynamics and context that he or she is investigating. Unlike strict ethnographic research that does not include personal reflections of the researcher, autoethnography extends participant observation

research through placing a significant reliance upon the relevant feelings, thoughts, perspectives, experiences, reflections, insights, and personal stories of the researcher, and often involves a high level of personal vulnerability in terms of revealing emotional/private aspects of oneself (Chang, 2008; Denzin, 2013; Ellis, 2004, 2009; Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013). Autoethnography has been rapidly growing in recent years in both its depth of inquiry as well as the variety of topics written about. This is evident from the combined scholarly and personal experiential essays across a wide array of topics in the 2013 *Handbook of Autoethnography* (Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013), which includes sexuality, family life, marriage, academic life, domestic violence, war, post-colonialism, walking, "queerness," high school reunions, reflections on writing, performance, and artful inquiry. In my own autoethnographic writings, I have written about the topics of artistic creativity, community mental health, modern religions and cults, and spirituality and an exploration of life after death (Benjamin, 2008, 2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2015a).

The depth and growing variety of topics included in autoethnographical research is consistent with the focus of this article on social media addiction in the form of the inappropriate and excessive use of cell phones in college classrooms, from the perspective of the experience of the college instructor. More specifically, I will describe my experience as a college psychology instructor of teaching my psychology classes while dealing with the above phenomenon of social media addiction in the form of the inappropriate and excessive use of cell phones. In most of my previous articles on this topic (Benjamin, 2015b, 2016, in press), I have described the above phenomenon primarily in terms of ways of dealing with the situation to improve the classroom environment, teacher effectiveness, and students relating more personally to each other, which I have referred to as "humanistic antidotes."[2] However, in this article I explore my own experiences of the above phenomenon in far more depth and vulnerability, giving what I believe is a novel autoethnographic account of what college instructors may experience when their students engage in the

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inappropriate and excessive use of cell phones in the classroom.

II. Autoethnography, Performance, and Social Action

In recent years there has been a growing interest in what has been described as "performance autoethnography" (Alexander, 2013; Denzin, 2003; Pelias, 1999, 2013; Shoemaker, 2013; Spry, 2011a, 2011b). Spry (2011b) has described performance autoethnography as follows:

> Performance autoethnography views the personal as inherently political, focuses on bodies-in-context as a co-performative agent in interpreting knowledge, and holds aesthetic craft of research as an ethical imperative or representation...[For me] it has been about dropping down out of the personal and individual to find painful and comforting connections with others in sociocultural contexts of loss and hope. (Alexander, 2013, p. 543; Spry, 2011b, p. 498)

There is also a growing interest in the inclusion of performance autoethnography in a wide educational context, as described by Pineau (1994, 1998):

> There is a commitment to a critical exploration of culture and positionality that is integrated throughout a pedagogical context (e.g., classroom, community-based activism, human services, therapeutic contexts) or even across the curriculum as a primary methodology...Autoethnography is taught as an *engaged performative pedagogy* [*sic*] that consistently interrogates the metaphor of teaching as performance. (Alexander, 2013, p. 553)

Furthermore, the integration of writing and performance is a powerful means of "making the personal political" (Holman Jones, 2005). As described by Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway (2013):

> We find in autoethnography fertile ground for social justice projects….It is the move towards actualizing hoped-for possibilities, towards world-making, towards social criticism, where autoethnography finds it [*sic*] thrust. (p. 571)

It is in this context of performance auto-ethnography that I describe a significant part of my experiential process as a college psychology instructor in regard to the inappropriate and excessive use of cell phones in my Spring, 2016 Human Growth & Development psychology class at what I will refer to for anonymity reasons as simply "University." The auto-ethnographic research that I describe below was largely motivated by my upcoming (at that time) talk entitled "Humanistic Antidotes for a Narcissistic Social Media Addicted Society" at the World Association of Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy and Counseling (WAPCEPC) conference in New York City, which took place in July, 2016. I knew that effectively engaging participants at my talk would result from a combination of the substance of my talk and how impactfully I was able to convey my experiences.

I also knew that conveying my experiences impactfully was very much related to my ability to dramatically present my experiences, which is very much at the core of performance autoethnography, as described above. However, while I needed to work through a good deal of conflicting feelings between my academic role and my desire to be authentically who I am, my goal was more than to simply convey my relevant experiences to my conference participants in an impactful way. I also wanted to raise awareness of an issue that I believe is of paramount importance in our society and the world, which is retaining our human capacities of relating to each other amidst the staggering and overwhelming technological world that we are living in, in the hopes that this raising of awareness would have some effect, small as it may be, in the lives of those attending my talk. Thus my goal was to infuse autoethnography and performance social action.

III. Authethnography and Ethics

Autoethnography shares the concerns about ethics in research with all other forms of qualitative and quantitative research, as described in the Belmont Report (United States Department of Health and Humane Services, 1979). However, autoethnography also has its own set of particular issues in the form of "relational ethics" (Ellis, 2007, 2009; Tullis, 2013) that needs to be dealt with. There are a wide variety of perspectives about how to deal with the ethical issues that arise from doing autoethnographic research (Tullis, 2013). There is a built-in tension between wanting to be vulnerable and revealing one's deepest relevant thoughts and experiences, with the possible consequences of revealing "secrets" of those the autoethnographer is writing about, which may be viewed by those being written about as violating trust, friendship, and relationship bonds (Ellis, 2007, 2009; Shoemaker, 2013; Tullis, 2013). Furthermore, revealing deep vulnerable distressing aspects of oneself may have detrimental personal consequences to the autoethnographer that also needs to be dealt with (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010; Metta, 2013; Tullis, 2013).

In my own autoethnographic writings, I frequently had to deal with this conflict between vulnerable relevant self-revelations, and respecting the privacy and maintaining the trust of personal relationships (Benjamin, 2008, 2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2015a). I always made the decision to reveal vulnerably as much about myself as I felt I could do without violating personal relationships that were very important to me, when I believed that this revelation was significant and relevant to what I was writing about.

However, this sometimes was an excruciatingly difficult process to navigate. Authoethnography is certainly not a research method for the faint-hearted.

Fortunately (for me) in my research on social media addiction in the form of the inappropriate and excessive use of cell phones in the college classroom, the relational ethics involved in my autoethnographic research was not very difficult to traverse. In my most recent articles, I left my university unnamed, other than including the fact that it is in Maine, and I used numerical codes to describe my students' excerpts from their project papers involving social media addiction and excessive cell phone use (Benjamin, 2016, in press). I continue to take the same safeguards in the present article, and I am confident that consequently there is no breach of relational ethics in my descriptions of my students or my university.

However, I must admit that it was more difficult for me to come to terms with my own personal vulnerability and exposure in my autoethnographic descriptions that follow. My writings break open whatever solid wall I tend to hide behind in academia as Dr. Benjamin with my two Ph.D's, and they describe who I am and what I experienced in regard to the phenomenon I am researching, candidly in a way that I believe gives unique insight into what this experience is like for the college instructor who encounters the excessive and inappropriate use of cell phones in his or her college classes. The process of my experiential descriptions below was largely geared toward my WAPCEPC July, 2016 conference talk in New York City (see above), which was focused on this topic. My autoethnographic writings describe my conflict between being "academically respectable" and "telling it like it is" in regard to how I really felt and what I really thought, inclusive of all my self-doubts and vulnerabilities. But this is what I believe autoethnography is all about, and I think that my accounts that follow add relevant knowledge to the phenomenon that I have been personally researching, but of course it is you the reader who will decide for yourselves if this is the case.

IV. Social Media/Cell Phone Addiction

My autoethnographic descriptions reflect three developing and overlapping themes:

Theme 1: the social issue of the inappropriate and excessive use of cell phones in the college classroom; Theme 2: personal experience and social issues; Theme 3: social issues and performance autoethnography. However, before exploring these themes, it is important to place Theme 1 in the wider context of the detrimental social aspects of excessive technology use in general, along with the related detrimental consequences of widespread narcissism (Twenge & Campbell, 2009), as described by Christopher Aanstoos (2015):

Robots and/or computers are increasingly taking care of children and the elderly, but they do not care about them….the recipients think they are loved by machines, a shallowing out takes the place of genuine human relations….Time spent on the Internet means less time spent with friends and even with families. Research done at the early phase of this development showed that increasing computer usage results in more loneliness and depression….increasing reliance on such technologies [such as Facebook] can dangerously reshape one's emotional life, resulting in fewer and more superficial relationships….the typically more narcissistic and impulsive online "personas" are dangerous because they contribute to the person becoming more impatient and grandiose in life….The great conundrum here may be that as people now communicate more *quantitatively*, they may do so less *qualitatively* [*sic*]. (pp. 246-247)

In my last 2 years of teaching psychology at University, I have gathered a number of descriptions by my students that reinforce Aanstoos' above concerns about the excessive social use of technology, which I have described as follows:

Families living under the same roof and choosing to send each other text messages to communicate rather than actually "talk" to each other—including husbands and wives; students coming to class before the instructor arrives and silently being immersed in their social media world on their cell phones instead of talking to each other; young children sitting immobile in front of their computers to vicariously play their computer games or engage in their online social media communications instead of getting physical exercise playing with other children; college-age people spending 12 hours a day immersed in their social media technology, as disclosed by one of my Human Growth & Development class discussion groups; socially extroverted "online" people who avoid eye contact with others and completely lack social skills when in person; a student's roommate waiting for her to leave and then immediately texting her to convey all her complaints to her about living together; a 12-year-old-girl who is continuously glued to her cell phone to the point of virtually not interacting in-person with any of her family members other than quick "yes" or "no" responses. The list goes on and on, and we haven't even scratched the surface when it comes to how all this social media technology immersion relates to family interaction, childhood obesity, unstable financial security through internet marketing, car accidents due to the use of cell phones when driving, etc. (Benjamin, 2015c, p. 2)

In regard to the specific concerns about the excessive use of cell phones, a student in my Spring 2016 Human Growth & Development class expressed this succinctly:

> For just about everybody, their phone is their life. That is how they keep in contact with everyone; that is where all their pictures are, and so on. Now even today I do not think one could imagine life without technology and social media. Use of technology is essential to make the tasks of life easier; however, its abnormal, excessive unnecessary use leads to addiction and makes life more difficult. (Benjamin, 2016, p. 3)

I previously summed up the current research on the detrimental effects of inappropriate and excessive use of cell phones as follows:

> It is now commonly agreed upon that in spite of the beneficial effects of the appropriate use of cell phones to effectively and quickly gather academic information, inappropriate cell phone use in high school and college classrooms is a pervasive problem in our current US society. The detrimental effects reported are inclusive of distraction from schoolwork and class activities, short attention spans, diminished reading capacity, lower GPA, higher anxiety, lower satisfaction with life, cheating on tests, and rudeness.[3] (Benjamin, 2016, p. 3)

I have included a number of illustrative reports and research studies that convey the detrimental effects of social media/cell phone addiction in my previous articles (Benjamin, 2015b, 2015c, 2016, in press). A good summary of these detrimental aspects was included in some of the research papers by students in my Spring, 2016 Human Growth & Development psychology class:

> From traditional television to iPads, social media, and cell phones, media and technology is becoming a dominant part of adolescents' lives….When one goes out into the public and they see adolescents not paying attention to anyone or anything but their cell phones, that comes from parenting….The amount of media use is becoming so unbelievable….Some teenagers send nearly 30,000 texts a month, often carrying multiple conversations simultaneously…. As teenagers send that ridiculous amount of texts, they are emailing, Faceliming, playing video games, reading online books, using a computer, and watching television….One of the biggest problems in society today is the fact that adolescents don't know what it's like to have an actual face-to-face conversation. The social interaction in adolescents is lacking because of how caught up they are in technology….adolescents are getting involved in media and technology at a younger age….Many people believe social media can be addictive, like Facebook for example….That's why there are 500 million users spying on one another. We're all interested in what others are doing….Now you have this real-life, breathing example right in front of you and it's so fascinating to people and they can get addicted….There are many different signs and symptoms of social media addiction. A few are the following:
>
> When you leave your phone behind at home and feel a sense of loss and isolation because you can't check your Facebook or Twitter updates while out and about;
> You check your Facebook account 20 times a day;
> If you don't receive a comment on your latest blog post within 12 hours you have suicidal thoughts;
> You go away for a week without your laptop and you suffer severe heart palpitations;
> You have more social media icons on your phone than productivity apps;
> You have more online friends than you do in real life;
> You check out Facebook or Twitter updates "after" going to bed;
> Abnormally excessive use of technology;
> Regularly checking the mobile or internet through some important activity like meeting (Bullas, 2010)….In a recent poll, 22% of teenagers log on to their favorite social media site more than 10 times a day…..In some cases, it is replacing other forms of communication, such as face-to-face interactions….they are so obsessed with checking their Facebook or Twitter so much that they miss out on fun or important things in life. (Benjamin, 2016, p. 5)

V. Autoethnographic Reflections of Cell Phone Addiction in the Classroom from my Perspective as a College Psychology Teacher (Reflecting on the Spring, 2016 Semester)

To begin my autoethnographic reflections, I initially described my above Theme 1 experience from my perspective as a college psychology instructor, about 6 weeks after my Spring, 2016 Human Growth & Development psychology class at University ended. My preliminary Theme 1 description overlaps with Theme 2 as I describe this social issue from my own personal experience.

Wednesday 6/21
I enter my college psychology classroom—Human Growth & Development, and I dread once again seeing some of my students surreptitiously engaging in their cell phone social network worlds under their desks, while I am lecturing on my

chosen topic of the day. I already have shortened my lectures to at most 10 or 15 minutes, leaving as much time as possible for my students to be involved in their small group discussions and whole class sharings. But even these 10 or 15 minutes feels too long to me. I wonder why it disturbs me so much. It just feels so demeaning—to be "tuned out" as if I were nothing more than a bag of empty words. Sometimes I make eye contact with one of my indulgent cell phone users, while reminding my class that cell phone use in the classroom is unacceptable and will result in a poor class participation grade, which counts as 15% of their final grade. Once in a while I call out the indulgent cell phone user by name and ask him or her to put away his or her cell phone. And sometimes I decide to ignore the situation, knowing that my lecture will soon end and that the small group discussion or whole class sharing will soon be happening.

It used to be harder. For the first month of the semester I lectured for half an hour, but after I received my disappointing student evaluations for the previous semester, I knew that a half hour was much longer than I could tolerate the disturbing cell phone scenario for in my classroom. And the semester before this was even harder—in both my Introductory Psychology and College Algebra classes. I had one student who was in both my classes, and every single class period in math class he would sit right in front of me and blatantly engage in his cell phone communications, smiling sneakily at whatever he was socially engaged about. It became a regular class ritual at the beginning of class for me to tell him to put away his cell phone, with my usual warnings. He would reluctantly put away his cell phone for the moment, but then he would re-engage with his cell phone a few minutes later, instead of working out the assigned math problems using his calculator. Sometimes my anger would almost get the best of me and it would be all I could do to stop myself from screaming at him. And this was all a few minutes after he was intermittently engaged with his cell phone throughout my psychology class. But at least in psychology class he sat in the back row and I could pretend that I didn't see him engaging in his virtual social world with his cell phone—well at least some of the time I could pretend.

I gradually realized that some of my students were truly addicted to their cell phones. They were suffering the pains of separation from their cell phones when I insisted that they put them away, and it was more than some of them were able to handle. And as I prepare to give my conference talk[4], which is focused on my students' cell phone addiction in my Spring 2016 Human Growth & Development

psychology classroom and what I refer to as "humanistic antidotes"[2] as a constructive response, I realize how important it is that I convey my own bona fide experience of cell phone addiction in the college classroom, as a college psychology instructor.

Yes the previous semester was worse. I got my "cheating" cell phone in the classroom initiation when one of my Introduction to Psychology students confided in me at the end of one of my classes during the first few weeks of the semester, how disturbing it was to him that the entire last row of students were using their cell phones to cheat on their quizzes for the past 2 weeks, while he industriously put in much time and effort studying for these quizzes. This shocked me and jolted me to find a constructive and creative way to respond to the situation. The result was that in the next class I had my students engage in The Psychology of Cheating small group discussion, in which they were required to share their personal school experiences of cheating or seeing others cheat[5]. After their discussions, in this same class period, I followed up on this with my stern little lecture about academic ethics, the severe school penalties for cheating, and the inappropriate use of cell phones and other technology in the classroom. This cheating/cell phone initiation certainly put me on alert to my students using their cell phones inappropriately in my classrooms.

In my next experiential description, I expand upon the first two themes that I have described above, giving more concrete instances of what I encountered as the inappropriate and excessive use of cell phones in my classroom, but I also explore my own internal conflicts related to my teaching in what I experienced as a difficult and disturbing social environment. This is where I changed gears and explored what I have referred to as "humanistic antidotes"[2] to what I was encountering, as well as started to think about preparing for my related conference talk, which would eventually immerse me in the Theme 3 connection of this social issue with performance autoethnography.

Thursday 6/22

As I think back to some of the particularly disturbing experiences I have had with my students in regard to what I view as their cell phone addiction, one incident that comes to mind for me involves a very gregarious female student who was in my Introduction to Psychology class the previous semester. Every class period this student would not look at the board while I was lecturing, but instead would be looking intently at her desk, and it was very obvious to me that she was surreptitiously engaging in her virtual social network world on her cell phone. However, unlike the other students who would be doing this, my generic cell phone

warnings to the class had no effect on her whatsoever, including when I made eye contact with her and singled her out by name. Finally out of desperation to have this not continue, I sent her an e-mail and conveyed to her in no uncertain terms that her class participation grade was being lowered because of my concerns that she was using her cell phone in the classroom, and that if she wanted to continue to attend my class then she needed to be looking at the board when I was lecturing. And at the end of the next class, as she was leaving she burst into tears and said that I had no right to pick on her when the three girls in the first row were continually using their cell phones during the whole class period. And then she emotionally added that during the last class she was checking her cell phone because she had just found out that there was a school shooting at her brother's school. Before I could respond, she slammed the door and ran out of the classroom.

I was left with a mess of conflicting feelings— wondering if I were too hard on this student and not relating to her "humanistically," but then remembering that her looking-at-her-desk use of her cell phone had been going on during every single class since the beginning of the semester, not just the last class. But needless to say, I got on the case of the three female students in the first row, making eye contact with them when I would give my now regular warning reminders about cell phones at the beginning of every class period. One of these three female students had blatantly been using her computer every class to do something that I knew had nothing to do with my class lectures, as she was busily buried in her computer without looking at the board during the whole time I was talking, and completely ignored my continuous reminders to the class about using their computers only to take notes when I was lecturing. I ended up conveying to her in an e-mail that this was unacceptable behavior and was resulting in her lowered class participation grade, and this ended her inappropriate use of her computer during my lectures. I also closely monitored the looking-at the-desk cell phone syndrome of this student and her two female friends in the first row, as well as the rest of my psychology students, as I was now more willing to call students out by name when I felt it was warranted. But I was feeling more like a policeman than a teacher, and my student evaluations were the worse I had received in the 5 years in which I was teaching at this university.

It was seeing my student evaluations from this previous semester after teaching Human Growth & Development for about a month this past semester, that prompted me to reduce my lectures from a half hour to 10 or 15 minutes, and to require my students to be engaging in personal/academic small group discussions every class period[6]. This is the crux of what I came up with as humanistic antidotes for the inappropriate use of cell phones in the classroom accompanied by widespread narcissism, and is the basis of my upcoming conference talk[2,4]. And I do think that there is much value in requiring students to continually engage in authentic discussions and personal/academic sharing and relating to each other, while putting away their cell phones. But I know that it is also important to me that I honestly convey what this experience of cell phone addiction in the classroom has been like for me as a college psychology teacher. This is authoethnography in a nutshell[7], and it is real and "the truth."

The truth is that it was "a drag" for me continuing to teach my Human Growth & Development class last semester after I saw my awful student evaluations from the previous semester, which included some students complaining about my "rude" behavior and "old-fashioned" teaching. The truth is that what enabled me to finish out the semester was knowing that I was practicing and experimenting with the humanistic antidotes that I have briefly described above, in preparation for my conference talk and article that is based upon my talk[8]. However, I will not be engaging in these humanistic antidotes in college psychology classrooms anymore, as I was not asked to teach again at this university, and I am now very content being a psychology mentor and committee chair to online Ph.D psychology students at Capella University[9]. However, I feel somewhat hypocritical promoting my humanistic antidotes in the psychology classroom, that I will not be using.

At the very least I should make an effort to see my student evaluations from this past semester when they are available, to learn if any of my efforts to engage my students continually in meaningful personal/ academic discussions were appreciated. And at my conference talk, I can facilitate others sharing about their experiences with social media addiction and narcissism, which is a significant part of the description of what my talk is about, as well as if the participants have found any effective humanistic antidotes to combat this. Authentically conveying my difficult experiences in response to the inappropriate cell phone use in my college psychology teaching, rather than presenting myself as an academic professional studying the "dual epidemic" of social media addiction and narcissism[10] in our society, is more honest and consequently more "humanistic." And this honest sharing of my own exp-eriences to convey firsthand something meaningful about the social

phenomenon of cell phone addiction in the classroom from the perspective of the psychology teacher, is what my deepest self knows it should be doing for my conference talk.

At this point in my reflections, I decide to view my student evaluations, and the disappointment and discouragement that I feel after viewing them have the effect of making me seriously consider canceling my upcoming conference talk. This internal conflict that I vulnerably share is very much at the core of my autoethnographic accounts as a college instructor caught in the web of trying to teach in the detrimental social environment of students tuning out my teaching through their inappropriate use of cell phones. However, my conflicts gradually work themselves out as I wrestle through the dilemma of wanting to be authentic in sharing my relevant teaching experiences at my upcoming conference talk (Themes 2 and 3), with also wanting to present myself in a professional academic capacity, promoting what I viewed as an important educational social issue (Theme 1).

Friday 6/23

And as it turns out, my student evaluations from this past semester were available to me. What can I say? Yes they were improved from the previous semester, but still disappointing to me. Although my overall numerical ratings appeared to be in the average vicinity, there were only one or two appreciative comments about all the social face-to-face meaningful interactions that I required of my students as part of their small group discussions every class period. And what struck me much more impactfully and has stayed with me and makes me feel sad, were the greater number of negative comments, though not as much as in the previous semester. Perhaps if my lectures were more interesting and more technologically modern, then students would have been less inclined to give in to their cell phone temptations to begin with?[11] Although I don't think the following comment was representative of how most of my students felt, I can't forget the way one student described his or her experience of the personal/academic small group discussions as "being forced to remember the shitty events of my past." Yes that hurt.

The truth is that I do not feel like I was successful in creating humanistic antidotes for the cell phone addiction that I witnessed in my college psychology classroom teaching. And yet I am scheduled to give a talk at a humanistic psychology conference next month that is focused on these humanistic antidotes. I feel like canceling my talk at this conference, but then I remember back to how I felt and what I decided when I saw my student evaluations from the previous semester, a month into teaching my classes last semester. I decided to

revamp my conference talk description and I gave more emphasis to facilitating a group discussion about how others dealt with our society's social media addiction and narcissism[12], and what humanistic antidotes they found effective in dealing with this. This eliminates the image of myself as a successful humanistic antidotes practitioner, and it enables me to simply describe my experiences of cell phone addiction in my classrooms, from my perspective as a college teacher. Perhaps if I were a better teacher there would have been less use of cell phones in my classroom? Perhaps this is the topic that would be most interesting and most useful to discuss in my workshop; i.e., presenting material in interesting and stimulating ways in the classroom is the most effective humanistic antidote to reduce the inappropriate use of cell phones in the classroom? Perhaps my intensive response to some of my students' inappropriate use of their cell phones was more about my own issues than it was about the reality of their inappropriate cell phone use?

Well I think if I approach my conference talk in the context of facilitation of group discussion after honestly sharing my relevant experiences, this may be of value to anyone who attends my talk. So I won't cancel my talk, but rather I will go to my conference in a more humble way than I had been anticipating.

In my next two accounts, after re-reading my student evaluations and seeing them in a more positive light, I work through a significant personal/professional challenge directly related to my Theme 3 performance autoethnography social issue plan for my conference talk. The article I submitted based upon my conference talk is rejected by the journal connected to the conference, and it is all I could do to not cancel my talk. The relevant internal conflicts of myself as an academic professional dealing with the above Theme 1 social issue is now at the heart of my autoethnographic reflections.

Sunday 6/25

As I re-read my student evaluations from last semester, I realized that based upon their numerical ratings of my teaching in a number of categories, inclusive of the value of class time and discussions, stimulating and intellectual classroom atmosphere, and effective teaching and critical thinking skills, there were a number of students who did appreciate my teaching methods that focused upon their interactive group discussions. There were certainly more students who rated me as favorable than unfavorable, and my overall numerical ratings appear to be above average, which is certainly a significant improvement from my distressing student evaluations of the previous semester[13]. However,

most of the students who chose to make personal comments were obviously not the students who rated me as favorable, and the comments of these students were hurtful to me. But what is even more hurtful to me is that I just found out that my article based upon my conference talk has been rejected by the journal affiliated with the conference. No reason given, just a statement that in spite of the merits of my article the editors decided it was not suitable for their journal, and it was recommended that I send my article to a specific other journal, with e-mail addresses of the two editors of this other journal.

I suppose the suggestion of this other journal and the e-mail addresses of the editors is a positive indication that my article was appreciated, and it happens to be the case that the new journal recommended to me is one that published one of my humanistic psychology articles a number of years ago[14]. But I must honestly say that I feel like the wind has gotten knocked out of me.

I wrote back to the journal editor who sent me my letter of rejection, and I asked for more feedback about why my article was rejected, and conveyed that I am thinking of canceling my conference talk that is based upon my article. Indeed, given all that I have questioned about my own responsibility for my students' cell phone behavior in the classroom, both to myself and to anyone reading this present article, it may be appropriate for me to cancel my conference talk regardless of whether my article was accepted or not in the journal. But it is time for me to end this day and do some math in the morning, and hopefully I will be in a better state of mind tomorrow.

Tuesday 6/27

Yes I was in a better state of mind the next day after getting a decent night's sleep and doing my mathematics, and I had some partially satisfying communications with the conference organizer and journal editor. It seems that my article was never reviewed, but rather it was decided that it was not appropriate for this journal because of the journal's focus on psychotherapy. However, I wish this had been conveyed to me beforehand, as the conference has the same focus on psychotherapy and I therefore thought that it was appropriate submitting my article to this journal. At any rate, there is definitely now a barrier between myself and this conference, and my relationship with both the conference organizer and the journal editor has been damaged. But I have decided to keep my plans of attending the conference and giving my talk. And I sent out my article to another journal, which makes me feel empowered. I realize that I truly do believe in what I have been writing about

and have experienced in the classroom; i.e., cell phone and social media addiction, and narcissism. I think these "normal" parts of modern US society should be examined from the context of humanistic psychology, and for whatever reason I have been given the opportunity to convey my concerns about these issues, and to facilitate a discussion about what can be done to offset these issues, in a humanistic context to participants at a conference with a humanistic psychology focus on psychotherapy. I think I am now at a point where I will be preparing to give my talk at the conference, and I will conclude these autoethnographic reflections after I give my conference talk.

There is now a 3 week break before I write again, and in my next two accounts I am in the process of going to New York City for my conference. My internal professional conflicts have been resolved to a large extent, both in my article being appreciated and seriously considered for publication by another journal[9], and in my development of a twofold formulation for my conference talk. This twofold formulation combines the sharing of my authentic experience as a college psychology teacher dealing with the Theme 1 social issue, with professionally presenting in an academic context my humanistic antidotes to offset this Theme 1 social issue. All three themes are now coming together for me, as I prepare to make an impact giving my conference talk as a performance autoethnographer, conveying my relevant personal experience of putting into practice humanistic antidotes to offset the distressing social issue of the inappropriate and excessive use of cell phones in the college classroom.

Monday 7/18

It is now nearly 3 weeks later and tomorrow I leave for New York to attend my conference. It turns out that I got an appreciative positive response from the editor of the journal that I sent my article to, which was the journal recommended to me from the editor of the journal that initially rejected my article[15]. I was also asked to significantly shorten my article, and consequently my article is now divided into two separate articles being considered for publication by two different journals[10]. Together with this present article focused on my autoethnographic reflections, I now have three current articles pertaining to cell phone/social media addiction in the college psychology classroom. I'm feeling more confident and geared up to attend my conference and give my talk, in which I still plan on making available time for group discussion about this topic. However, it remains to be seen for how much of my talk I will use excerpts from these autoethnographic reflections, compared to excerpts from my two more professional/academic articles that are presently being considered for publication[10]. At any rate, I

think I will read some of these autoethnographic reflections to whomever attends my creative artists support group[16] tonight, and I will now sign off until after my conference talk.

Tuesday 7/19

It's just about midnight as I am staying over in Sturbridge, Massachusetts on my way to New York. Last night I read the first few pages of this article, which was my initial 6/21 entry, to my creative artists support group. I received a round of applause, and my reading stimulated some lively discussion about social media addiction. My creative artists support group was very supportive to me, and this helped to boost both my confidence and enthusiasm about giving my conference talk.

I'm continuing to read the various essays in *The Handbook of Autoethnography* (Holman Jones, & Adams, 2013), and the personal experiential way of writing speaks to me deeply. However, I believe that I also have an important message to convey to the world of humanistic psychology, beyond that of my own personal experience. My message is twofold; the first part is that we are living in, as radical British psychiatrist R. D. Laing (1967) used to say in the 1960's, "an insane society." In the year that I am writing, 2016, cell phone and social media addiction, accompanied by widespread narcissism, is rampant in the United States and the whole Western world, and pervades virtually every US college classroom[1,12]. The second part of my message is that there are humanistic antidotes for this addiction that we as humanistic psychologists can promote. I can describe these humanistic antidotes in regard to my own college psychology teaching simplistically as a three stage process: 1) stop students from using their cell phones inappropriately in class, as much as possible; 2) structure the class so that students speak a dominant part of their class time, talking with each other in meaningful ways about personal/academic course topics; 3) promote awareness of the negative aspects of excessive and inappropriate cell phone and social media use through well-chosen discussion topics that will stimulate some students to write a term paper on this topic. This three stage process can be further simplified as 1) attention—eliminate inappropriate cell phone use in the classroom; 2) engagement—students engage in personal/ academic small group discussions every class period; 3) awareness—some students decide to learn more about cell phone and social media addiction for one of their term papers.

Yes I have what I believe is an important psychological/educational message to convey to whomever attends my conference talk, aside from my own autoethnographic experience. I think some

kind of creative combination is in order here. I want to convey my psychological/educational message about social media/cell phone addiction, accompanied by widespread narcissism, in college psychology classrooms, and I want to do this based upon what I have personally experienced as a college psychology teacher.

Finally, I conclude my autoethnographic accounts with a description of what I experienced giving my conference talk. My description continues in its internal dialogue and experience, especially as it initially appeared to me that "no one" would be attending my talk. However, my talk ended up being well-attended and received, and I felt like I effectively integrated my three themes, with potential future prospects of developing my three themes in other contexts.

Friday 7/22

I get to my conference room for my talk 5 minutes early to set up and put the chairs in a circle. Lots of people are socially and noisily chatting in the open lobby area right outside my classroom, and I am concerned about how noisy it will be during my talk. But it is now time for my talk and no one is there; 5 more minutes pass and still no one. It dawns on me that apparently no one may show up for my talk. I leave my classroom and sit in the lobby area, watching to see if anyone goes into my classroom. Finally one woman opens my classroom door, looks inside at the empty circle of chairs, and then quickly walks out. I run after her and ask her if she was going to the social media addiction talk, but she says that she is not, that she was just looking for someone. It is now 10 minutes after my talk is supposed to begin, and I start to accept the painful truth that no one is coming to my talk.

I decide to pack up my papers, reading glasses, and watch, and put the chairs back into rows, and think about attending one of the other talks scheduled during my time slot, but nothing interests me. I know that it will take me a long time to accept this fiasco, as I have invested $2,000 to come to this conference and have put extensive thought and preparation into my talk. I tell myself that these people are just not interested in the negative aspects of social media addiction, and that this is not the conference for me. But I know that this conference is focused on Carl Rogers' (1961, 1969)[2] person-centered psychology theories and is at the heart of humanistic psychology, and that if people at this conference are not responsive to me, then who else in the world would be? But just after I put my stuff back into my pack and am about to put the chairs back in the rows, a young woman walks into the classroom. I was afraid she would leave when she realizes that she was the only one at my talk, but she proceeds to sit in the circle, and then a

young man walks in and also sits in the circle. I tell them that this will be a small group and that I will get started, and after I start reading a few lines from my initial 6/21 entry in this article, two more people walk in. It is now 15 minutes after my talk was supposed to start, and I have four people at my talk I tell everyone that I will start from the beginning, but just as I start reading a few more people walk in. This same pattern happens again, and then the young man says that he was surprised that I started my workshop early, and it is explained to me that I had the wrong starting time for my talk! Yes my talk was scheduled for 15 minutes later than I had thought, and in the end I had 22 people attend my workshop. Everything went very well—people were very receptive to all that I shared, and a stimulating 20 minute discussion followed, which I had to end to allow people (including myself) to go to their/our next talk.

From "down low" to "up high"—wow what a difference! People thanked me after my talk, and I felt like one of the "important" people at the conference. I was quite talkative at the next workshop I attended, and then I actively participated in a conference lunchtime discussion about starting a Ph.D graduate person-centered psychology program, which the conference organizer had expressed his desire for at our encounter group last night, and I had supported him by suggesting a lunchtime meeting. Who knows, maybe I'll apply to give a talk at their next conference in Vienna in 2018. But first I need to get back to the process of getting my two articles on this topic published[10].

So what did the people who attended my talk think about social media addiction? Well virtually everyone who spoke up during the discussion, which was about a half-dozen people, agreed that this was a problem, but some of the younger people did not think it was quite as extreme as I was conveying. The young man, who was the second person to come into the classroom, suggested that teachers be trained to deal more effectively with teaching in the technology age. However, from the smiles and attention and responsiveness that my participants displayed during my whole talk, and from the thank you's and appreciation that I received from a number of them after my talk, I feel confident that my talk had impact on virtually all who attended. I feel successful, and I am psyched to continue my efforts to increase awareness in my society about the pervasive problem of social media addiction and narcissism.

VI. Conclusion

It is now over 2 months since I gave my conference talk, and the traditional Fall 2016 college semester has started up. However, I am not teaching in the traditional Fall 2016 college semester, and the whole issue of cell phone addiction in the college classroom feels much more removed to me.

But what I have experienced as a college psychology teacher in regard to the excessive and inappropriate use of cell phones in the classroom is something that I think is both relevant and important to share in the world of academia. Aside from all the negative consequences of this phenomenon, as I have described above and in some of my previous articles[1], the relevant experiences of the college instructor who is dealing with the excessive and inappropriate use of cell phones in his or her classroom is not something that has been the focus of research. Consequently it is in this context that I have engaged in autoethnographic reflections of my own experiences as a college psychology instructor dealing with this phenomenon.

As I worked through my conflicts of coming to terms with the mixed reactions of my students to my humanistic antidotes of dealing with their excessive and inappropriate use of cell phones in my Spring, 2016 Human Growth & Development classroom, it was the anticipation for and planning of my conference talk on this topic at a humanistic psychology conference that kept me motivated to try to effectively deal with the disturbing cell phone behaviors that I encountered in my classroom.

I gradually realized that the message I wanted to convey at my conference talk was twofold: I wanted to convey my relevant real experiences as a college teacher who had to deal with this phenomenon, but I also wanted to convey what I found worked at least somewhat effectively as humanistic antidotes to offset this phenomenon. This twofold perspective is consistent with the combining of autoethnography, performance, and social action, as I have described above in my three themes, and I feel satisfied that I accomplished my twofold goal in a reasonably effective way during my conference talk. However, I am not yet clear about what my future endeavors will be in this context.

As I have indicated above, I believe that virtually our whole US society is engaged in the excessive and inappropriate use of their cell phones, at the expense of natural human interactions and relationships, as has been frequently described.[1] However, it may be the case that the most extreme form of this phenomenon is on the college campus, and therefore I think it is important for college instructors to describe their personal relevant experiences with their students' excessive and inappropriate use of cell phones in their classrooms. For as Stacy Holman Jones (2005) has conveyed, "the personal can be made political," and this is very much at the heart of what I believe my autoethnographic reflections in this article are about: the twofold process of conveying my relevant personal experiences as a college psychology teacher dealing with the phenomenon of the excessive and

inappropriate use of cell phones in his classroom, and my desire to offer humanistic antidotes and raise consciousness about the negative consequences of this phenomenon.

Notes

1) See Benjamin, 2015b, 2016, in press and the references therein.

2) The humanistic antidotes that I have developed is based upon the humanistic education work of humanistic psychologists, in particular Carl Rogers (1961, 1969). Humanistic education involves empathy, caring about students, and genuineness on the part of the learning facilitator. The basic principles of humanistic education include choice and control, felt concern, the whole person, self evaluation, and the teacher as a facilitator. For more information about humanistic education, see http://en.wikipedia.org-/wiki/Humanistic_education

3) See the references that support this statement in Benjamin, 2015b.

4) The conference being referred to is the World Association of Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy and Counseling (WAPCEPC) conference that was held in New York City in July, 2016 (see the Introduction and www.pce-world.org).

5) See Benjamin, 2016 for a description of the Psychology of Cheating small group discussion topic that I gave out to my students.

6) See Benjamin, 2016 for descriptions of four small group discussion topics that I used in my Human Growth & Development class at University.

7) See the description of autoethnography and the relevant citations in the Introduction.

8) As it turns out, the "article that is based upon my talk" encompasses three articles: Benjamin, 2015b, 2016, and the present article.

9) For more information about Capella University, see www.capella.edu

10) See Benjamin, 2016, in press.

11) See Benjamin, in press; Earl, 2012.

12) See Benjamin, in press and Twenge & Campbell, 2009 for descriptions of what I have referred to as the narcissism epidemic in our society.

13) For a more detailed description of my course evaluations, see Benjamin, 2016, in press.

14) See Benjamin, 2007.

15) This is *Self & Society* journal; see Benjamin, in press.

16) See Benjamin, 2008, 2014b, 2015d.

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