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Sex Addiction:

7 Surprising Secrets

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Forward

There's a lot in the news these days about the sex lives of celebrities and many questions have been raised about sex and "love" addiction.

I've written 9 major books since 1980 including best-sellers *Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places* (which I wrote in 1988), *Male Menopause*, *Irritable Male Syndrome*, and *Mr. Mean: Saving Your Relationship from the Irritable Male Syndrome*.

Not many people understand sex and "love" addiction. I wrote this piece some time ago, but I offer it now as a good introduction to the field.

A Personal Introduction

Someone told me about a new insurance being offered for co-dependents-"It's Your Fault." Once I got finished laughing, the kind of self-conscious chortle that says, "too true, too true," I began to reflect on my own growing up.

I'm the only child of parents who married for reasons other than love for each other. My mother had a secret love for another man, Norton Volker, a reporter for the New York Times, whose passion for travel and dangerous assignments was more pressing than his desire for my mother. My father never separated from his own mother and no other woman could match the lost love that he longed for but never received. At age 85 my father still recites a heart-felt poem to his mother and his undying love for her.

Looking back at my childhood, with the benefit of 20 years of therapy and 10 years involvement in Twelve Step programs, I can see that I had the perfect family scripting to become a co-dependent, sex and romance addict.

My father didn't like to acknowledge that he was married. As a struggling actor in New York, he spent much of his time in the company of other hopeful literary types. My mother said she was continually surprised when they would go to parties to find out that most people thought he was single. My mother had numerous affairs both before and during her marriage to my father, but her life centered around having a baby. After years of unsuccessful attempts, I was conceived by injecting my father's sperm into my mother's vagina, a procedure that 45 years ago had an

extremely low success rate. When my mother found out she was pregnant, she tiptoed down Park Avenue in New York, afraid to do anything that might dislodge the new life that she was carrying. If babies experience, in utero, the feelings of their mothers, I was bathed early in the heady mixture of fear and desire. Two months pregnant and sure she was going to have a baby girl (dolls were bought, a suitable name was selected), my mother prepared for her first mother's day presents from my father. My father said nothing about my mother's pregnancy and took a trip to visit his own mother for that special day. He stayed through the month.

When I was born the following December, everyone was shocked that I wasn't a girl. No boy's name had been selected and I went nameless for three days until my father's wishes prevailed and I was named Eliot, after a cousin who had died young. My mother cried for a week until my father finally relented and agreed to change my name to John, after my mother's father who had also died young. It took me until my last year in College to decide to take a name that I liked, and changed my name to Jed.

My mother was overjoyed with my birth and spent hours stroking me and showing me off to friends in the neighborhood. As a small child I remember her boasting to her friends that she loved me so much and was so afraid that something would happen to me that she wouldn't let anyone else touch me, not even my father. My father withdrew more and more deeply into fantasy, had numerous "nervous breakdowns," and was eventually committed to Camarillo State Mental Hospital following an unsuccessful suicide attempt. My mother raised me, feeling alternately ecstatic to have me to herself and terrified of the responsibility of being a single parent. I felt that my father's breakdown was my fault, a result of trying to make money to raise his family(me).

If anyone had asked me about my life growing up, I would have said that I came from a very average, normal family, where I was loved and cared for. Many experts on family dynamics now estimate that 5 to 10% of families can be classified as "healthy and functional." They offer the kind of care and nurturing that allows growing children to have their physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual needs met. The vast majority of us, 90% to 95%, came from families that were dysfunctional in some way.

With the average family being dysfunctional, it isn't surprising that so many of us believe our own dysfunctional family was "normal." Studies show that whatever kind of intimate experience we had as children is what we take for "love" as adults. If our families were chaotic, distant, or overly enmeshed, we will unconsciously seek adult relationships where "love" is all tangled up with insecurity, fear and pain. This is the origin of co-dependence, sex, romance and relationship addictions.

Definitions of Co-Dependence

1. An exaggerated dependent pattern of learned behaviors, beliefs and feelings that make life painful. It is a dependence on people and things outside the self, along with neglect of the self to the point of having little self identity.--(Smalley, S: cited in Wegscheider-Cruse, 1985)

2. Preoccupation and extreme dependence (emotionally, socially, and sometimes physically) on a person or object. Eventually, this dependence on another person becomes a pathological condition that affects the codependent in all other relationships. This may include ... all persons who (1) are in a love or marriage relationship with an alcoholic; (2) have one or more alcoholic parents or grandparents; or (3) grew up in an emotionally repressive family .. .It is a primary disease and a disease within every member of an alcoholic family.--(Wegscheider-Cruse, 1985)

3. An emotional, psychological, and behavioral pattern of coping that develops as a result of an individual's prolonged exposure to, and practice of, a set of oppressive rules--rules which prevent the open expression of feelings, as well as the direct discussion of personal and interpersonal problems.--(Subby, 1984, 1987)

4. A personality disorder based on: a need to control in the face of serious adverse consequences; neglecting one's own needs; boundary distortions around intimacy and separation; enmeshment with certain dysfunctional people; and other manifestations such as denial, constricted feelings, depression, and stress-related medical illness. (paraphrased from Cermak, 1986)

5. A stress-induced preoccupation with another's life, leading to maladaptive behavior.--(Mendenhall, 1987)

6. Any suffering and/or dysfunction that is associated with or results from focusing on the needs and behavior of others. Co-dependence is the disease of lost selfhood. It is addiction to looking elsewhere.--(Whitfield, 1988)

More recently Charlotte Kasl has extended our understanding even farther. In her new book, *Women, Sex, and Addiction: A Search for Love and Power*, to be published by Ticknor & Fields in 1989, she has the following things to say about co-dependency:

"I describe the co-dependent person as someone whose core identity is undeveloped or unknown, and who maintains a false identity built from dependent attachments to external sources--a partner, a spouse, family, appearances, work, or rules.

Co-dependency is a disease of inequality in that any minority person who has to survive in a world defined by others will know more about those in power than about himself or herself.

Addictive and co-dependent personalities come into full bloom in adult relationships, but are rooted in early childhood experiences in the family and the culture.

As children we all experienced feelings of powerlessness. Dependency is inherent to childhood. That's why the use and abuse of power in families has such a profound effect on children.

Children who grow up in dysfunctional families spend all their energy dancing to the tune of the parents in the hope of being loved or to avoid shame and abuse. As a result, they don't learn to know themselves.

Co-dependents can't tell you how they want something to be, but they can tell you the rule for how it should be.

Not having a center to resonate from, they take their cues from the outside. Their greatest fear is that if they lose or let go of external forms (My friend Sally calls it our scaffolding)--the house, the spouse, the rules, the status--they will fall into a terrifying emptiness. (I call it the black hole).

Developmentally they are like tiny children who have not left their mother's arms, so they cling to forms, to people

and things representing security, as if the form was life itself.

Co-dependency represents an attachment to all those things that give a person the security of knowing they exist. It follows that at its deepest level codependency is essentially an addiction to security."

My Own Understanding of Co-dependence.

Since I first began working in the field of addictions 25 years ago, our understanding of addictions has grown tremendously. As growth has taken place, so too have the words we use to describe our experience. Words like "moral degenerate," gave way to "dope fiend," which changed to "addict."

I believe the term "co-dependence" is also evolving. It began as co-alcoholic, a term to indicate a person's relationship to someone who drinks too much. Later definitions expanded the term to include pathological relationships to other substances, processes, and people. The definitions have now gotten so broad they seem to include almost everything.

The term seems to include at least five addictions that I feel need to be understood and treated separately: (1) Sex addiction, (2) Romance addiction, (3) Relationship Attachment addictions, (4) Relationship Attraction addictions, (5) The Core addiction.

Anne Wilson Schaef, in her important book *Escape From Intimacy*:

Untangling the "Love" Addictions--Sex, Romance, Relationships, has this to say about co-dependence with which I wholeheartedly agree:

"While doing the research for this book I have also seen many who define themselves as co-dependents who are really sex, romance, or relationship addicts (frequently relationship addicts) and who would much rather label

themselves co-dependents than admit to being an addict of whatever kind. I certainly can understand this propensity, because I have found it in myself.

"When I first started learning about the addictive diseases, I was sure that I was 'the healthy one' and had only been affected by the disease. The 'affected' not the 'afflicted' as Ernie Larson puts it.

"At some level, this is what all the "co" diseases do. AI-Anon by its very setup is defined in terms of the alcoholic, as is Adult Children of Alcoholics; Co-Sex Addicts define themselves in relation to sex addicts. In so doing we are practicing the very disease from which we are trying to recover."

Much of the high relapse rate we see in the field can be attributed to our denial of other addictions. Treating a person's alcoholism will not help with their sexual addiction. Likewise, a person who has both a sexual addiction and a relationship addiction needs treatment for both.

It is critical that we also treat the core out of which all our addictions emerge. Failure to treat the core addiction is like pulling the tops off of weeds without getting to the roots.

Before looking at each of these addictions in detail, let's explore what we know about sex and romance addictions. Up until recently these addictions have been completely hidden, so embedded in our addictive society they were virtually invisible.

Sex and Romance Addictions: Looking For Love In All The Wrong Places.

We often recognize an emerging alcoholic by noting the special place alcohol plays in the person's life. Many report that when they began drinking they knew they had found true love. So too with sex and romance addicts. Our early experiences are often a mixture of excitement and fear.

My dreams and fantasies from the time I was nine were totally dominated by sex. I learned to masturbate when I was 10. Taught by an older friend to "keep rubbing it,

faster and faster. It will feel real good and sticky stuff will shoot out." I practiced every day, sometimes many times in a day, for a year, but could never seem to get the "sticky stuff" to come out.

When I was 11 I found my mother's "back massager" which she said she used to massage her shoulder muscles. An inquisitive kid, I found that if I rubbed it over my genitals, I began to get the same pleasure I had gotten using my hand to masturbate, only the pleasure was even more intense. I remember being in the living room, lying on the couch with my Levi's pulled down around my knees. My mother was at work and the summer day warmed my body as the electric vibrator roared (in those days, they didn't hum, they roared) in my ears.

My penis was rock hard and I felt an increasing sense of pleasure and power. I felt I was a king and could conquer the world. The pleasure was so great and the feelings so intense I thought I would pass out. All of a sudden, my whole body began to jerk. I seemed to momentarily lose consciousness, as my penis danced wildly around, covering everything with what I knew was the real thing. "Sticky stuff" was all over my hands, my jeans, the couch and covered the electric vibrator which had fallen on the floor but was still whirring loudly. The sound seemed different, I remembered thinking.

The real difference, though, was my penis. Just moments before it had been huge--standing straight out like it owned the world. Now it had shriveled, had lost all its power, and seemed dead. All of a sudden, I knew what had happened. My heart seemed to stop and I could barely breathe. I remembered my mother's warnings about children who were careless taking baths. She had repeatedly told me the story of the little boy who had been listening to the Lone Ranger while sitting in the bathtub. He reached up to the shelf over the tub to turn up the sound and the radio fell in the bathtub. The boy was instantly electrocuted.

I never touched anything electrical, until then. When I looked down at my tiny, wet, flaccid penis and saw the vibrator covered in liquid, I knew it was the end. My God, I thought, I've electrocuted myself. I've killed my penis. I didn't believe in God, but I prayed for him to resurrect my dead friend. I promised I would never play with it again. My prayers were answered an hour later but my preoccupation with things sexual continued on.

Many sex and romance addicts report that their first encounters with sex had a mixture of excitement and fear. It isn't surprising that as adults we often confuse Intensity with Intimacy.

In the 50's and 60's we dealt with sex by pretending to ignore it in public while becoming obsessed with it in private. In the 70's and 80's, we went to the other extreme. Anything humans could do was now acceptable. The era of sexual liberation was upon us. For many it didn't bring liberation, but rather a continuing obsession.

With a few exceptions the idea of sexual or romantic addicts was ignored during this period. Ken Keys, Stanton Peele, and Dorothy Tennov are the three notable exceptions. It is to their work we now turn.

Sex and Romance Addiction: Early Researchers.

In 1975, Stanton Peele and Ken Keys both published books on addiction. In *Love and Addiction*, Peele challenged the prevailing belief alcoholism or drug addiction is simply about the body's addiction to the drug. He suggested instead that drug addiction is about an individual's subjective experience in relation to the substance. Peele demonstrated that addictions to people have the exact parallels to the experience of drug addiction, including the physical withdrawal when we are cut off from our supply.

Peele made the following points about "love" and "addiction:"

Addiction has as much to do with love as it does with drugs.

Many of us are addicts, only we don't know it.

We turn to each other out of the same needs that drive some people to drink and others to heroin.

Interpersonal addiction--Love addiction--is just about the most common, yet least recognized, form of addiction.

Addiction is not an abnormality in our society. It is not an aberration from the norm; it is itself the norm.

"Love" is an ideal vehicle for addiction because it can so exclusively claim a person's consciousness. If, to serve as an addiction, something must be both reassuring and consuming, then a sexual or romantic relationship is perfectly suited for the task.

Addictive relationships are patterned, predictable, and isolated.

When people go to others with the aim of filling a void in themselves, the relationship quickly becomes the center of their lives.

Peele sums up his view of sex and "love" addiction by calling it a sterile, ingrown dependency relationship with another person who serves as the object of our need for security.

In *The Handbook to Higher Consciousness*, Ken Keyes describes addictiveness, rather than the classic progressive disease model of addiction. Like Peele, he returns to the Buddhist notion that addiction can be an attachment to virtually anything. Keyes makes the following observations:

To get the most out of your relationship, you'll find it helpful to distinguish between involvement and addiction.

Involvement means "I share my life with you."

Addiction means "I create the experience that I am lost without you. I need you to be happy."

Involvement means spending a lot of time together.

Addiction means "ownership."

Involvement means choosing to share a large part of my life with my beloved and building a mutual reality together.

Addiction means that I feel insecure without someone--I want him or her to save me.

A clear distinction is made between preferring to have someone and needing to have someone. Need leads to fear of loss and addictive clinging. Preference leads to freedom and mutual involvement.

Perhaps the best treatment of romance addiction was done by Dorothy Tennov in her book *Love and Limerence: The*

Experience of Being in Love. In the preface she speaks directly to all of us who are addicted to romance (are there any of us who aren't?):

"You think: I want you.

I want you forever, now, yesterday, and always. Above all, I want you to want me.

No matter where I am or what I am doing, I am not safe from your spell. At any moment, the image of your face smiling at me, of your voice telling me you care, or of your hand in mine, may suddenly fill my consciousness rudely pushing out all else.

The expression 'thinking of you' fails to convey either the quality or quantity of this unwilled mental activity. 'Obsessed' comes closer but leaves out the aching."

As Tennov so aptly observes, it is the "rush" we get hooked on, the surge of adrenaline in our veins, the intense emotion that is generated as we go from the peaks of excitement when we first "fall in love," to the valley of depression when we inevitably crash.

Since Peele, Keyes, and Tennov did their work, more and more people have begun to identify themselves as sex, romance, or relationship addicts. Many others say there is no such thing as sex, romance, or relationship addiction. They feel that the term "addiction" is misused when applied to "love." I feel the terms are useful, if defined correctly, but to understand them properly requires guidance.

Guidelines for Dealing with "Love" Addictions.

1. "Love" addictions do exist.
2. Addictions need to be self-defined. No one has a right to call anyone else an addict.
3. "Love" addictions, like all addictions, are progressive and fatal if not treated.
4. Any "love" behavior can be addictive and none are automatically addictive.
5. Sex, Love, and Relationship Addictions are not about sex, love, and relationships.

6. It is important to "name" our addictions and name them correctly.

7. Anyone can recover from "love" addictions.

1. For me, "LOVE" ADDICTIONS EXIST.

When I first suspected that my own sexual behavior was compulsive and destructive, I denied it. I told myself that all men masturbate, read pornography, undress pretty women in their minds, and are preoccupied with sex. After all, I reasoned, I don't do anything to hurt anyone and I can stop whenever I want to. (Though I never wanted to.) The fact that there were times I would masturbate 20 or 30 times a day, spend hours reading pornography, and roam the streets looking in bedroom windows hoping to see some "action," made me feel foolish and ashamed. But I rationalized that I was under a lot of pressure and needed some "fun" to relieve the tension.

I began going to Twelve Step Programs such as A.A. and AI-Anon, not because I needed any help, but because I wanted to know what resources were available for the addicts I was treating in my counseling practice. (It's interesting, isn't it, how we choose our professions "by accident," but with the unconscious desire to heal ourselves?)

It wasn't until I had spent a year going to Synanon (to be able to help the heroin addicts I was seeing) that it dawned on me the way I related to sex, romance, and relationships was the same way alcoholics and heroin addicts related to their drug of choice.

Not only was I preoccupied with sex, but I was forever "falling in love." I considered myself a hopeless romantic and felt very proud of the fact. I brought my new love flowers every day for a month. I spent days planning our dates, compulsively scouring the town to find just the right restaurant, taping music for 18 hours one day so that I could provide just the right mood, learning to read poetry that I hated because the poet was supposed to be a romantic and tragic figure. I had little interest in getting to know the other person. The thought of real intimacy terrified me. If I got too close I was sure I would be abandoned.

I loved romantic music. I had the fantasy that all the women I fell in love with were twin sisters of the woman who sang "To know, know, know him, is to love, love, love him. Just to see him smile, makes my life worthwhile." That was my secret desire: To have a beautiful, sexy woman; a woman all my friends would die to be seen with, but who only had eyes for me (God, there's another one of those songs again). I need do nothing to meet her. Just walk into the room on some enchanted evening. (All evenings are enchanted for romance addicts). Our eyes would meet across a crowded room as a woman in blue velvet sings the refrain from Unchained Melody-- "Oh my love, my darling, I've hungered for your touch, a long lonely night." I need do nothing to have her. I just introduce myself, "Hi, I'm Jed." Instant love. To know me (my name) is to love me. I need do nothing to keep her. All that is required is that I smile (and I was very good at smiling) and not only did it make her days worthwhile, but also her nights, and her whole life.

The fact that these "love affairs" were short lived was O.K., because it was better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all. I fancied myself to be "The Moonlight Gambler" (another song hero). He sang, "I've gambled for match-sticks, I've gambled for gold. The stakes may be heavy or small. But if you've never gambled for love in the moonlight, then you've never gambled at all." I haven't heard that song in 35 years, yet I still remember the words and the feelings still influence my life. All romance addicts have songs like that. What are your songs?

In my fantasy I was the moonlight gambler who women instantly fell in love with. In my fantasy, "to know me was to love me." But in my heart of hearts, in the depth of my soul, I believed a quite different truth, "to know me, is to leave me." Like all addicts, I felt that at the core of my being there was something evil, or even worse, that at my core there was nothing. If you got too close you would find out the truth and then I would be all alone and die.

I am also a relationship addict. Even as I child, I knew I would fall in love, marry early, and live happily ever after. The day after I turned 19, I met her. It was love at first sight and we soon talked of marriage and how many kids we wanted. She wanted to wait until I finished medical school, but the thought of being alone made me uncomfortable. Everyone I saw seemed to be paired up. Life just made more sense as a couple. Once I decided "this is the one," I quickly became "attached." I was very jealous

of anyone else paying my wife a compliment. She was mine and I was hers. When times were tough, we held each other tight and reassured each other that "it's us against the world."

In spite of our fights, infidelities, open marriage, broken promises, lost dreams, and sleepless nights, we clung to each other out of a desperation and need that was so deep and so old, we thought it must be love. In the 10 years we were together, we grew to hate each other, but still clung to the dream of "us." Even though we had lost complete touch with our individual selves (had we ever been in touch?), we still held on to the hope that somehow the "we" could breathe life back into individuals who were dying.

When the end came, after a year of therapy and many years trying to make it work, I thought I would die. I couldn't think of myself as a "me," only as a "we." I looked at the portrait of us on the wall. She hadn't wanted it and I took it with me. Though I didn't recognize the two people in the picture as anyone I now knew, and I was glad to be rid of the pain of our trying, I still liked the idea of a twosome. It felt, when I looked in the mirror at my lone face, like there was nothing of substance. The image would seem to fade away and I felt invisible.

For the next year, the thought of finding a relationship possessed me. Saying I would have taken anyone would be too strong. But it was very, very important that I find someone. I told myself, "I'm just the kind of guy who does better when he's married." My wish came true. We didn't have our first fight until the night we made love, which was six hours after we met. The next morning we were engaged. After meeting my bride-to-be, some of my closest friends had a heart-to-heart with me. They said she seemed to be a more hostile version of my first wife and they suggested I not move so quickly. I knew they were just jealous and I didn't invite them to the wedding. They were still my friends after the divorce and they didn't even say, "I told you so."

I believe it has been helpful for me to recognize my addictions. The process has allowed me to break patterns that continued to repeat themselves, causing my life to be unmanageable. Calling my behavior "an addiction" has allowed me to get support from others in Twelve Step Programs. For me it was like coming home, a feeling that "these are my people." They can accept me without judgment because they have walked the same road.

2. ADDICTIONS NEED TO BE SELF-DEFINED.

One of the major differences between "professionals" and "recovering" people is in the way they look at themselves and the way they define problems. When I was in graduate school, studying to be a professional counselor, I spent a lot of time learning how to diagnose various problems.

In this view I was the expert and "they" were the ones who needed help. I was given the authority to decide what problem "they" had. When I got involved in recovery and began participating in the Twelve Step programs I was exposed to a very different tradition. In the recovery tradition, we are all in this together. There is no "I" separate from "you." We recognize that part of our disease has to do with our desire to "play God," and part of our playing God has to do with diagnosing other's problems. In Recovery, we simply tell our own story (a process we are forbidden to do as professionals) and let the other person decide for themselves whether or not they are alcoholics or addicts.

Although I believe there are some aspects of the Professional tradition that are superior to the Recovering tradition, this is one where it seems clear that letting each person define for themselves "what they are" and what they want to call themselves is clearly superior to the labeling that often goes on, when "we" try to decide what's wrong with "them."

3. "LOVE" ADDICTIONS, LIKE ALL ADDICTIONS, ARE PROGRESSIVE AND FATAL.

This means that things get worse over time, though it may not always be obvious. With drug addiction we more readily recognize the progression. Because the "love addictions" are so much a part of our culture we often don't recognize the harmful effects. I see a great deal of physical illness, including cancer and heart disease, as directly related to the harmful consequences of being addicted to sex, romance, or relationships.

To say addictions are fatal seems too harsh for some. Obviously we will all die sometime. In that respect life is a fatal disease. When we say that addictions are fatal, what we mean is that they limit our lives and cut them short. This is true in the physical sense that people who are addicted to sex, romance, and relationships die sooner

than do healthy people. It's also true that people may not be physically dead, but they are dead in spirit.

We all know people who remain in addictive, destructive relationships, who have just given up on living. We think of them as the walking wounded, and in extreme cases as zombies. They have the external appearance of being alive, but inside they are dead. "Love addictions" are even more dangerous than "drug addictions" because they so effectively lull us into accepting a life of "non-living" in exchange for the sweet taste of sex, romance, or relationship. Roberta Flack's song "killing me softly" gives us a chilling sense of the hidden dagger beneath "love's" cloak.

As the basic text for Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous says, "Perhaps progression was the key, driving at the fact that once we had lost control over how often or how long we engaged in sexual and emotional indulgences, there was no way that we would avoid, over the long run, a critical threat to sanity, and even to life itself. Our condition was, indeed, one of powerlessness and hopelessness." Charlotte Kasl says, "It is serious. It is serious. It is serious."

4. ANY SEXUAL/ROMANTIC BEHAVIOR CAN BE ADDICTIVE AND NONE ARE AUTOMATICALLY ADDICTIVE.

The more we learn about addictions the more we recognize that addiction doesn't reside in the substance or the activity, but in the way we humans relate to them. We used to think that heroin was an addictive drug and that anyone who used it would become addicted. When large numbers of soldiers became hooked on heroin in Vietnam, many thought we would face a massive addiction problem once the soldiers returned to the States. The reality was that once they were removed from the stresses of Vietnam, most found it quite easy to give up their drug. The addiction was not in the heroin as many had believed.

We also learned that no drugs are inherently non-addictive. We used to believe that marijuana and cocaine were "recreational" drugs and weren't addictive. Again we were surprised when large numbers of people found they couldn't stop using the drug and their lives had become unmanageable, in spite of the fact that they weren't using an "addictive drug."

So too with the ways we seek to connect with others. Falling in love, having sex, being in relationship, can be healthy or it can be addictive. No particular form of sexual addictivity is automatically "healthy," no matter how socially acceptable, and none is automatically addictive no matter how socially unacceptable. Thus we see that heterosexual intercourse in the missionary position with one's wife can be addictive. So can masturbation. And homosexual sex with multiple partners, for instance, can be non-addictive and healthy. So can "open marriage" or being married to two women at the same time.

There is always the tendency to view the types of sexual, romantic, and relationship activities that I and my friends do as non-addictive and the behaviors of those I disapprove of, as addictive. Labeling another an "addict" is thus a disguised form of social control.

5. SEX, LOVE, AND RELATIONSHIP ADDICTIONS ARE NOT ABOUT SEX, LOVE, AND RELATIONSHIPS

It would seem that people who are compulsively involved with sex, love, and relationship are really just taking a good thing too far. Robin Norwood captures this belief in the title of her book Women Who Love Too Much. We seem to be saying, "we really are seeking love, we just go too far." Actually nothing could be farther from the truth. Love addicts don't love too much. Sex addicts don't enjoy sex too much. And relationship addicts don't over-do intimacy. In fact, addiction and intimacy are mutually exclusive. So too are love and addiction.

When I talk about the love addictions, I put the "love" in quotes. We are so well trained by our families, peer groups, and society to confuse addiction and love, that we fail to see that the two are actually on a different level of existence from each other.

People who seek out sex, romance, and relationships and become addictive are really seeking an addictive fix to cover their pain. In this context sex, romance, and relationships are about self-protection rather than about connection. We are not really relating to another person, but to our own projected need for security.

As Robin Norwood suggests, many women believe what they are seeking is love, but they are really terrified of love. She says, "It means, in truth, obsessing about a man and calling that obsession love. It means measuring the degree

of your love by the depth of your torment." As a popular song concludes, "You're walking the wire of pain and desire, looking for love in between."

Anne Wilson Schaefer has a similar understanding of our search for intimacy. "When we are looking at the addictions that have their focus in pseudo-relationships, we need to see that though they look like ways of approaching intimacy, they are actually escapes from intimacy, ways of avoiding it."

6. IT IS IMPORTANT TO "NAME" OUR ADDICTIONS AND NAME THEM CORRECTLY.

The naming process is extremely important. Once we have named something, we are able to mobilize our energy to deal with it. All addictions thrive in the dark. Naming our addiction shines light on our situation and allows for growth to begin.

Naming, however, is not the same as labeling. Naming is done by the person themselves. "I am a sex addict," is naming. "You are a sex addict," is labeling. When I name my addiction I can also love it, it is part of me, and all of me is lovable. Labeling an addiction is always an act of violence. My wife wrote a book titled, *Love It, Don't Label It* which reminds us that labeling and loving can never go together. Labeling always engrains in us the mistaken belief that there is something essentially wrong with us. The label "addict" increases self hatred, the name "addict" increases self love.

It is important to give things the proper names. When I wrote *Looking for Love In All The Wrong Places*, I said I was using such names as "sex addict," "love addict," "romance addict," and "relationship addict," interchangeably.

I felt we weren't clear enough about the different addictions to be able to separate them. Then it was more important to offer people support for the general issues. Now it is important to become more precise.

The "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous says that the disease of addiction is cunning, baffling, powerful, and patient. Anne Wilson Schaefer describes it like water flowing

down a slope. If it is blocked at one place it will find another place to seep through. It never rests, is often invisible, and is easily disguised.

We know that for all addictions there is a high relapse rate. I've come to believe that the primary cause is our failure to name the addiction or the failure to name it correctly. Many clients I have seen said they had been in other Twelve Step program such as A.A., AI-Anon, Cocaine Anonymous, etc. A number felt they had a sexual or romantic addiction in addition to their drug addiction or co-dependency. Many were told, "just keep coming to meetings and doing the steps and your sexual problems will take care of themselves."

This type of denial is reminiscent of the past when we told alcoholics not to worry about their drinking. As soon as we solve your family, psychiatric, or emotional problems your drinking will take care of itself.

We have learned that people don't recover from their addictions until all addictions are treated. Relapse may be an indication that we have not been treating the proper addiction. A recent issue of *Recovering* magazine had this to say about re-lapse. "I've heard it said that when someone slips after being sober for many years, it's practically always something about intimacy (i.e. relationships) that pushed them over the edge. I was impressed once to hear two men say virtually the same thing on the same day: 'I've been sober ten years, have gone to AI-Anon, have dealt with my ACA issues, and today I was ready to jump off the Golden Gate Bridge over this SLAA (Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous) stuff.'"

Many people have an addiction to alcohol and act out sexually as part of their alcoholism. Once their alcoholism is treated the sexual acting out goes away. The reverse is also true and almost always neglected. There are some people who drink excessively and act out sexually. They have a primary sexual addiction and they drink to cover the pain. When their sexual addiction is dealt with, their excessive drinking stops. Finally, there are people who are alcoholic and sexually addicted. Most addictions must be understood, named, and dealt with correctly if recovery is to occur.

The situation is even more complicated when we begin to look at the "love" and "intimacy" addictions. One of the major complaints I hear from people who are "working" a

program is that there aren't a lot of people with long-term recovery. One of the reasons we give is that the programs dealing with sexual and romantic addictions are relatively new and it takes time to develop "old timers." But that isn't the whole story. The major programs have been around well over ten years and people continue to struggle with recovery.

It's interesting to note that in the sexual arena there are more different programs than for other addictions. There is only one Twelve Step program for cocaine, one for narcotics, one for alcohol, but there are at least four programs which deal with primary sexual addiction and a number of others that deal with "Co" issues.

The large numbers of programs coupled with low recovery rates leads me to believe that we have not yet properly named the addictions, developed appropriate programs to deal with those addictions, or understood how the various "love" and "intimacy" addictions interact.

I agree with Anne Wilson Schaefer that there is a difference between sexual addiction, romantic addiction, relationship addiction, and addictive relationships. Further, it may be that what we have been calling codependency and ACA issues may be better understood as forms of these addictions rather than separate addictions. I am always suspicious when people define their addictions "in relation to others." In my own life, it was often a cover up for dealing with my own addiction head on. It is much easier and more acceptable to be a "CO" and define our addiction in relation to our partner, or an ACA and define our addiction in relation to our dysfunctional parents than it is to say I am a sex addict, or I am a romance addict, or I am a relationship addict, or I create addictive relationships every time I "fall in love."

7. ANYONE CAN RECOVER FROM SEX, ROMANCE, AND RELATIONSHIP ADDICTIONS.

Traditionally, "sexual abnormalities" have been either treated through psychotherapy or imprisonment. Neither approach has proven very successful. Our earlier attempts at treating drug and alcohol addiction using those approaches were just as ineffective.

When A.A. was founded in 1935 it offered the first hope that alcoholics had any chance of leading successful lives.

An addictions model, based on the Twelve Step approach, proved more effective than anything that had been tried previously. Applying Twelve Step approaches to sex, romance, and relationship addiction have also shown that people can indeed be helped.

Although not perfect, they offer the best basis for recovery I know. More can be added as we learn more, but involvement in Twelve Step programs is the core for most everyone I work with. As author Melody Beattie says of Twelve Step programs:

"They are not merely self-help groups that help people with compulsive disorders stop doing whatever it is they feel compelled to do (drinking, helping the drinker, etc.). The programs teach people how to live--peacefully, happily, successfully. They bring peace. They promote healing. They give life to their members--frequently a richer, healthier life than those people knew before they developed whatever problem they developed. The Twelve-Steps are a way of life."

You will find a listing of the major Twelve Step Programs in the resource section at the end of this book.

Let's now explore the meaning of sex addiction, romance addiction, relationship addiction, and the core addiction.

Sex Addiction: Hooked on the Turn On.

Patrick Carnes, author of *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*, one of the first to offer an understanding of addiction, begins his book with this quote from Gay Talese:

Although Hefner was approaching forty-five, and had been involved with hundreds of photogenic women since starting his magazine, he enjoyed female companionship now more than ever; and perhaps more significant, considering all that Hefner had seen and done in recent years, was the fact that each occasion with a new woman was for him a novel experience. It was as if he was always watching for the first time a woman undresses, rediscovering with delight the beauty of the female body, breathlessly expectant as panties were removed and smooth buttocks were exposed--and he never tired of the consummate act. He was a sex junkie with an insatiable habit.

Carnes recognized in the sex addict the same kind of compulsion and loss of control that many had recognized in those addicted to alcohol and drugs.

Instead of alcohol or drugs, the sex addict becomes compulsively involved with a sexual experience. He says, "The sexual addiction is parallel. The addict substitutes a sick relationship to an event or process for a healthy relationship with others. The addict's relationship with a mood-altering "experience" becomes central to his (or her) life."

Anne Wilson Schaeff says, "Sexual addiction is a hidden addiction; I have found more willingness to confront almost any other addiction. Paradoxically, it is also one of the addictions that is most integrated into our society as "normal."

Drawing on Carnes' exploration of levels of sexual addiction, Schaeff suggests the following: Level One, repressive sexual addiction which includes person's who are obsessed with repressing sexuality--their own and others'- and are totally preoccupied with sex. Carnes says these people are "acting in," as opposed to those who "act out" their sexual compulsions.

Schaeff includes in Level One, characteristics of frigidity, impotence, sexual righteousness, obsessive sexual purity, non-integrated celibacy, religious sexual obsession, sexual anorexia, and the treating of others as sexual objects.

Included at Level Two, passive sexual addiction, are obsessive sexual fantasizing, passive pornography (voyeuristic and private), and voyeurism (public).

Level Three, sexual acting out, includes more acting out such as masturbation, exhibitionism, prostitution, active pornography, "New Age sexual freedom," using one's sexual partner as an object to get a "sexual fix," voyeurism-exhibitionism, public masturbation, sexual telephone calls (sending and receiving), sexual touching fixes (usually public), and autoerotic asphyxia.

The latter, Schaeff thinks, might be better placed at level four due to its risk. The idea is to shut off one's oxygen supply, usually by a form of hanging with a rope, while

masturbating or having sexual relations. The result is supposed to be a dramatic effect at the point of orgasm or an intensifying of the orgasm. It appears that many deaths attributed to teenage suicide were actually caused by this behavior.

Level Four, violent sexual behavior, includes individuals involved with child prostitution rings, rape, incest, child molesting, sado-masochistic sex, and other forms of sexual violence. At this level of addiction, the behavior is always directed toward another and is violent in the psychological and/or physical treatment of the self and/or others. The behavior almost always violates social and ethical norms and usually the law.

Romance Addiction: Hooked on Enchantment.

Romance addiction is often confused with sexual addiction and relationship addiction. Though they often overlap, there is value in understanding them separately. Many people with serious romance addictions don't get help because they can't identify with programs geared to sexual addicts.

Romance addicts are hooked on the illusion of romantic fulfillment. For us, the idea that "some day my prince (or princess) will come" is not just a fantasy, but a real expectation. "Love" songs are not "silly." For us, they are road maps giving directions on how to lead our lives.

We believe that love is blind and often painful and hence when we feel an intense attraction to someone we don't know, and feel like we are going to die if we don't see them, we are sure we are "in love." For romance addicts, to "fall" in love is not a figure of speech, it is the way we do everything. It's comforting to be able to leave our minds behind.

Schaefer says, "The romance addict uses form as a 'fix.' If the situation is romantic and dreamlike, then everything must be all right. Romance addicts are talented in movie-like settings, with background music, dim lights, and illusion." She goes on to make an important point about this form of addiction by noting that not all romance addiction is played out in relationships. Romance addicts can also play out their disease in adventures or causes. Often these two aspects are combined. I would often get involved in exciting causes and would fall in love during a

march or rally. It was like taking two drugs at once and getting an effect greater than either taken separately.

Schaeff describes three levels of romance addiction:

Level One--

Level One romance addicts live in fantasy. They often are "in love" with movie stars or romantic figures they can know at a distance. Level one addicts usually never act out their fantasies. We all have romantic fantasies to some degree. When fantasies begin to make our lives unmanageable, we have become romance addicts.

Level Two--

Level Two romance addicts begin to act out their fantasies. They begin to have affairs, liaisons, and multiple marriages. The movie *Dangerous Liaisons* offers a very graphic account of the lives of romance addicts. At this level more and more time is spent in illusion. Reality begins to recede in the background.

One client of mine, a successful business executive, came to see me when he recognized that he had spent thousands of dollars on various romantic affairs, usually taking the women on romantic trips out of town.

Level Three--

As' is true of all addictions, romance addictions are progressive and if not treated become more dangerous. It takes more and more excitement to get the same "fix." Romance addicts at this stage get hooked on the "thrill" and the thrill can lead to fatal consequences.

On February 18, the San Francisco Chronicle headlined, "Sunnyvale Killer's Love Fantasy" and gave the following shocking details:

"Richard Wade Farley's seven victims probably died quickly after being hit by shotgun blasts at close range, Sunnyvale police said yesterday. The man inhabited a fantasy world in which the woman who rejected him in real life was his constant loving companion, according to letters obtained yesterday.

It all began in the spring when Laura Black smiled at her coworker in the Sunnyvale defense plant where she worked as an electrical engineer.

Within a month, she knew something was very, very wrong. 'He began to manifest a strange obsession with me, and began a course of emotional harassments which continues to this date,' Black recounted earlier this month."

It ended in tragedy. Seven people were killed, four, including Black were wounded, the killer was finally restrained by the police. All were victims of romantic addiction.

Relationship Addictions: Hooked on Attraction or Attachment.

There are two main types of relationship addictions. In the first, a person is addicted to having a relationship--any relationship, real or fantasized. In the second, a person is addicted to a particular relationship with a particular person.

The first type I call being hooked on "Attraction." We are always out looking for that that certain someone. We like the idea of a relationship much more than an actual relationship, so our relationships are often short lived. The cliché "I can't live with her (him) and I can't live without her (him), usually falls on the side of "I can't live with" and we continue our search. Although we may use romance or sex to get a relationship, the real hook for us is the relationship itself.

The second type I call being hooked on "Attachment." Once we have found our mate we want to "hold on tight and not let go." No matter how bad or destructive things may get, we stay, usually telling ourselves its because "I love her (him)", or "its for the kids." It's very difficult for us to think of ourselves. Robin Norwood's book Women Who Love Too Much sold millions of copies all over the world. Clearly the world is full of women for whom "loving turns into loving too much," as Norwood says. She goes on to say that this addiction occurs "when our partner is inappropriate, un-caring, or unavailable and yet we cannot give him up--in fact we want him, we need him even more. We will come to understand how our wanting to love, our yearning for love, our loving itself becomes an addiction."

Although women are more often conditioned to the "attachment" addictions and men are conditioned to become "the dance away lovers," afraid of getting smothered by commitment, I believe that men and women are susceptible to both types. In the age of "liberation," many men give up their macho conditioning of always being on the prowl only to get caught in the opposite addiction of being hooked on destructive women. Women, on the other hand, in their desire to throw off the apron of domesticity and take their place in the world, become hooked on attraction. Some women go from being the "Madonna" to becoming the "whore." Many of us were slow to realize that liberation was not about "getting the goodies that the opposite sex had." That path often led to taking on the addictions of the other sex. Real liberation has to do with a spiritual quest to be true to our higher selves and to be guided by our higher power.

Many of us thought we were becoming more liberated when in fact we were just trading one kind of relationship addiction for the other. As Anne Wilson Schaef so aptly put it, "relationship addicts do not have relationships, they take hostages."

I agree fully with Schaef when she says that "Much of what was previously described as co-dependence is probably relationship addiction, and many or most co-sex addicts are probably relationship addicts (as are most alcoholics and co-addicts). The focus in co-dependency upon controlling others may well be relationship addiction.

Schaef describes 4 levels of relationship addiction:

Level One--

Anorexia, includes persons obsessed with relationships; they are obsessed with avoiding them. These are not people who are comfortable loners, but people for whom relationships are seen as necessary for their life and at the same time are seen as deadly. The result is that they long for relationships but do everything possible to avoid them. This kind of person is rarely detected and often covers their relationship obsession with work addiction, money addiction, or eating addictions.

Level Two--

The addict spends much of his or her time in fantasied relationships. These differ from romantic fantasies or sexual fantasies in that the focus is rarely on moonlight

and roses or sexual excitement. The fantasy is in being coupled with another person. Level Two addicts may spend hours in the park on a warm spring day fantasizing that they are coupled with each attractive person they see.

Level Three--

Schaeff calls these "normal" relationship addictions, both because they represent what most people in our society are taught to see as normal relationships and because these are the types of relationships that have been widely represented in such books as *Women Who Love Too Much* and *Men Who Hate Women and The Women Who Love Them*. These are people, says Schaeff, who act out their relationship addiction in relationship. Addicts at this level marry people they do not even know or like just to be married. They may tell themselves that they are in love, or like the sex or romance, but what they really crave is the feeling of being coupled for life.

Level Four--

Schaeff describes Level Four as leading to death. She is convinced, as am

I, that people die from relationship addiction. Schaeff talks about her experiences at a pain clinic where many of the people were suffering from terminal cancer. 'The clinic director was convinced that most of the people he treated were in dead or destructive relationships, and he saw these relationships as the key to the physical problem. Relationship addictions can be fatal. Those addicted, often unconsciously, choose death as the only way to gain peace and get out of a destructive relationship.

The Addictive Core

I believe there is an addictive core that is at the center of all our addictions. It results from having been abused, abandoned, or neglected as children. (Remember, if it is true that 90-95% of us come from more or less dysfunctional families, it isn't surprising to see the degree of damage passed on to the children.) Feeling there must be something the matter with us, we develop a sense of shame, a feeling that at the core of our being we are damaged. Afraid to believe in ourselves because we feel we are to blame for being damaged, we start on an endless search for our lost selves.

The addictive core is the mistaken belief that our survival depends on looking elsewhere. The seed for "Love" addiction is planted when we give up on ourselves and begin to seek ourselves in others. "Substance addictions" take hold when we give up on getting our needs met with people and seek our lost lives in something we believe is more reliable-- the bottle, the needle, or the pipe.

The addictive core has two aspects. The one is an attempt to cover over the pain we feel as damaged children with broken dreams. It is also a search for our lost selves. Addicts are people who want to go home. Yet in our addiction we are like damaged homing pigeons. The farther away from home we get the more terrified we become and the faster we fly in the wrong direction.

As I have suggested throughout, the core of the addictive process occurs in childhood. Whether we believe that we inherit our propensity for addiction, learn it from our parents, or some combination of both, our early life is crucial.

We can summarize the beliefs and related emotions that are at the core of the "love" addictions:

<u>Belief.</u>	<u>Emotion.</u>
I am damaged and therefore bad inside	Shame
To know me is to abuse or abandon me	Fear
I can't rely on people to meet my needs	Distrust

7. Since people can, and often do, disappoint us, we try to fill the void and lessen the pain, in inanimate relationships. We turn to drugs, alcohol, T.V., money, work, etc. When we don't find it in one we look for it in another. If we don't find it there, we may marry someone who is an alcoholic or an addict and become a co-alcoholic or co-addict.

Recovery must go in reverse. First we treat the outer circle addictions and co-addictions, then, we move on to treat the sexual, romantic, and relationship addictions. At the same time we must go back into the addictive core and recognize that the desire to find our lost self was real, but in our fear to go inside, we went the wrong way.

We must be willing to be guided back inside (We can't make the journey alone. We must each have a guide who has already been there.) We learn to let go of our false self, go into the band of shame and through the black hole. We then are able to feel the power of our true and perfect self. The journey is not only a personal odyssey, but a spiritual one as well. As we touch deeply into our selves, we also touch the mystery of the universe, what some call our "higher power."

After 40 years travelling on my own road of recovery, I recognize that the journey never ends. We are all on the path together and we will all arrive in love. This time no parentheses around love. This is the real thing. Thank you for letting me share my journey with you.

-The End-

-And The Next Beginning-

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