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## SEXUAL ADDICTION

James looks happy. He has a successful career, a dedicated wife, three fine children, and a nice house. He goes to church every Sunday with his family. James sneaks away during the week to adult bookstores and X-rated movies. He recently began having sex with prostitutes. His wife found out and she is devastated. James' life is falling apart. Joe, a single thirty-two year old, masturbates five times a day. He is obsessed with sex. He constantly sexualizes all the women he sees, plans masturbation, and fantasizes about the pornographic magazines and movies he watches every day. Joe lost his job this week due to his tardiness, missed meetings, and turning his work in late, because of his masturbation. Mark, a fifty-two year old pastor of a local church got caught with a prostitute. He also has had numerous affairs with women in his church, and struggles with pornography and excessive masturbation. Mark's ministry is over and his life is in shambles.

These men are sexually addicted. Sexual addiction occurs when an individual's level of sexual behavior is uncontrollable. Sexually addicted men are constantly preoccupied with sex and continue to engage in compulsive sexual activity despite adverse consequences like loss of marriage, job, health, and freedom (Schneider, 1991). They tenaciously pursue sexual behaviors to help alleviate relational pain and make themselves feel good, satisfied, and in control (Schaumburg, 1997). The primary goal of sexually addictive behavior is to avoid relational pain - to control life (Schaumburg, 1997). All sexually addicted people are involved in false intimacy. Sexual addiction is a powerful, destructive force in a person's life. Sexually addicted people come from all types of backgrounds and religious affiliations. Sexual addiction frequently co-exists with other addictive disorders such as drug addiction, alcoholism, or eating disorders. Three to six per cent of Americans have sexual addictions (Schneider, 1991). Forty million people have visited sexually oriented websites (Dobson, 2000). Cybersex, internet pictures, videos, chat rooms and clubs have

become the number one issue in sexual addiction (Lasser, 1992). We live in a sex-saturated society. There is something sexual everywhere you look. Billboards, the media, provocative clothes, advertisements, movies, and crude humor flood our lives. More men than women struggle with sexual addictions, but increasing numbers of women are sexually addicted.



### *Sexually Addictive Behaviors*

Behavioral choices vary for sex addicts. Many include masturbation along with other behaviors, while others do not. Some have multiple affairs, others have one, or no affairs. Some frequent prostitutes and others do not. Schaumburg (1997) notes that not everyone who has an affair, masturbates, or has hired a prostitute is sexually addicted. Sexual behaviors can be nonintrusive (victimless) or intrusive. Intrusive sexual behavior includes direct or indirect sexual contact that violates people, and usually creates emotional, spiritual or possibly physical damage (Schaumburg, 1997).

- **FANTASY SEX** - nonintrusive - obsessing about sexual adventures.
- **VISUAL SEX** - intrusive or nonintrusive - pornography, strip shows, voyeurism.
- **VERBAL SEX** - intrusive and nonintrusive - 900 numbers, sexual talk, obscene calls.
- **CYBERSEX** - nonintrusive - internet access to pornography.
- **PHYSICAL SEX** - nonintrusive - sex with a willing participant.
- **PHYSICAL SEX** - intrusive - child sexual activity, rape, exploitation, sadomasochism.
- **PHYSICAL SEX** - intrusive - inappropriate touching, impersonal sex within marriage.
- **PROSTITUTION** - nonintrusive - soliciting prostitutes for sex.
- **PROMISCUOUS SEX** - nonintrusive- extra-marital affairs.
- **OBJECT SEX** - nonintrusive - objects to increase pleasure, fetishes, sex with animals.

### *Dynamics*

Sexually addicted men are compelled and consumed with their behavior. Their behavior is completely out of control and they usually deny the seriousness of their situation. They rationalize their behavior. Sexual addiction results from loneliness, pain, the self-centered demand to be loved and accepted regardless of the consequences, and a loss of vital relationship with God. The addict believes and demands that life must satisfy all his needs. He seeks physiological relief (orgasm), at all costs, to provide that brief illusion of intimacy and belonging. Sometimes sex addicts use their behavior to act out their anger at their wives (Schaumburg, 1997).

The sex addict is internally engulfed with lust (sin). Sexual addiction is a complex result of sin and human behavior. The addict starts out with lower levels of stimulation and graduates to higher levels of sexual stimulation and acting out as he seeks greater "highs." Sex addicts describe the euphoria with sex similar to that described by drug addicts with drug use. Milkman and Sunderwirth (1987) classified sexual addiction as an arousal addiction

because its effects on the brain are similar to the effects of cocaine, amphetamines, compulsive gambling and risk-taking behaviors. Sexual addiction follows the same predictable pattern of other addictions (Arterburn, 1991). Initially, addicts experience uncomfortable feelings of pain, stress, or shame. Then they become preoccupied with relief. They develop a predictable path to achieve their controlled outcome. Compulsive sexual behavior follows. Addictive sex offers escape. The sex addict usually feels intense guilt, shame, and remorse after the act. He promises himself he will never do it again. The scene is repeated days or weeks later. The addict becomes desensitized over time needing more and more stimulation to produce the same level of results. Without intervention, he spirals downward.

Lasser (1991) lists four signs that a person is at risk for sex addiction: loneliness; having been abused as a child; coming from a family in which one sex addict was present; and coming from a rigidly religious home that taught only negative messages about sex. Warning signs that your spouse may have a secretive cybersex problem are: preoccupation with visual, sexual stimuli; evidence of pornography usage; insisting on his own internet account or email address; unexplained credit card bills; having a separate credit card; having a post office box where he can receive correspondence from chat room partners; staying up late, after everyone's gone to bed so he can get on the computer without interruption; a distance between the two of you emotionally and spiritually. Also look for alcohol abuse, anger, guilt, more or less sex, different time schedules, more use of the computer, and missing cash, in someone you suspect of sexual addiction.

## Causes

Why do men risk losing their career, reputation, wife, family and friends? Sexual addiction is a complex problem with multiple causes. A deeper understanding of this problem comes from the Biblical model of sexual addiction. Adam and Eve lived in perfect harmony with God and enjoyed complete healthy sexual intimacy before the Fall, when sin entered the human race. Good, normal, God-given sexuality becomes evil when it serves self, exclusively. Sex addicts use sexual behaviors to meet their deepest level needs on demand. Deep internal needs like love and belonging can only be met by God. Developmental factors also contribute to sexual addiction. Children denied consistent parental nurturance, acceptance, and love begin to feel powerless, inadequate, and unlovable (Schaumburg, 1997). They do whatever they can to bring them secure, consistent love. Children also feel betrayed when their parents don't provide spiritual and emotional support. They feel that their relationship with their parent is not safe. Insufficient parental teaching and modeling about intimacy can leave children feeling confused, rejected, hurt, and angry. They develop

# Freedom in Christ



Sexual addiction is a serious problem with disastrous consequences. The sex addict can have total victory and freedom in Christ. He will always be susceptible to relapses, but less likely to

fall, or stay down if he is surrounded by Christ and other believers. Freedom comes from abiding in Christ and worshipping Him rather than self. We won't be entirely rid of sin until Christ returns, but we can have victory over it on a daily basis through the Holy Spirit. There is hope. Sexual wholeness is possible. The journey may be long and difficult but the addict can have life as he overcomes in Christ. The more intimate his relationship with Christ, the healthier his relationships with others will be. Once he works through the intimacy issues and finds fulfillment in Christ he can let go of the addictive behaviors he used to fill his emptiness. He is free to let the peace of Christ rule in his heart (Col. 3:15). He is free in Christ to live victoriously and encourage others to do the same.

their own sense of intimacy and false patterns of love and affection. Early sexualization, exposure to sexual sounds, smells, sights, and inappropriate touches during infancy and childhood negatively affect children. Sexualization may also include being exposed to sexual abuse, pornographic material, seeing people engage in sex, or hear people talk graphically about sex. Young children are not ready to deal with sexualization. It leaves them feeling insecure. The sexual images resurface as they get older and they tend to act on them inappropriately.

## Healing

We need to be understanding, compassionate, and loving toward the sexually addicted. They need God's love, forgiveness, healing power, and our support. These men struggle with sin and emotional pain like everyone else. They need accountability, and support that is provided in the loving context of Christian treatment and follow-up care (Arterburn 1995). The sex addict's first step to recovery is to face his denial. This leads to reviewing the painful issues causing his addiction. The addict experiences fear and anger over his behaviors when he faces the issues. This is necessary for healing. Sometimes family or friends have to confront the sex addict about his behavior. Once the addict recognizes his need for change, sincerely asks for help, faces his brokenness, repents and asks for God's forgiveness, God begins healing him. The sex addict cannot heal himself, only God can. Only God can satisfy his needs. He must give up control and surrender to God. Abstinence from inappropriate sexual behaviors is not enough, he must understand and deal with the intimacy issues, loneliness, depression, and anger. The sex addict has to work through the barriers to connecting

physically, emotionally, and spiritually with his wife. This involves reviewing pain and unresolved conflicts in the marriage. The addict must change his patterns. All sexual images from the internet, cable, etc. must be removed. His friends can help him accomplish this. Professional group counseling can facilitate healing. Self-help groups for sex addicts are also recommended. Christians should bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:1). We need to help and encourage our fallen brothers to trust God for complete restoration.

## F.Y.I.

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