

Introduction

Bob nervously watched the big TV as the seconds counted down to Super Bowl halftime and the football teams left the field. “It’s halftime,” said Bob to his wife. “I’m going to make a quick business call.”

Bob got up from the couch and walked down the hall to his oak-paneled office. Already lost in his addiction, his mind was cluttered with images regarding what he was going to see on the computer screen. Bob was in such a hurry that he quickly shut the door behind him, neglecting to turn the lock. He rushed to his large desk, sat in the luxury leather office chair, and flipped on the thirty-inch monitor. Out the window was an incredible view of the mountains, but Bob didn’t see it. His eyes saw only the computer screen as his fingers quickly reached the website he wanted. Having been there so many times, he was able to quickly sign in and navigate to a specific video. Finally, it started.

Bob pulled down his sweat pants so his genitals were exposed. He moved into just the right position in the chair and began his very familiar ritual of masturbating to these types of images and videos. He had seen hundreds over the years. His wife had caught him three times, and the last time she had said that the next time would be “it” for their marriage. Bob had tried to stop, but didn’t. So here he was again, thinking of nothing else but the images on the screen.

On his monitor was a video of a young woman being forcefully held down and sodomized by three men in masks. Although Bob had never done this in real life (and most likely never would), watching domination is what got him the most turned on. His right hand in motion, Bob got more and more excited. He was lost. Gone. And he didn’t hear the door start to open. Bob usually double-checked the lock on the door, and, like

most addicts, he lived with the illusion that he would never slip up. But this time he was in such a hurry to do what he needed and get back to the game that he thought the door was locked. It wasn't.

Just as Bob began to climax, his ten-year-old daughter opened the door and stood there, motionless, shocked, and terrified at the sight of her father ejaculating to the horrendous images on the computer monitor. Melanie ran screaming to her mother.

Bob no longer lives at that house.

His wife had warned him that he was down to his last chance, and her attorney showed no mercy towards Bob—not after what Melanie had seen.

Four years later, his daughter was still in therapy. Bob had only supervised visits with her. A glum-faced Child Protection Services official needed to be present at all times. Bob's ex-wife was still so angry that she communicated with Bob only through her attorney.

How Bob Changed His Life

In many ways, Bob was considered a good father and what many people thought of as a nice guy. But he was caught by his compulsion. The Internet had him by the balls. He just could not stop. Yet, for men like Bob, there is a way to break the stranglehold of the compulsion. The incident that occurred when his daughter walked into his home office finally convinced Bob to get counseling. He had “hit bottom.” Alone in the motel room where he was forced to live, Bob finally called me.

Now he has gone through treatment and is forging a new life—a life free of porn and moving in the direction of true intimacy with a real woman in his life. It was not

easy. Bob wasn't a bad guy at heart, and he went through a great deal of despair and horror at his own behavior. In a technique that you will learn in this book, I guided Bob through the process of understanding that he was more than his mind, his thoughts, or his addiction. He was so much more.

In the beginning of our work together, I asked him to bookend his days by calling me in the morning and at night to report on his feelings and actions. I wanted him to be able to hold himself accountable and to get support from me if he needed it. After all, I know what being in the grips of the compulsion is like. I've been there myself. Bob could tell that I really did care that he got well.

Bob's Success

Bob's progress took a lot of time and work, including practicing the techniques briefly described below. Eventually, Bob began to associate porn with suffering, not bliss. After more time passed, Bob began dating a woman in CoDA (Codependents Anonymous) recovery. He learned about true intimacy and true happiness. Without the pull of porn, Bob had even more time and energy to devote to his business. His income has increased, and he's begun to donate to recovery causes. This does not in any way excuse his selfish, addictive behavior. Yet it does show that he has begun the process of forgiveness and redemption.

Bob learned all the techniques that I'll be teaching you in this book. What follows now are brief descriptions of just a few of those techniques, which will be explained in detail in later chapters. In each chapter I'll also present real-life examples of the how the

techniques work, though the names and some of the details in the examples have been changed to protect privacy.

Is This Book For You?

Patrick Carnes, author of many excellent books including *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction* (the breakthrough book on sexually compulsive behavior), defines sexual addiction as any sexually-related compulsion that interferes with normal living and causes severe stress to family, friends, loved ones, and one's work environment. Sex addicts frequently make sex a priority over relationships and work (Carnes 2001). If you're suffering from any form of sexual compulsivity—using porn, prostitutes, chat rooms, phone sex, and so on, then this book is for you. By following the steps in the book, you can finally break free of the wretched regressive story, the childish behavior, and the narcissistic urges. Your life will change for the better. In addition to men with a wide range of sexually addictive behavior, my clients have included a large number of women, many of whom were addicted to sex-oriented chat rooms, relationships, and love. My clients have also included many gay men and women who have had a range of sexually addictive behaviors, usually with a tendency toward cruising and having anonymous sex.

The techniques I use work for almost everyone, and this book could've been written with examples for every possible sexual type and variation of addict, whether straight, gay, male, or female. However, in the interest of simplicity and the book being concise and easy to read, most of it is written in a way that addresses heterosexual males. Obviously, you might be a woman, or gay, or transsexual. If you're not a heterosexual male, I

encourage you to make the appropriate adjustments in wording for your individual needs and addictive behaviors. In addition, if you are buying this book for someone else but also plan to possibly read it yourself, you can adjust the wording accordingly to your situation.

Techniques That Interfere with Your Addictive Impulses

One technique about listening to your addiction is called “Turning on the Lights in Your Amphitheater.” You will learn to review and monitor your own internal amphitheater of protagonists and helpers. Rather than having a number of inner voices or subpersonalities all trying to talk at once, you can choose one subpersonality and/or complex that you would like to have speak. Your addict might not talk right away but, believe me, there is a part of you in there that wants to talk. From there, you can begin to create a new internal subpersonality that will be your champion and can help you refuse to act out. This sounds more complicated than it is, but it’s fully explained in an easy-to-follow way in chapter 2.

Chapter 5 includes a section called “What’s Always True?” This section introduces a technique that helps you drop down into your essential self, becoming aware just for a moment, of the connectedness you experience in your most peaceful moments. Focusing on what is always true will help you start to be who you truly are rather than who you think yourself to be. Typically, much of your thinking comes from your experience of what other people have told you rather than from your true essence.

Chapter 9 has a description of my experience with “Blue Sky and High Heels,” which is a way for you to know what to do when sexually compulsive thought patterns

enter your mind. For example, suppose you're walking around and, in a flash that's faster than what I call "clock time," you smell perfume and you want to have sex—with anybody. Perfume equals sex. It's a story you've made up in your mind, and you don't know when or how it's going to hit you. The Blue Sky and High Heels technique provides a way to be aware that this will happen and teaches you how to be prepared to deal with your impulses.

Another technique that interferes with addictive impulses is what I call "The Red Light Guy," which is covered in depth in chapter 11. It's a fun technique to convert sexual energy into positive adult behavior and thinking. In chapter 12, you'll find "First Thought Wrong," which is about learning to question the voice of your addict. The "How Good Can You Stand It?" technique in chapter 14 is an affirmation that can change your life for the better.

These are only a sample of the techniques for overcoming sexual addiction that you will discover in this book. Regardless of your sex, gender, sexual orientation, or sexual desires, a sex addict's individual behavioral compulsions have a seemingly unshakeable grip that can end up ruining their lives. But there are many variations of Bob's story, and you too can break free of the shackles of sex addiction. Although, in my case, the type of porn was not what Bob would have chosen, the result on my own marriage—no, make that *marriages*—was the same.

How I Changed My Life

Many years ago, I was a sex addict living in the grip of my compulsion. I was down and almost out. My second wife had left me because I was depressed from too much porn—

videos, seedy theatres, and magazines—and I had no clue how to be intimate with a real, live, loving woman. I had a great job with a good salary, and it was fun work. But without my lovely wife, I just felt hopeless. This was the second wife I'd lost to porn and the underlying issues. I got so depressed that I took an overdose of tranquilizers. I felt that hopeless. Luckily, my mother, who lived in another state, knew I was in terrible shape. When I didn't answer my phone, she called the local police. They took me to the hospital, where I woke up in the ICU.

From that lowest of low points, I began to overcome my addiction by attending self-help and recovery groups. I then went on to earn a Masters Degree in counseling psychology at John F. Kennedy University so I could help others, which I've been doing successfully since 1995.

I also met and married a wonderful woman with whom I am finally able to experience true intimacy. This book can show you the way out of your addiction and into real intimacy with another human being. In addition, without a sexual addiction, you'll have more energy and time to make friends and enjoy have hobbies. It's also very likely that you'll increase your income. If I can do it, so can you. It's the difference between being enslaved and being free. Which do you choose?

You Always Have a Choice

If you choose to be free of the compulsion that you are allowing to run your life, I will show you the steps you can take to be free of your impulses. In addition, you can learn to experience true closeness and intimacy with another.

When helping my clients, I use the techniques I mentioned earlier along with other processes you'll learn about in the following chapters. These methods have proven the test of time. Some are my own discoveries, while others I learned in my studies, from the twelve-step program, and still others from several wonderful mentors. Keep in mind, I was a sex addict who got better, which means I have a deep understanding of what works and what doesn't. In this book, you will learn the ways that I and many others became sane. When I say "sane," I mean becoming a person whose primary driving desire is no longer to act out sexually. This is not to say that you will eliminate sex from your life or even from your thoughts. Of course it's normal and healthy to have sexual desire and to experience sex. But it is neither normal nor healthy for sexual desire to become all consuming. Sexual desire should be a part of a larger approach you have to life. The goal is balance. Interactions with partners should be about love and intimacy in addition to being about sex.

Let me simply describe something that took me a long time to learn and which you will probably not absorb just by reading this paragraph: *I am not my addiction. You are not your addiction.* No one has to be defined by his or her addictive behavior. I am infinitely more than my addiction, and so are you.

Your addiction is now all consuming—and possibly all defeating. It is probably ruining your life. But you are so much more than your addiction. And when you realize this, you can put your addiction into perspective and begin to deal with it. Again: You have a choice.

Or maybe you are one of those who will procrastinate until it seems you don't have a choice. But, once more, the truth is: *you always have a choice.* In chapter 10 I

explain that concept in depth. For now, let's just say that this book shows you how to choose to break free from sexual compulsions, how to stick with that choice to be free, and how to move on to a more fulfilling life.

My promise to you is that you can get free so that you're not out of control and you can experience intimacy. But to fulfill my part of the bargain, I need to repeat myself so that the concepts get through to you. I'm not saying you have a thick skull. It's just that the part of you that is addicted ("your addict") may be resistant and try to pull you off the path to freedom. (Remember all the times that you've tried to stop on your own?)

When that happens, and you're pulled off the path, another crucial step to remember is this: *you are not your mind*. In other words, you are not who you *think* you are or who your addict keeps telling you you are. You've been living in reaction to your history. We all do, and this is mostly okay. An exception is when living in reaction to your past results in sexually compulsive behavior. If you realize the essential truth that you are not your mind, you can experience actually making choices in the moment. That means you can live without your stories telling you that you can't be successful or have real intimacy, and living without those negative stories can mean that you no longer have to act out sexually. When everything you do is fresh and you're no longer living in reaction to your history, there are no preconceived notions, no story. Your life will be different. That's what Bob ultimately did. But he waited until after he had hit bottom and lost his home, his marriage, and severely limited his right to see his own child.

Are you going to wait until you hit bottom? Will you wait until you feel you have no choice? Or are you going to make that choice now? If you're not ready to change your life, then don't buy this book.

How Difficult Is It?

It's difficult. I won't bullshit you. And you can do it. This book offers a condensed version of what happens in sessions with clients, either in person or over the phone. My associates and I at Compulsion Solutions treat people from all over the United States, as well as from the rest of the world. The book will guide you, step-by-step, through processes that have been proven to work.

I was addicted to porn, peep shows, and strip clubs. I've counseled clients who have done almost anything imaginable. What I describe in the following chapters are the treatment techniques I use with clients, but which I first used on myself. They helped me not only to become free of sexually compulsive behavior but also to realize that I'm *not* my addiction—that I'm not even my "mind," nor am I all the stories I've told myself about myself. I am infinitely more than my addiction, and today I enjoy a level of consciousness far beyond the memories, projections, and associated feelings of what I used to call my life.

You can have this too. Because you and I are not that different.

If you work through this book, you'll know what I'm talking about. Really. You might not believe me yet. The truth is that it's actually *fun* to be conscious and present (most of the time) instead of being lost in a life of quiet desperation.

Your path to freedom starts, as mine did, with the realization that you've lost control around sex. You begin by acknowledging that you're acting regressively (like a twelve-to-fifteen-year-old, at best), and that you're probably a mature man in most ways, *but* you don't understand intimacy and have confused intimacy with sexual activity.

Also—and this is crucial—you are beginning to realize that you *can't get enough of what won't satisfy you!* Objectifying and sexualizing people is a never-ending, negative process that yields a few minutes of excitement, a brief orgasm, then hours, days, weeks, months, and years of fear, pain, shame, self-doubt, self-criticism, judgment, and anger. Doing the work in this book will help *free* you from the shackles of your own negative sexual story.

How do I know? Because I did it and have seen hundreds of clients—like you—break free of sexual compulsions. It will take courage to do the assignments in this book. I can vouch for that. However, this could be your rite of passage into true manhood, free of your old compulsive sexual desires.

It's worth the discomfort. Try to work the steps or techniques in sequence as they are presented in the book. Some parts may be easier for you than others. The chapters are in a sequential order because, in my many years of counseling experience, this sequence has proven the most effective at freeing individuals from the grip of their sexual compulsions. I know it's a cliché now, but “Just do it!” I adopted that saying early on, and it's helped me immensely.

When you're having a difficult time, remember that I didn't just read about this in a psychology book. I *lived* the life of a sex addict. I took the worst thing that ever happened to me and made it into a thriving business—because the treatment processes I use work. You can take the energy you're expending on addictive behavior and channel it into a more satisfying career, an intimate relationship with a partner, your family, dear friends, and meaningful activities. In other words, if you follow the steps in this book, you'll actually get a life.

Chapter 1

Are You Under the Spell of Sex Addiction?

Take a good look at your own behavior. Is there someone who may discover what you're up to and say, "This is your last chance." Could there be a problem with the law, such as being arrested with a prostitute? Could a spouse or child discover the porn on your computer? Could your wife find you masturbating to porn in front of the TV (where your children might also see you)? What would need to happen to make you decide you have a problem? Who would need to find out? Think about it. It happens to people like you every day, and it can happen to you. *Just think about it.*

Are You a Train Wreck Waiting to Happen?

Would it take something like what happened to Bob when his young daughter walked in on him? Or could you "hit bottom" when it looks as though you're doing okay and you're still maintaining, yet your life could totally self-destruct at any moment. Howard is a good example of someone who took action before his life could become a train wreck.

Howard and the Working Girl

Driving his brand-new, shiny black Lexus sedan, Howard turned off Highway 580 and guided his car the few blocks to San Pablo Avenue in Oakland, California. At that time, San Pablo Avenue was a grungy thoroughfare, parts of which were littered with used

drug needles and empty liquor bottles. It has since been cleaned up, although many areas are still run down. At that time, the notable “attraction” of San Pablo Avenue was that it was known as an area where prostitutes solicited customers while walking the unswept sidewalks or leaning into cars from dirty curbsides.

A heavysset man with curly red hair and very pale skin, Howard had achieved financial success as a programmer for a major software company. He frequently traveled and had no clue about how to date. Lately, Howard’s job had been more and more impacted, not by his work, but by his compulsion to “visit” working girls. As a result, his job performance was suffering and his social life, which had never been great, was basically going down the tubes.

But this time, as Howard slowed the Lexus to get a good look at the “girls” on the street, there was a difference. Howard knew he was in trouble and he didn’t want to lose the life he had worked so hard to build. He had called me and had started sex-addiction counseling. It was going well. So why was he once again cruising San Pablo Avenue? *Because I had asked him to.*

What? His sex addiction counselor had asked him to look for a prostitute?

Yes! Except this time his counselor—me—was sitting comfortably in the back seat of the Lexus. I frequently give clients assignments and, when I think it’s needed or would be effective, the client’s counseling session might be a field trip, with me along for moral support or merely to stir things up. In Howard’s case, I wanted to provoke a serious change in his initial interaction with a prostitute.

Howard’s assignment—with me in the back seat of the Lexus—was to go to San Pablo Avenue and pick up a prostitute. But this time it wasn’t about getting sex. Rather,

Howard was working to break the stranglehold of his sexual addiction. And he was nervous about what was going to happen. After several minutes of procrastination, Howard pulled the car up next to the type of woman he habitually hired.

Although she was probably about twenty-two, she looked older, tired, and her teased blonde hair was not properly combed. Her low-cut, pink blouse and short, tight-fitting skirt showed several light stains. When she smiled, her yellowing teeth were chipped. Her breath was strong, and it was clear she was not taking the best care of herself.

“What you looking for today, Hon?” she asked Howard.

“I, um,” Howard stammered uncomfortably. “How much do you charge to just, um, party?”

She named a price and Howard glanced back at me. I leaned forward in the seat so she could see me.

“So is this a twofer,” she stated.

“No,” I said. “I’m a sex-addiction counselor.”

“What? What is this?” she said, alarmed.

Howard gripped the steering wheel, his knuckles white and his hands sweaty.

“He’ll pay you for your time,” I said. “No problem.”

While I continued to sit in the back seat, I motioned for the woman to get in the front.

She opened the door and sat in the passenger’s seat, saying, “You’re definitely going to pay?”

Howard nodded and opened his wallet so she could see that he had the cash. She visibly relaxed, and I could tell she would be happy to cooperate in any way possible.

As Howard drove to a nearby semi-secluded area, I said, “My client is addicted to prostitutes.”

“That’s what I’m here for,” she said, with a cheery smile.

Howard glanced at her face, then at her breasts. He was sweating even more now.

“He wants to fuck you. Do you want to fuck him?” I asked.

“Sure. So long as he pays me,” she said.

“But do you really *want* to fuck him?” I asked, keeping my voice low and gentle.

“What do you mean?” she asked, even though she knew exactly what I meant.

“I mean, do you enjoy it? Do you enjoy being with men like this man?”

The artificial smile on her face faltered. I knew I’d hit a nerve. She was off her game now. Flustered, she tried to regain her composure and angrily set her jaw. I have a lot of practice at providing a safe environment for people to open up, though I don’t typically do this on this on the street anymore. It could be dangerous. Her pimp could have been following us or she could have had a knife. My intention at the time was to help Howard achieve a breakthrough and see that the prostitute was a real human being .

“Do you really *love* to fuck men?” I asked again, keeping my voice gentle yet forceful. “It’s okay to say how you really feel. Right now you’re getting paid for *not* having sex.”

She glanced at me, then at Howard, who was trying not to look at her body but couldn’t help himself. She glared at him now, her anger rising.

“It’s okay,” I said again. “It would be very helpful for my client to hear the truth.”

“The truth? You *really* want the truth?” She hesitated. It wasn’t easy for her to speak. She shook her head.

I nodded, encouraging her with my eyes to continue. Although my goal was to intervene in the situation so my client would have a very different and new street experience, I also felt compassion for the woman. (Prostitutes occasionally call my office for help, and I refer them to appropriate organizations.) When she realized neither Howard nor I wanted anything sexual from her and she was going to get paid anyway, she dropped her hard-edged veneer, at least a little, and she began unburdening herself. She also must have sensed that I cared enough to do what must have seemed like a crazy intervention. Maybe she was having a bad day. Gradually, as we talked for a while, her anger came spilling out and she got to her story about herself and prostitution.

“Okay, okay, I guess the truth is—the truth is I don’t really like men all that much,” she said, her voice barely audible.

She glared at Howard again and folded her arms across her chest.

“Can you say that again, louder?” I asked. Although it seems improbable that a sex worker would open up, I had been making interventions similar to this for years. I also had been receiving several calls a week from sex workers wanting to leave the trade. This had given me more experience in talking with them and in encouraging them to speak candidly.

“I fucking hate men! Okay?!” she said vehemently now. “My father was a total asshole. The things he did. Motherfucker!” There were tears in her eyes and she couldn’t stop them. She quickly patted her face, not wanting to smear her thick makeup.

Howard was inches from her, taking this all in. Sweat dripped from his forehead.

“He beat me and my sisters!” she continued. “And he fucked us. All of us. Treated us like, like things to be used and thrown away. Men are such assholes!”

She glared at me, shaking her head. But our eyes met and she knew I understood something about who she was and what she’d been through. She could tell that I wasn’t seeing her as an object, but as a person—a woman in pain. Howard could also see it. I could tell that, by this time, he was no longer wanting sex and had received his lesson, which was to permanently disrupt his addictive behavior. I told Howard to pay her the money and drop her off back on San Pablo Avenue.

That experience with the prostitute changed Howard. He was different. I won’t kid you and say his urges totally stopped at that moment. That took a lot more work. But that moment clarified in the deepest part of Howard that his sexually compulsive behavior was something he could no longer tolerate. It triggered an immense amount of empathy and loving kindness for himself as well as for the women he had hired for sex. After that experience, all prostitutes looked different. It was the catalyst for his solid launch into recovery. Whenever he had the compulsion to hire a prostitute, our brief visit to San Pablo Avenue jumped into his mind and he could no longer unconsciously give in to his addiction.

As a side note, I gave the prostitute my business card. She called me several weeks later, and I referred her to an organization that assists prostitutes in leaving sex work and finding other careers.

After Howard made the decision to change his life, he went through weeks of discovery about himself and his life history (which I call his *story*). He learned techniques to deal with his impulses and began healing his original *emotional wound*.

This meant that he began coming to terms with unresolved emotional experiences from childhood that result in coping behaviors that can contribute to a tendency to act out sexually. After several years of dedicated counseling work, Howard was married. I was invited to the wedding and stood at the back of the church. As Howard walked down the aisle, we exchanged glances and he nodded at me in thanks.

Again, I don't want to sugarcoat the process of change. It was difficult and time consuming for Howard and, even after his marriage, our work together continued. And, like Howard, you can change. What this book can do for you is to teach you how to deal with your addiction, so your addiction is no longer running your life. One way to do that is by starting at the beginning.

You Calling Me a Sex Addict?

No one wants to admit that he's addicted. Yet we all have impulses or compulsions that we'd rather not have. The difference between addiction and compulsion is really just language. Every one of us would have to say that we have an addiction to something. We all have an addiction to certain beliefs. If you're reading this book, you're probably a certain kind of addict—a sex addict. Or you may prefer the word “compulsion.” I know I do. In fact, if you go by the dictionary definition, compulsion fits better than addiction because compulsion is a need to *do* something. In defining sex addiction, psychologist and author Patrick Carnes uses the words “sexually compulsive behavior” (Carnes 2010). Unlike the word “compulsion,” the word “addiction” has a stigma attached to it. Even though sexual addiction may more accurately be labeled a compulsion, the word

addiction is commonly used, as well as the word “addict.” Therefore, this book will use both addiction and compulsion.

Patrick Carnes wrote an apt description of the addict’s behavior: “The addict substitutes a sick relationship to an event or a process for a healthy relationship with others. The addict’s relationship with a mood-altering experience becomes central to his life” (Carnes 2001, 14).

For me, acknowledging that I was an addict was a matter of realizing the truth of a great truism that I may mention often in this book: *you can’t get enough of what won’t satisfy you*. If you keep trying to get that “something”—whatever it is that you get over and over while remaining unsatisfied—you’re an addict. But where do these compulsions originate?

Coping Strategies for Uncomfortable Feelings

You are a product of your early environment. If your home was weighed down with alcohol, drugs, fighting, divorce, changing environments (frequent moves), porn, overparenting, lack of parenting, or abandonment, then these situations most likely led to an imbalance in your life. You probably developed coping strategies to deal with your fear, shame, pain, self-doubt, judgment, criticism, and anger. You could have adapted and socialized so that you were connected with others. Or, you could have felt isolated, in which case your coping strategy may have been addiction or, more specifically, sexually compulsive behavior.

Since sex is going to be on the mind of a young guy and it feels good, you may have found ways to express your angst through compulsive masturbation, peeping,

inappropriate touching, or some other variation of compulsive behavior. Of course, since on the surface most sex in our culture is not spoken about openly, you had to keep it a secret.

In a 12-step recovery program, there is a saying: “we’re only as sick as our secrets.” Very true. But who can you tell? Probably no one. And, like most of us, you probably didn’t get “the talk” from your parents. Not a talk that made any sense anyway. You probably heard the locker room bragging of sexual conquests and how much pussy this or that man claimed to be getting. But, instead, you were developing “relationships” with pictures, negative sexual actions, or inappropriate partners. You probably started to misinterpret sex, considering it to be the same experience as true intimacy. The result may have been that your addictive behavior felt soothing rather than disgusting and stupid.

Who Becomes a Sex Addict?

Almost anybody who suffered as a child can become a sex addict. Some circumstances might push an individual more in the direction of healing childhood wounds rather than making due with simply coping. Other conditions might have led to beliefs about yourself that required a coping strategy. Can you think of your sex addiction as a coping strategy? Perhaps, as a child, you experienced a certain stimulation or overstimulation. You might have discovered your dad’s porn or played doctor with a neighbor girl. This early sexual stimulation typically felt nice. As soon as a young child develops the ability to be stimulated, whether through his ears, eyes, nose, hands, or genitals, he naturally becomes interested in revisiting that stimulation and the resultant good feeling. For example, when

a boy misbehaves and is sent to his room, one way of coping with feeling bad is to self-soothe by touching himself sexually.

In general, we establish patterns of behavior. For some people, the coping could be eating. For others, it becomes sex addiction. Other examples of childhood experiences that might lead to sex addiction include a little boy being masturbated by a babysitter, having sex with a primary caregiver or sibling, a boy spying on his sister or a neighbor, a mother treating a child like a parent by making the child into what has been frequently referred to in psychology as a “surrogate husband” or, in the case of young girls, a “surrogate wife.” An example of such dysfunctional behavior took place in my own life. In my childhood, my mother frequently paid me twenty-five cents to massage her shoulders. “I hate your father,” she would say over and over again, often adding, “And you’ll always be my little man.” One day she asked me to massage her breasts. I was six years old and got a tiny erection. I believed this meant my mother loved me. My mother’s behavior continued in ways that resulted in me feeling a deep sense of shame and being pathologically “close” to her.

In psychiatry and psychology, this type of parental behavior has often been called *emotional incest* or *covert incest* (Love 1990). It was damaging for me and resulted in an unhealthy view of sex and a distorted view of relationships and intimacy.

After the damaging experiences with my mother, watching peep shows or porn felt much safer to me than interacting with a “real” woman. If I was watching porn or looking at pictures, there was no danger of an incestuous relationship or behavior. There was no danger of a real woman I cared about acting inappropriately in regard to sex, as

my mother had done. It was much safer to objectify women and masturbate rather than risk the possibility of intimate connections and hurt feelings.

Years later, as an adult in my late twenties, I was in a booth in a San Francisco peep show parlor (before the Internet was available) where I accidentally dropped my last quarter on the filthy floor. I went ahead and picked it up, all wet and sticky, because I just *had* to watch one more peep. I had started frequenting these shows in my early twenties, and by my late twenties I was an addict.

Confusing Sexual Messages

When we're first discovering our sexuality, it's very powerful. At the same time, our society bombards us with messages about sex that are both stimulating and repressive. It's easy to get stuck right there and not to become truly sexually mature. The natural progression in puberty is to be stimulated by the female form—or same-sex bodies, as the case may be—and gradually to discover that intimacy and true connection are superior to making someone into a sexual object. But if you continue objectifying the physical act of sex, it means that you continue to make sex more about compulsive behavior and bodies rather than intimacy.

Changing Your Mind

Many people are stuck at that point, and they frequently consider fucking to be intimacy. Part of my counseling typically involves redefining intimacy, and that will be covered in depth throughout this book (with a particular focus in chapter 14). For now, please trust on me this: there's the possibility of such an intimate sexual connection that it can be

deep and spectacular. But you will never reach that truly ecstatic state if you're stuck in the mind of an adolescent boy who is interested only in body parts.

My job with clients, and your job when reading this book, is to “grow up the child.” Allow yourself to mature. You may always have the wound, but you can be more than the story you tell yourself about that damage. If you can convert that story into something useful, something adult and mature, then the energy around it will shift and your behavior will change. You can then stop acting out addictive behavior.

You can change your mind and the story of who you believe yourself to be. Our minds are like software. We have synaptic grooves—and we can make a new groove. We can have a new reaction to circumstances such as seeing a sexy woman, or man, in the grocery store. It can be different. Really. An early step is to feel the compulsion yet not need to respond to it. What I tell people in counseling is this: “if you have to, chew on a table leg, but don't act out.” What that means is that you might be uncomfortable for a while, but you can survive it. You won't die of discomfort. In fact, you'll eventually live better than you ever have before.

In chapter 2, you'll learn how to shed light on the parts of yourself that call out to you to act in a sexually compulsive manner. These are similar to the characters or actors in a story or movie. Every one of us has these immature parts within ourselves that might never grow up. Some people have the idea that they have to wipe the slate clean. But that doesn't happen. What you can do with the immature pieces inside you is to make space for them while limiting their power to persuade you to continue your old, sexually compulsive behavior.

Exercise: What Would It Take For You To Hit Bottom?

Take a break from imagining yourself in your usual sexual situations. Instead, imagine yourself getting caught in those sexual situations, or being arrested, or your wife finding out how much money you spend on prostitutes or porn, or anything else that just might cause you to hit bottom. This would be a good time to start taking notes. Write in a journal, a notepad, or just go to your computer and start typing. Find a quiet place and take about ten to twenty minutes to answer the following questions:

- How many times have you hit bottom only to relapse and hit bottom all over again?
- In my practice, men often call me only when they're being charged with an illegal sexual offense. Could that happen to you?
- Do you want a high bottom or a low bottom? A low bottom is signified by events such as being arrested when soliciting a prostitute and going to jail on porn charges. A high bottom is when you hit bottom without having major legal consequences.

Think about it. What would it take for you to hit bottom? And will it be a high or low bottom? Once you've thought about it, ask yourself: What can I do to change my mind? Do I even want to? Maybe there's a voice in your head saying, "No, I don't want to look at my behavior. I don't want to change." The next chapter will explain how to identify these voices of your addiction.

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