

## **Denial Enables Sexual Compulsivity to Persist In Spite of Negative Consequences**

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Sexual addiction, like any other addiction involves defense mechanisms that allow the desired behavior to persist despite negative consequences. The sex addict attributes the problems associated with his/her sexual behavior to anything but the sexual behavior. Since sexual addiction co-occurs with other addictions, the other addictions often get blamed for unintended behavior or consequences. And the combination of addictions and/or their patterns of interactions can prompt unintended behavior or consequences.

Unfortunately, when there are multiple addictions along with sexual addiction, this complicates the picture enough for the addict to spend a lot of time and energy trying to solve the addiction problems independently. For example, a sex addict with alcoholism or other drug addiction may attribute all the negative consequences of his addictions to the alcoholism. S/he goes to inpatient treatment, not mentioning the serial one-night stands that endangers her health, damages her self-esteem, and put her into dangerous situations. She blames those one night stands on the drinking. She was certainly drinking and getting drunk each time those events happened.

She assumes that when she sobers up, that the sexual acting out will stop. Only it doesn't. Instead of picking men up in a bar or a club, she selects her partners at AA meetings and in other social settings. The behavior is still shaming her. It is still damaging her self-esteem. She wants to stop engaging in that behavior, but it is compulsive. She is at the beginning of recovery and has not yet learned good living skills. When she experiences hurt, anger, sadness, and even boredom, she feels compelled to engage in the sexual behavior. She may not even make the connection between her feelings and the compulsion. If she does, she probably thinks, "At least I'm not drinking". But in fact, she is engaging in mood/mind altering behavior.

When sex addicts are able to connect their own sexual compulsivity to negative consequences and outcomes, they like other addicts, attempt "softer, easier ways" to get their lives back under control. These attempts usually involve trying to manage their external environment a little more closely. It could involve using an internet filter to take away their digital drug of choice, putting a parental block on the television, putting a 900 number block on the phone, or it might even involve trying to engage in a romantic relationship.

Sexual addiction is also an intimacy disorder, where the addict has difficulty with being truly intimate in a relationship. The sex addict, in an attempt to get the sexual compulsivity under control, may believe that if they get married or focus all their sexual activity or energy in the relationship, that their sexual acting out will stop. They believe that their need for porno, one-night stands, fantasy, (or whatever their sexual drug of choice is), will go away.

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