

Addicts

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ferent from having obsessive, addictive sex," Bill said. "It may look exactly the same from the outside, but it's what's going on in my head. Before I got sober, I wasn't necessarily here. I was off in some fantasy."

The obsession occasionally manifests through an addict taking "indecent liberties," a term Williams explained as physically rubbing against another person's body and fantasizing, often culminating in chronic masturbation.

However, symptoms only reflect the externalization of the root cause, he said.

"They've taken something that, as we know, is a wonderful, natural act, and they've made it something that they have to engage in to deal with emotional pain," said Williams, who also worked as an addictions counselor for 22 years.

Psychologist Robert McDonald, Ph.D., explained the official collection of psychological diagnoses, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, excludes sex addiction.

"I help people change their behavior to ways that work for them," McDonald said. "If they identify their behavior as a problem, it is a problem, so I see it as a legitimate problem."

That issue often remains untreated, while the addict rationalizes their behavior as normal, according to McDonald.

"Sexual arousal and orgasm are so inherently pleasurable that there usually has to be an external problem before the individual identifies it as a problem: you have to get arrested for soliciting a prostitute, or run up the credit cards really high or the person you're in a relationship with gets really ticked off," said McDonald, an Oklahoma native.

Since sex addiction often stems from feelings of shame and anxiety, support groups encourage members to find their "higher power" and put their faith in spirituality.

Eric B., a member of the Asheville chapter of Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous who wished to exclude his last name, explained that, to reach intimacy with another individual, he first learned to reach intimacy with himself and his "higher power."

"What is not spiritual? To me, it all is, and especially sexuality. Sexuality is sensuality, which is all of the senses. And what is not sensual?" Eric said.

The love facet of addiction remains as important as the intercourse, said Wil-

"It took about six months to lose my job, a year to lose my license and about two-and-a-half years of civil court. I don't regret any of that now because it all got me into recovery, and my recovery is more important than any of my professional life. I didn't have a spiritual life before, and now I do and that's worth whatever the cost."

—Anonymous sex addict

liams.

"There's a saying around those recovery zones: a person doesn't fall in love; they take people hostage. They become a kind of leech to the person they fall in love with," Williams explained of addictive relationships. "It's more of that need to be needed, need for romance, need to be loved."

"The partner becomes the person's 'higher power,'" Eric said.

For Sexaholics Anonymous, membership only requires a genuine commitment to stop lusting obsessively and pursue sexual health and sobriety. This universal urge unites all types of individuals on a common front, said Bill.

As another alternative, individual therapy offers more personalized benefits, according to McDonald.

"I have the luxury of tailoring everything to the individual's needs, as closely as I can figure that out. I try to figure out what led to that maladaptive behavior, what maintains it, what kind of intervention might be helpful for the individual to gain more control over it," McDonald said.

Internet pornography and sexually explicit photographs serve as tools which sex addicts tend to employ frequently, according to Bill.

"When you have to go to a grimy store in a bad part of town and pay somebody face to face to get sexual material, there are a lot of hurdles there. But if you can press a couple of buttons on a computer in the privacy of your apartment or bedroom, there are virtually no hurdles," McDonald said.

McDonald often receives female clients who feel discomfort because their

male partner spends great quantities of time with a virtual woman through a computer screen.

"Women feel threatened by the men paying a lot of attention to abnormally attractive women," McDonald said. "If they were male, and she was looking at the Chippendale Strippers with the ripped stomachs, we'd be kind of uncomfortable just from the perspective of, 'is that what I have to live up to? Is my flabby stomach a real bummer for her?'"

In most cases, the men insist they intend to stop. However, McDonald estimates that 99 percent of the time, they cannot stop themselves.

"It (Internet pornography) kills intimacy," Eric said.

Sex addicts who ask for help tend to be middle-aged males, according to Williams.

"The meetings definitely have more men in them, but my own personal belief is that it's harder for a woman to come out of the closet with this in our culture," Bill said of the 12-step support programs. "If a man's having a lot of sex, he's a man; if a woman's having a lot of sex, she's a slut. Our society just looks at it differently."

Biological growth offers another explanation, according to McDonald.

"At the point when the fetus gets the message to become a male, a portion of the brain that would develop into empathy and the ability to socially understand situations — females, empathy and social understanding, those things can be tested — for men, it develops into sexual interest and aggression," McDonald said.

Although people tend to get help later in life, sex addiction affects every age group. Younger individuals manage to

Extra:

For more information on sex addiction, visit the Sex Addicts Anonymous Web site at:

www.sexaa.org

or

www.sexaddict.com

For counseling information, call UNC Asheville's Counseling Center at:

(828)-251-6517

The counseling services are located on the first floor of Weizenblatt Health Center and provides three major programs: service, free of charge, to all registered UNCA students; individual counseling, group counseling and outreach programs.

copulate frequently without the label "addicts" because society expects it of the said McDonald.

"One of the challenges in that period, 17 to 25 or so, is to learn to manage feelings, of stress or attraction or whatever, in ways that are not too problematic," McDonald said. "At 30, using sex becomes more problematic than it does at 18 to 22."

However, young addicts can experience the same strains of symptoms, such as compulsive sexual dispositions and using sex as an emotional outlet.

"The middle-aged sex addicts I've dealt with seem to have had a life-long course: they were hypersexual in their teens and twenties and then on into adulthood," McDonald said. "But when they get married, after a period of time she (their spouse) is going to find something going whacky."

Despite obsessive mentalities, addicts still manage to pursue sobriety successfully. Bill uses prayer to curb potential fantasies.

"That puts the power between my head and not between my legs," Bill said.