

## COMMENTARIES ON THE CHARACTERISTICS MOST OF US SEEM TO HAVE IN COMMON

### Characteristic 3:

**We tended to become immobilized by romantic obsessions. We became addicted to the search for sex and love; as a result, we neglected our lives.**

As sexual compulsives, our notions of sex, romance, and relationships often became distorted. Romance and the prospect of romance exerted a mysterious and powerful pull over many of us, as did the allure of sex and love. Our feelings of shame and unworthiness increased our fear of physical or emotional intimacy. We continually searched for ways to get out of ourselves, and to escape from our feelings. Fantasy provided a diversion to distract us from what was actually going on in our lives. We often allowed the world of fantasy to spiral into obsessive thinking, leading us to project "ideal" values onto situations or people. These situations or people could be real or imagined. We found targets for our compulsive desires who were often unrealistic or unattainable. This obsessive behavior provided us with temporary respite from the pain of real life.

Obsessions became a coping strategy that allowed us to overlook what was lacking in our lives, complete with their day-to-day drudgery. The false reality we created sometimes developed consciously, but often it was a pattern of which we were initially unaware. Ultimately, our tendency to objectify and romanticize others became habitual. We lost ourselves in fantasies involving people we found physically attractive, admired, or even envied. Sometimes, our feelings towards the objects of our obsessive desire were ambivalent. Social media provided online avenues for unnoticed or plainly fervent adoration. In the physical world, we may have seen someone at a distance, or perhaps met them at a social or work event. Sometimes, the focus of our attention was a colleague we worked with every day. A look, a word, a touch, and we felt captivated, feeling a sense of exhilaration. If we had a chance to talk to them or spend some time with them, our fantasies intensified. Whatever the level of our involvement, the elation we initially experienced began to permeate our consciousness, and we became obsessed. We were often rejected by those we desired in this way, and our euphoria vanished, leaving us with our stress and anxiety, and feeling abandoned. All too frequently, though, the obsession continued long after it became clear to us that our interest was not reciprocated.

Often, if we lacked another person to obsess over, we focused our energies on finding one. We searched for that idealized person whose attentions would affirm us. The pursuit itself became compulsive, with its potential to create an escape. While we were on the lookout for our obsession, we were sometimes numb to the everyday problems in our lives, including difficult feelings. However, with our experience of seeking sexual gratification compulsively, we often found ourselves looking for this idealized love in all the wrong places. Some of us genuinely believed

that the same behaviors we had used to seek out objectifying sexual encounters would result in us finding “the one” who could magically relieve our pain. Sometimes, the paradigm included seeking out makeshift, temporary sexual contact as we pursued our romantic obsessions, romantic intrigues, and “love.”

During periods of romantic obsession or love addiction, many of us set aside or even ignored our other relationships. Our inability to be present made us unavailable to our friends and families. Friends became mere sounding boards for our ruminations about the object of our fantasies. Obsession and love addiction may have led to us neglecting our careers, or other aspects of our daily lives. Our work and home lives suffered. This intense infatuation became our top priority: endlessly fascinating, often painful, and always urgent.

Sometimes, we stopped taking care of ourselves altogether; our everyday routines became less important to us, or were all too easily disregarded. Our non-sexual talents remained unexplored or even suppressed, and we couldn’t seem to live up to our potential. We put our energy into doing what we hoped would make our obsession respond to us. In some cases, our obsession with another person may have induced us to violate their boundaries. Our emotional development may have suffered as a result of our focus on winning the attention of another. We quickly lost track of ourselves and reality, molding our personalities to fit our obsession. Sexual compulsion expressed as romantic obsession put our lives on hold for months, years, even decades.

The intensity of our fixation and the stress of maintaining it often led to severe anxiety. We feared we would never get what we wanted from our obsession. This fear of rejection or abandonment might trigger us to seek out other avenues of compulsive sex. Alternatively, some of us abstained from sex with others completely, because other people never lived up to our expectations or fantasies. Our unrealistic approach to romance sometimes meant that we forsook opportunities for actual and available relationships, and became mired in a kind of sexual anorexia. Or, even while romantically obsessed, some of us continued “the search,” using compulsive sex to cover up our emotions. It was addictive; we could never put aside the obsession with sex for long. Whichever way the desire was expressed, we were constantly seeking out sex, and looking for love, in one form or another.

## **In Recovery**

We become aware of our obsessive thinking and behavior and strive to participate in life. We take care of ourselves and stay connected to family and friends, because seeking a romantic partner is no longer our main focus. We discover that we can be social without being sexual, and that we can enjoy our own company. We pursue everyday life without seeing it only through the veil of romantic obsession. When we use the Tool of Dating, we do not look for a partner to fix us, but rather seek out people who are in real relationship with us, and who nourish our desires. We stop obsessing over people and fill our time in healthier ways. Our values are realigned so that we experience balance. We come to realize as we work the

Program that our Higher Power provides us with spiritual, emotional, physical and economic security.

(Extract from "The Characteristics Most of Us Seem to Have in Common"  
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