

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

Characteristic 6:

We tried to bring intensity and excitement into our lives through sex, but felt ourselves growing steadily emptier.

When sex first came into our lives, we felt excitement about it like anyone else. However, as sexual compulsives, our relationship to sex and the intensity and excitement it brought with it seemed to be different from the start. Sex added itself to our already addictive thinking and emotional processes, nestling among such feelings as anxiety, loneliness, anger, self-hatred, shame, envy and unworthiness.

In our active compulsion, many of us also experienced dissatisfaction with our lives. Especially when compared to others, we easily found the lives we were living uninteresting and frustrating. As addicts, we all too readily formed resentments against others, or against our circumstances. We had a sense of entitlement, but also felt that we were inadequate, that our lives were empty, or that they lacked adventure. Whatever the source of our discontentment, we developed an intense craving for excitement to dull its effect, and as a foil to the other emotions we were experiencing. At some point, we discovered that acting out sexually could provide us with a refuge—short-lived though it might be—from both our malaise and the various ills we perceived to be present in our lives.

We found that we generally sought out sex for its arousing and intoxicating effects like we would a drug, rather than relating to it as an expression of our God-given sexuality. In acting out our compulsion, we may have used innumerable ways of finding sexual connection, such as by frequenting bars, clubs, hookup spots or any place where sex was available. Some of us used online dating sites or apps to connect with others. We loved the excitement of being wanted and desired without having to go to physical lengths to get acquainted. We jumped from one relationship to the next – seeking connection, but ultimately unable to sustain it. We may have cheated on our intimate partners, never satisfied, and craving the “rush” of a clandestine encounter.

In our downtime, we also often recalled times in our past when sex and fantasy had brought us excitement. This served in part to relieve the boredom that plagued us. Some of us experienced intense euphoric recall of past sexual exploits. Many of us constantly looked for ways to experience this excitement again, to fill the emotional void and quiet the disturbance we felt within ourselves.

In attempts to transcend what we saw as our bland and unrewarding existence, some of us engaged in sexual activities that were not in keeping with our personal sexuality. The pursuit of excitement pushed us into violating lines we thought we would never cross, pursuing fantasies and activities that violated our values,

morals, and integrity. We found that dangerous or forbidden activities activated our adrenaline.

Some of us used pornography to fill what seemed to be a growing void. The list of possible sexual activities was as diverse as our imagination. Many of us already had an extensive history of using sex in compulsive ways, so choosing a sexual outlet from among the many possible was familiar and routine. No matter what we did, the purpose was to bring intensity and excitement into our lives through sex. However, we soon found that the thrill of our sexual behaviors began to fade.

We often pursued sex without thought for our personal safety. Some of us told ourselves that using protection or prophylaxis was inconvenient, unnecessary, or that it ruined the experience. What counted was the "hit." In some cases, other factors came into play that caused us not to concern ourselves with how our behavior might affect a partner. As we ventured further and further into extremes, residues of shame made us feel unworthy, and alienated us from other people. With each new degradation, we lost another piece of our souls.

No matter how much we engaged in these activities, the disenchantment with our lives often remained. The rewards became intermittent. By repeating the same behaviors without any further benefit of excitement, we felt a sense of emptiness and futility. The sex failed to relieve the dissatisfaction and unhappiness we experienced in our everyday lives. We still felt incredibly empty. Some of us chose to abstain from sex completely as an answer to these feelings. However, most of us found ourselves unwilling or unable to make that choice. For the majority of us, it wasn't a choice at all. The emptiness we felt compelled us to seek more intensity.

If we were having sex outside a committed relationship, we felt ever-more-isolated from our partners, and ever-more-distant from true intimacy based on honesty. If we were single, we might have rationalized that we were merely "sowing our wild oats," but our actions left us hollow and unprepared for building a relationship with anyone. We were locked into a relentless loop of exhilaration followed by feelings of fear, remorse, dread, and self-loathing. Our inability to break this cycle resulted in abject despair, and whittled away at our spiritual self. The insistent need to remedy this "hole in the soul" we could not properly identify compelled us to try to use sex and excitement to alleviate what was, in fact, a spiritual emptiness.

Many of us doubled down and tried to find more and more intense sexual activities. The hookups became more dangerous, as more risk temporarily increased the adrenaline-high we experienced. The regular pornography no longer worked, so we searched for something edgier. For some of us, pornography use might have included illegal images, or perhaps the viewing of excessively graphic or violent scenes. No matter what or how much we did, we had to keep chasing the next "high" – hoping to find that elusive "perfect" sexual experience. As the compulsion deepened, many of us escalated our activities to the point of compromising our basic decency and most fundamental principles. The hookups became sessions filled with unbounded humiliation, unsafe sexual decisions, and other physical dangers.

Eventually, these sexual activities stopped working to bring us intensity and excitement altogether. We had run out of options. Our sexual behavior had reached the point where it was making unreasonable demands on our time and energy, placing us in legal jeopardy, or endangering our mental, physical or spiritual health. Perhaps we lost jobs or sabotaged relationships by introducing an intensity to our sex lives that others couldn't tolerate. Many of us suffered physical health consequences, sometimes contracting sexually transmitted infections. Some experienced arrest, in the process possibly becoming designated as a sex offender or sexual predator.

The deepening spiral of injecting intensity and excitement into our lives through sex had left us emotionally and spiritually drained. The emptiness of our lives was still there and, in fact, had deepened with shame. We had trapped ourselves in a spirit-breaking ritual. We finally realized that no amount of sex would fill the emptiness we felt, or make our lives miraculously free of the everyday irritations we had so strongly chafed against, and sought to soothe with compulsive sex.

In Recovery

Through the grace of our Higher Power, we no longer need to seek intensity and excitement to escape pain — our spirituality fills us. As we heal, we develop a fulfilling relationship with ourselves, our Higher Power, and outwards to others. We come to value and respect ourselves and others, and change our behaviors to reflect that. We find contentment in previously unappealing activities. We find intensity through sheer joy, which can take many forms, such as getting in touch with nature, participating in service to others, and creating or appreciating art. By living a full and balanced life, we become satisfied.

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