

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

Characteristic 9:

We searched for some "magical" quality in others to make us feel complete. Other people were idealized and endowed with a powerful symbolism, which often disappeared after we had sex with them.

For some of us, the need for validation drove our obsessive and compulsive search for sexual and romantic partners. We sought out people who would make us feel like we mattered, provide us with what we felt was missing, and somehow complete us. We idealized people to whom we were attracted, fantasizing that they were perfect, and we often sexualized our admiration of them. We were entranced by their mystique, which was largely of our own making.

We desperately looked for a way to feel better about ourselves and our lives through others. Instead of building up our sense of self-worth by working on our problems and possible solutions to them, we directed our attention and energy outward, developing attractions to people and idolizing them. For some of us, these tendencies began in adolescence and increased as we grew older. We often imagined and focused on romantic partners whom we idealized and endowed with almost magical qualities. We believed that if we could somehow get the attention of and merge with these "perfect" figures, their seeming ease of being would be ours as well, and we would feel complete.

We got lost in the lives of our idols, and felt whole around them. It was as if we needed them to feel fulfilled. We became fixated not on the reality, but on the fantasy that we associated with their lives and beings. The more we focused on these other people, the more attractive they seemed to us. This fixation blinded us to any romantic or relationship possibilities we had with available people – individuals who genuinely wanted to connect with us – and we continued our search for an idealized person who could make us feel whole.

Many of us had spent years feeling incomplete as human beings. The reasons for this varied, but the result was the same - we felt inadequate, defective, unworthy and unlovable. We discovered that sex, fantasy or romantic obsession could bring temporary relief from these feelings, and compulsive sex soon became a way to escape them. As our addiction escalated, we directed more and more energy into the prospect of a perfect sexual and romantic partner who would complete us. While we waited for our dream, we often settled for sex with people who didn't really matter to us, but whose attention temporarily eased our pain.

We often believed that if only we could spend time with the object of our fantasy and ultimately have sex with them, their idealized qualities would fill the emptiness we felt. We also hoped that the people we had endowed with this powerful

symbolism would help us escape our negative feelings about ourselves. We sometimes imagined that they would rescue us from the banality of our lives and the repetitive, meaningless cycle of sex which some of us pursued. Our actual sex life could never measure up or be fulfilling as long as we held on to the fantasy of our idealized relationships. Sexual activity with others felt like settling for less, and as if we were making compromises, reinforcing how undeserving we were of what we truly wanted.

If we eventually had sex with someone we had idolized, our image of them frequently shattered as reality set in. Their humanity and the sex act itself were at odds with the unattainable fulfillment we sought. We were disillusioned to discover that those we had idealized were not perfect. When we touched our idols, the guilt rubbed off on our hands. Any spiritual uplift we had hoped to find did not materialize, or failed to last. Our negative feelings about ourselves and our lives remained. If anything, they increased as we realized our error where the focus of our desire was concerned. We felt cheated out of the time and energy we had spent in the pursuit. For most of us, sex with our idol had not changed our feelings of emptiness and isolation. In fact, oftentimes, the need to find a new object of our attention became more desperate. Though painful to admit, the reality was simple; the issues of identity and spiritual incompleteness we were dealing with could not be resolved by sex, or by another human being.

In Recovery

We let go of unrealistic expectations and impossible standards. We take off our "sex-colored glasses." We see people for their human qualities and allow them to be imperfect. We pay attention to red flags and hear what people are saying about who they are and what they want. We use the Tools of the Program to develop acceptance of ourselves and build a relationship with our Higher Power that makes us feel whole. We come to realize that the true magic is the wonder of reality, genuine relationships, a sober life, and the rewards of sexual sobriety.

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