
PART ONE

THE STORM

CHAPTER ONE

THE STORM OF SEX ADDICTION

An Epidemic

*What is happening under our eyes within the mass of peoples?
What is the cause of this disorder in society, this uneasy agitation,
these swelling waves, these whirling and mingling currents
and these turbulent and formidable new impulses?*¹

Teilhard de Chardin

The storm of sex addiction is brewing. It is a gathering danger, a looming national epidemic making landfall and breaching our societal levees. The threat is imminent for every family and the casualty count is rising. We are *all* in the path of the storm.

Sex addiction is a brain disorder characterized by the compulsive use of sexual behavior over which an addict has lost control. Sex addicts are attempting to escape reality by *mood-altering* using sex. As the illness progresses it wreaks havoc, creating chaos and misery in the lives of addicts and their families.

Sex addiction affects males and females of all ages (including children). The Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health suggests that approximately 3-5% of the population seek treatment, though

more could be afflicted; and statistical surveys suggest that 80% of sex addicts are male.² Online sexual activity, the “crack cocaine of sex addiction,” is a major contributing factor and has spurred a multi-billion dollar Internet pornography (iPorn) industry.³ As you may know, the majority of online searches are related to sex and pornography.

Using sex like a recreational drug may appear to be harmless and it is certainly in vogue; but such widespread re-direction of biological drives for sex, romance, and relationship, into excesses of sexual fantasy and behavior is unprecedented. The result is a growing storm of sex addiction that could create a social catastrophe of immense proportions. However, if forecast and confronted with a coordinated response, the storm may also present a remarkable opportunity for us as individuals, families, and society, to positively transform our personal lives and the ways in which we relate to one another. If we are to be a sexually responsible and sober society, we must do more than remediate the casualties—we must prevent the devastation.

Dark Clouds on the Horizon

The most stunning downfall of a public figure because of sexual transgressions may well be that of all-American golf hero Tiger Woods. As 2009 drew to a close, the glow of holiday celebrations was dimmed by news of a darker kind of merry-making. Emblazoned on TV screens and exploding from the headlines was the shocking story of the man many consider the most talented athlete of all time. In fewer strokes than it used to take him to sink a winning putt, Tiger Woods had jeopardized his career and his family, and betrayed the nation’s adulation of him. With reports of his adulterous adventures rocking the world—in the course of a week some ten women came forth to tell all—Woods’s product-endorsement income was predicted to be decimated by more than \$150 million. As his wife fled their home, taking their young children with her, Tiger Woods’s fate as a global golf champion and a squeaky-clean role model for young athletes everywhere hung in the balance.

Why would a man at the peak of his powers put everything he had worked so tirelessly to attain at risk for a blond brigade of “alleged mistresses”? What in Tiger Woods’s life—now or in his past—drove him to this terrible moment?

Buzz Bissinger writes in *Vanity Fair*, “[I]t is safe to say that behind the non-accessible accessibility and seemingly perfect marriage to a beautiful woman was a sex addict who could not get enough.”⁴ Addiction expert Drew Pinsky, who hosted the TV program “*Sex Rehab with Dr. Drew*,” also speculated Woods may be addicted to sex. Pinsky stated: “It’s safe to say that sex addiction might be a part of his problem.”⁵ Indeed, Woods’s compulsivity, loss of control, and the fact that he continued his risky behavior in spite of severe consequences—all hallmarks of sex addiction—suggested that this might be so. Of course, no one can make this claim without evaluating Woods in person. Interestingly, though, Pinsky noted that we may learn more about the cause and cure of this affliction as we observe how Woods seeks treatment and rebuilds his reputation. He did in fact apologize publicly and entered a treatment program for sex addiction.

The story of Tiger Woods is a sad one. He lost his marriage, disrupted the high-achievement of his career, imperiled his reputation, and had a “fan” throw a hot dog at him as a result of his infidelities. This would seem to indicate an uphill road, with long-term therapy in his future. It remains to be seen how he will piece his life back together, but he must have felt that firing his caddy was a good start. And after years of struggle, he finally achieved another PGA Tour victory.

In addition to Tiger Woods, the public has been reeling from media revelations of sex scandals that destroy the lives of both the glamorous and the ordinary. Politicians such as Anthony Weiner, who resigned after using social media to send underwear glamour shots; Senator and presidential candidate, John Edwards (love child and “legally” concealed mistress); Governor Eliot Spitzer (client “Number Nine”); Governor Mark Sanford (Argentinean “soul mate”); and Senator Larry Craig (airport bathroom stall “foot-tapper”) are likely forever branded by their indiscretions.

TV star David Duchovny migrated from the “*X-Files*” to the triple-X files, to play a sex addicted writer on Showtime’s “*Californication*.” Ironically, he later admitted himself to treatment for sex addiction. Debra LaFavre and Mary Kay Letourneau are the most infamous predecessors of a rapidly expanding list of classroom teacher sex offenders. Superstars of evangelism and priesthood have shamed themselves and their multi-million dollar ministries with their sexual misconduct. ESPN analyst Steve Phillips entered rehab for sex addiction after being fired from his job. Even David Letterman got in trouble, after an extortion scandal forced him to admit a series of affairs with young women on his staff. And Charlie Sheen may or may not really have been “winning” with his tireless pursuit of prostitutes and “goddesses.”

We are often astonished and mystified by such reckless and seemingly irrational behavior, but we cannot diagnose Tiger Woods, Charlie Sheen, Penn State’s Jerry Sandusky, or any other public figure. But what of people whom we can definitively identify as sex addicts, men and women who are deeply disturbed by their behavior and desperate to find the proper treatment? What do we know about how they got caught in the maelstrom of addiction and how they continue to subjugate their lives to this dangerous obsession?

In my thirty-plus years of private practice as a psychotherapist, I have evaluated and treated hundreds of men and women of all ages and racial and ethnic backgrounds—people whose out-of-control sexual behavior has caused them untold suffering—people who are determined to rid themselves of their compulsive activities. In the safety of my therapy office, they have shared their most shameful secrets, drilled down to their childhood memories, and bravely examined their self-destructive habits. They have helped me gain a fresh understanding of how sex addictions arise, how this disorder maintains a grip on its victims, and how, with help, sufferers can learn healthier and happier ways of living.

The Storm of Sex Addiction: Rescue and Recovery is intended to elevate the conversation about sex addiction. It is a clarion call for us as a society to address this illness. I have become increasingly concerned

about the rising number of clients who struggle with sex addiction. You may be concerned because you or someone you know is struggling, too. This book is based on my years of experience as a marriage and family therapist and as a Certified Sex Addiction Therapist. It incorporates knowledge from my extensive work with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. *The Storm of Sex Addiction* explains the dynamics and roots of the disorder. It provides practical information and compassionate guidance to *anyone* affected by sex addiction, especially the addicts and families whose lives it shatters. It will describe the hopeful process of recovery.

However, *The Storm* does more than sound the alarm and encourage treatment. It goes beyond the voyeuristic entertainment value of personal sex tragedies sensationalized in the media, and addresses the epidemic as the public health issue it truly is. *The Storm* envisions a new era of valuing authentic intimate relationships over reckless sexual consumption and exploitation.

Using Sex like a Drug

Although it is the last major addiction to be identified and researched, many clinicians believe sex addiction is not only a “real” addiction, but the ultimate addiction. As Sigmund Freud suggested, all others “may just be a substitute.”⁶ Modern neuroscience, via brain imaging, reveals that *all* addictions, including sex addiction, stimulate the same pleasure centers of the brain.

Sex addiction is to be included in the next edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V) as a category called *hypersexual disorder*.⁷ It is not yet to be included as “sex addiction” because studies are ongoing about its withdrawal effects, which seem to be similar to withdrawal from smoking—irritability, restlessness, insomnia, fatigue, and cravings.

Sex addiction falls within a spectrum of severe intimacy disorders, which include relationship addictions—codependency, romance addiction, love addiction/love avoidance, and trauma bonding. Sex

and relationship addictions are characterized by dependence on sexual or emotional intensity as the “drug” of choice. Sex addicts stimulate sexual arousal and emotional intensity to become euphoric or “numb-out,” much like substance addicts use cocaine or alcohol. Excessive use of mood-altering behaviors, rather than mood-altering substances, are a sex addict’s path of escape from life stress and overwhelming emotions of loneliness, anger, fear, and shame.

Sex and relationship addictions are considered severe intimacy disorders because one’s “significant other” is a mood-altering behavior rather than a real person. An addict lacks the skills to develop a close intimate relationship with a person, usually because these skills were not learned in early life. The intimacy disorder increases an addict’s emotional isolation and loneliness, triggering further cycles of acting-out with sex to escape unbearable emotions.

Sex addiction often progresses to the point that an addict is risking everything for the euphoria and escapism of a sex “fix.” Many addicts feel deep shame about acting outside their values, and fear the risks and consequences but are unable to quit. Others have ready excuses to minimize their problem or deny their addiction: “Everybody does it,” “I just have an uninhibited lifestyle,” or, “It’s just sex.”

How Is Sex Addiction Different?

We tend to envy starry-eyed lovers and idealize romantic love stories. Sexual prowess is admired in our culture; and addicts often have a type of “junkie pride” about their conquests, in which high intensity masks low sincerity. In her memoir, *Desire: Where Sex Meets Addiction*, Susan Cheever explains, “How is addiction to other people different from other addictions? In our world, addiction to other people—especially addiction to sex partners—is the only addiction that is applauded and embraced.”⁸

Before his recovery, Larry, a successful middle-aged corporate attorney bragged, “My friend Mike is really jealous because he’s

not as good at it as I am,” referring to his habit of picking-up young women at bars, health clubs, sports events, and other venues. “He can’t figure out how I constantly attract women everywhere I go.”

Also, as opposed to other addictions, sex taps directly into a necessary and extremely powerful biological life force—the instinct of sexual attraction, desire, and mating. As anthropologist Helen Fisher explores in *Why We Love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love*, there is chemistry involved in animal attraction that is the precursor of sex and human romantic love.⁹ Sex addicts sometimes believe they have “fallen in love” during their many trysts, because it “feels” like it.

Greg, a high-level executive of a large company, spent over \$500,000 on escorts before his wife discovered evidence of his secret life. He was considering divorcing his wife, abandoning his three children, and moving to another country to marry a high-dollar call-girl who was still “in the business.” He scheduled a consultation with me to get an expert opinion about whether his feelings for the prostitute were “true love.” In recovery, Greg began to realize that his feelings were the euphoria produced by the chemistry of a sex addiction, and that the prostitute was not “the love of his life” or his “soul mate,” but a sex object who was an expert at making him feel special. Greg realized that what felt like love had caused him to do things he deeply regretted.

Cheever clarifies the confusion experienced by addicts like Greg, when she writes, “With human beings, how can we distinguish between passion and addiction? One primary characteristic of addiction is *always* a broken promise, whether it’s a promise made to oneself or to another person.”¹⁰

Warning Signs

Sex addiction is not just sex or sexual behavior that someone might find offensive or excessive. It is an illness, a brain disorder, characterized

by specific symptoms—primarily, sexual preoccupation and compulsivity, and the inability to stop detrimental behaviors despite severe risks and consequences. Symptoms result from an addict's misguided efforts to self-soothe the discomfort of extreme emotions that he experiences. Some warning signs that sexual problem behavior may have crossed over into addiction are:

- Struggling to control sexual thoughts and behaviors
- Losing or impairing relationships because of the inability to stop sexual activities outside a primary relationship
- Lying about unaccounted for time that involved sexual activities
- Feeling guilty or shameful after engaging in sexual thoughts, fantasies, or behaviors
- Routinely pursuing sexual activities online
- Resorting to sex to escape, relieve anxiety, or cope with problems
- Losing time from work pursuing sexual activities
- Engaging in criminal sexual behaviors such as soliciting prostitutes, sexual harassment, or child pornography
- Participating in sexual behaviors that violate one's own values
- Blaming others for one's sexual behaviors
- Putting self at risk for STDs

Preoccupation, compulsivity, and loss of control may occur in many types of sex behaviors—fantasy, masturbation, pornography, affairs, the use of escorts and prostitutes, sexual harassment, exhibitionism,

power-position relationships, anonymous sex, child molestation, and cybersex. Cybersex includes Internet pornography (iPorn), real-time encounters online or via mobile devices, soliciting or cruising online, and peer-to-peer sharing of sexually explicit material.

Addicts often report a “slippery slope” in which their use escalates and becomes more extreme in order to achieve the same “high.” The iPorn addict may advance to images depicting violence and humiliation. The social media romance addict may cross over to more risky behaviors, such as web-camming real-time encounters or hooking-up for sex. The manager who is preoccupied with sexual fantasies may advance to seduction and serial affairs with co-workers.

The Costs

The illness of sex addiction is destructive and costly in many ways:

- Relationships, marriages, and families are destroyed when the promise of faithfulness is shattered by sexual acting-out and repeated relapses.
- Addicts may be fired and lose their incomes, reputations, professional affiliations, and credentials because of misconduct or criminal charges.
- Addicts may lose their freedom when they are sentenced to jail for sex offenses, such as soliciting underage girls online or downloading child pornography.
- Productivity is compromised at work when addicts are tired or hungover from late night computer sessions or other acting-out, or because they are distracted by their obsessions.
- Children and adolescents who are addicted to iPorn and use it as their model for relating, have long term difficulty with relationships, and often continue the addiction into

adulthood (and add others) to make up for their intimacy deficits.

- Partners of addicts often experience symptoms similar to trauma survivors and sexual abuse victims, and frequently need their own therapy and recovery.
- Finances are strained because of spending related to the addiction—payments for phone sex, online subscriptions, prostitutes, hotels, gifts, and legal fees, as well as for medical expenses incurred for STDs, unplanned children, and counseling for addicts, victims, and their families.
- Children lose the guidance and nurturance of an addict parent who is preoccupied by the addiction, and of the other parent (if one is still around) who is preoccupied with the addict.
- Isolated addicts can become suicidal when they are trapped in acting-out cycles or when experiencing devastating consequences and deep shame or humiliation.
- Society loses the contributions of talented and experienced leaders who must resign because of sexual misconduct.

Roadmap for the Book

The Storm of Sex Addiction: Rescue and Recovery is organized into four sections. Each chapter presents vital information for anyone affected by, or interested in, this important subject. Part I, *The Storm*, introduces the warning signs of sex addiction and features the dynamics and nuances that are converging to create the epidemic. These include the cultural climate, the power of the sex drive itself, and the role of Internet pornography. Sex addiction is explained as a compulsive relationship with a mood-altering experience. Addicts substitute their