

Love Addiction / Relationship Addiction - Main Page

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http://www.loveandaddiction.com/love_addiction.htm

Other Names and Definitions

- extreme emotional dependency
- romantic intrigue
- pattern of painful or obsessive romantic relationships

What is love addiction?

Love addicts are drawn to the fantasy of romance. They find themselves continually drawn into unhealthy relationships that cause them pain.

Love addiction is destructive pattern of relating to others that becomes increasingly empty and fuels resentment. Addicts attach themselves to others and take care of them or become helpless and cared for, in an attempt control others and avoid abandonment.

Romance addiction describes being in relationship with a fantasy. The "high" of the intoxication experienced during the attraction stage of romance becomes the drug, preventing any real intimacy from ever developing. The common pattern for this addiction is a series of short liaisons that end when any difficulty arises. It may also be present in long term relationships, as the addict escapes to fantasy lovers, avoiding the challenges of forging true intimacy. At times, this can also take the form of a dramatic obsession that results in the stalking of the romantic fantasy object by the obsessed.

Obsessive, dependent, erotic love often is a misplaced attempt to achieve the fusion we so deeply desire. We want to end the feelings of isolation caused by our learned restraints against true intimacy. Aroused by the experience of love, one often is willing to suspend those restraints in order to merge with another. If the merger is dependent and immature, the result is love addiction. Life energy is directed on the pursuit of gratification rather than growth. If mature, the love will grow and expand.

Real love is not addiction nor is addiction love. Love addiction is any immature attachment to people, euphoria, romance or sex in an attempt to get needs met. It is a reliance on someone or something external to the self in an attempt to heal past trauma, get unmet needs fulfilled, avoid fear or emotional pain, solve problems, fill our loneliness and maintain balance.

Real, healthy love is a very different and much better state of being than the desperately clinging, emotional dependency.

As the love addicted relationship progresses, both people find themselves feeling more trapped. The addict often feels deeply threatened when their "loved one" disapproves, disagrees, distances or even attempts to enjoy life outside of the relationship.

<http://loveaddicts.org/kindsofloveaddicts.html>

Obsessed Love Addicts: OLAs cannot let go of someone they love, even if their partner is:

- Unavailable emotionally or sexually
- Afraid to commit
- Unable to communicate
- Unloving
- Distant
- Abusive
- Controlling and dictatorial
- Ego-centric
- Selfish
- Addicted to something outside the relationship (hobbies, drugs, alcohol, sex, someone else, gambling, shopping etc.)

Codependent Love Addicts: CLAs are the most widely recognized. They fit a pretty standard profile. Most of them suffer from low self-esteem and have a certain predictable way of thinking, feeling and behaving. This means that from a place of insecurity and low self-esteem, they try desperately to hold on to the people they are addicted to using codependent behavior. This includes enabling, rescuing, caretaking, passive-aggressive controlling, and accepting neglect or abuse. In general, CLAs will do anything to "take care" of their partners in the hope that they will not leave—or that someday they will reciprocate.

Relationship Addicts: RAs, unlike other love addicts, are no longer in love with their partners but still cannot let go. Usually, they are so unhappy that the relationship affects their health, spirit and emotional well being. Even if their partner batters them, and they are in danger, they cannot let go. They are afraid of being alone. They are afraid of change. They do not want to hurt or abandon their partners. This can be summed up as "I hate you don't leave me."

Narcissistic Love Addicts: NLAs use dominance, seduction and withholding to control their partners. Unlike codependents, who accept a lot of discomfort, narcissists won't put up with anything that interferes with their happiness. They are self-absorbed and their low self-esteem is masked by their grandiosity.

Furthermore, rather than seeming to obsess about the relationship, NLAs appear aloof and unconcerned. They do not appear to be addicted at all. Rarely do you even know that NLAs are hooked until you try to leave them. Then they will no longer be aloof and uncaring. They will panic and use anything at their disposal to hold on to the relationship—including violence. Many professionals have rejected the idea that narcissists can be love addicts. This may be because they rarely come in for treatment. However, if you have ever seen how some narcissists react to perceived or real abandonment, you will see that they are indeed "hooked."

Ambivalent Love Addicts: ALAs suffer from avoidant personality disorder. They don't have a hard time letting go, they have a hard time moving forward. They desperately crave love, but at the same time they are terrified of intimacy. This combination is agonizing. ALAs also come in different forms, listed below.

Torch Bearers are ALAs who obsess about someone who is unavailable. This can be done without acting out (suffering in silence) or by pursuing the person they are in love with. Some Torch Bearers are more addicted than others. This kind of addiction feeds on fantasies and illusions. It is also known as unrequited love.

Saboteurs are ALAs who destroy relationships when they start to get serious or at whatever point their fear of intimacy comes up. This can be anytime—before the first date, after the first date, after sex, after the subject of commitment comes up—whenever.

Seductive Withholders are ALAs who always come on to you when they want sex or companionship. When they become frightened, or feel unsafe, they begin withholding companionship, sex, affection—anything that makes them feel anxious. If they leave the relationship when they become frightened, they are just Saboteurs. If they keep repeating the pattern of being available/unavailable, they are seductive withholders.

Romance Addicts are ALAs who are addicted to multiple partners. Romance addicts are often confused with sex addicts. However, unlike sex addicts, who are trying to avoid bonding altogether, romance addicts bond with each of their partners—to one degree or another—even if the romantic liaisons are short-lived or happening simultaneously. By "romance" I mean sexual passion and pseudo-emotional intimacy. Please note that while romance addicts bond with each of their partners to a degree, their goal (besides getting high off of romance and drama) is to avoid commitment or bonding on a deeper level with one partner.

A Note about ALAs: Not all avoidants are love addicts. If you accept your fear of intimacy and social situations, and do not get hooked on unavailable people, or just keep your social circle small and unthreatening you are not necessarily an ALA. But if you eat your heart out over some unavailable person year after year, or sabotage one relationship after another, or have serial romantic affairs, or only feel close when you are with another avoidant, you may be an Ambivalent Love Addict.

Combinations: You may find that you have more than one type of love addiction. Many of these types overlap and combine with other behavioral problems. For instance, you may be a codependent, alcoholic love addict. Or a love/relationship addict. The important thing is to identify your own personal profile so you know what you are dealing with.

For instance, Robert was a love addict, relationship addict, romance addict and sex addict. He was married but did not want to divorce his wife of twenty years even though he was not in love with her (relationship addiction) His hobby was masturbating to pornography when his wife was not home (sex addiction). He had affairs with several other women simultaneously without his wife finding out. He really cared about each of these women (romance addict). One day he met Jennifer and fell in love with her. It did not take long before he was obsessed with her. She did not want to be with him because he was married, so he began stalking and harassing her (love addict). Robert finally got into recovery, divorced his wife, gave up the pornography and affairs and married the woman he was obsessed with. At first his jealousy was out of control, but after a few years of therapy and 12-Step meetings he began to trust his new wife. Because she was mature, well-grounded and had high self esteem, the relationship began to normalize. Today, all of Robert's addictions are in remission.

Narcissists and Codependents: It is very common for love addicts to end up in relationships with other love addicts. The most common kind of love-addicted couple is, as you might have guessed, the codependent and the narcissist. In the beginning, narcissists are often seductive. After they have hooked their codependent partners, however, they change. Here is an example of a narcissist-codependent relationship.

Nancy and James met at a bar and were instantly attracted to one another. Within days, Nancy (the codependent) had fallen madly in love with James (the narcissist). From the beginning, she was helpful, nurturing, attentive and went out of her way to make him happy. James, on the other hand, appeared to be able to take or leave the relationship after they made love. He canceled dates, neglected to return phone calls, saw other women, became very domineering and for the most part seemed aloof and detached. Still, six months later, Nancy married James because she was in love with him and secretly hoped that he would change.

After Nancy and James were married, the pattern of neglect continued—especially his affairs with other women. When Nancy objected, James bullied her until she stopped nagging him about it. This went on for years. Nancy tried to save her marriage by placating James in every way she could think of, but he continued to do what he wanted. Eventually, Nancy stopped loving James and thought about leaving him, but she just couldn't bring herself to face the loneliness of being single again. This was better than nothing she thought. So she continued her codependent behavior, always trying to keep James happy and comfortable even if it meant sacrificing her own happiness in the process.

Eventually, Nancy sought counseling and within a year she felt strong enough to leave James. He had other ideas. The first time Nancy brought up the subject of divorce he laughed at her. Then he threatened her verbally. The day she presented him with divorce papers, he beat her so badly she had to go to the hospital. It seems that despite his lack of love and respect for Nancy, James was addicted to her and the relationship they shared. He also felt that if he couldn't have her, nobody else could.

Eventually, Nancy got away from James even though he stalked her for months—threatening to kill her if she didn't come back. Thankfully, he eventually let go. However, you have only to read the newspapers to realize that such a volatile combination of codependency and narcissism can lead to homicide.

Switch-hitting: Many love addicts switch-hit because they have more than one underlying personality disorder. For instance, a relationship addict may play the role of a codependent for years, then finally get out of the relationship and fall in love with someone who is unavailable. Suddenly, our relationship addict is an obsessed love addict or a torchbearer. Even narcissists switch-hit, believe it or not. For years they can be in one relationship after another, playing the role of the dominant, uncaring partner. However, if they ever fall hard, they can easily turn into a torchbearer or Obsessed love addict. If they fall in love with another narcissist then they have no choice but to become the codependent love addict in the relationship because the narcissist will not stand for anything else. Even ambivalent love addicts will start obsessing instead of running away when they are addicted.

Love addicts switch-hit because of separation anxiety. If another form of behavior is necessary to placate a partner and to hold on to the him or her, the love addict will adopt that behavior. Is it an act? Sometimes . . . but if the love addict has weak personality boundaries, they may actually become the other person while under the spell of the addiction. The point here is not to identify all the kinds of switch-hitting going on, or even to explain it, but to true it out and learn from it.

Psychology

Psychologically, love addiction is an attempt to satisfy our developmental hunger for security, sensation, power, identity, belonging, and meaning. It is often associated with feelings of "never having enough" or "not being enough." None of us got everything we needed and we subconsciously walk around with holes in our psyche wanting to be filled. At the base of love addiction is a violation of trust. Because of the betrayal of trust we both want and fear closeness. Since we are meant to be in relationships we have no choice but to figure out a way to be involved with others. Love addiction is the answer.

Culture

We do not become love attacks living in a vacuum. Our obsession with love, sex and romance pervades every aspect of popular culture from romance novels to song lyrics, and even great works of fiction, poetry, drama and art. Culture idealizes, dramatizes, and models a dependency that suggests we cannot live without another person, sex or romance. We become dependent almost unconsciously.

Biology

When it comes to love we are neuro-chemically vulnerable. Biology provides us naturally with the three sensations of pleasure--arousal, fantasy, and satiation--as a way to experience life to its maximum. These three planes are controlled by hundreds of brain chemicals that we are only at the beginning stages of understanding.

Without these chemicals we would not have the ability to appreciate our own human nature and the earthly gifts.

The "High"

The "high" of the intoxication experienced during the attraction stage of romance becomes the drug, preventing any real intimacy from ever developing.

Signs and Characteristics of Love Addiction

- Lack of nurturing and attention when young
- Feeling isolated, detached from parents and family
- Compartmentalization of relationships from other areas of life
- Outer facade of "having it all together" to hide internal disintegration
- Mistake intensity for intimacy (drama driven relationships)
- Hidden Pain
- Seek to avoid rejection and abandonment at any cost
- Afraid to trust anyone in a relationship
- Inner rage over lack of nurturing, early abandonment
- Depressed
- Highly manipulative and controlling of others
- Perceive attraction, attachment, and sex as basic human needs, on a par with food and water
- Sense of worthlessness without a relationship or partner
- Feeling that a relationship makes one whole, or more of a man or woman
- Escalating tolerance for high-risk behavior
- Intense need to control self, others, circumstances
- Presence of other addictive or compulsive problems
- Insatiable appetite in area of difficulty (sex, love or attachment / need.)
- Using others, sex & relationships to alter mood or relieve emotional pain
- Continual questioning of values and lifestyle
- Driven, desperate, frantic personality
- Confusion of sexual attraction with love ("Love" at first sight.)
- Tendency to trade sexual activity for "love" or attachment
- Existence of a secret "double life"
- Refusal to acknowledge existence of problem
- Defining out-of-control behavior as normal
- Defining "wants" as "needs"
- Tendency to leave one relationship for another. (Inability to be without a relationship.)
- Attempts to replace lost relationships with a new one immediately

Symptoms:

- Is all consuming and obsessive
- Is inhibited
- Avoids risk or change
- Lacks true intimacy
- Is manipulative, strikes deals

Questions / Test

- Do you ever feel that you remain in relationships, even though you're hurt continuously?
- Do you rationalize away the things you don't like in your relationship?
- Have you ever thought of leaving the relationship and been too afraid of being alone?
- Does your partner's behavior change your self-esteem or mood?
- Do you try to change your partners?
- Do you become intimate before you have established trust?
- Do you disregard what is important to you in order to please your partner?
- Do you let abusive people remain in your life?
- Do you or those you are attracted to abuse you or refuse commitment?
- Do you look to others to fulfill you?
- Do you expect or demand unconditional love?

Treatment / Recovery

- understand the thinking, feeling and behaviors which cause love addiction cycle, and
- learn how to develop satisfying, loving and healthy relationships in the future

See also:

Last update: Sunday, November 18, 2007. Feedback - send an email to:

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