

CHAPTER ONE

Understanding Sexual Integrity Issues and Sexual Addiction

Before you start to dig into yourself through the pages of this book, I think it's important that you have a solid foundation in understanding both sexual integrity issues as well as sexual addiction. After all, that's what has brought us all together.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SEXUAL INTEGRITY ISSUE AND A SEXUAL ADDICTION

Oftentimes, when trying to explain the concept of a sexual addiction, a debate ensues over the parameters and the explicit definition of an addiction of this nature. Keep in mind that in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Disorders, which is the standard created and used by the medical community for defining mental health issues, a sexual addiction is not considered a bona fide disorder. It has been hotly debated and in the end, the most current revisions of the manual ruled out sex addiction. While sex addiction didn't meet all the criteria, there are three key components of "addiction" that we can apply from the medical community's definitions: 1) mood altering, 2) impairs functioning, and 3) difficulty stopping even when desiring to.

On the other hand, a sexual integrity issue, I propose, is more of an umbrella term used to describe someone that may (or may not) have an addiction per se but has breached their marriage covenant by acting out sexually in some form or fashion, whether once or a sundry of times, mentally, emotionally and/or physically.

Debating with your husband as to whether or not he has a sexual addiction may not be worth your breath. Whether it is an addiction or an integrity issue, it hurts just the same. For this reason, I use the terms interchangeably throughout this material. Try not to let this be a distraction. All of the concepts apply to a wife healing from the damage caused by a husband with either a sexual addiction or a sexual integrity issue.

In addition, I use the word "wife" consistently but know that whether you are married, divorced, engaged or dating; whether your marriage ends or is restored; every woman impacted by sexual betrayal is worthy of healing. Each of you is welcome here. Don't forget your comfy pants, grab something warm to drink and let's dig in together!

THE ADDICTIVE CYCLE

Now that you have an understanding of the aforementioned terms, it's also important to have a grasp of the addictive cycle since it explains some of the thoughts and feelings behind your husband's actions.

As you look at the addictive cycle (see figure 1.1)¹, it's important to remember that a trigger could potentially be anything. However, we can boil it down to three key things, **shame**, (known as the three I's, which we will discuss in greater detail in chapter nine), a **negative emotion**, or even the **desire to reward oneself**.

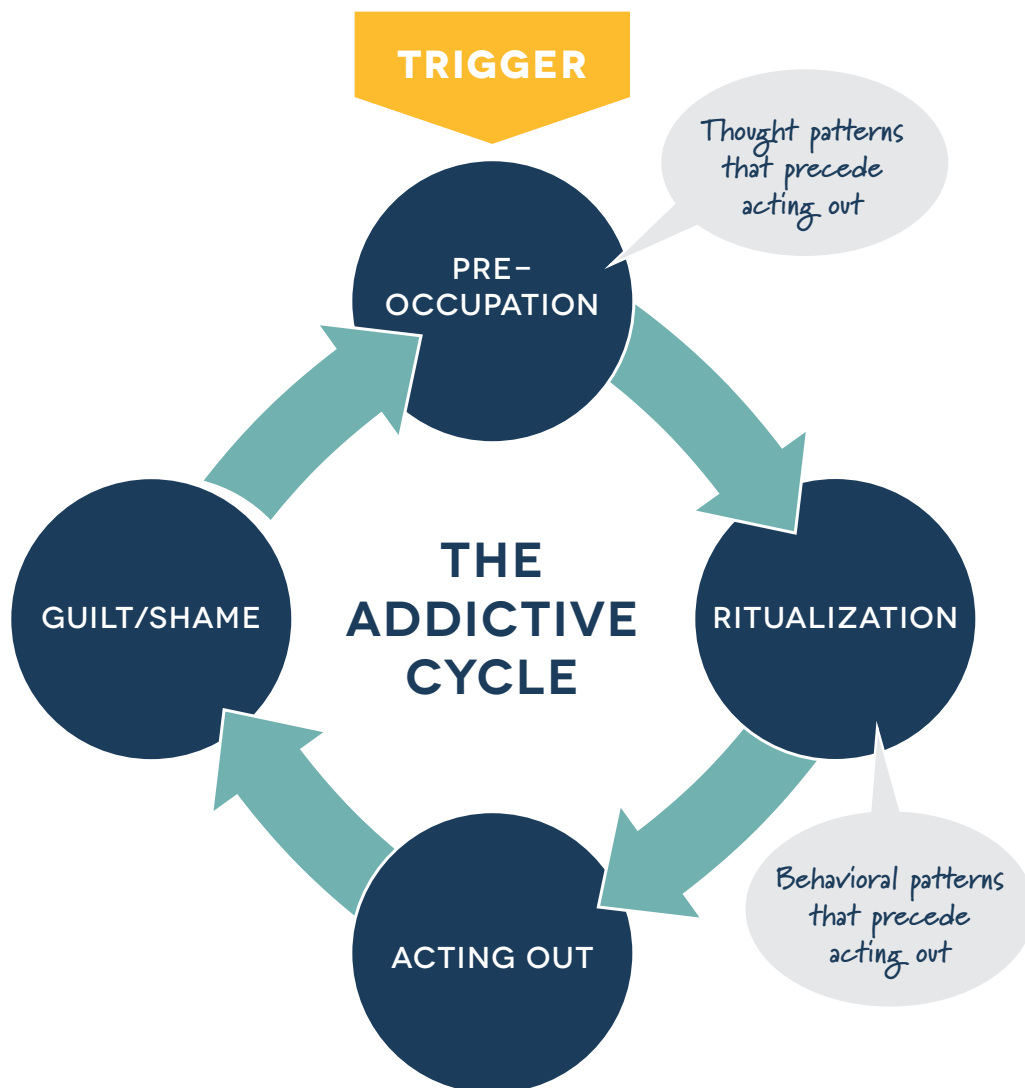


FIGURE 1.1 AN ADAPTATION OF THE ADDICTIVE CYCLE ORIGINALLY DEVELOPED BY PATRICK CARNES.

For now, know that the “male version” of the three I’s are **Insignificance** (Do I matter?), **Incompetence** (Do I have what it takes?) and **Impotence** (Do I have power or control?). (There is a female version, too which I will also discuss in chapter nine). When one of these three I’s is activated, your husband will then start to look for ways to medicate so that he doesn’t have to feel these strong emotions. Keep in mind that early in recovery he may not even be able to identify that this is what is going on inside of him.

In order to explain the addictive cycle, let’s use an example. There was once a man (that shall remain nameless) working for a large corporation who hated his job. He didn’t feel that he was well suited for his line of work. He felt very incompetent at what he did. One particular day his boss got onto him because of his performance. He was **triggered** (but didn’t have the insight to be aware of this). He felt so incompetent that all he could think about was getting home and getting his fix. It was almost as if he was in a trance and nothing would stop him (**preoccupation**). He left his office early without even considering the consequences. He arrived at home and knew his wife wouldn’t be home for a couple of hours. He grabbed cold pizza out of the fridge and sat down on the couch. He opened up his computer and decided to check stock quotes, sports highlights and YouTube. He clicked on these things almost every time before looking at porn (**ritualization**). Then he started to look at pornography. He viewed it for about fifteen minutes before quickly shutting his computer. He couldn’t believe that he did it again. If his wife knew, she would leave him, he was sure of it. He felt so **guilty** for doing it. Again. He told himself he was worthless and not deserving of his wife’s love. He was **ashamed** of himself.

While oversimplified, I hope this example scenario gives you an idea of how acting out works. Now let’s look at the acting out continuum.

THE “ACTING OUT” CONTINUUM

Acting out looks completely different for each person. Let’s think of this using a continuum (see figure 1.2). On the left end is sexual lust - sinful thought patterns of sexual fantasy. These things are contained in the mind, not acted out in real life. As you move to the right on the continuum, the sinful activities move from thought life to real, lived life. The level of depravity, gravity of consequence as well as compulsivity all increase as well. This is not to say that the sin is “worse” as you move to the right, but it is to say that the sin is different, with different consequences.

One would assume that as you move from left to right on the continuum, the level of pain the wife feels also increases. But this is actually very inaccurate. Yes, the level

of consequences for both the wife and her husband increase when moving from left to right on the continuum (for example, exposure to STD's), but not necessarily the pain. We can't judge someone else's pain nor do we know the sum of their life experiences prior to disclosure or discovery. I state this in order to validate your pain. It's not "just masturbation" or "just pornography". This behavior can, in all possibilities, be just as damaging as a one-night stand or anything else. There are simply too many variables that go into each of our stories. My pain is my pain and your pain is your pain.

CONTINUUM OF SEXUALLY ACTING OUT

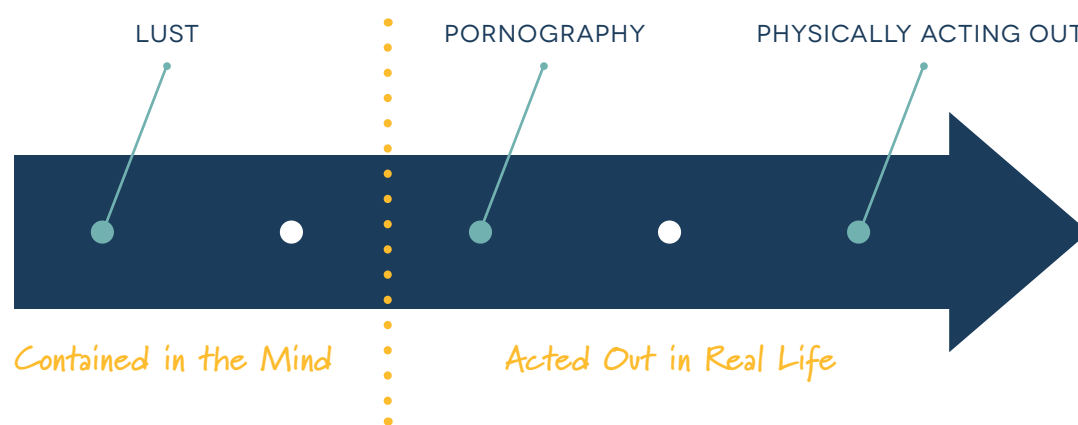


FIGURE 1.2 CONSEQUENCES INCREASE WHEN MOVING FROM LEFT TO RIGHT BUT NOT NECESSARILY THE WIFE'S PAIN.

IT'S SO PERSONAL

Being married to a man with a sexual integrity issue and/or a sexual addiction, I believe is the most painful of addictions out there. It feels ever so personal for a wife, and rightfully so. When a spouse is addicted to alcohol or drugs, their partner realizes that they are choosing these substances over them and they are choosing these substances over becoming healthier. I'm not trying to lessen the damage and hurt that such choices make in a relationship. I'm simply proposing that choosing alcohol over a spouse doesn't feel as personal as **when a husband chooses other women over his own wife**. Very quickly, the comparison begins between you and the other woman. Whether it's porn, lust, affairs, or prostitutes, the comparison begins. And you begin to ask yourself: Why? What is so wrong with me? Why would he choose her over myself?

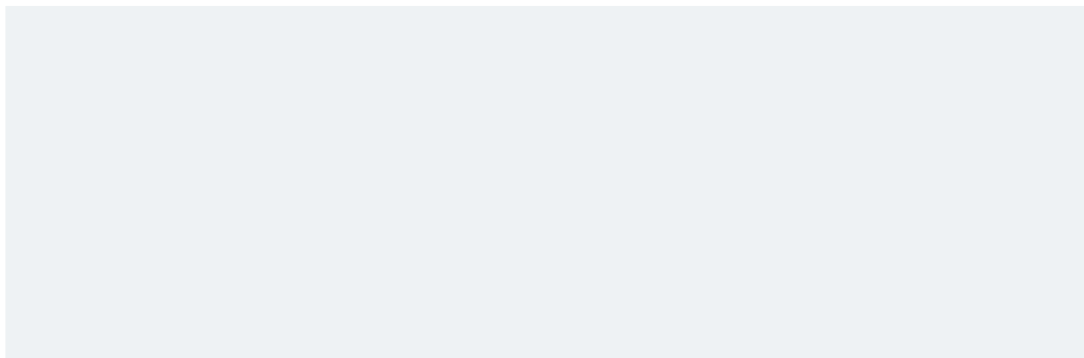
(It's important to note that some men don't act out with other women but instead act out with men, animals, inanimate objects, or within their minds. All of these modes of acting out are hurtful. Throughout this workbook, I refer to "other women" because that is often the case but depending on your situation, feel free to substitute the language that fits your story.)

QUESTION #1: When you realized your husband had a sexual integrity issue, did you compare yourself to the women he was using? Did you wonder why your husband was choosing his sexual addiction over you? If your husband disclosed that he was acting out with other men, how did this affect you?



As you start to sit with the fact that your husband chose another woman over you, it's natural to think that you did something wrong. That in some way, this was your fault. If you were more attractive, sexier, skinnier, had larger breasts or smaller breasts, had more curves, had brown hair, had blonde hair (really, you could plug literally anything in here) then this wouldn't have happened. But the reality is: **It's not your fault.** The truth of the matter is, you did not choose nor force your husband to look for sexual pleasure outside of your relationship. Sure, there are certain personality characteristics that you brought into your relationship that may have pushed his buttons in an unhealthy way, but that is no excuse for a husband's choices. **We are all responsible for our own actions, but not for each other's actions.**

QUESTION #2: Do you believe in your heart AND in your mind that your husband's sexual integrity issues are NOT your fault? Why or why not? (Note that sometimes what you know in your mind and what your heart feels are two distinct things.)



THE CORE OF THE ONION

With any coping mechanism a person uses, it is important to figure out what is driving the behavior. Because a sexual integrity issue is in its simplest sense a coping mechanism, it's imperative that your husband is able to identify the very thing at the core of his onion that drove him into this destructive and damaging behavior.

Almost all the time, at the core of the onion for men struggling with these sorts of behaviors is a core belief that they are **unwanted** and **unloved**.² Keep in mind that these holes in your husband's heart started growing in childhood, well before he met you. Deep down your husband feels unloved, unwanted, and even abandoned. In fact, the sense of abandonment - some believe - is seen as the most influential contributor to a sexual addiction.³ This "sense of abandonment" could present itself explicitly (a caregiver leaving the family), implicitly (a caregiver dying during childhood) or even in the form of a threat (a caregiver threatening to leave). With this in mind, it might be that at first glance, your husband says he doesn't believe he was abandoned. His mom was there. But as the hard work of peeling back the layers ensues, typically there is a sense of abandonment present. At the core of abandonment is this: "you don't *want* me."

Patrick Carnes says that these core beliefs (think of these core beliefs as the lens we view the world through, in other words, it influences our choices) build upon one another until ultimately, the addict believes that his most important need is sex.⁴ (You may be saying, "*Hold up...I'm starting to take this personal. I loved him I accepted him. What did I do wrong?*") Remember: This isn't about how much love you've given but rather the core beliefs from childhood that have influenced your husband's choices.)

If you feel especially responsible for your husband's behavior – it might be worth looking back at **your** family of origin. Did you put others needs before yours? Was the role you played in your family that of the caretaker? If so, then it makes sense that you'd feel especially responsible for not meeting every need of your husband. So here is the truth: you can't meet your husband's every need. It's simply impossible. Just like he can't meet every one of your needs. In addition, remember, just because your husband's needs were not met (whether perceived or in reality) doesn't give him the right to expend his sexual energy elsewhere.

I hope you are tracking with me because this next sentence is important: it's through this addiction or integrity issue that your husband was able to manufacture feeling wanted, loved and accepted. Think about it: will your husband get rejected when he looks at porn? Will he get rejected when he goes to a strip club? Will he get rejected when he chooses to masturbate? The answer is no. This in turn causes a **false intimacy** to develop. This isn't true intimacy between a husband and a wife; this is fabri-

cated self-preserving intimacy between your man and whatever sexual fantasy or act he so chooses. (I will discuss this in greater detail in chapter twelve.) Thus, a husband with a sexual integrity issue typically isn't very connected to himself or the people close to him. He never learned how to be emotionally intimate with others.

It's common for me to hear a wife say she "never hears her husband share his feelings". The reason being: a man with an integrity issue or addiction doesn't know how to connect with himself or with others. **Remember – true intimacy requires being fully known and fully knowing (another).**

THE SEXUAL INTEGRITY ISSUE IS PERVASIVE

If you think this destructive behavior has only affected your sexual relationship with your husband, think again. When a man is devoting any amount of time to any part of the continuum mentioned above, it affects multiple areas of the couple's life.

I think two of the best words to describe a man with a sexual integrity issue are: detached and selfish. I can speak first hand to this. During our first couple of years of marriage, I felt like I was responsible for everything: paying the bills, oil changes, grocery shopping, home maintenance; all the while we both worked full-time outside the home. In addition, I remember wanting so badly to connect with Jason in some way. About three years into our marriage, I still remember chasing him through our house trying to engage in an argument with him. He eventually locked himself in a bathroom and chose not to come out.

THE SEXUAL INTEGRITY ISSUE IS A SECRET

A hallmark of this addiction/integrity issue is the fact that it is done when nobody is watching. It's something that most men say they'd never share and instead believe they will take it with them to their graves. If and when a wife finds out about her husband's secrets, it's extremely difficult for her to reach out for help. This in turn perpetuates the problem. Know that you are not alone when you are walking in these shoes. For example, one recent study found that sixty-three percent of those men surveyed admitted to "looking at pornography at least one time *while at work* in the last three months" (emphasis mine).⁵ If that doesn't surprise you then how about this: every second, 30,000 people view porn and there are sixty-eight million porn searches *per day*.⁶ And last, roughly twelve billion dollars is spent on the sex industry per year in the United States alone (fifty-seven billion world-wide).⁷ Indeed, if you are a wife that has been impacted by sexual betrayal, you most definitely are not alone.

STAYING AFLOAT

Remember, what your husband has chosen to engage in isn't about you. It was *his* choice. It isn't *your* fault. With that being said, it's still painfully personal and hurtful. Whether your husband has engaged in activities towards the left of the continuum or towards the right, I want to validate that it is all very painful.

