

Addictions... where do they come from?

Written by Dr. Michael J. Lincoln, Ph.D.

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We live in an institutionalized, impersonal society in which individual initiative is systematically undermined while the culture is simultaneously extolling its virtues. We are therefore addiction-prone, especially to things that can give the illusion of power over our lives and environs.

Comfort-seeking has become an over-riding goal in many people's lives, due to an overwhelming sense of powerlessness to do anything significant or effective about the world and their lives.

This, in turn, generates a deep-seated need for some way to relieve the anxiety associated with being in effect unable to determine the nature of our life, and to a profound need to have some sort of emotional well being in our experience.

This need for relief and/or emotional or sensual comfort makes us highly vulnerable to becoming addicted to some experience that distracts our attention from our situation.

Another central component of the modern world dilemma is the extreme sense of separateness we all feel. Emotional and/or factual isolation is a more or less universal state of affairs for us nowadays.

Alienation and a feeling of alienness is virtually universal at present. This has resulted in a severe "angst," an experience of being cut off from all of our necessary supports and sustenance systems.

It has also generated a profound case of "existential adriftness," a feeling of having no connection with each other, the world or ourselves. In addition, it has produced a more or less universal "spiritual crisis" in which there is no experience of access to our inner self, to our "Higher Self" or to God.

Ironically, although addictions are clearly attempts to relieve severe suffering and separation, it is a fact that an addiction is an excessive attachment to something or someone that can and usually does cause further suffering to us and others.

It is a fixation on a model of how things should be experienced. It is a set of unrealistic expectations and belief systems, and/or it is a need to alter our state of consciousness, including the relief or dulling of physical or psychological pain.

It is a dependence that results in a denial-dominated, defensive and controlling disorder of living. It is an inability to establish a meaningful relationship to the world and to have a fully elaborated life.

It's a mindless absorption in something external or in something on the internal plane that is pragmatically irrelevant. It is a "resignation settle-for" arising from our learned helplessness and from the attributed worthlessness we experienced.

Addictive passions are passive, indiscriminate, negative, repetitive, superficial, banal, and self-destructive. Exuberance, joy, intimacy, dedication and meaningful significance are simply not allowed to be there.

Once involved in a severe addictive experience, access to all else is in effect cut off, and total immersion results. The whole of our life becomes centered around the addictive experience, and it now completely controls us. It results in the persistence of behavior detrimental to our well being, due to an uncontrollable urge that is dominating our functioning.

We become agitated when the supply is not available, and we are also obsessed with removing our discomfort. Needless to say, this type of behavior is strongly encouraged by our society (see *“When Society Becomes An Addict”* by Linda Wilson-Schaeff). Our massive advertising and social organizational forces are all focused around “relief” and “escape” as primary goals in life.

In any case, the serious addiction situation involves an overwhelming need to “get through the day or night,” to “get it on,” to “get away from all this,” to “get high” or to “get in touch with ourselves.” It is a running away from life, utilizing a superficial “pseudo-joy” substitute for living. It has a characteristic process that betrays its operation in the way our life goes.

It goes without saying that these are high prices to pay for our addictions. On the other hand, in as much as addictive patterns, even mild ones and the “dry drunk” pattern are the product of a highly unsupportive early history, it is perhaps not surprising that so many people are willing to pay the price.

The key to the reversal of the whole process is the development of the self-love and the connection with the “Home Office” (All That Is) and the Higher Self that was aborted in childhood to one degree or another.

It is a self-rejection and serious separation that lies at the base of the whole process, and self-love and inner merging are the only way out. As they say in the 12-Step programs, “Turning it over” is the only way to fly.