

these extraordinary impulses to bring them down to normal levels where they can be effectively addressed via *mussar*.³

In a report on a Nefesh sponsored workshop on "Understanding Internet Addiction" Dr. Rachel Sarna cites similar comments made by two leading experts in the field, Delmonico and Griffin:

While it may appear that addictions are pleasure-seeking behaviors, the roots of any addiction are usually traceable to suppression and avoidance of some kind of emotional pain. Addiction is a way to escape from [a] reality too full of sadness or too devoid of joy. **Emotional trauma in early life may be the source of most addictions.** Everyone is [potentially] at risk. However, people who suffer from low self esteem, distorted body image and ADHD are even at greater risk than others. [p.14, emphasis added]⁴

The frustrated emotional need of a vulnerable person can hijack his normal sexual drive in a desperate attempt to assuage his pain. The fact that the acting out involves his normal instinctual need - and may, for example, intensify when his wife is a *niddah* - can fool people into thinking that it is simply an exaggeration of a normal drive. This is why well meaning advisors will often push marriage as a cure for sexual acting out.⁵ The many married men with this problem provide irrefutable evidence that the intimate relationship of a loving couple bears only the most superficial resemblance to the acting out behavior and therefore, this "cure" is doomed to failure.

Developmental factors

What are the early emotional traumas that may make it more likely for someone to develop an addiction to sexual acting out? There are many different possibilities, of course, but the following is a small sampling. A young child in an emotionally supportive home, when dealing with frustration, anxiety, alarm, fear, or dread will feel comfortable turning to his parents for comfort and support. They will protect, reassure, soothe and guide him, thus teaching him by their reactions that; 1) The world is not such a frightening place; 2) Most problems have solutions; 3) Sharing problems with others makes problems easier to deal with. The child will have been **soothed by his parents** and will learn that comfort is achieved in an interpersonal venue.

In a less emotionally supportive home, parents are sometimes the **source** of the pressure the child is experiencing and even if the pressure is from external sources, the child doesn't feel comfortable sharing the problem with his parents. Since he cannot address the problem interpersonally he seeks **solitary** solutions for **self-soothing** which often involve acting out in a

³ This is similar to Rabbi Dr. A. J. Twerski's comment that "The methods suggested by *musser* to overcome *machshavos zaros* [inappropriate thoughts] are not effective with obsessive thoughts. The latter require treatment," (*Dear Rabbi, Dear Doctor*, Shaar Press, p. 117).

⁴ In the Shadow of the Net: Understanding Internet Addiction and Problematic Online Sexual Behavior. *Nefesh News*, November 2005, pp. 1 & 14.

⁵ More on this point below.

sexual manner. Besides the release experienced via the pleasurable experience itself, there is the additional benefit that he is not dependent on (unreliable) others for relief.

Later in life, even if the person's life becomes more manageable (perhaps as the result of therapy), there is still a feeling that without constant vigilance things will go bad again, so there is often chronic "low voltage" stress which provokes the old "solitary solution." For example, someone who has been hyper-sensitized by chronic emotional abuse early in life may feel pressure to be extra nice to his wife to ensure that she does the same for him since he cannot tolerate even mild criticism. This person may, in fact, have a good marriage with no discernable stress, but the effort to avoid the slightest bit of disharmony (rather than communicating openly and calmly about differences) can exact a tremendous emotional toll. The habituated response to this chronic strain may very well be **solitary self-soothing**.

A person who had suffered from years of parental rejection will likely remain overly sensitized to being rebuffed for any reason and to any degree. Even if he's happily married and his wife is usually very affectionate, if she, on rare occasions, is not in the mood for relations, he will likely feel overwhelmingly rejected and deprived, and this may also provoke the old "solitary solution."

The emotional functions of sexual acting out

Sexual acting out is often motivated by a (subconscious) attempt to;

contain and transform [painful emotions] ó such as depression, anxiety, aggression, shame, and fear ó by turning them into feelings of excitement and aliveness, rather than allowing them to be overwhelming and depleting. The sexual encounter [usually] takes place during periods in which the integrity of the self is threatened by some disappointment, some frustration. The aim of the sexual encounter is for both a soothing and an obtaining a compensation for what they had to put up with or what they have been through.⁶

The importance of exploring the particular meaning for the acting out of each individual patient is insightfully emphasized by my colleague, Dr. Shloimie Zimmerman (personal communication, June 2010)

Describing something as "just *taavah*" removes the individual's uniqueness. While every person's *dimyon* (illusion) and behavior may have a common element in general human experience, each person is also seeking his own unique form of emotional fulfillment. I find that examining the illusion provides considerable insight into what the individual is trying to attain in the counterfeit/ *dimyon* world. It also provides insight into what they lack and feel they cannot get in their real-life. However, illusions in general and sexual illusions in particular, are resistant to analysis. Their survival is contingent on maintaining the illusion which impedes examination of the nature of the counterfeit.

⁶ H. Turken. 2001. The Psychotherapeutic Encounter: Sexual Acting Out as the Focus of Intervention. *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*. 61, 185-197, pp. 186 & 195.

Many other illusions, such as the illusion of self worth based upon luxurious possessions, good looks, *kavod*, etc. are partially maintained through the value other people erroneously lend them; consequently, it is not completely based on the individual's illusion of themselves. However, with most sexual illusions it is completely based on the person's ability to block any rational analysis of the illusion as that would cause it to collapse. Therefore, when therapeutic analysis takes place it can cause the illusion to dissipate on its own or be weakened to the extent that it can be overcome.

In my clinical experience, I have found another factor that often serves to maintain the overwhelming impulse to act out sexually. Someone who has been emotionally deprived, severely criticized and/or abused throughout his childhood will often feel that he is not deserving of pleasure. When he attempts to partake in a pleasurable experience, feelings of guilt will cancel out the pleasure. Only the intense sensations involved in sexual acting out can override the inhibitions to pleasure. This causes the child to become interested in sexuality prematurely and eventually this can lead to a sexual addiction.⁷

Pornography

Pornography, on a superficial level, simply serves the purpose of ensuring a more intense, momentarily self-soothing, physical experience. However, there often seems to be another level of emotional need being addressed.

A lack of affectionate intimacy in childhood often results in a frustrated need for intimacy without the tools to achieve it in a healthy way. (Like someone who did not get sufficient attention as a child, who now needs intense attention that can only be achieved by acting immaturely). This is often the appeal of pornography. In ordinary circumstances a person would not see someone else unclothed unless they had an intimate relationship. Therefore, seeing someone unclothed via pornography creates the **illusion** of intimacy.⁸

For some people, standard pornography is not intimate **enough** because everyone knows that the person they are viewing in a supposedly intimate moment is really an actress who is forgoing her privacy for the sake of money or drugs. They therefore, find it difficult to attain the illusion of intimacy with standard pornography.⁹ They prefer voyeurism where they believe they are

⁷ The same dynamics can apply for drug addiction.

⁸ The common use of the term "making love" even when referring to a person one hardly knows, underscores the essence of the illusion and what it is the person is really after - love. A married man who frequented houses of ill repute, related to me that one time, the lady told him when she met him that she was impressed with his intelligence; he felt satisfied with the compliment, paid the fee and left. The substitution of illusions for desperately needed feelings is not limited to sexual acting out. Parents who use intimidation to extract "respect" or expressions of "love" from their children are also living an illusion. For example, a wealthy couple with estranged married sons in *kollel* gave them their monthly stipend only if they came for a weekend visit. The parents would then use the visits as evidence of their children's love and respect.

⁹ An analogy can perhaps be found in the act of sharing private information with a friend. As a result of this sharing, the recipient of the information feels a sense of intimacy with the one who shared with him. But what if he then discovers that the speaker shared this same information with countless others? He will no longer feel privileged.

ösharingö a truly private, intimate moment. They, of course, have to block out the fact that the person being observed did not consent to this öintimacy.ö (In the case of voyeurism via pornography they also have to accept the illusion that the observed are not aware of the fact that they are being filmed). An added emotional öbenefitö of voyeurism is the feeling of power in forcing the öintimacyö on the other person. This is especially appealing to someone who was made to feel powerless in his early family environment.

Heinz Kohut elaborated on some of the emotional issues addressed by pornography and voyeurism:

Behind the enormous attraction of pornography which channels these feelings [of voyeuristic preoccupation]í were children who were contact hungry, were not cuddled or held enoughí [and the] enjoyment of the interplay between mother and child ó seeing and looking ó was missingí . The voyeuristic issues come up in individuals who have felt deeply deprived in this more comprehensive interaction with othersí . [The visual contact] becomes the carrier of what should have beení skin contact, voice contact, and all other avenues of pleasure.¹⁰

There are often idiosyncratic details added to the sexual fantasy or acting out that enhance the longed for emotional satisfaction for particular individuals. For example, one person was especially desirous of peeping on *frum* girls caught in the act of self stimulation. In his mind, such girls are usually less involved in sexual matters and therefore, such an act would be considered especially intimate. Similarly, another person, suffering from same sex attraction (SSA) was especially attracted to *chassidic* men, because he believed that they have little sexual interests and so the fact that such a person desires him was especially ego-enhancing.

Interestingly, many people suffering from voyeurism have no desire to see friends in intimate situations because when there is a real relationship there is no need for the illusion of a relationship.

For some people, the act of viewing someone unclothed is sufficient to achieve a satisfaction of the emotional need for intimacy. For others, the eventual sexual release adds a necessary intensity to the emotional experience (like an exclamation mark at the end of a sentence).

After the fact, there is usually a double disappointment: First there is the guilt and shame over the act itself. Then there is the painful disappointment that the hoped for emotional comfort (i.e., the illusion beyond the pleasure ó as described above) was not achieved beyond the momentary illusion. It is like when a failed dieter eats cake to alleviate loneliness. The loneliness is alleviated for only a few moments while the shame and feeling of failure linger on. One wonders why the inevitable disappointment doesn't eventually undermine the illusion. I believe there are a few possible explanations.

¹⁰ H. Kohut, 1987, *The Kohut Seminars on Self Psychology and Psychotherapy with Adolescents and Young Adults*, ed. M. Elson. NY: Norton, pp. 168-169. See also B. Anechiarico, 1990, Understanding and Treating Sex Offenders from a Self-Psychological Perspective: The Missing Piece. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, **18**, 281-292.

Firstly, As Rav Dessler explains,¹¹ *Hashem* gave the *yetzer horah* the power to create illusions that resist the lessons of experience. Otherwise, it would be virtually powerless. When faced with an acute or chronic frustration of a basic need (such as the need for intimacy, attention, acceptance, etc.) the power of the illusion intensifies in proportion to the frustration. One finds this with a person dying of thirst in a desert who imagines seeing an oasis up ahead.

Secondly, there is a little bit of truth in every illusion. When one is desperate this little bit becomes enormously appealing. For example, a shipwreck survivor on a raft in the ocean who, after days of unbearable thirst, will finally break down and drink the ocean salt water even though he resisted it for days because he knows it will kill him. None-the-less, since it contains the illusion of water, at some point it feels like it's worth it to get that temporary relief. Likewise, someone desperate for intimacy may reach a point where he feels that the illusion of intimacy is all he can hope to get and this illusion may be better than nothing.

Other factors that enhance the illusion

There is often another factor that makes it especially difficult to control these impulses by some people. Those who grew up in homes that were especially harsh and punitive were often led to feel that the Torah's limitations on sexual expression exist for the sole purpose of depriving them of pleasure. No one has attempted to explain to them that it is for the person's own benefit, even in this world.¹² When a person experiences multiple emotional deprivations in his life, this additional perceived deprivation can seem intolerable, thereby enhancing the appeal of the illusion.

If the family puts undue emphasis on external values, such as physical beauty, or impressing others, this can also enhance the appeal of pornography (the ultimate *chitzonious*). Sadly, this emphasis on *chitzonious* is not limited to the secular culture. It is alive and well in the most unlikely places and by the most unlikely people.

Many years ago I treated a young man who suffered from intense social insecurities, very poor self-esteem and same sex attraction (SSA). He had made progress with his issues and his teacher encouraged him to begin dating. One day he came to a session very despondent. He had gone out on a date with a very quiet girl. I wondered why he agreed to go out with such a girl when he knew from previous experience how much he disliked such dates. He explained that his teacher strongly suggested that he go out with this girl (even knowing that she was extremely quiet and being aware of this young man's strong aversion to such girls) because she was "gorgeous" and the teacher felt this would help him overcome his SSA issue. I found it sad that a respected teacher would subscribe to this superficial perspective of looks being more likely to make a girl attractive to him rather than looking for a girl with whom he'd feel comfortable. Feeling emotionally comfortable with a girl and desiring to feel closer, would be a much more likely path to physical attraction.

¹¹ *Michtav MeEliyahu*, Vol. 1, p. 99.

¹² See the *sefer*, *Mishkan Yisroel (Yerushalayim, 5764)* and *Marital Intimacy*, Rabbi A. P. Friedman (Compass Books, 2005) where this point is elaborated upon.

The association between acting out and “*emunah* issues”

Chazal speak about the association between sexual acting out and *emunah* issues (e.g., Sanhedrin 63b). I would like to briefly touch upon a psychological aspect of this association that I have encountered in my clinical work. A *frum* person who is acting out sexually (or in any other serious manner) will experience intense guilt and profound shame. He will see himself as worthless and deserving of severe punishment, especially if his parents responded to his childhood misbehaviors with intense criticism and/or rejection. This will drive him to intensify his efforts at controlling his behavior. Unfortunately, these efforts will most often turn out to be ineffective since the effort involves suppression due to terror as opposed to change resulting from growth.¹⁶ The failure to change intensifies the self-loathing and terror of retribution. At some point the person will develop a strong resentment toward *Hashem/Yiddishkiet* for putting him into this untenable situation and so he becomes alienated from *Yiddishkeit*. Or as one young man put it: ׀It¸ not that you don¸ believe in G-D, it¸ just that you don¸ want anything to do with Him. Just like I don¸ want anything to do with my [abusive] father even though I¸m well aware that he exists!¸

The Internet

Much has been written in the Orthodox press regarding Internet addiction, especially in regards to pornography. Many horror stories have been recounted of supposedly well adjusted teens who, after a chance encounter with Internet pornography, became swept up in its web and developed serious emotional and/or behavioral problems as a result. It is often stated or implied that the vast majority of teens who have ¸gone off the *derech¸* have done so primarily as a result of exposure to the Internet. This is a commonly held belief by most people in our community, even among many mental health professionals. The obvious question is; if the exposure to the outside culture is the primary culprit, why are there just as many rebellious teens in the very insular communities as there are in the more ¸modern¸ ones. This question is never addressed.

I want to make it clear that I am well aware of the dangers to one¸s spirituality that can result from exposure to the seamier side of the Internet and other ¸cultural¸ media. But I believe we are misleading parents when we imply that it is this exposure that is the main (if not only) cause of teen rebelliousness and other emotional disorders. Why should parents struggle to improve their parenting skills and resolve their own emotional issues so that they can be better parents if they are told that the parent-child relationship is not a major factor in success in parenting?

I came across a superb article on the dangers of the Internet [available at: www.aish.com/societywork/society/escaping_the_cyber-slums.asp] written by Rabbi Leib Kelemen (from Neve Yerushalayim; author of *To Kindle a Soul*). This article is an extensive and in-depth review of the research on the subject. It is comprehensive and well balanced. After methodically documenting all the dangers associated with the Internet, Rabbi Kelemen notes (under the heading of ¸The necessity of identifying risk factors¸):

¹⁶ See *Michtav MeEliyahu*, Vol. 1, p. 235 where he compares the repression of a strong impulse to pressing on a spring where the harder you press the stronger it presses back.

Ultimately, restricting Internet access is a necessary but insufficient solution¹⁷. What is needed is healing the personality weaknesses that virtually guarantee some individuals will fall victim to Internet temptations. *Studies show that those most likely to get into trouble are not deterred by limits on Internet access*¹⁸. Therefore, a key challenge to parents and educators is identifying the risk factors¹⁹. Researchers describe *four pre-existing conditions that put an individual at high risk for getting into trouble on the Internet. They are lack of family bonds; low self-esteem; inability to express opinions and questions; and inability to socialize.* [Emphasis added]

This is a good example of utilizing an in-depth psychological perspective to better understand a problem affecting the community at large. Based on this understanding Rabbi Kelemen is able to give parents cogent advice rather than just state the obvious, more superficial advice of limiting or supervising children's access to the Internet.

Rabbi Kelemen's article was subsequently printed in a prominent Orthodox publication. Unfortunately, the section on identifying personality risk factors was omitted from this printed version of the article. The mistaken impression a reader of the printed article would be left with is that the danger is totally external, and that the **only** defense is protection from the outside world. Is it any wonder that parents who are very careful to protect their children from the outside environment, but neglect the family environment are then shocked when their child goes off the *derech r"l*. Because they did everything that they were told to do in order to avoid such tragedies, to no avail, the only possible conclusion is that *it can happen to anybody*.²⁰ In their minds, therefore, there is nothing one can do to reduce the risk other than to protect their family from **external** influences.

In conclusion, to be successful in overcoming addictions to sexual acting out, it is important to understand the psychological factors that can transform a *normal yetzer hara* into an addiction.¹⁷ Even more importantly, is the role such an understanding could play in prevention. When children are raised to be emotionally healthy they are spared from dealing with *yetzer haras* beyond the normal range.

¹⁷ See *Michtav MeEliyahu*, Vol. 1, p. 262, and *Matnas Chaim* (Rav Matisyohu Salomon), *Maamorim*, Vol. 1, p. 229, on the importance of understanding the underlying vulnerabilities when fighting the *yetzer hara*.

Addendum

A colleague who read this article informed me that the *halachic* authority of a clinic run under *charedi* auspices in a *frum* community won't permit the clinic to accept people with sexual perversions/addictions because, in his opinion, they are not a genetic disease but rather a "*yetzer ha'ra*" issue/problem and he feels people use their emotional problem/addiction as an **excuse** to act out.

I responded that it seems to me that the mental health profession has created this problem by "explaining" almost all emotional disorders - including all sorts of addictions - as being primarily genetic/biological in nature which is both inaccurate and not particularly believable (at least in regards to sexual addictions) - so lay people and *rabbonim* write us off as frauds and conclude that it must be simply a *yetzer ha'ra* problem. Rather than creating a false dichotomy that addictions (and other emotional disorders) are either biological and out of the patient's control or that it's purely a choice, we would be both more truthful and more believable if we explained that, in addictions, the *yetzer ha'ra* is hijacking a psychological problem, which can also make it extraordinary difficult to control without psychological help.¹⁸

Contemporary therapists go to great lengths to avoid relating pathological behaviors to the patient's early history, they, therefore, have to describe addictions as if they are "pseudo-diseases" with some mysterious, unexplained biological cause. Even when there is a history of prolonged emotional trauma, etc. there is a fanatic resistance to relating the patient's symptoms (addiction, anxiety etc.) to this past (and often present as well) history.¹⁹ Many *rabbonim* have a gut feeling that this explanation for addiction doesn't ring true and therefore they are forced to conclude that it is merely an excuse.

This brings to mind an article that a mental health professional in the *frum* community wrote years ago encouraging alcoholics not to be embarrassed to seek help because alcoholism it is a genetic/biological disease similar to diabetes etc. I wrote in protesting that the implication is that if it is a psychological problem (e.g., a result of abuse etc.) then one **should** be embarrassed.

¹⁸ See my article on "How Free is Free Will" which discusses how psychological factors can impact on the level of free will. A vivid example of the type of psychological issues that impact on sexual acting out is provided in the *sefer Keser Rosh* (in the back of the *Siddur Ha'Gra*):

...["] ["] - (' ') (מרבי חיים מוואלאזין)
... ["]
... (של"ה הקדוש):
...
... " : של"ה
... ["] ;
... " " יסוד יוסף

¹⁹ I documented this avoidance in a series of articles published in *Nefesh News* a few years ago (see my article "Chemical Imbalance or Problems in Living"). A recent (and sad to say, not especially extreme) example of this "biological bias" was related to me by a patient whose wife was referred to a very reputable CBT therapist for treatment of severe anxiety. The patient had shared with his wife how his therapy had helped him understand the connection between his father's over-controlling and very critical parenting style and his anxiety symptoms. His wife attempted to relate her own experiences with controlling and critical parents to her therapist. The therapist, however, told her that although she was sympathetic, her experiences with her parents weren't relevant to the treatment, since anxiety is caused by inherited genetic factors so it would be a shame to waste precious therapy time discussing irrelevant issues!

Since most alcoholics feel in their gut that they are not suffering from a medical disorder they conclude that they need to feel shame! Would it not make more sense to say that people should not feel embarrassed to get help for psychological problems, since they most often have their roots in childhood experiences over which they had little if any control. Even in situations where the patient may bear partial responsibility for his situation, we need to help him appreciate the fact that he is striving to correct his situation. Certainly, one should not feel shame for striving to do *teshuvah!*²⁰

²⁰ It is especially unfortunate that clinicians promulgate the "brain disorder" myth as an attempt to decrease the stigma of emotional disorders, since research clearly indicates that this approach actually increase stigmatisation! As Read and Harré summarized this issue ("The role of biological and genetic beliefs in the stigmatisation of mental patients" *Journal of Mental Health*, 2001, Vol. 10, 223-235): "Research indicates that the mental illness is an illness like any other" approach to destigmatisation has failed to improve attitudes. This study confirmed previous findings (contrary to the assumptions on which most destigmatisation programs are based) that biological and genetic causal beliefs are related to negative attitudes, including perceptions that mental patients are dangerous, antisocial and unpredictable" [p. 223].