

Nondual Psychotherapy and Second Stage Sexual Addictions Recovery: Transforming “Master of the Universe” Narcissism into Nondual Being

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Abstract This article describes the process of working through the “dry drunk” second stage of sexual addiction recovery through transforming the narcissistic “Master of the Universe” personality into the experience of nondual being using the Almas Diamond Approach of self-realization. The Diamond Approach is a transpersonal informed psychology synthesizing western psychology with eastern spiritual wisdom where self-realization is experienced as an awakened nondual presence at the core of human consciousness. Narcissism is the barrier to this realization. The narcissistic personality structure found within the sex addict if not worked through in recovery does not allow the person to see the bottom of sexual addiction and move into emotional sobriety in a second phase of recovery. Accepting the experience of dissolving the narcissistic separate self and embracing nondual being opens one up to the absolute ordinariness of pure awareness; the true nature of who and what we are. A case study is used to illustrate the usefulness of Almas’ Diamond Approach in transforming the narcissism of a client who had been immobilized in the second phase of sexual addiction recovery for 4 years.

Keywords Second stage recovery · Transpersonal psychology · Narcissism · Nondual · Almas

Beyond Limited Recovery from Sexual Addiction

Therapists working in the sexual addiction field have been preoccupied with the problem of facilitating long term recovery. There is a range of traditional recovery approaches specific to sex addiction including a disease model of recovery (Jellinek 1960; Wilson-Schaefer 1990), cognitive-behavioral therapies (CBT) (Young 2007), healing through eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) (Cox and Howard 2007) and emotionally focused therapy (EFT) (Reid and Woolley 2006), to name a few. However, the problem remains on

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how to not only facilitate recovery and abstinence from sexually acting out in the short term, but also how to facilitate long term recovery and movement towards wholeness. Limited recovery does not address the underlying psychological factors that perpetuate addiction such as chronic dependence on others, fear of pain, helplessness, and mindlessness and may instead replicate these factors (Tessina 1991). In response to this issue, Bewley (1993, 1995) suggested that a “meta-recovery” model is needed which allows people to move beyond perceived limitations in recovery, and shift to more of an “internal locus of control” and correspondingly let go of norms and rules that no longer fit their experience. Similarly, Kasl (1992) called for a second phase of recovery beyond the conventional abstinence preoccupation and recommended a shift in focus from survival to growth.

In terms of long term growth and recovery, Manley (1995) envisioned recovery from sexual addiction and co-sexual addiction as moving through three progressive stages, beginning with the addictive/victim, progressing to the wounded survivor, and arriving at the sexual thriver to claim “healthy sexuality.” Additionally, Earle et al. (1998) advocated for a spiritual journey as being integral to recovery, a process in which the recovering individual works on his or her relationships with self, a significant other, children, family of origin, friends, society and the Divine. Currently, Carnes’ (1983, 1991, 1997, 2010) task-centered approach is considered the bench mark in the treatment of sex addiction over the long term. It focuses on uncovering and reframing negative beliefs about one’s self and repairing damaged relationships. There are 30 different tasks to complete over a 5 year stage-like recovery process. The tasks begin with what to expect in the first year of recovery, including dealing with withdrawal symptoms, breaking isolation and developing a support network and are followed by progression into the areas of self-repair, finding meaningful work and repairing broken relationships in the growth stages of the fourth and fifth year.

Like the abstinence focus of stage one substance abuse recovery, stage one in sexual addiction recovery focuses on behaviorally stopping acting out sexually. Just because a person has stopped acting out does not mean underlying emotional issues that perpetuate addictions such as chronic dependence on others, fear of pain, helplessness, hopelessness, self-abandonment, and mindlessness have been worked out (Nixon 2001; Tessina 1991). Larsen (1985) summarized that in initial phase of recovery the central question has not been asked “Why did we have all that pain in the first place?” (p. 14). The pain underlying the addiction must be dealt with in the second phase.

The “Dry Drunk” Second Phase of Sexual Addiction Recovery

It is evident that people get “stuck” in their recovery making the transition from short term abstinence and focus on addictive behaviors to long term holistic recovery. In substance abuse recovery, Larsen (1985) used the term “dry drunks” to describe people in recovery from substance abuse who may have stopped drinking but still have not dealt with the underlying emotional issues of their addiction. Kurtz (1982) described the precarious disposition of the dry drunk as one who was a “‘merely dry’ former obsessive-compulsive drinker who ‘put the cork in the bottle’ yet continued to ‘think alcoholically’: i.e., to entertain grandiose plans and expectations, to nurse feelings of resentment, etc.” (p.123). The problem with this disposition is that, having overcome active alcoholism, the person has lost any perception of “bottom” which could lead to a surrender experience and true sobriety.

Taking this proposition of the dry drunk who has not found the “bottom,” it is clear how this applies to sexual addiction recovery. The sexual addict in recovery who has not hit

bottom, to use Kurtz's words above, has not yet become emotionally sober as he or she can still be caught in addictive thinking patterns of entertaining grandiose plans and expectations, and nursing feelings of resentment. Solberg (1983) described the obvious traits of stalled recovery which apply as well to sexual addiction recovery as being qualities of grandiosity, judgmentalism, intolerance, impulsivity, indecisiveness, dishonesty, control, and self-centeredness. The person is still caught in narcissistic patterns of feeling special, and entitled, with all the underlying emotional issues of inadequacy and false core drivers of not being good enough (Wolinsky 1999). Carnes (1983, 1991, 2010) recognized the particularly narcissistic nature of such a person caught in sexual addiction and limited recovery and who has not hit bottom as playing out "The Master of the Universe" role. We will now turn to more fully explore this addictive personality style.

Sexual Addiction and the Master of the Universe

Carnes (1983) describes sex addiction as a never ending psychological and physical "itch" in need of constant relief:

Sexual addiction has been described as "the athlete's foot of the mind". It never goes away. It always is asking to be scratched, promising relief. To scratch, however, is to cause pain and to intensify the itch. The "itch" is created in part by the rationalizations, lies, and beliefs about themselves carried deep within the sexual addict. (p. vii)

Searing pain and shame of living a lie, manipulation and deceit, shattered relationships, contracting disease, violence, inauthentic connections with others and the world, and profound isolation are all too common themes in a sex addict's life (Carnes 1991, 2010; Peele and Brodsky 1975; Schneider and Schneider 1991; Wilson-Schaefer 1990). Pursuit of pleasure, in its various forms, and avoidance of pain creates an endlessly swinging pendulum of pain and suffering. Fuel for the addictive lifestyle is found in the river of deception, manipulation, conning, exploitation of others, and attempts at escape from pain (Carnes 1983, 1991, 2010; Griffin-Shelley 1997; Guigliamo 2003; Jampolsky 2008; Laaser 2004; Peele, and Brodsky 1975). To relieve the itch and address the addiction, deconstructing the lies and defensive postures that keep the addictive process alive is crucial.

Carnes (1991) emphasized the narcissistic nature of the sexualized addictive personality by calling it the "Master of the Universe":

The Master of the Universe theme emerges in addict's lives in many different ways. But constant is the rationale that all is justified because of the addict's uniqueness, specialness, or superiority. In their addiction, they are set apart from others, either made of "the right stuff" or having some special right or need others don't have. Being out of control requires that you have no limits. Overextension, denial, sexual acting out, trouble, and unmanageability mingle in the addicts who live on the edge. (p. 184)

Correspondingly, Carnes (1991) pointed to the Greek playwrights' admonitions about the prideful hero. The hero was often tragically characterized by hubris, "the excessive pridefulness" of elevating one's self up over others and making self into a god, and as Carnes (1991) explained, "Ignoring their own human limits was always the undoing of the Greek heroes. It is the undoing of addicts as well" (p. 184).

This shoring up one's sense of specialness as a central motivation in the sex addict's life is revealed in Guigliamo's (2006) qualitative research study of 14 self-identified male sex addicts. Guigliamo found that, with a majority of these research participants, habitual sex became a way of self-regulating one's narcissistic needs. He explained:

Nine of the men described a need to be seen, reflected, or mirrored, and to achieve the feeling of being wanted, desirable, alive, or powerful. The habitual sexualization of others to see themselves admiringly reflected in the other's eyes seemed to restore these informant's narcissistic supplies. To compensate for their lack of inner resources and to supplement self-esteem, sexual conquests and external validation were employed to meet emotional and psychological needs. (p. 365)

The resulting tragedy is that the addict's whole identity is dependent upon being validated externally through sexual conquests and he or she can never fully be true to self.

Related to this, is the classic narcissistic trait of justification and rationalization of one's behavior utilized by the "master of the universe." The 'master' will give the impression that change is possible but will ultimately defend against their actions when exposure and vulnerability become immanent (Carnes 1983, 1991).

Taking the narcissistic traits of the sexual addict into consideration, the next section describes the need to move beyond more traditional approaches to recovery and instead integrate forms of healing that work with one's entire consciousness; from body and mind to the dimension of spirit providing movement into a second phase of recovery. From this perspective, sex addiction is seen as a counterfeit quest for wholeness; where a false sense of completeness and specialness is found in the sexual conquest and release process. Fuel for the addictive personality is not only found in manipulation and escape from pain, but also much deeper, in the belief of a separate individual existence and its accompanying narcissism and grandiosity (Therault 2010). All of this, which fuels the "Master of the Universe", needs to be deconstructed in recovery. While sexual acting out behaviours will be curbed in the first phase of recovery, it is essential that the underlying narcissistic ways of the addict are addressed and worked through in a further and second recovery phase. As clients move into this stage, the solution for recovery is a spiritual one. This involves facilitating the falling way of narcissism and falling into true being, so that a true surrender in recovery can happen. The whole "Master of the Universe" way of being must be brought into awareness and worked through.

Transpersonal Psychology Approaches

To work on the narcissistic aspect of the person in sexual addiction recovery, a turn to transpersonal psychology is required as this field of psychology focuses on the mindfulness awareness of the problematic nature of the separate self narcissistic ego. Transpersonal psychology has been preoccupied, for over 40 years, with the problem of moving individuals beyond a personal egoic existence to fully embrace what Maslow (1968, 1971) described as the further reaches of human nature. As a result of the growth of transpersonal psychology, there now exists a large community of transpersonally informed psychologists and therapists who recognize a deeper drive existing within the addictive personality. Sex addiction is viewed as being more than merely a "disease" or some form of "maladaptive behavior," where one identifies as being in recovery for the rest of their life. Instead, addiction is seen as a spiritual crisis; a soul sickness, where one's being is split in the pursuit of something external to self. The invitation is to awaken to our true nature. This

implies a true surrender of seeing through and letting go of the separate self grasping at one's ego identity and pattern of external seeking, and an acceptance of the vast interconnected consciousness which connects all beings and resolves the dualistic crisis (Ash 1993; Bien 2002; Chopra 1997; Grof 1993; Jampolsky 2008; May 1991; Nixon 2001; Small 1991; Theriault 2010).

Cortwright (1997) simply defined transpersonal psychology as “the melding of the wisdom of the world's spiritual traditions with the learning of modern psychology” (p.8); where the self is still very much the focus, “but by moving across traditional personal psychology to the larger spiritual context, the individual self moves out of its existential vacuum into a wider dimension to which the world's spiritual teachings point” (p. 10). The transpersonal perspective assumes that our essential nature is spiritual, consciousness is multi-dimensional, and humans have valid urges towards spiritual seeking, expressed as a search for wholeness, through deepening individual, social, and transcendent awareness. As well, it is assumed that contacting a deeper source of wisdom and guidance within is both possible and helpful to growth, and that altered states of consciousness can be an aid to healing, and help make our life and actions more meaningful (Cortwright 1997).

Extensive work has now been done in the area of transpersonal psychology in Western psychology with the development of Ken Wilber's Spectrum of Consciousness approach, Michael Washburn's recent innovation centered on Jung's Analytical psychology, A.H. Almaas' Diamond Approach, Robert Assagioli's Psychosynthesis, Stanislav Grof's Holotropic Therapy, as well as existential, psychoanalytic and body-centered transpersonal approaches (Almaas 2001, 2004; Assagioli 1973; Cortwright 1997; Grof 1985, 1988; Hixon 1978; Maslow 1968, 1971; Walsh and Vaughan 1980, 1993; Washburn 1988, 1994).

Wilber (1977, 1986, 1990, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2006) has developed a spectrum of consciousness developmental model which incorporates both conventional psychology and contemplative traditions. What is exciting about the Wilber model is that while it was not explicitly developed for addictions, it offers an exciting opportunity to work with underlying issues during recovery from addictions issues, and moves the client into a second stage of recovery. Wilber's (1977, 1986, 1990) spectrum of consciousness model mapped out ten principal stages of the psyche in a developmental, structural, holistic, systems oriented format. Wilber (1986) synthesized the initial six stages from cognitive, ego, moral, and object relations lines of development of conventional psychology represented by such theorists as Piaget (1977); Loevinger (1976), and Kohlberg (1981), and the final four transpersonal stages from Eastern and Western sources of contemplative development such as Mahayana, Vedanta, Sufi, Kabbalah, Christian mysticism, Yoga, Aurobindo, and Zen.

The final four stages of psycho-spiritual development outlined by Wilber (1986) are particularly important for the approach contemplated in this article, which entails helping the person now in recovery to move beyond their characteristic egoic narcissism. The first stage beyond the mind-body integration of the existential level and the seventh overall is the “psychic.” This stage symbolizes the level of the “yogis” (Wilber 1986). The next transpersonal stage, and eighth overall, is the “subtle” and is referred to as the level of the “saints” (Wilber 1986). Here, subtle sounds, audible illuminations, and transcendent insight and absorption can be experienced. The following stage is the “causal.” This level of the “sages” is the realization of the unmanifest source or transcendental ground of all the lesser structures (Wilber 1986).

Losing one's attachment to the separate self and integrating all levels of existence leads to the final stage of “non-dual” living (Wilber 1986). The final stage is the realization of the non-separateness of form and formlessness, “the center of formlessness is shown to be not

other than the entire world of form” (Wilber 1990, p.99). The sense of the separate self ego dissolves and the extraordinary and the ordinary, the supernatural and the mundane are precisely one and the same. In this level of complete integration of formlessness and form, as well as all prior levels as they arise, the individual is now able to enjoy the ‘suchness’ of all levels and let go of attachment to manifest existence (Wilber 1986). It is here that the need to exist as a separate and special identity is overcome. In addition, a no-mind state is embraced in which the need to know, and belief in stories and concepts is burned through. At this level, the addiction to self and to mind is let go of (Adyashanti 2008). As will be discussed later in the paper, it is the final resting place for an addict in recovery who wants to take the journey all the way home (Almaas 2004).

While Wilber’s model is very informative in providing an overall map of consciousness development, Almaas’ (2001) transpersonal model of facilitating a transformation of narcissism and ego death is particularly relevant as it applies to the sexual addict in recovery who is still caught up in playing out the “Master of the Universe” script. Almaas’ model has exciting implications for long term recovery because it provides a means by which typical issues such as ego preoccupation and psychic inflation can be worked through in the counselling process. Embracing the pivotal steps of the transformation of narcissism, this model includes such themes as discovering the empty shell and fakeness, becoming aware of the narcissistic wound, working through the great betrayal, narcissistic rage, the great chasm, discovering a place of loving beingness, and the realization of the essential identity. With its primary focus on moving away from reliance on the false self and relaxing into essence, this model highlights many of the developmental issues of long term recovery. Further, Almaas’ experiential phenomenological approach offers an invitation and provides a process to assist the individual embrace nondual being. In the next section, a discussion of the relevance of nondual being itself will be considered as an answer to the addictive lifestyle. This will be followed by the use of a case study to more fully explore this experiential pathway to nondual being as powerful second stage of recovery for sexual addiction.

Nondual Being

Prendergast (2003) pointed out that the work of Wilber (1986) and other integral transpersonal psychologists mapped out nondual awareness as a rarified condition at the pinnacle of self-realization. Prendergast felt this was surprisingly no longer true. A new generation of spiritual seekers, clinicians and teachers have begun to explore nondual awareness as the understanding and direct experience of fundamental consciousness that underlies the apparent distinction between perceiver and perceived. Those with a nondual orientation simply rest in presence. Prendergast explained:

Their locus of identity is either resting in or moving toward unconditioned awareness, or Presence. The result is the emergence of a natural simplicity, transparency, clarity, and warm acceptance of whatever arises within themselves and their clients. Since they increasingly do not take themselves as some “thing,” they also do not take their clients as objects separate from themselves. They understand that there is no separate mirror and someone mirrored; there is only mirroring. (p. 3)

Prendergast (2003) described that it is not so much that a nondual oriented person integrates being but rather is absorbed by it. Presence is enhanced, the effects of which can be contagious, “When we are in the Presence of an individual who has awakened from the

dream of ‘me’, we can sense an unpretentiousness, lucidity, transparency, joy, and ease of being” (Prendergast 2003, p. 5).

Nondual awakening is the realization that one does not exist as a separate solid self, but rather, who and what we essentially are, is that silent stillness in which all forms of existence arise and fall (Theriatult 2005). Awakening has also been referred to as emptiness, Essential Identity, true nature, the void, awareness and self-realization in different spiritual traditions (Adyashanti 2008; Almaas 2004; Fenner 2007; Wilber 1986).

While traditional schools of psychology focus on self-repair, the nondual transpersonal psychology focus is on unveiling the illusionary nature of the separate self and facilitating movement towards an awakened life free from duality (Almaas 2004; Epstein 2007; Prendergast 2003; Theriatult 2010; Wilber 1986). Nondual awareness refers to what is formless and exists outside of time and space, thus adding a vertical dimension. Through a radical process of self inquiry, what is normally assumed as the sense of individual separate existence is exposed, revealing the timeless nondual no-self nature of existence as Wilber (1986) explained:

Passing fully through the state of cessation or unmanifest casual absorption, consciousness is said finally to reawaken to its prior and eternal abode as nondual Spirit, radiant and all pervading, one and many, only and all—the complete integration and identity of manifest form with the unmanifest Formless... Strictly speaking, the ultimate is not one level among others, but the reality, condition, or suchness of all levels. (p. 74)

It is here, in the depths of silence and absolute awareness, that the whole structure of subject-object dualism collapses revealing reality as it is before the infringement of mental conceptualization (Nixon 2010; Theriatult 2005). Fundamentally, the wisdom found in nondual realization is freedom from the ego self, and total relaxation into pure being.

Nondual realization is the sudden awakening out of the dream world of individuality to life as it presents itself. Awakening is a shift from identifying with the illusionary self to unconditional presence as such (Nixon 2010; Theriatult 2005). The dualistic notion between an independent subject “here” experiencing another independent object “out there” falls apart. They are seen as happening all at once: the perceiver, the perceived and the perceiving are all one movement (Krishnamurti 1954).

Here, there is no separate sense of “me” to define, support or protect. Furthermore, it is recognized that this experience of no self can not be enhanced in any way for there is nothing more or less that it needs. In fact, it is not an experience per se, but the ground from which all experiences arise and subside (Theriatult 2005). The need for any improvement would only usher one back into the world of dualism and further away from the truth of one’s identity (Balsekar 1989). It is clear that no effort or technique can lead to embracing nondual being, as it is a spontaneous seeing of what is.

The Master of the Universe’s Counterfeit Quest for Wholeness

The habitual self-destructive behaviors and repetitive forms of addictive seeking are seen as a deep denial of the present moment and an escape from the threat of non-being (Firman and Gila 1997; Nixon 2001; Theriatult 2010; Tolle 1997). Firman and Gila (1997) described addictions as comprised of desperate strategies accumulated over a life-time used to avoid the terror of non-existence. Nixon (2001) called the addictive pursuit a “counterfeit quest towards wholeness” where the eternal present moment is forsaken for a temporary experience in time.

Similarly then, sex addiction can be described as a distorted acting out towards wholeness where the yearning for a physical charge, sexual release and sense of relief run rampant in a sex addict's life. The high-arousal states of sexual energy can provide a pseudo sense of power and omnipotence (Therault 2010). The mirroring in the sexual encounter crystallizes a false sense of uniqueness and specialness (Guigliamo 2006). Without the sexual mirroring the underlying pain and threat of non-being emerges into awareness, whereby the automatic reaction is to reengage in the acting out behavior. This becomes a vicious loop. Awareness when fixated on sexual desire creates a deep split in one's being (Wolinsky 1999).

Here, the immediacy of the moment is lost and the availability to share in a healthy sexual relationship goes forsaken. Liberating awareness from such fixations is the key to transformation (Wolinsky 1999).

Appreciating the addict's dilemma then, Chopra (1997) recognizes a sex addict as having embarked on a very important but initially misguided quest:

In my view, a person who has never felt the pull of addictive behavior is someone who has not taken the first faltering step toward discovering the true meaning of Spirit. Perhaps addiction is nothing to be proud of, but it does represent an aspiration toward a higher level of experience. And although that aspiration cannot ultimately be fulfilled by chemicals or compulsive behaviors, the very attempt suggest the presence of a genuinely spiritual nature. (p. 5)

Following Chopra's point, the transformation from sex addiction is not limited to correcting ones behavior or reconstructing a healthier more positive sense of self but in dismantling or seeing through the illusionary nature of the egoic narcissistic self that drives the addiction and awakening to one's spiritual nature. On the periphery of experience, the various strategic forms of manipulation and deception keep the addictive personality alive, and yet, when confronted and deconstructed, what one has taken as the self is seen to be a false pretense all along (Therault 2010; Wolinsky 1999).

The felt sense of individuality is made up of a collection of thoughts, beliefs, and memories, held together through fixated awareness. The paradox is that one comes to believe they exist as a separate individual but the moment awareness turns in on itself to locate this so-called separate self there is none to be found (Fenner 2007; Wolinsky 1999).

The master of the universe personality can't tolerate the threat to its own existence and so avoids this realization at all costs. And yet, the belief in separation leaves one bound up in confusion and tension always having to defend itself against the unpredictable rhythms of existence. The remedy is to embrace the threat of non-being from a place of non-judgmental awareness, which, can act as a portal, if you will, to nondual being where the dance of paradoxical living arises and falls in unconditioned awareness (Fenner 2007; Therault 2010; Wolinsky 1999).

Identification with the mind, the "I" thought, is seen as the original seed of misery and suffering. This is a central underpinning of nondual transpersonal psychology. The "I" thought grasps at external seeking to justify and bolster its existence. It is here that Almaas's (2001) transformation of narcissism approach can be used. For the sexual addict in recovery, still caught in the "Master of the Universe" script, the grasping onto specialness needs to be dissolved in the intensity of beingness in the present moment. Realizing our true nature is to re-orient awareness back to the present moment, to our original ordinary condition of simple abiding presence (Almaas 2008; Therault 2010; Tolle 1997).

The need to be somebody, to be mirrored in a special way, to be seen and appreciated is a defense against being ordinary or nothing at all. Deep within the core of one's being is a vast

empty spaciousness untainted by the toxic ingestion of addictive behaviors (Theriault 2010). In this spaciousness, there is an absence of the egoic self. The problem is that this absence is perceived as a lack, a death in fact, and therefore, an experience to be avoided at all costs. The self will defend against its own death in many ways and so being extraordinary sets one endlessly adrift to the shores of somebodiness as Osho (2001) explained:

Every mind is seeking some extraordinariness. That is what the ego is: always trying to be somebody in particular, always afraid of being nobody, always afraid of emptiness, always trying to fill the inner void by anything and everything. Every human being is seeking extraordinariness—and that creates misery. (p. 35)

What is called for here is radically different; a letting go of egoic self, and a fall into the vast chasm of being in which no independent egoic “I” exists. This is a process of moving to abide in absolute ordinariness is the cessation of all self-recognition. As Almaas (2004) described:

To recognize the absolute as the ultimate ground of all objects and phenomena is to perceive their transparency, insubstantiality, and lack of ultimate being. Instead of opaqueness we experience a transparent expanse, spacious and open. Instead of substantiality we experience a lightness, a freedom, a total absence of heaviness. Joy is released and contentment fills the heart (p. 391).

To relax in the ordinariness of our absolute condition requires a leap of faith into the vast mystery of being (Almaas 1987). This condition is inherently available to all human beings in the immediacy of the moment. However, the veils of narcissism obscure our true nature, and so, for an individual willing to move beyond the personality of a sex addict, deconstructing the master of the universe is critical.

We will now turn our attention to a case study to illustrate how Almaas’ (2001) transformation of narcissism approach can be used to facilitate the transformational journey of a sex addict in recovery but who is still caught in the pattern of being the “Master of the Universe.”

A Case Study Utilizing Almaas’ Transformation of Narcissism Approach

In our work with people in recovery from sex addiction both in addictions agency and private practice settings, both authors have noticed that the clients can typically manage the first year of the not sexually acting out phase. Immediate changes in their lives happen as they are no longer “banging” their head against the wall through acting out (Carnes 1991). But we have noticed as they move into second and third years of recovery, there is a disturbing trend of people stalling out at this stage. Here, Carnes (1991) observed significant rebuilding should start to happen in areas of finances, stress management, spirituality, self-image, career status and friendships. However, clinical observations indicate that for a great number of people in sexual addictions recovery who have stopped the behaviours of acting, the deconstruction of the “Master of the Universe” personality has not fully taken place. This leaves them in a state of limbo in their recovery.

As therapists, both authors have experienced tremendous success in using Almaas’ Diamond Approach; a transpersonal informed psychology that offers a real possibility of transforming the narcissistic quality of the master of the universe into self-realization. This approach synthesises the schools of modern depth psychology with that of the spiritual domains of human consciousness (Almaas 1986, 1987, 1988, 2001, 2004, 2008). It

recognizes self-realization as the ultimate endeavour of all sentient beings; the pinnacle of human consciousness, where the personal and impersonal aspects of consciousness are fully realized and the sense of individual self-hood is exposed as illusionary in nature (Almaas 2004) and is powerful framework for promoting transformation of the sex addict's narcissistic personality.

The Diamond Approach identifies narcissism as the main barrier to self-realization and offers a working through process of undercutting this barrier through profound self-enquiry (Almaas 2001). Eighteen steps of transformation are identified in an unfolding stage-like process, where each step represents a significant experience of the dissolution of one's personality (Almaas 2001). For the purposes of this article, the process is condensed down to six essential steps for deconstructing the narcissistic identity of a sex addict. They include: 1) fakeness and the empty shell, 2) the narcissistic wound and rage, 3) the great betrayal 4) ego activity, 5) the fall into the black chasm of being, and 6) realization of essential identity. Each one of these steps will be illustrated in the following case study which is taken from the clinical practice of the first author.

Jess (a pseudonym), now in his mid-thirties, had been down a long and twisted 10 year road of internet pornography, massage parlors, escort agencies and prostitutes. This life trajectory was especially perplexing for him as he had been trained as a social worker. Subsequent to this he had switched careers and completed a film studies degree but after job offers in the film industry dried up, he was employed as a forklift driver at a plant. Jess had been in recovery from sex addiction for 4 years, and was a regular attendee of a SA group in his town of residence. In our first session he complained to me that even after 4 years he was still "white knuckling" it, in that he still had lots of cravings, and even occasional relapses. It appeared to me that, in many ways, he seemed to be caught in a stalled second stage of recovery, the typical "dry drunk" phase, but in his case sexual addiction. He had stopped sexually acting out behavior except for periodical slips into internet pornography. However, his recovery had not progressed for years. Jess seemed perplexed by this as he has been to many counsellors, and had been a regular attendee of SA groups, and even recently was a charter member of a new group. Additionally, over the years, he had not just worked on stopping his acting out, but he had also dealt with issues of trauma, and being more connected with his feelings. Yet, here he was looking across the counselling room at me, claiming frustration at how stuck he was.

Fakeness and the Empty Shell

In our first session after processing his story, I proposed to Jess that maybe the reason why he was stuck is that he had not really worked on the central underlying issue of his sexual addiction, which was his underlying narcissism. Giving him a handout from one of Almaas' books, I suggested that we begin working on aspects of this issue to see if it fit for him.

Exposing the empty shell of the sex addict is a critical first step in awakening to one's true nature. As discussed earlier, the lies, deceit, manipulation and control are just some aspects that keep the master of the universe personality in place (Carnes 1991). This personality structure is likened to that of an empty shell because without the sexualized mirroring it begins to thin out and dissolve (Theriault 2010). When the patterns of manipulating the other for sexual conquest and validation are addressed, the empty shell and fakeness are exposed. Almaas explained (2001):

He begins to realize that what he has been taking to be himself is actually a shell, devoid of any substantial reality or inherent richness.... The empty shell feels

impoverished, insubstantial, and false. He feels hollow and vacant, as if his body has become a shell of tension with its insides sucked out of it. (pp. 303–304)

I invited Jess to look at his whole pattern of sexualized acting out including all of his hidden intense sexual fantasies. As we processed both his behaviour and sexual fantasies, it was clear that both were driven by a whole pattern of yearning for specialness and the idea of being a god, like the “Master of the Universe.” He felt like people should recognize how special and wonderful he was, and mirror back to him that he was the special one, and have anything he wanted sexually.

I asked Jess how long he has been special, and he said “Since I was a little boy. My family thought I was a little Jesus.” I asked him to think of himself going to a convention in which there were thousands of people like him who thought they were spiritually special, and that they wanted to get their sexual desires fulfilled. I laughed out loud with Jess and said, “There must be hundreds of thousands maybe millions of people like that. How ordinary is that?”

Jess sat there stunned. He could actually see what I had said. It was an intense realization. His “Master of the Universe” gig had been exposed. Funny, it was actually a very ordinary gig, nothing special at all. I invited Jess not to defend against this experience but to allow it in its entirety. When one ceases to resurrect the empty shell through continued acting out or fantasizing about one’s specialness, there is an opportunity to fall deeper into being. Firstly though, the narcissistic wound with its rage has to be fully exposed and worked through, which is illustrated in the next section.

The Narcissistic Wound and Rage

As the empty shell is exposed, an underlying pain begins to emerge; that of the narcissistic wound. The pain here can be intense, “The slightest indication of not being seen will evoke deep pain, intolerable anguish, endless tears about a bottomless grief. When investigated, rather than reacted to, this hurt reveals an emotional wound of staggering depth and profundity” (Almaas 2001, p. 310). Here, people have to actually confront the constricted situation from a beingness perspective. It must be seen for the first time that they have been living off of the mirroring from others to fuel their personality and specialness, and now as that other validation is taken away along with their so-called “specialness”, they are confronted with their own gaping narcissistic wound.

The wound, however, is not so much about having lost the support of being mirrored from the outside world, but more from having lost contact with one’s own essential nature (Almaas 2001). One sees, perhaps shockingly, just how much of their life energy had been spent in supporting an illusion. This is a crisis of being which accounts for one of the many reasons why numerous addicts typically relapse early in recovery (Carnes 1991). As the sex addict disengages from sexual mirroring, this spiritual crisis can be intolerable. The inherent rage is a reaction to the wound and can be seen in the addict who self-sabotages the recovery process through projection and blame. Attempting to bypass this wound simply prolongs the suffering. The only remedy is to accept, understand, and go through the pain; to step into the eye of it without the desire for escape; to allow it to wash through one’s entire being

As this wound was processed with Jess, it appeared like the gaping wound overtook him in the moment. He was mad. He admitted he had thought there was a special plan for him, as he truly was a gifted person on a very important spiritual mission in life. He was now very disillusioned with this plan and felt that God and existence had “screwed him over.” I

invited Jess to embrace his narcissistic rage. Using the “empty chair” technique, we put existence in the empty chair and I encouraged Jess to let existence “have it.” With a little encouragement from me, Jess was soon screaming loudly and catharting his anger out at existence. He was livid that he had been let down by life, and even screamed obscenities at “God” in the empty chair.

After he had exhausted his rage at existence and God, I sensed there was another sore spot, so I invited Jess to process his rage against females. Off he went again against the empty chair, angry that females had not recognized how special he was and how they had refused, for the most part, to be willing participants in his sexual fantasies and acting out. He spewed rage for 10 min, and finally collapsed back into the chair. Ironically, after venting his rage, Jess was now more present and open than he had been for quite some time. We proceeded to the next stage.

The Great Betrayal

Helping Jess to work through his gaping narcissistic wound and rage, set the stage for an even deeper insight to be revealed; that of the great betrayal. This betrayal is not about feeling betrayed by others but is greater than that; it is one of total self-betrayal. As Almaas (2001) explained:

We see that we betrayed ourselves, just as the people in our environment betrayed us. We chose their company and approval over Essence. We recognize that this betrayal is the deeper one, at the very roots of our disconnection from our essential nature. We feel the hurt now as more terrible, the wound a bottomless abyss of pain. There is great sorrow, regret, and sometimes shame, guilt, and self-hatred. (p. 319)

What is most critical here is not the realization that we were betrayed by others, but that we betrayed ourselves in our futile attempts to establish our specialness through manipulating others. I asked Jess, “Can you see all of this sexual acting out was you just trying to be the answer? You betrayed yourself.” Here, it is vitally important for the client to allow this realization into awareness as it needs to shatter the victim psychology which projects and blames others. So, I just sat there with Jess, waited, and let him be with this dilemma. He had to see that he himself had chosen the fake world of one night stands, massage parlours, internet pornography, dirty talk chat lines, and the conquering sex mentality. All of this was part of his “Master of the Universe” specialness that he was hanging onto. He did it to himself. It only took a few minutes. Suddenly, his eyes lit up, and he laughed and said, “I have been a complete total narcissist.” He laughed like a madman. With this powerful insight it was no longer painful but humorous to him and as he sat there, clearly something relaxed in him. It was like he let go of his narcissistic specialness, and fell into beingness. Jess reported, “this is strangely relaxing.”

Here, we see the great paradox of the realization of the great betrayal. Almaas (2001) explained, “Ultimately we realize that, in our struggle for survival, we have rejected our own truth and lost our precious Essential Identity” (p.322). This realization, as Jess showed here, frees the person to fall into being as the person sees he or she is responsible for the betrayal of self. Almaas (2001) warned, however, that at this point ego activity as a defence may surge.

Ego Activity

The collapse into being came at the end of this session and it was like Jess had literally been stopped in his tracks. The magnitude of his own betrayal of beingness and essence had

literally put him back into the vulnerability and defencelessness of the present moment. I invited Jess to rest in this natural open and vulnerable beingness state for a few minutes as we wound up. His homework was to be just in this place of beingness with no grasping onto specialness. In a way, this homework was a set up. I knew the narcissism of the ego and mind, does not permanently give way so easily. I expected Jess to have to confront lots of ego activity in the next week.

When he returned, Jess reported how hard it was to stay in this vulnerable open place. Embracing the present moment is an invitation for the death of the egoic separate self, and the mind will “raise hell” at this point. This shows up in the form of frantic ego activity. *Almaas (2001)* explained that “The self reacts to the stillness as a death, and intensifies its activity by which it generates its sense of self-recognition. The ego activity becomes furious agitation and feverish inner obsessiveness” (p. 340). Although this type of activity can occur at any stage of unfolding, it is intense here, because the underlying emptiness is perceived directly and concluded as a threat. One may try to defend against the emptiness by reverting back to old addictive behaviours which are perceived as having lesser consequences.

Jess reported that he had noticed in the last week how his mind and ego frantically looked for ways to prop himself up in a familiar sense. He actually had momentarily looked up some internet porn but shut it off after 5 min realizing how hopeless it was. Other than that, he was consumed all week, by a sense of feeling totally lost and out of place, and that he needed to put himself back together. I wanted Jess to recognize that all his activity, including sexual fantasies and acting out, was merely a desire to escape his own inner emptiness and dread of the “big black hole” he could feel in the bottom of his belly. I asked him if he was willing to work on this fear of the underlying emptiness with me in the session. He hesitantly agreed.

The Fall into the Black Chasm of Being

First, I reminded Jess that he had dropped into his beingness during our last session, so he had already done this before. Next, I invited him just to relax and breathe into his belly. He reported that felt like he had contracted upon himself and was now suspended over a black abyss, which felt like he could really crash into and hurt himself if he let go. The abyss did not have the presence of a soft loving holding energy, but instead seemed to him to be almost like a wall.

I encouraged him just to stay with the awareness of his belly, but now to let go of any judgment of the situation. As famous Zen teacher *Sosan* stated, he was to have no choice or preferences, just be at one with the situation (*Osho 1994*). I encouraged him to accept what is, instead of trying to frantically save himself in some way.

As we sat in our chairs, he continued to feel himself clinging and contracting upon himself over the black abyss, as if he could be smashed by its murky bottom. Again, I invited him to just relax into the abyss with no judgment, as the deep abyss was in fact his own energy. It is what *Almaas (2001)* called the loving black chasm of being:

When the student finally settles into this experience of deficient emptiness, allowing it without judgment, rejection or reaction, she sees that it is a state of no self, or, more specifically, no identity. When we fully experience this state of no identified self, it transforms naturally and spontaneously into a luminous vastness, a deep spaciousness, a peaceful emptiness. (p. 336)

As Jess sat there, it was clear from his flowing look, that he had stopped fighting to protect himself, and he was now just letting go and merging with the blackness he

perceived in his belly. He described himself as feeling like he had broken through the bottom of the wall of blackness, and now was resting in blackness. He reported that strangely for him, this terrifying abyss was transforming. As he continued to breathe into the blackness, he indicated that the energy was no longer a black coldness but had a loving spaciousness to it. This was something very new to him; the vastness of inner spaciousness. We sat there in the meditative stillness of the moment and he reported “It’s like an inner ocean of energy has opened up for me.”

Here, Jess was embracing the vastness of being with no separate self to hang onto. As he relaxed into it, he experienced that in his vastness he was truly okay. Almaas (2001) described this remarkable experience:

In the black space we are aware of the absence of the sense of self... It is a nothingness, but it is a nothingness that is rich, that is satisfying precisely because of its emptiness. It is a direct sense of endless stillness, of pure peacefulness, of an infinity of blackness that is so black that it is luminous. It is a transparent blackness that is radiant because of its purity. This is not the experience of a self, an observer beholding the endlessness of space; rather, it is the experience of the self experiencing itself *as* the infinity of peaceful space. (p. 338)

This is a radical transformation; where one’s familiar centre of self shifts from that of a sex addict to a fall into nondual being. Abiding as pure black emptiness burns up the seeds of separateness where the grasping for a point of self referencing collapses completely. Here, one makes their home in the huge spaciousness of being, devoid of any points of reference; free from the snares of desire and fear, and recognizes that freedom was always available, here and now, in the ordinariness of the moment (Almaas 1988, 2001).

Jess seemed pleasantly shocked by his transformation. I invited him to continue to make this vast open beingness his home in each moment over the next week. For homework, I specified for him to keep being choicelessly aware and accept what is (Krishnamurti 1954). I was aware that living in the vast openness of being can be terrorizing for the mind, and Jess needed to be mindful of the mind’s attempt to move away from the vulnerability and insecurity of open beingness with no ego to hang onto. I encouraged him to watch the mind’s attempts to find a way to settle back into the ego and the ‘I’. For Jess, this included not judging his state of boredom. While having had moments of ecstatic beingness in session, he also had a pattern of returning to feelings of boredom and negative nothingness. He needed to learn to be with the emptiness, without judgment, and without trying to change what is.

Realizing Essential Identity

When Jess came back the following week, he reported feeling he had made substantial progress in moving from a sense of deficient emptiness to resting in being. He found the level of ego activity had been quite stilled, and for a lot of the time he was simply able to rest in being.

As Jess shared his progress over the past week, I encouraged him to wrap up his description and let go of describing anything about the past week, as it had passed. I invited him to instead be totally present in this moment. Jess took this invitation to surrender to this moment easily, and I noticed him drop into silence, and full presence of being instantaneously. He had been able to get the knack of letting go into the present moment and was flowing along. He laughed with me how easily he relaxed into the full presence of the moment.

I asked Jess to describe who he was in the moment, and he replied, “I am this vast consciousness, this vast space. I used to think it was nothingness, but now I see it is a full nothingness. It is like a total loving presence in this moment.” I nodded in agreement.

Later in the session Jess also described something very interesting. During the week and also in this session, he felt himself in an ecstatic beingness that he had never experienced before. Along with this, he reported that it felt as if his masculine side and feminine side were coming together in the moment. It was what Osho (1980) described as an experience of “*unio mystica*”. He could feel himself becoming a hollow bamboo in the moment, and the energy of existence flowing through him. For the first time in his existence, he felt like his chakras were completely open and he was having a cosmic orgasm.

In the experience of bliss and ecstasy, and the cosmic orgasm of connection with existence, his perspective shifted immediately regarding his sexual acting out. He laughed to himself, realizing that he was already in a place of wholeness. Now, his reaching out for conquest, orgasm and release no longer made sense to him. He was already whole. He could also clearly see what I had tried to explain to him in an earlier session about the fixation on grasping onto his desires. Previously and including up to the last week, when he noticed an attractive woman he would feel a sexual desire, then grasp onto it, and almost hoard it for later. Now he realized that he could just notice the attraction, and then let it fall away. He did not have to hang onto it, because he was no longer trying to get somewhere else though his sexual desiring. He could just stay in the energy of the present moment. He now had clarity that his sexually acting out and fantasizing was a way for him to grasp outside himself for support. By being choicelessly aware he realized that he could notice beauty in the moment and did not have to hang onto it.

Jess and I only had a few follow up sessions after that. Life had definitely shifted for him. He reported that working on his narcissism had transformed his recovery, and he no longer was stuck in a second phase. Instead he could feel himself embracing wholeness. He continued with active involvement in his 12 step meetings and worked his recovery, but life actually felt like it was moving ahead for him now after a few years of “stuckness”. He was enjoying new possibilities of a promotion at work, and a slowly progressing new relationship.

Conclusion

A preoccupation with being the “Master of the Universe” with all its narcissistic accompaniments can keep an individual stalled in second stage sexual addiction recovery for years. As illustrated with the previous case study, a full resolution of this predicament rests in the deconstruction and transformation of the narcissistic nature of the master of the universe personality. This allows the person in sexual addiction recovery to truly hit the bottom in recovery, surrender the separate self, and embrace nondual being. It is only when one gives up their specialness, that the gateways of nondual being open up. Rather than seeing a negative nothingness, with a deep acceptance of our empty nature there is a turn into a full loving presence, in which the utter futility of grasping externally onto specialness and sexually acting out is embraced in each moment. As Almaas (2004) explained, in accepting and abiding in nondual being, in our ordinariness, paradoxically the vastness and mysteries of existence are opened up within us. This is truly a satisfying journey for the person in sexual addiction recovery who for so long had lived off of sexual fantasies, sexual conquests, and the mirroring of specialness from others, and now is embracing and abiding in nondual being.

The Almaas (2001) path of transformation of narcissism is available both for therapists and clients, but therapists must lead the way. Firstly, before one can facilitate and invite another's transformation of narcissism, it is imperative that the therapist has done this deep work personally. This relaxing into the chasm of being approach can't be taken on by an objective expert but must be personally and deeply subjectively explored. This approach relies on the therapist being the role model of a person who has let go of the narcissistic clutches of the ego and fallen into beingness presence.

It is also clear that not all addiction clients in recovery will be ready for such an intensive transformational approach. It is evident that some sort of desperation in the client is helpful. Almaas (2001) described this desperation in the client as an emerging sense of fakeness and awareness of the empty shell of narcissism. This wound sets the stage for the invitation for transformation. Not all clients will be ready for the unpacking and deconstruction of their narcissistic orientation. Thus, therapists need to look out for these signs of desperation and readiness in clients, and be ready in second stage recovery to help clients who want to push their recovery even further. It is quite the paradox though, as this transformation is really a seeing into our true nature which is always available in the here and now. Clients can suddenly become available for this transformational process, as their desperation ripens, and so therapists need to stay open to these possibilities. As we saw with the case study client Jess, like fruit on a tree, clients can ripen over time, and become available to this transformation of narcissism process.

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