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Sex Addiction: A Literary and Yogic Perspective

by

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Introduction

Sex, the word alone holds a razor's edge. When voiced, the word sex carries the ability to cut through the air, lingering in the atmosphere, offering a mix of both curiosity as well as discomfort. Sex is a topic that is reserved for certain environments amidst specific company, while grossly being avoided amongst other connotations. Sex is a topic that is gratuitously shoved in the face of society in numerous ways, yet hypocritically, holds an essence of taboo. Sex is complex, it is sacred. It is a place of desire that can offer immediate gratification, and yet stoke fears of longing and emptiness long after the satisfaction has occurred. Sex, although wrought with various meanings, collectively holds a great deal of power and effect. Sex is an act of both carnality and holiness; sex can equally tear down and build up.

While sex is universal, it is often reduced to something far less than it was created to be. As a result, most view sex as a simplistic carnal act that is as basic as eating but just as eating can hold unhealthy behaviors, the same can be true about sex. When such a reduction is made, sex becomes selfish, intimacy is non-existent, identity is sought in unhealthy ways, and people are treated as commodities versus the fascinating complex souls they are. In today's society where hook-up culture abounds, the line between sexual promiscuity and sexual addiction is paper thin, and yet, such a line does exist. First offering insight into the disease of sexual addiction overall and what, in fact, does delineate it from sexual promiscuity, this paper will go on to seek ways to mitigate such

behavior by exploring not only symptoms, but the existing underlying issues as well through a yogic whole-body perspective. Furthermore, diving deeper into such an application, specifically under the context of the *yamas* and *niyamas* and investigating how both might, not only serve as therapeutic tools for sex addicts, but perhaps allow for a healthier approach overall to sex in the modern world.

Sexual Addiction versus Sexual Promiscuity

According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASM), addiction is defined as, “a treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual’s life experiences. People with addiction use substances or engage in behaviors that become compulsive and often continue despite harmful consequences.”¹ As with any diagnosed addiction, sexual behavior becomes problematic when sexual engagement is pursued regardless of the ensuing negative consequences. It is the result of first pursuing enjoyable, then destructive experiences, and yet, not stopping said behavior despite the harmful consequences that follow.² While sex addiction is not currently included in the

¹ American Society of Addiction Medicine, “Definition of Addiction,” 2019.
<https://www.asam.org/quality-care/definition-of-addiction>

² G. E. Kızılok, “Sexual Addiction: Definition, Etiology and Treatment,” *Current Approaches in Psychiatry / Psikiyatride Guncel Yaklasimlar*, 13(3), 394–411. <https://doi-org.electra.lmu.edu/10.18863/pgy.791954>

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), there is some debate amongst health care professionals whether to view it as an addiction versus an impulse control disorder, with some medical professionals using the term “compulsive sexual behavior” instead.³ Yet, despite there being no current universal agreement in defining sexual addiction, “...scholars argue that the disorder remains the same, regardless of what it is called.”⁴ Dr. Alexandra Katehakis with the Center for Healthy Sex in Los Angeles, CA writes,

Throughout my career, I’ve met numerous therapists who questioned the validity of sexual addiction until they came face-to-face with it in their therapy office.

Ironically, most of these therapists quickly learned that they didn’t have to scrutinize every other client as a possible sex addict because the signs and symptoms were fairly obvious.⁵

Moreover, various studies have shown findings that would further support such a clinical disorder inclusion. Not only is the pursuit of such activities motivated by pleasure, but more noteworthy is the offering of momentary escape from internal discomfort, a key

³ Mayo Clinic, “Compulsive Sexual Behavior,” February 7, 2020, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/compulsive-sexual-behavior/symptoms-causes/syc-20360434>

⁴ M. Griffiths, & Dhuffar, M. “Treatment of Sexual Addiction Within the British National Health Service.” *International Journal of Mental Health & Addiction*, vol. 2(5), (2014) <https://doi-org.electra.lmu.edu/10.1007/s11469-014-9485-2>.

⁵ Psychology Today, “Sex Addiction beyond the DSM-V,” Accessed April 12, 2022. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sex-lies-trauma/201212/sex-addiction-beyond-the-dsm-v>.

proponent of, not just partaking in sexual acts, but rather in sexual acts that prove disruptive.⁶

...sexual behaviour met the definition of an addictive disorder, described as: ‘a disorder in which a behaviour that can function both to produce pleasure and to provide escape from internal discomfort is employed in a pattern characterized by (1) recurrent failure to control the behaviour, and (2) continuance of the behaviour despite significant harmful consequences.’⁷

Additionally, research shows there are three main components of sex addiction: recurrent sexual urges, recurrent sexual fantasies, and recurrent sexual behaviors.⁸ The reality is that sex addiction very much exists regardless of the terminology and is a behavioral problem that affects an estimated 12 million adults today.⁹

The terms “sex addiction” or “hypersexual disorder” are used to, “... encompass various types of problematic behaviors, including excessive masturbation, cybersex, pornography use, sexual behavior with consenting adults, telephone sex, strip club visitation, and other behaviors.”¹⁰ Sex addiction can materialize in various ways, including but not limited to, seeking such experiences in person as well as online. Since

⁶ Kızılok, “Sexual Addiction: Definition, Etiology and Treatment.”

⁷ M. Griffiths, & Dhuffar, M., “Treatment of Sexual Addiction Within the British National Health Service,” p. 562

⁸ Kızılok, “Sexual Addiction: Definition, Etiology and Treatment.”

⁹ Authored by Editorial Staff, “Sex Addiction Treatment,” American Addiction Centers, last updated January 28, 2021, <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/sex-addiction>.

¹⁰ Lauren Karila, et al. “Sexual Addiction or Hypersexual Disorder: Different Terms for the Same Problem? A Review of the Literature.” *Current Pharmaceutical Design* 20, no. 25 (2014): 4012-20. <https://doi.org/10.2174/13816128113199990619>.

March of 2020 there has been an 11.6% increase in pornography use.¹¹ “It has been stated that the most watched hours of porn in both European, American, and Asian countries are around 3-4 in the morning.”¹² This situation highlights, perhaps an unsuspecting one, a specific negative aspect that accompanies those struggling with sex addiction: insomnia.¹³ Furthermore, problematic pornography usage, which, as previously noted, falls under the category of sex addiction, has also been shown to be associated with depression and anxiety.¹⁴ Among such aspects, sex addiction has other delineating factors as well, “Sex addiction is associated with ...increased risk-taking behaviors (e.g., substance use and multiple sex partners) ...impulsivity, loneliness, low self-worth, and insecure attachment styles.”¹⁵ In addition to such symptoms, those struggling with sex addiction are more prone to relational issues, emotional withdrawal, guilt, isolation, and feelings of emptiness.¹⁶ “Clients often struggle to truly engage in intimate relationships which is typically the result of a lack of attachment to a parent or guardian throughout childhood. At times, the addiction becomes a way to make up for this important component they’re missing.”¹⁷ Thus, causation for such behavior can go as far back as childhood.

¹¹ Kızılok, “Sexual Addiction: Definition, Etiology and Treatment.”

¹² Kızılok, “Sexual Addiction: Definition, Etiology and Treatment,” p. 326.

¹³ Kızılok, “Sexual Addiction: Definition, Etiology and Treatment.”

¹⁴ Steven D. Shirk, et al. “Predicting problematic pornography use among male returning US Veterans.” *Addictive Behaviors*, 112 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2020.106647>.

¹⁵ Van Gordon, William, et al, “Meditation Awareness Training for the treatment of Sex Addiction: A Case Study,” *Journal of Behavioral Addiction* 5, no. 2 (2016), p.363.

¹⁶ Kızılok, “Sexual Addiction: Definition, Etiology and Treatment.”

¹⁷ Wolff, Betzalel, “Sex Addiction Counselling Toronto- Sex Addiction Treatment & Rehab:

Expounding further upon the impact of the parent/child relationship, childhood trauma, sexual abuse, and various family environments have all been shown to be potential root causes amongst those navigating sexual addiction.¹⁸ “It is estimated that 30% of psychiatric disorders diagnosed in adults may be directly related to childhood experiences... These problematic attachment types can attract individuals to increasingly sexual relationships in the name of affirmation and affection.”¹⁹ Additionally, if such a traumatic history is prevalent, other symptoms such as post-traumatic stress disorder can also form, “...it is estimated that it is not a pleasure but a strategy to survive, if the sexual addicted individual experienced childhood trauma.”²⁰ Thus, research suggests that sex addiction can be a type of dissociative disorder as well.²¹ “Sexual addiction is not about sex -- although needless to say, sensual pleasure plays a role -- it is about reassurance and avoidance of pain.”²² As self-esteem issues are quite common, it is probable low self-worth, impulsivity, loneliness, and insecure attachment styles will more than likely be present, only reiterating the challenge sex addicts might have in developing healthy intimate relationships.²³ Furthermore, “Sexually addicted individuals long for to

Betzalel Wolff: Addiction Counseling,” December 15, 2021,
<https://www.torontoaddictioncounselling.com/addictions/trea/sex/>.

¹⁸ K1z1lok, “Sexual Addiction: Definition, Etiology and Treatment.”

¹⁹ K1z1lok, “Sexual Addiction: Definition, Etiology and Treatment,” p.400

²⁰ K1z1lok, “Sexual Addiction: Definition, Etiology and Treatment,” p.400

²¹ K1z1lok, “Sexual Addiction: Definition, Etiology and Treatment.”

²² J. D. Levin, “Sexual Addiction,” *National Forum*, 79,4, (1999): 33,
<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A58186899/AONE?u=anon~5bb2bc0&sid=googleScholar&xid=a96bcf6a>.

²³ Van Gordon, et al., “Meditation Awareness Training for the Treatment of Sex Addiction: A Case Study.”

be admired and reflective reactions because they lack internal sources to equip them with self-confidence and to be accepted.”²⁴ This lack of internal resource sheds light on the fact that self-esteem issues are not only a symptom of sex addiction, but more importantly can also be a root cause of such behavior. As common with dissociative disorders overall, other symptoms can arise such as anger and loneliness, reiterating the implication that sex addiction is, in fact, a psychological disorder.²⁵

Looking at the delineations that set sex addiction apart from sexually promiscuous behavior, it is important to note the problematic aspects that can arise due to numerous sexual engagements being driven by those previously mentioned root issues. This begs the exploration of these root causes and motivation of such behavior on a deeper level, seeking to find the similarities, if any, that exist within that of sexual promiscuity and sexual addiction. Regardless, when reckless and devalued, sex is reduced to nothing more than a physical experience, and as previously stated, turning those involved into disposable commodities. As a result, the value of the human life is being reduced to simple anatomy. The main difference that separates sexual addiction and sexual promiscuity is the compulsive behavior that exists within the mind of an addict.

Sex addiction has long been mistaken for promiscuity. It's taken many years and a lot of research for sexual disorders to finally become recognised as a real brain condition, just like drug or alcohol addiction. The main differences between the two are the inability to resist sexual impulses and the negative impact the behavior

²⁴ KIZILOK, “Sexual Addiction: Definition, Etiology and Treatment,” p.397

²⁵ KIZILOK, “Sexual Addiction: Definition, Etiology and Treatment”.

has on one's life...Other defining characteristics of sex addiction include the common traits that come with other addiction such as feelings of a drug-like euphoria followed by shame, frustration, and depression. People who are simply promiscuous are able to make rational decisions about their sexual behaviors, whereas sex addicts often find themselves in a cycle of toxic behavior which they continue in, regardless of the negative consequences. Addicts may also find themselves in dangerous or risky situations due to their lack of rational thinking.²⁶

Even if one doesn't want to act out sexually, those struggling with sex addiction are compelled to.²⁷ Nonetheless, while the compulsion to act out is different between addiction and promiscuity, some of the motivating factors and symptoms have, in fact, proven to be the same.

Modern Day Sex

A neoteric study showed an increase in sexual activity specifically among college students during the height of COVID-19. The study reported consequences of the pandemic included factors such as stress, anxiety, and depression. Noting that, "lack of

²⁶ Heide, "Sex Addiction vs Being Promiscuous: What's the Distinction?" Affirmative – Sex Addiction Australia, February 13, 2019, <https://www.sexaddictionaustralia.com.au/blog/sex-addiction-vs-being-promiscuous-whats-the-distinction/>.

²⁷ Wolff, Betzalel, "Sex Addiction Counselling Toronto- Sex Addiction Treatment & Rehab: Betzalel Wolff: Addiction Counseling,"

physical contact, outlets for socializing and communication with peers and teachers, restrictions on travel, and reduced physical activities have contributed to these emotional issues.”²⁸ The study went onto note that changes in sexual frequency had increased, yet the quality of sexual life significantly decreased.²⁹

Higher anxiety was associated with external reasons for sex; younger age and lower self-esteem were associated with affect management reasons. Female youth with higher impulsiveness reported more external reasons and fewer intimacy/desire reasons. Among male youth, lower self-esteem was associated with intimacy/desire reasons, but lower depression was associated with affect management reasons.³⁰

While this study specifically looked at sexual engagement and not sexual addiction, the motivating reasonings that were found for such sexual activities were many of the same that show up in sex addictive behavior overall, i.e., low self-esteem, stress, and anxiety. Once more highlighting the blurred lines between both.

²⁸ Passent Ellakany, et al, “Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Students’ Sleep Patterns, Sexual Activity, Screen Use, and Food Intake: A Global Survey.” *PLOS ONE* 17, no. 1 (2022): <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0262617>.

²⁹ Ellakany, et al, “Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic,” 17.

³⁰ Laura H. Dawson, et al, “Reasons Why Adolescents and Young Adults Have Sex: Associations with Psychological Characteristics and Sexual Behavior,” *Journal of Sex Research* 45, no. 3 (2008): 225–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490801987457>.

In 2017, “Liberated: The New Sexual Revolution” aired on Netflix offering a poignant perspective into today’s sex culture. A documentary that explored the lines between pop culture, gender identity, hook up culture, and sexuality as a whole, with its opening line being, “Nothing quite prepares us for the struggle of identity and intimacy in this world.”³¹ When exploring the topic of sex, intimacy and identity are unavoidable inclusions in such a conversation, and perhaps it is within such topics that a healthier approach to sex can begin to take place.

When first looking at the concept of identity, one must acknowledge the slippery slope that exists from the way society defines sex, even more specifically with the masculine and feminine definitions that have been curated by today’s culture and the differences in how both genders approach sex. It is no secret that the terms “masculinity” and “femininity” have come to represent a myriad of things, and with that, hold both positive and negative connotations. Benjamin Nolot, the director of *Liberated* writes,

Our world needs real men and real women not fabrications of the culture...Women are intellectual, emotional, spiritual, creative, athletic, familial, political, caring, compassionate, relational, and strong...Women are searching for deeper meaning and purpose...They long to have an impact in the world. Simply put, women are not a sexual buffet for the gratuitous appetite of men. They are the image bearers of God and the crown of His creation. Similarly, men are not what the pop culture

³¹ *Liberated: The New Sexual Revolution*, Directed by Benjamin Nolot. Panama City, FL: Magic Lantern Pictures, 2017.

has constructed. We are not mindless, sexual roving beasts without conscience.

There are so many beautiful dimensions of manhood that are being obscured, that we bring as a gift in this world... We must embrace the better angels of our nature and usher in a new generation of manhood. One based in honor, dignity, respect, vulnerability, empathy, and mutuality. Central to this is the way we speak about and treat women...Esteeming Women, engaging in loving relationships, protecting the vulnerable are ways to respect oneself and advance the male gender. We must create a world where men are loving and respectful and where women are valued and safe and only then will we disrupt and eliminate sex-trafficking in our world.³²

One of the key take-away points in Nolot's documentary is the acknowledgement of how pop culture, hook up culture, and rape culture are separated by delicate threads and inevitably bleed into one another.

The greatest promoters of the world's version of sex are actually businessmen who are making billions from it. Because lust sells, they have worked to change our sexual standards in order to increase their customer base. They hate virginity and marriage because it hurts their bottom line...It never dawns on people that

³² Emily Shore, "Liberated: The New Sexual Revolution," Author Emily Shore, August 5, 2018, <https://emilybethshore.info/liberated-new-sexual-revolution/>.

‘screwing anything that walks’ is not a sexual revolution or postmodern mindset...this perversion is older than Sodom and Gomorrah.³³

Specifically recognizing the clear affect pop culture has had, and continues to have, when it comes to identity and defining what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman, it is no surprise that sex has been reduced to such an animalistic pursuit. When people rely on external sources to provide internal meaning, fulfilment is futile.

Once we decide who we are, then we will naturally work out our actions, attitudes and behaviors to manifest our person. But if we don’t settle this in our hearts, then two things most often occur. First we begin to look to other people to tell us who we are. This leads us to becoming whatever others need us to be to fulfill their imagination. Soon we find ourselves in the very dangerous place of developing intimate relationships with people so that we can draw strength and self-esteem from them.³⁴

When identity is rooted in others, sex simply becomes an extension of such, turning it into a desert of temporary affirmations and ego boosts, versus a place of depth and restoration. As previously noted, sex addiction can be a result of lacking internal resources, thus leaving the addict with the hope that such encounters will provide a sense

³³ Kris Vallotton, and Jason Vallotton. *Moral Revolution: The Naked Truth about Sexual Purity*. Minneapolis, MN: Chosen, 2014, p.122

³⁴ Vallotton, *Moral Revolution: The Naked Truth about Sexual Purity*, p.63.

of worth that can truly only come from within. Furthermore, when sex becomes solely based on a physical experience, purely as an act to meet one's physical needs, it takes on a selfishness that it was never intended to carry. Sex no longer becomes about giving, but merely about taking and edifying the self, leaving no room for true intimacy.

Brené Brown, a qualitative researcher of shame and vulnerability notes, "There is no intimacy without vulnerability."³⁵ How much more vulnerable can one be but to stand naked in the presence of another? However, when intimacy is absent, that type of vulnerability is misused. Standing naked in the presence of another without true emotional intimacy that is rooted in a mutual vulnerability, can quickly turn the atmosphere into one that is shameful and uncomfortable, perhaps even fearful. Sex becomes one-sided, taking on the goal of getting versus giving. The key difference between selfish and unselfish sex is found in the ways it is separated from that of a carnal animalistic act to one rooted in love, but even more importantly, in how the other person is viewed. If there is not a recognition that the other person is made up of more than just a physical body, but of one that houses an emotional, mental, and spiritual body as well, how is it any different than animals? "Instinctive urge for sex-pleasure and for procreation belong to the biological level of one's being. It is alike to men and animals,

³⁵ A Quote by Brené Brown," Goodreads. Goodreads. Accessed April 16, 2022.
<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/9031653-never-underestimate-the-power-of-being-seen---it-s-exhausting>.

and to all biological life. But a human being cannot remain peaceful with a biological existence.”³⁶ Surely we can rise above mere carnality! Moreover, “There’s more to sex than mere skin on skin. Sex is as much a spiritual mystery as a physical act...we must not pursue the kind of sex that avoids commitment and intimacy, leaving us more lonely than ever...” 1 Corinthians 6:19 [The Message Version])³⁷. When sex is rooted in selflessness, one is not only able to receive the other’s whole self, if offered, but he/she is able to present their whole self as well. Such an ability that goes far beyond the physical layer, and in a way that is only feasible when selflessness and vulnerability are truly present from both involved. Thus, when sex is rooted in selfish pursuits, true meaningful connection disappears.

While the sexual revolution of the sixties was fraught with emotion and the idea of connection – ‘What the World Needs Now is Love...’ and ‘Come on people now, smile on your brother, let us love one another right now...’- this new sexual revolution is completely devoid of emotion. Friends with benefits except without the friends.³⁸

When partaking in sex from a more selfish perspective, does one ever leave feeling truly ‘satisfied’? Such an approach is creating a generation that is rooted in shallow

³⁶ Swami Jyotir Maya Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*. Bombay: Taraporevala, 1991, p. 63

³⁷ 1 Cor. 6:19 (MESSAGE VERSION).

³⁸ Shore “Liberated: The New Sexual Revolution.”

interactions where no one is truly “known”, and one should, “never underestimate the power of being seen.”³⁹ Ultimately, by reducing sex, society is inevitably reducing what it means to be human.

Modern Day Sex Addiction: An Example

John Rechy is a modern American novelist. His book *Numbers* offers an excellent exposé into the psychological aspect of sex addiction and the thirst that seems to never quite be quenched, the satisfaction that is always just one more ‘hit’ away. As with any good literary symbolism, *Numbers* very appropriately opens with, “It was always so; during the day the Dwelling was covered by the cloud, which at night had the appearance of fire,” (Numbers 9:16).⁴⁰ While this Bible verse itself is referring to the presence of God leading the Israelites through the desert, considering the coming narrative that unfolds in the proceeding pages, the verse comes to hold a slightly different meaning to say the least.

Numbers follows a man by the name of John Rio. By all accounts, an attractive, well-built man who has been away from the City of Angels for quite some time, returning for a ten-day voyage of sorts, which upon arrival, his reasoning for such is still yet to be

³⁹ “A Quote by Brené Brown,” Goodreads.

⁴⁰ John Rechy, *Numbers*, New York: Grove Press, New York, 1984, p.7

determined. Entering the bustling city of Los Angeles, Rechy writes, “An enormous loneliness is choking him. And so: Will it all be the same? Just as it was before he wonders. Those three years I was away- what have they meant then? Didn’t I learn anything from the time I lived here?”⁴¹ As the pages turn, the reader is quickly made more and more aware of one thing: Rio’s need to be desired. A need, in which as the story unfolds, is his whole world. To be admired and pursued is something that he, not only takes great strides in bringing to fruition, but seemingly it is the one thing on which his entire happiness depends, “Sitting there waiting, he feels- he knows he is- more desirable than ever. And he feels alive.”⁴² It is within this desirability that Rio’s entire world, his identity, teeters, “One rejection- real or imaginary- can slaughter Johnny Rio...”⁴³

Rio’s time and energy is 100% occupied by his need to be admired. He wakes up thinking about it and goes to sleep ruminating over the *numbers* acquired from the day, aka the sexual encounters he has won. It is an obsession that holds him in its grip, with the slightest sign of either rejection or competition threatening to thrust him into the abyss of a breakdown. “He’s never been able to reconcile himself to the fact that no one in the world, no matter how desirable, will *always* be preferred.”⁴⁴ Moreover, he constantly finds the need to make excuses to explain away, not only his behavior, but

⁴¹ Rechy, *Numbers*, p.38

⁴² Rechy, *Numbers*, p.82

⁴³ Rechy, *Numbers*, p.82

⁴⁴ Rechy, *Numbers*, p.147

others' as well, his "reasons." His reasons offer a pathetic attempt to find some form of anchor amidst the chaos in his mind, offering him, although brief, a lifeline in the storm.

Always before, at each crisis in his life, the only salvation Johnny Rio has found from total, shattering anarchy has been the grasping for and finding of a reason for his actions- no matter how ugly, no matter how wild those actions... Whether or not it's the real reason (he has never looked too closely) – a reason has always emerged to save him from disorder, to keep him from surrender to chaos, from complete disintegration... Erected on such a flimsy foundation, then, his life, like a pyramid of playing cards requires perfect balance: for every action, a reason.⁴⁵

However, just like a house of cards, the slightest discrepancy can bring everything crashing down.

Throughout the pages of *Numbers*, the reader is made privy to the pursuit of Rio's need to be admired and the fact that it is purely one-sided, purely selfish, never the admirer but always the admiree, "I want them to want me, I want them to...love ...me, he thinks. But of course he means 'desire me'; there has always been a severe confusion between 'love' and 'desire' for Johnny Rio."⁴⁶ Constantly struggling with an internal dialogue throughout the pages, one that seems to spin like a broken record within his mind, Rio's need to be admired is his addiction, and such admiration is defined, by him, through the number of sexual encounters he can collect. Encounters that he finds by lurking in the deepest darkest areas of Griffith Park, as well as old movie theatres that

⁴⁵ Rechy, *Numbers*, p.178

⁴⁶ Rechy, *Numbers*, p.76

offer certain picture showings and dark balconies for those seeking another form of entertainment. With barely any conversation had between each of these other “sex hunters”, the deed is done with Johnny Rio always on the receiving end. “So much intimacy and ...you...just ...walk ...away...without a word, Johnny thinks suddenly. All these people. What are they really like? Does anyone ever get to *know* anyone else? Does anyone ever want to? I don’t know anyone’s name...Yet: here I am!”⁴⁷ Each encounter bringing him one step closer to some sort of reprieve, and yet through his own admission, “...it’s over so quickly that it’s almost as if it exists only in retrospect- or in anticipation. The wave of excitement has drowned the terror, has calmed the sense of drift. But only momentarily...it all seems wrong. He feels very sad. He’s toward nowhere.”⁴⁸ However, it is amid such pursuits that he is finally brought to the realization of what drew him back to LA in the first place, “*That’s* why I came back to Los Angeles! To free myself completely! -because it has to be me that’s through with that world- I had to know *it* still wants *me* but I don’t need *it!*”⁴⁹ Ultimately, a voyage rooted in ego and selfish motivation, and yet as the story goes, one that never fully offers the fulfillment Rio seeks. “...I’m just here and that’s all. And thinking that, he’s grasped by an enormous craving whose demands are already multiplying, squaring themselves, burgeoning geometrically-

⁴⁷ Rechy, Numbers, p.184

⁴⁸ Rechy, Numbers, p.185

⁴⁹ Rechy, Numbers, p.191

a craving that expects no surcease. Johnny *feels* an emotional howling.”⁵⁰ The famous last words hanging in the air, “Just one more!”⁵¹

While a fictional story, *Numbers* offers a gripping narrative that does not hold back but instead presents a unique ‘door wide open’ perspective into the mind of a sex addict. While the book does not talk about Rio’s childhood or potential issues that have gone left unresolved, it is alluded to that such pains do exist. “...a scared child (and he was a very scared kid though he put up a tough front), Johnny would often go to bed saying a rosary (secretly, embarrassed that anyone should know) in order to drive away the unfocused black fears.”⁵² Without justification or judgment, Rio’s story is told, and at its conclusion, the reader cannot help but feel a weight of unsettled sadness. The haunting reality that, regardless of his efforts, Rio is, ironically, both victim and perpetrator of this vicious cycle that ultimately will never truly offer the fulfillment he is so desperately seeking. His actions proving to be a coping mechanism that he has latched onto in order to find both his identity and affirmation, and yet at the first sign of true intimacy, he becomes unhinged, “That other-that further country...I just...explored it. And ...it isn’t mine. Nauseated, he stops the car; and he vomits convulsively out the window. That country-...he thinks. It wasn’t mine.”⁵³ At length, the treatment for his nondisclosed underlying issues is the only way to remove himself for such a cyclical life, and yet to

⁵⁰ Rechy, *Numbers*, p. 255

⁵¹ Rechy, *Numbers*, p. 255

⁵² Rechy, *Numbers*, p. 125

⁵³ Rechy, *Numbers*, p. 240

venture into such a place of health and wholeness, he must risk the one thing he never will: vulnerability.

As previously mentioned, Brené Brown has done a great deal of research regarding shame and its specific correlation to vulnerability. Brown defines shame as, ...the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging, something we've experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection. I don't believe shame is helpful or productive. In fact, I think shame is much more likely to be the source of destructive, hurtful behavior than the solution or cure.⁵⁴

She also notes that, "Vulnerability is the core of shame and fear and our struggle for worthiness, but it appears that it's also the birthplace of joy, of creativity, of belonging, of love."⁵⁵ In being vulnerable, one might risk experiencing shame, but perhaps even more devastating, when *not* risking vulnerability, one might never experience true connection and belonging. Moreover, only when the authentic self is *risked*,

⁵⁴ Brené Brown, "Shame vs. Guilt," Brené Brown, October 28, 2021, <https://brenebrown.com/articles/2013/01/15/shame-v-guilt/>.

⁵⁵ Brené Brown, Brené Quote, "Vulnerability Is the Core of Shame and Fear and Our Struggle for Worthiness, but It Appears That It's Also the BIRTHPLAC...", Quotefancy. Accessed April 26, 2022, <https://quotefancy.com/quote/777754/Bren-Brown-Vulnerability-is-the-core-of-shame-and-fear-and-our-struggle-for-worthiness>.

does true belonging take place, one will always belong anywhere they show up as their true self.⁵⁶

Nonetheless, despite the overall prevalence of sex addiction in today's world, there is still much to be desired regarding treatment options and diagnostic tools for those navigating sex addiction.⁵⁷ This is not only a result of there being an evident gap in the treatments currently available, but also due to sex addiction being an extremely shame-based disorder, thus making treatment even more challenging. The actual pursuit of medical help is more difficult for an individual struggling with this specific addiction. As a result, "Despite the desire of salvation, sexual addicted individuals do not demand too much medical support based on the shame they feel. In general, they apply to psychiatrists with suicide attempt or depression, anxiety symptoms."⁵⁸ Moreover, studies have shown 91% of mental health therapists do not even provide a service specifically designed for sex addiction, and instead view it as a specialized service that should be outsourced.⁵⁹ As aforementioned, with the rise of pornography engagement, this sentiment is only reiterated with the increased accessibility of the internet, thus the need

⁵⁶ Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*, New York: Random House, 2019.

⁵⁷ Resources for Addiction Treatment & Recovery: American Addiction Centers, Resources for Addiction Treatment & Recovery | American Addiction Centers, Accessed April 26, 2022, <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/>.

⁵⁸ Kızılok, "Sexual Addiction: Definition, Etiology and Treatment", p. 406.

⁵⁹ Griffiths, et al, "Treatment of Sexual Addiction within the British National Health Service," *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, vol. 12, no. 5, 2014, pp. 561–571, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-014-9485-2>.

for, not only dedicated services and specialized treatment interventions ⁶⁰, but also ones that deal beyond isolated components of sex addiction also continues to rise. The need for continued development of specific treatment options for those suffering with sex addiction is clear, specifically in regard to addressing the whole person. In addition to mental health and addiction specialists, I believe yoga's whole-body approach is way to facilitate such needs.

Yogic Perspective

According to the Yoga Sutras, the practice of yoga starts in the mind. Sutra 1.2 reads, "yogas-citta-vritti-nirodhah," which translates to, "Yoga is the restriction of the fluctuations of consciousness."⁶¹ To 'do' yoga, the physical body, the mental body, the emotional body, and the spiritual body must all be acknowledged. Such an acknowledgment not only recognizes the differences of each, but also the relational affect each one has on the other. From personal experience, I come barreling into yoga class, the stress of the oncoming day already filling up my mind, causing my thoughts to jump from one to the other. I roll out my mat, lay down, and close my eyes. I start to settle my physical body, which automatically begins to cause a sense of stillness to come over my

⁶⁰ Griffiths, et al, "Treatment of Sexual Addiction within the British National Health Service," 2014.

⁶¹ Patañjali, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, trans. by Georg Feuerstein. (Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 1989, p. 26.

thought life, a calmness ensues. Equally, there are times on my mat when my body is fidgeting and non-cooperative. I find myself too aware and overly sensitive of the tiniest thing, an itch on my knee, a strand of hair brushing my cheek, I am wildly restless. I begin to close my eyes and focus on the breath, my mind takes over with a distinct focus, and as a result, the physical agitations cease. The body and the mind are powerful partners. Sometimes, one is the pilot, while the other is the co-pilot, other times, these roles are reversed.

The mind and body are inextricably linked with a complex relationship between the two known as the mind-body connection. Just as how we treat our physical body (with what we eat, how much we exercise and how much sleep we get) affects our mental state, our minds (or our collection of thoughts, feelings, and attitudes) can also positively or negatively affect our biological functioning.⁶²

Similarly, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (Prov. 23:7 [King James Version]).⁶³

The physical and mental bodies are undeniably connected.

The mental body holds extreme power, “Frontal lobes play a major role in beliefs. Mental representations of the world are integrated with sub-cortical information by prefrontal cortex. Amygdala and Hippocampus are involved in the process of thinking and thus help in execution of beliefs.”⁶⁴ There are aspects of the brain that are literally

⁶² Misty Milioto, “Mind Body,” *New Orleans Magazine*, July 30, 2020, <https://www.myneworleans.com/mind-body/>.

⁶³ Prov. 23:7 (King James Version).

⁶⁴ T. S. Rao Sathyanarayana, et al “The Biochemistry of Belief,” *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 51, no.4 (December 2009): 239, <https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5545.58285>.

responsible for gathering information to reaffirm specific thoughts and perspectives we have; their only responsibility being to prove the things we are repeatedly telling ourselves are, in fact, true. As a result, it is extremely apparent to see how perspectives of oneself, others, and the world are greatly shaped by thoughts, and grossly affect the way people interact with each of these; further supporting the invaluable necessity of a healthy thought life. In a recent Stanford University article, Alia Crum, director of the Stanford Mind and Body Lab, was quoted saying, “Our minds aren’t passive observers, simply perceiving reality as it is. Our minds actually change reality.”⁶⁵ The article goes onto read, “Probably the best-known way the mind shapes reality is the placebo effect, where people get better if they simply believe they are being treated for a disease.”⁶⁶ The mind is a powerful tool revolving around the thought life and, in effect, is one that can greatly influence the physical body.

The biochemistry of our body stems from our awareness. Belief-reinforced awareness becomes our biochemistry. Each and every tiny cell in our body is perfectly and absolutely *aware* of our thoughts, feelings and of course, our beliefs. There is a beautiful saying ‘Nobody grows old. When people stop growing, they become old’. If you believe you are fragile, the biochemistry of your body unquestionably obeys and manifests it.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Nathan Collins and Alia Crum as quoted in, “Stanford researchers explore how the human mind shapes reality,” Stanford News, June 11, 2018, <https://news.stanford.edu/2018/06/11/four-ways-human-mind-shapes-reality/>.

⁶⁶ Collins, “Stanford.”

⁶⁷ Asha Sathyanarayana, et al, “The Biochemistry of Belief,” 2.

Self-talk is a crucial part of developing a healthy mental self which leads to a healthy perspective of who one is as an individual, as well as a healthy perspective of others.

“When we change our thinking, we change our beliefs. When we change our beliefs, we change our behavior.”⁶⁸

In the same way, the mental and physical bodies can alternate between a co-pilot and pilot relationship, the same can be true between the physical and emotional bodies. Emotions can manifest physically in several different ways, while the physical body can also produce certain emotional reactions.

In Ancient Greece, Hippocrates, the father of modern Western medicine proposed a connection between the body’s physiology and mental and emotional states...Around five hundred years later, another Greek physician, Galen, distinguished between symptoms that were caused by organic, or physical, causes and those that looked similar but resulted from purely emotional causes.⁶⁹

In my own history, there have been numerous times throughout my life where a physical activity has produced an emotional experience. One example: I was in a yoga class doing *Ustrasana*, Camel Pose, and I suddenly began to cry. I had no idea why, there was just something about the physicality of the pose that caused an emotional reaction for me.

“Emotional pain and traumatic memories can be ‘stored’ in the body long after exposure to a traumatic situation has ended.”⁷⁰ Equally there have been times in my life when

⁶⁸ Asha Sathyanarayana, et al, “The Biochemistry of Belief,” 2.

⁶⁹ David Emerson, and Elizabeth Hopper, PhD., *Overcoming Trauma through Yoga, Reclaiming Your Body* (California: North Atlantic Books, 2011), 9.

⁷⁰ Emerson and Hopper, *Overcoming Trauma through Yoga, Reclaiming Your Body*, 21.

going through a more emotionally based experience, my body physically responded through a loss of weight. The emotional bodies hold a great deal of history that can manifest in the physical bodies in various ways.

As this exploration of each of the bodies continues, the spiritual self must be acknowledged as well. “There is a whole universe that man in all his wisdom is ignorant of. That is the world of the spirit. And I’m not just talking about the spiritual realm outside of us but also the spiritual being inside of every person.”⁷¹ Christian theology presents the belief that humans are made up of three parts: body, soul, and spirit. “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Thess. 5:23 [NIV]).⁷² For the sake of this discussion, the soul and spirit, though different in Christian theology, will be categorized together as one under the spiritual body component. “When a person dies, there is a spiritual part of them that lives on, however, the spiritual body is also very much alive and well while we are here on Earth. “Your spirit gives life to your physical body.”⁷³ Within this space the topic of one’s moral code arises. Arguably, it is within the spiritual body that one’s consciousness lies and, as a result, one’s standards for living, one’s understanding of right and wrong, and one’s

⁷¹ Andrew Wommack, “Spirit, Soul & Body,” Andrew Wommack Ministries, n.d., <https://www.awmi.net/reading/teaching-articles/spirit-soul-and-body/>.

⁷² 1 Thess. 5:23 (NIV).

⁷³ Andrew Wommack, Series: Spirit, Soul, and Body-Episode 1, *Andrew Wommack Recorded Live*, podcast audio, January 6, 2020, <https://www.awmi.net/audio/radio-archives/?yn=2020&wn=1&dn=1>.

ethics are found. When it comes to defining the standard of how to treat the self, as well as how to treat others, this is only feasible if there is not only a recognition of the spiritual body, but more importantly a reference point that exists outside of the self. There must be a perspective that is rooted in something bigger than the self. It cannot simply be the “internal self,” that is still self, and as life shows, the self is made up of many complexities, not all of which are healthy. Hence, a need for a connection to something, Someone, outside of the carnal existence is imperative. The purpose of this connection is so one can live from a place that is transformed by such awareness, not purely from the physical, mental, or emotional selves, all of which are rooted in humanistic desires, or as yoga refers to it, in the “ego”. Maintaining an awareness of the spiritual component of life helps one walk in accordance with a Higher standard that goes beyond the humanistic selfish motives. Yes, for the sake of loving others regardless of feelings and emotions, but equally to love oneself regardless of feelings and emotions. This awareness offers a foundation rooted in purpose and identity, helping offer a perspective that a person is more than simply his/her thoughts or emotions. The spiritual body helps create a checks and balance among the physical, mental, and emotional bodies and propels us towards a sense of self-awareness, and ultimately, an overall wholeness. For it is only in first knowing one’s own identity that the ability to know another’s is then made possible, and as a result, meaningful connection and intimacy are made plausible.

When it comes to being aware of and knowing the self, it is not a matter of perfection; self-awareness is a matter of growth. Self-awareness means being comfortable with the uncomfortable. Self-awareness means one has the tools to bring

these various aspects of the self back into a balanced and harmonious alignment, back to one's true whole identity. "The intention is to learn to be with and to interact with our own bodies in such a way that we come to know what works best for us." (Emerson 28). This only continues to perpetuate the need for whole-body therapeutic tools, "Yoga engages the student in the healing process; by playing an active role in their journey toward health, the healing comes from within, instead of from an outside source and a greater sense of autonomy is achieved."⁷⁴ Yoga is a tool to help facilitate this self-awareness and to be able to help cultivate recognition when we are not operating from such a whole harmonious place.

Yoga-based approaches use a series of postures and breathing techniques to build a sense of connection to the self. Yoga practitioners are able to cultivate the ability to remain present, to notice and tolerate inner experience, and to develop a new relationship with their body. This body-based practice then has a ripple effect on emotional and mental health, on relationships, and on one's experience of living in the world.⁷⁵

However, there must be space created for such a journey to self-awareness to take form in the first place, and that journey inevitably brings us back to vulnerability. Brené Brown writes, "The definition of vulnerability is uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. But

⁷⁴ Catherine Woodyard, "Exploring the Therapeutic Effects of Yoga and Its Ability to Increase Quality of Life," *International Journal of Yoga* 4, no 2 (September 2011): 49, <https://doi.org/10.4103/0973-6131.85485>

⁷⁵ Emerson and Hopper, *Overcoming Trauma through Yoga, Reclaiming Your Body*, 24.

vulnerability is not weakness; it's our most accurate measure of courage.”⁷⁶ The willingness to reconnect with ourselves requires our readiness to not only show up, but to also be present when we are there, wherever ‘there’ might be. Coming back to the Yoga Sutras, “Yoga is the restriction of the fluctuations of consciousness,”⁷⁷ one must allow the mind to settle and to become fully present in the moment. Being detached from reality is an epidemic that is taking over society due to the numerous things not only vying for one’s attention, but more so due to the growing desire or need to feel that there must be an escape from reality in the first place. As a result, it is no wonder that addictions are so prevalent today, especially sex addiction where there is equally a component of not only escape, but a false sense of connection that is desperately being pursued.

When there is a lack of connection to the self, unfulfilling connection is sought in external unhealthy factors. This disconnection, when it comes to any of the self-components, can happen in a myriad of different ways for multiple reasons, some reasons graver than others. “The truth is really, because of my work, I know everyone has a story that will break your heart. Everyone is completely feeling isolated and alone and ‘less-than,’ and those feelings are the one thing that we all share in common.”⁷⁸ As previously noted, sex addiction has the potential to be a disassociate disorder depending on specific

⁷⁶ Brown, *Braving the Wilderness* (London: Vermillion, 2017), 153.

⁷⁷ Patañjali, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, trans. by Georg Feuerstein, 26.

⁷⁸ Brené Brown, “A Look at Wholeheartedness with Brené Brown,” interview by Dumbo Feather, B The Change, March 26, 2018, <https://bthechange.com/a-look-at-wholeheartedness-with-brené-brown-c8d8f3fd8b63>.

root issues. *Overcoming the Body Through Yoga, Reclaiming the Body* refers to disassociation in reference to avoiding pain-induced memories from our past, “Disassociation is a coping mechanism used to create distance from emotions, cognitions, or somatic symptoms.”⁷⁹ One might not even realize how disconnected he/she has truly become from the present moment and from themselves, yet yoga is a way to facilitate such reconnection. “Yoga teachers and clinicians can use physical cues to help survivors make links to their present-moment experience.”⁸⁰ Exploring the physical body through the method of yoga and/or yoga therapy practices allows an opportunity to reconnect to the body, thus the present moment, which can then begin to offer an avenue of reconnection to other parts of one’s life.

’The act of opening my shoulders or my legs in Happy Baby pose [a yoga posture that involves being prone with the legs up in the air and the hips widened- a very open and exposed gesture] may be physical, but it also carries a lot of meaning. A lot of the meaning is rooted in my body, and that is what makes the gestures and just thinking about being able to do them so profound...For me it always comes back to the body and the memory that I store there.’ Another survivor experimenting with yoga described her experience of coming alive again through her yoga practice...She was present, experiencing the current moment, and she

⁷⁹ Emerson and Hopper, *Overcoming Trauma through Yoga, Reclaiming Your Body*, 22.

⁸⁰ Emerson and Hopper, *Overcoming Trauma through Yoga, Reclaiming Your Body*, 41.

wasn't afraid of what she was feeling. She had tears in her eyes, and a big, warm smile broke out on her face. 'I feel whole,' she said.⁸¹

For human beings to get in touch with this precious place of the whole self: a balanced existence amongst the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual selves, is such a beautiful, priceless gift. A gift that should be pursued and cultivated to not only develop this sense of wholeness, but in order to have the capacity to recognize each of these layers within another individual. Self-awareness ultimately grants the ability to invest in others, the whole "Love your neighbor as yourself" mindset (Mark 12:31).⁸² As life reveals, it is hard to give away that which is not first possessed, even more so that which is not even acknowledged. The courage to be present and show up with oneself then gives the courage to do so with others. Moreover, as one becomes more in touch with his/her individuality, he/she can contribute more communally.

Owning our story can be hard but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it. Embracing our vulnerabilities is risky but not nearly as dangerous as giving up on love and belonging and joy—the experiences that make us the most vulnerable. Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light. When we deny our stories, they define us. When we own our stories, we get to write a brand new ending.⁸³

⁸¹ Emerson and Hopper, *Overcoming Trauma through Yoga, Reclaiming Your Body*, 140.

⁸² Mark 12: 31 (NIV)

⁸³ Michelle Monet and Brené Brown as quoted in, "Owning Our Story can be Hard, but it is Not Nearly as Difficult as Spending Our Lives Running From it," Medium, October 23, 2017, <https://link.medium.com/rmgqxrhBn9>.

Through the restoration and healing of each of the bodies: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual, one's true identity has the opportunity to, not only be restored, but to fully blossom. As a result, there is an invitation to wholeness extended to the lives of those around them as well, "Her soul is Alive. And we are drawn to her."⁸⁴ As discussed, the end goal of self-awareness is not perfection, the end goal is growth.

As noted, in addressing not only the physical body, but the mental, the emotional, and the spiritual bodies that make up the human life, yoga's whole-body approach meets the individual on each of these various layers. "It affirms the two-fold essence of what constitutes yoga therapy- to empower a person so that they progress towards wellness using practices of yoga, guided by the underlying philosophical approach of promoting an integrated oneness."⁸⁵ As a result, it is believed that such an application could help facilitate healing in the lives of those struggling with sex addiction and the correlating symptoms they navigate. For example, studies have shown that yoga, as not only a complementary, but also as a stand-alone therapy, is effective in reducing both anxiety

⁸⁴ Stasi Eldredge and John Eldredge, *Your Captivating Heart: Discover How God's True Love Can Free a Woman's Soul*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007.

⁸⁵ Aparna Ramaswamy, "Integrative Yoga Therapy to Relieve Symptoms of Depression, Anxiety, and Bipolar Disorder," *Proceedings of the Yoga & Psyche Conference*, ed. Mariana Caplan and Gabriel Axel (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2014), 152.

and depression.⁸⁶ Furthermore, practices such as breathwork and chants, amongst others, have been shown to decrease insomnia by 50%.⁸⁷ Studies have also shown the application of various *Kriya Yoga* practices have a positive effect on those struggling with depression.⁸⁸ As well, “The *Kriya Yoga* brings psychophysiological changes leading to the total control of the body, i.e., internal functions of the body.”⁸⁹ In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, it reads, “Mind is ruler of the senses...”⁹⁰ As meditation is a way to reign in the mind, it has been said that such a practice is the most vital component of yoga, helping to eliminate negative emotions such as anger, among others. “Both mindfulness and meditation-based practices have enjoyed increasing popularity in contemporary psychotherapy, as such practices can be part of a ‘self-help’ treatment for anxiety and depression.”⁹¹ Studies have also shown that particularly inversions, standing poses, heart

⁸⁶ Chandra Nanthakumar, “Yoga for Anxiety and Depression, a Literature Review,” *The Journal of Mental Health Training, Education and Practice*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2020, pp. 157–169, <https://doi.org/10.1108/jmhtep-09-2019-0050>.

⁸⁷ Sadhna Verma, et al, “Yoga of Immortals Intervention Reduces Symptoms of Depression, Insomnia and Anxiety,” *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, vol. 12, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2021.648029>.

⁸⁸ Suprabha Srivastava, et al, “Interventional Effect of Bhramari Pranayama on Mental Health among College Students,” *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.25215/0402.044>.

⁸⁹ Sarita Vivek Bapat, “Psychophysiological Analysis of Kriya Yoga as per Patanjala Yoga Sutra,” *Yoga Mimamsa*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2016, p. 18, <https://doi.org/10.4103/0044-0507.198701>.

⁹⁰ Muktibodhananda, and Satyananda Saraswati, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika: Light on Hatha Yoga*. Bihar School of Yoga, 1998, p. 510

⁹¹ Sadhna Verma, et al, “Yoga of Immortals Intervention Reduces Symptoms of Depression,

openers, and supine/restorative *asanas*, or postures, are especially effective in mitigating depression and anxiety as well, along with insomnia and low self-esteem.⁹² Continuing to look at other treatment options, there is research supporting various methodologies like psychotherapeutic and pharmacotherapeutic methods also being effective.⁹³ As well, the combination of pharmacological, behavioral, and psycho-dynamical approaches has also said to be helpful.⁹⁴ Additionally, twelve step approaches, closed group therapy, and cognitive behavioral therapy have also shown to be affective in the treatment of sex addiction.⁹⁵ With each of these varying symptoms being, as previously noted, prevalent in the lives of sex addicts, it is evident how such yogic applications could assist those struggling with sexual disorders.

Insomnia and Anxiety,” p.2

⁹² Andrea L. Forfytlow, “Integrating Yoga with Psychotherapy: A Complementary Treatment for Anxiety and Depression,” *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, 45(2), 2011, 132-150. Retrieved October 11, 2021 from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ930795.pdf>.

⁹³ Griffiths, et al. “Treatment of Sexual Addiction within the British National Health Service,” 2014.

⁹⁴ Kızılok, “Sexual Addiction: Definition, Etiology and Treatment.”

⁹⁵ Griffiths, et al. “Treatment of Sexual Addiction within the British National Health Service,” 2014.

Yamas and Niyamas

When taking the perspective of the whole-body approach a step further specifically regarding sex addiction, the *yamas* and the *niyamas*, guidelines that offer a right way of living according to the Yoga Sutras, present an additional way to do just that. Through such a lens, a deeper sense of, not only how one views the self but others as well begins to develop. Furthermore, from such a viewpoint, the way an individual treats him/herself as well as the world around them begins to also shift. “Practice of restraints should not be limited to the physical level alone. One should not be content by observing these virtues in words and actions alone, but, one should endeavour to remove the deep-rooted impressions of egoism and its effects from the *Chitta* (mind-stuff).”⁹⁶ Starting specifically with the *yamas* or restraints, one such restraint is *Bramacharya* or control of sex-energy. The practice of *Brahmacharya* is disciplined mindfulness that one applies to certain actions and/or activities, thus it is, “...an ability to practice moderation in all things...”⁹⁷ However, to fully understand *Bramacharya* and its application to sex addiction, one must first explore the two *yamas* that come before it.

⁹⁶ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p.7

⁹⁷ D. Finlayson, et al, *Yoga therapy: Foundations, tools, and practice: A comprehensive textbook*, Singing Dragon, 2021, p. 43

Ahimsa, or non-violence, is the highest of all the virtues according to the sutras.⁹⁸ It is, "...the foundation of all *Yamas*...It is also the vital spirit behind all *Niyamas*..."⁹⁹ Not only regarding physical violence, but anything done to cause harm to another through one's body, speech, or mind is a breach of *ahimsa*. "When you injure others' sentiments and feelings, you are practising subtler forms of violence."¹⁰⁰ An act that is believed to be ultimately rooted in ego and a lack of self-awareness; it is written that "a reliance on egoistic life" is what initially causes violence to develop within oneself.¹⁰¹ "The thought-waves of violence joining with unenlightened ego assume the form of desires to hurt, injure, and harm others."¹⁰² An example of such is seen in unhealthy masculinity. As former NFL quarterback Don McPherson puts it, "...masculinity is really a performance, it's a performance boys do for other boys. So what happens is that girls become what boys do to prove their masculinity to other boys. So, she's not necessarily a girl with a name and identity, but she's an opportunity to prove my masculinity to my friends."¹⁰³ Part of avoiding such an internal harmful development that is motivated by ego lies in one's ability to recognize another's soul, their identity, their whole person. "In day to day relationships, a practitioner of non-violence must behold the Self abiding in all beings." (Yoga sex sub-13). As a result, it is the opposite of reducing people to commodities. Instead, it is, not only recognizing human life, but more importantly, dignifying it. It is

⁹⁸ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*.

⁹⁹ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p.28

¹⁰⁰ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p.11

¹⁰¹ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*.

¹⁰² Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p.18

¹⁰³ Shore, "Liberated: The New Sexual Revolution," 2018.

this lack of spiritual perspective that gives rise to the ego in the first place (yoga sex sub-31). Moreover,

When a person is unable to find fulfillment of a positive nature, he takes recourse egoistic methods of compensation. He begins to hurt himself. This process of hurting himself is subtle in the beginning. He develops thoughts of violence, misunderstanding and cruelty. Therefore, he does not allow himself to be relaxed, happy and peaceful. He is unable to understand that he is hurting himself.¹⁰⁴

Revisiting once more the behavior of an addict, “People with addiction use substances or engage in behaviors that become compulsive and often continue despite harmful consequences,”¹⁰⁵ the parallels of conduct rooted in both *ahimsa* and addiction are uncanny. Additionally,

A person overcome with impure *Vasanas* (subtle desires) is unable to experience fulfillment of his desires. He sees his life as a succession of bitterness and frustration...He enters into a world of love and hate for selfish reasons. He can stoop to any act of violence and sin for satisfying his egoistic interest.¹⁰⁶

When self-discipline dissipates, self-fulfillment is the driving factor behind one’s actions, and the need to satisfy desires at the expense of another is inevitable. For it is the tolerance of dehumanization that history has proven time and time again to be the

¹⁰⁴ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁵ American Society of Addiction Medicine, “Definition of Addiction,” 2019.

¹⁰⁶ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 34.

primary instrument used in every recorded genocide throughout time.¹⁰⁷ The practice of *ahimsa* cultivates a mindfulness in how one approaches him/herself, as well as others.

Following *ahimsa* is the second of the *yamas*, truthfulness or *satyam*. “But without Truth it would be impossible to observe any principles or rules in life.”¹⁰⁸ It is believed that within the practice of truth, ego is eliminated, and love exits.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, when practicing truthfulness, one becomes aligned internally, “He is harmonized in his thought, speech, and action. Such a harmonization is the nature of perfection in the practice of truthfulness.”¹¹⁰ For in such harmony, self-awareness is feasible and, as a result, self-control is then made possible.

The body is compared to a chariot. The senses are the horses. The mind is the reins. The individual soul is the dweller in the chariot. The intuitive Self is the driver of the chariot. The purpose of the human existence is to lead this chariot to the Goal of Self-realization through the diverse roads of virtues and vice, and circumstances of the world-process...Further he comes adept in the practice of *Dama* (self-control) and *Shama* (control of mind resulting in serenity of the mind).¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Brown, *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*, Random House, 2019.

¹⁰⁸ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁹ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*.

¹¹⁰ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 47.

¹¹¹ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 49, 52.

When the pursuit of truth is at the forefront of one's focus and motives, the mind and body align in a way that is moving one closer to, not only self-awareness, but a higher level of such, "...the mind and senses are highly cultured, controlled, and purified."¹¹² Moreover, there is a separation between one's thoughts and one's identity, and as a result, actions are mindful, not mindless, with the ability to transcend the ego. When this pursuit of truth is not present, then the ego returns to the driver seat and consequently, "One is unable to differentiate between right from wrong, virtue from vice, due to the fog of falsehood that affects the transparency of the intellect."¹¹³ Truth creates an internal compass towards purity, not only in action, but in thought and speech as well. A purity that is not rooted in legalistic dos and don'ts, but rather in a purity that is inviting the true self to shine forth, one that, in actuality, is rooted in authenticity and wholeness.

It is only through non-violence and truth, that awareness of the true self is plausible, however it is through the practice of *Bramacharya* that a greater advancement of the mind can really take place.¹¹⁴ When looking at the restraint of sex in a more generalized context, *Bramacharya* does not necessarily label sex nor sexual energy as a negative, in fact, according to Sri Swami Sivananada, it is a creative force that simply needs to be directed towards the appropriate focus, "*Bramacharya* is an integral part of Yoga. It is an indispensable factor for divine union or blissful *Samadhi*. Sex-urge is a

¹¹² Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 52.

¹¹³ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 51.

¹¹⁴ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*.

creative force. Direct the sex-energy to the higher spiritual channel. It will be sublimated. It will be transformed into divine energy.”¹¹⁵ Additionally,

Sex is a powerful factor in human personality. It is the creative force operating in the physical vital plane of one’s being. In the scheme of nature, it is a means to promote spiritual unfoldment. But when it is considered as the finality in life’s ambitions, it becomes the basis of mental and personality disintegration.¹¹⁶

While *Bramacharya* is most associated with control over sexual energy, as the Sanskrit word itself literally translates to “celibacy”¹¹⁷ it can also house a more general connotation regarding self-restraint. Thus, perhaps cultivating a deeper sense of self-awareness overall.¹¹⁸

Brahmacharya (restraint, moderation, continence): *brahmacharya* can be interpreted and practiced in many different ways. We can practice *brahmacharya* by consciously choosing to use our life force to express our *dharma*, our true nature and mission or purpose, rather than to dissipate it frivolously in the pursuit of temporary pleasures (*palkhivala*). We can be aware of underdoing and overdoing in our lives and try to keep everything in moderation by listening, feeling, and tuning into our bodies and their needs both on and off our

¹¹⁵ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 58, 59.

¹¹⁶ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 61.

¹¹⁷ J. S. Willis, Ed., *The Joy of Yoga*. (1-16). Avalon/Marlowe & Company, 2002, Accessed <https://philarchive.org/archive/PIPTMO-2>.

¹¹⁸ Swami Sri Sivananda, *Practice of Brahmacharya*, The Divine Life Trust Society, 1997.

mats. Moderation in consumption, behaviors, and finding a better work-life balance reflect *brahmacharya*.¹¹⁹

Self-awareness and self-restraint go hand in hand, and both are necessary parts of an addict's healing process.

...yoga and mindfulness as complementary therapies for addiction, it is suggested that the skill, insights, and self-awareness through yoga and mindfulness practices can target multiple psychological, neural, physiological, and behavioural processes implicated in addiction and relapse.¹²⁰

It is not about removing one's sexual energy; it is about redirecting it in a healthy way. Ultimately, *Bramacharya* is the ability to house a perspective that goes beyond the physical realm.

Bramacharya literally means movement in *Brahman*, but in effect, it implies the virtue of mastering the biological urge of sex, and transmuting sex energy into spiritual energy to aid mental advancement towards the realization of the Supreme Self...The energy that has the possibility to create human beings should not be handled under the dictates of passing sentiment; it should not be wasted, nor

¹¹⁹ Nina Markil, et al, "CHES HATHA YOGA," *ACSM's Health & Fitness Journal* 14(5), 9-24. Doi: 10.1249/FIT.0b013e3181ed5af2, p. 23

¹²⁰ A. Tripathi, "Impact of internet addiction on mental health: An integrative therapy is needed," *Integrative Medicine International*, 4(3-4), 215–222, 2018
<https://doi.org/10.1159/000491997>, p. 220

misused. Rather, when it is properly channelized and sublimated, it gives rise to the development of a very high standard of health of the body and mind.¹²¹

This ability brings the individual back to his/her sense of identity, back to their inner resource. Moreover, it is within such a practice that one is hopefully able to develop enough awareness to recognize if his/her pursuit of sex is either a result of such or a lack thereof.

The two remaining *yamas*, *asteya* or non-stealing and *aparigraha* or non-covetousness, offer another unique lens into these restraints and the application to sexual addiction specifically.

When the mind is invaded by the malady of greed and sentimentality, it is impossible to be truly prosperous and successful. One may possess a vast amount of wealth, and yet, he cannot be considered wealthy, because his mind continues to hanker for more and more wealth. His hankering is more intense than in a normal poor person...Practice of non-covetousness requires the abandonment of the basis of greed. On the other hand, practice of non-stealing demands abandonment of the effect of greed. This is the subtle difference between the two.¹²²

Returning once more to the story of Johnny Rio, an example of such a hankering that is never satisfied is clearly seen. A greed that clouds judgement and strokes the ego, yet never offers a lasting sense of fulfillment. Rio returns day after day fueled by a greed that is truly unquenchable. It is only within the practice of *aparigraha* that one holds the

¹²¹ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 61.

¹²² Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 97, 101.

ability to stop such an endless pattern, "...a virtue that stops one from a blind chase after possessions... Therefore, though you try to possess an object, you are merely running after shadows; though you feel that you have possessed an object, you have merely held a shadow in your fleeting hands."¹²³ It is in the shadows where Rio's escapades inevitably take place, and equally, it is within the shadows that secrecy lies, and shame has the ability to continue to grow and fester. Yet, illumination of one's true self, along with an enlightened perspective, can offer freedom from such darkness. "With this insight into the nature of Self, an aspirant must continue to remove from his mind every shade of greed... just as the shining rays of the sun dissolve the mist, fog, and darkness of the night, in the same way the God-ward vision destroys ignorance... desires and... entanglements."¹²⁴ Awareness of one's true self, rooted in a Higher perspective that goes beyond humanistic definitions, offers the foundation needed for the pursuit of health and wholeness. As a result, such selfish cravings can dissipate due to identity no longer being sought in the object/objects pursued.

While the *yamas* are considered restraints, the *niyamas* are known as observances. They are: *shaucha* or purity, *santosh* or contentment, *tapah* or austerity, *swadhyaya* or study of scriptures, and *ishwara pranidhana* or surrender to God. *Shaucha* is a matter of both physical and mental purity, "When the mind is free from greed, pride, passion, and hatred, it is considered pure."¹²⁵ The second *niyama*, *santosh*, is also rooted in the mind,

¹²³ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 103, 107.

¹²⁴ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 100, 106

¹²⁵ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 112

“He finds a divine significance in every development. Therefore, he grows in mental contentment.”¹²⁶ Coexisting amongst such a contentment is *tapah*, which can be considered spiritual discipline, “...a mental and physical endurance in performing the day-to-day duties of life.”¹²⁷ My great-grandmother used to say, “Anything worth doing is worth doing well.” When viewing the day to day through the spiritual lens, even the mundane begins to hold significance, and as a result, invites not only a mindfulness in, but an overall contentment as well that is grounded in a knowledge that continues to exist outside of the physical realm. This knowledge that exists outside of oneself is found in the practice of the remaining two *niyamas*: *swadhyaya* and *ishwara pranidhana*. Both are rooted in the pursuit of God, one through the scriptures and one through His presence. “He enjoys the sweetness of divine surrender. He allows himself to be led by the Divine Will. His mind continues to flow to God in every condition of life. Surrender draws divine grace. Divine grace leads to spiritual attainment.”¹²⁸ Without the acknowledgment and pursuit of God, we are left to our own devices to navigate this complex thing called life.

Feel the presence of God at all times. When your intellect is freed from complexes of worldly vanities, when the light of reason burns brighter in the shrine of your heart, you will feel the presence of God at all times. You will become aware of a universal presence of a divine sustenance underlying all movements of your life.

¹²⁶ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 112

¹²⁷ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 113

¹²⁸ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 113

God is not a matter of supposition or postulation, but He is the very Truth of one's existence.¹²⁹

A lack of such a perspective allows our ego, our carnality, and our humanistic desires or *vasanas*, to all skew the filters in which we see ourselves as well as others. It is only in knowing God that we are truly able to know ourselves, thus, identity rooted in an existence that goes beyond the physical world. Applying this perspective to how we speak and treat others creates a platform in which implementing each of the various *yamas* and *niyamas* becomes feasible.

Of all lessons in life, the best is know one's own essential nature. Vast wealth, enormous acquisitions, great material powers- all of these are merely like busting bubbles of vanities, if you have not endeavoured to know yourself, if you have not tried to realize your deeper Spirit. Many people continue to pursue external achievements in business, and in sense-pleasures of the world, but they do learn to simplify their life...and maintaining the reason in a state of purity. Therefore, in spite of the external glories of life, they develop veils and veils of complexes that hide their essential nature from their own sight, and devoid of depth within one's own being...one lives a life of constant agony, of constant pain and misery.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 185

¹³⁰ Nanda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence*, p. 187

It is only in the acknowledgment of the human life being made up of a physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual body that true wholeness can be found. As a result, authentic identity and intimacy fall close behind.

Conclusion

The power of identity rooted in the acknowledgment of a multilayer person allows what it means to be human to carry the full weight of what it deserves. In doing so, healthy perspectives of oneself are made possible, and as a result, the ability to view and treat others with the same dignity is also made possible. If existing in a world where spiritual, mental, and emotional layers are non-existent, the human experience is reduced to such a limited viewpoint framed by one's selfish egotistical filters due to a lack of a higher awareness. Interactions with others become shallow and one dimensional, leaving no room for true connection, belonging, and intimacy. "Intimacy is so important because it's how we receive the highest level of love."¹³¹ To experience the fullness of what it means to be human in a healthy way, vulnerability must be risked with our true selves being brought to light.

Creating an environment where those struggling with sex addiction feel seen and acknowledged versus judged and shamed is the first and foremost starting point to

¹³¹ Vallotton, *Moral Revolution: The Naked Truth about Sexual Purity*, p. 116

offering tools towards restoration and healing. The second priority lies in addressing the various components that make up the human life. An example of such an application is seen in Yoga 12 Step Recovery (Y12SR), an organization that specializes in using yogic practices and principles to specifically navigate addiction. Their website reads,

The characteristics and effects of addiction can easily be described as separation. Addictive behaviors disconnect us from ourselves, our loved ones, our environment and so much more. Conversely, yoga itself means union, integration, balance. Yoga and its practices teach the fine art of balancing our multi-dimensional lives while living in a complex world.¹³²

Yoga is a reconnection back to the true self. While yoga certainly addresses the full dimensions of the human life, it is worth pointing out once more the value of applying such practices in addition to other mental health care services, especially regarding sex addiction. In doing so, the person is working through these various layers in a completely supported way.

As aforementioned, the driving factors behind such behaviors seen in sexual addiction, as well as sexual promiscuity run deeper than mere physical fulfillment. “Anything that masters you is an addiction, and it will eventually destroy you. Addictions grow in the basement of denial. Denial means that you avoid the root issues that cause pain in your heart by covering them up with pleasure. That’s the reason that sexual

¹³² “Why Yoga 12 Step Recovery,” *Yoga of 12 Step Recovery*, <https://y12sr.com/about/why-yoga-12-step/>.

addictions are rampant in our world.”¹³³ The value of acknowledging the underlying currents that motivate unhealthy behaviors and certain lifestyle choices is imperative if wholeness and restoration are truly to be found in one’s life. Wholeness is only discovered when denial and shame are no longer in the driver’s seat. Only when one is willing to risk vulnerability is authenticity achieved, as well as a sense of belonging. Humans are meant for community and relationship. At the heart of it all, each of us possesses a longing to be seen and known. To have the capability of seeing another, one must first hold the ability to see themselves. When exploring the multi-faceted layers of what it means to be human, we venture beyond mere carnality and soar into the full divinity of who we were created to be. To be human is a gift full of complexity; it would be a great disservice to treat anyone less than the fullness of what this means, especially within themselves.

¹³³ Vallotton, *Moral Revolution: The Naked Truth about Sexual Purity*, p.88

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