

COMMENTARIES ON THE CHARACTERISTICS MOST OF US SEEM TO HAVE IN COMMON

Characteristic 5:

“Because of our low self-esteem, we used sex to feel validated and complete.”

In our active compulsion, the causes of our low self-esteem were less important than the effects. As children, many of us experienced families that were not nurturing, or that were abjectly abusive. We craved attention and a balm to soothe how we felt, and how we felt about ourselves. Some of us became socially isolated or even sexually anorexic because we felt that contact with people in other than the most superficial ways threatened us. Some of us felt unsafe around others. Some of us had a deep sense of unworthiness, and were consumed by toxic and secret shame. Some of us allowed societal attitudes to our sexuality or other background to affect our sense of ourselves, including as sexual beings. The emptiness and dejection we felt from being lonely, left out, ignored and in some cases ostracized, fueled our compulsive behaviors.

The compulsion told us that the cure for how we felt about ourselves was sex, or romance, or love, or a relationship. When we did have sexual relations, there was never a sense of equality. It felt like our only value was in what we could provide sexually to others. Or, conversely, in acting out our low self-esteem and disconnection, some of us would routinely objectify or exploit others. Our self-shame often became a vicious cycle, in which our efforts to obtain self-respect through sexual exploits and encounters actually lowered it further. In relationships, we often could not feel love or affection except in sexual situations. If our partner happened to be ill or otherwise temporarily unavailable for sex, it felt like rejection.

In recovery, we no longer need to look for external sources of validation. We distinguish ourselves in healthy ways. We come to accept ourselves as we are, and others as they are. We let go of perfectionism and grandiosity, and we develop humility. We learn to forgive ourselves, and others. As we cross the bridge from our fantasy world to the real world, we gain a sense of belonging to a community. Through progress in our recovery, we come to identify causes and conditions that underlie our negative self-image and feed our low self-esteem, and we work on addressing them. In working the Steps, we learn to be "right-sized," with a self-esteem that is neither too high nor too low, but is based in reality. We find emotional balance. Sex, too, assumes its rightful proportion, purpose and place in our life.

(Extract from “The Characteristics Most of Us Seem to Have in Common” © SCA-ISO)