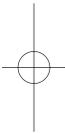
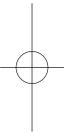


INTRODUCTION

Once Upon a Love Addiction



It was a warm summer night in July, and Mary, an attractive, intelligent femme brunette, decided to join her usual group of lesbian pals at a lively, chic restaurant in Los Angeles. Whenever Mary went out she hoped she'd meet someone new, but that night she was not feeling particularly desperate. Then it happened. Standing at the bar, chatting with a friend and sipping her mocktail, Mary spotted a sexy brunette out of the corner of her eye. She felt immediately drawn to this woman who was just Mary's type—a soft butch with a Rachel Maddow look, short hair, and a tall, slender build. Mary was immediately turned on by her expressive eyes and creative, androgynous style. Promptly ending the conversation with her friend, Mary walked over and introduced herself to the woman. Her name was Jane.

Mary and Jane ended up deep in conversation for the rest of the night, talking passionately about life, love, and work, unaware of the other women around them. Mary found Jane's sense of humor and subtly sexy demeanor intriguing and her openness compelling. There were other things she couldn't quite put her finger on—just “something about Jane.” There was one problem though: Jane had a girlfriend. “Damn,” Mary thought, “don't the cute ones always have girlfriends?”

Little did Mary realize the night she met Jane that she would soon plunge into a deep well of love addiction, and only later discover just

how profoundly it affected her life. It would take years to understand how to manage this addiction and prevent it from consuming her.

MARY'S RELATIONSHIP TO LOVE ADDICTION

Mary had already wrestled with alcohol and drugs earlier in her life. Thankfully, she was sober, and her life had gotten much better. Once she was in recovery, her career as an advertising executive took off.

Allowing herself to explore her true lesbian nature was also a big deal for Mary. Coming out to herself, her friends, and her family had not been easy. Her family's heterocentric (having a heterosexual bias and viewing heterosexuality as superior to any other sexual orientation) values and, in particular, her mother's negative feelings about same-sex love, deeply affected her.¹ Mary was in her late twenties before she finally embraced her attraction to women and freely discussed her sexuality. Once Mary overcame her struggles with coming out, she immersed herself in the lesbian community, giving her a sense of pride and security. Her career took off, and she started living her life to the fullest. Coming out had unleashed an excitement around sex and love that Mary hadn't experienced before, and with these new feelings she jumped into multiple and often overlapping romantic and sexual experiences.

After discovering Jane wasn't available, Mary decided not to pursue her. Not that night, anyway. But she didn't forget about her. Over the next couple of years, Mary would run into Jane at various lesbian functions. Every now and then she would find herself fantasizing about Jane and the possibility of a relationship, imagining that something very special existed between them. On one occasion she woke up with a start, breathless from the explicit sexual dream she'd had about the two of them. Thinking of Jane in these sexual and romantic ways made her ultra-excited and triggered a sense of aliveness she did not experience any other way. She loved—*loved!*—being this attracted to another woman and was enthralled by the idea that she was even capable of such a special connection. These reflections made her feel good about herself. She would feel varying degrees of euphoria exploring this fantasy life. She felt wonderful and full of hope.

In those moments, those fleeting seconds, Mary felt free of all the mundane and frustrating aspects of her life. Feeling this high made life seem exhilarating and worth living. It softened the shame she had carried around with her since she was a child. It diminished daily hardships and challenges; extinguished her feelings of loneliness, unworthiness, and self-hatred; and muted the voices in her head that told her she wasn't good enough or deserving of a great life. In those very precious moments, all the problems, resentments, and difficulties she struggled with vanished.

WHAT IS LOVE ADDICTION?

At this point in human evolution, most of us are familiar with addiction and the effect it can have on everyone, including the friends and family members of the addict. The effects of alcohol and drug abuse, which can be life threatening and lead to violent acts, are fairly obvious. Sex addiction came out of the closet more recently and has been prominently exposed in the media. However, the focus has mainly been on heterosexual men. Sex addiction has been the subject of a number of movies including *Shame*, *Don Jon*, and *Thanks for Sharing*, all of which have highlighted straight male sex addicts, and the damage it does to the men and their loved ones.² The 2012 romantic comedy *Thanks for Sharing* is the story of several sex addicts and the twelve-step recovery program they use to overcome their addiction. The movie is funny and warm while still educating its audience on the seriousness of the topic—that sex addiction destroys lives, but one can recover when motivated and be willing to do what it takes to get better, such as going to a twelve-step program.³

HOW IS LOVE ADDICTION DIFFERENT FROM SEX ADDICTION?

While sex and love addiction may overlap in some people, for others the two can be quite separate. Both involve getting high from their respective drugs: sex or love. But sex addicts get high solely through acts that are compulsive and involve sex such as daily or weekly anonymous sex,

hiring prostitutes, porn, and masturbation.⁴ Love addicts get their high by falling in love, obsessing about another person, never being alone, serial monogamy, or the fantasy of falling in love with or having a relationship with other people.⁵ Sometimes it involves sex with the desired person, but sometimes it does not.

While many helpful books have been written on love addiction for women, most are heterosexually focused, which leaves women who love women—whether they identify as lesbian, bisexual, queer, fluid, or pansexual—with little understanding of how love addiction can affect them. Love addiction has serious consequences for women with varying styles of LGBTQ identity, including lesbian, bi, fluid (having a more fluctuating sense of sexuality that includes attraction to any gender), queer (an identity that embraces all same-sex love, gender identities, and gender expressions as their own—they feel connected to every identity within the spectrum of the LGBTQ community), or pansexual (an identity that encompasses an attraction to all people). These women suffer greatly from many of the destructive and often unconscious behaviors and emotional demands that this addiction creates.⁶

Since the 1980s to the present day, several love addiction pioneers and twelve-step programs have defined love addiction in various ways. The characteristics used to help organize the definition for this book are from Pia Mellody's *Facing Love Addiction*, Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous' (SLAA) literature, and Anne Wilson Schaef's *Escape from Intimacy*. Each of these books have been invaluable in helping me sort through the myriad of available explanations. The lesbian psyche was kept in mind the entire time this was thought out. If you think that love addiction might be a problem in your life, ask yourself if you possess any of these characteristics.

Characteristics of a Love Addict

1. A love addict idealizes the woman she falls in love with and often assigns magical qualities to her. Love addicts become preoccupied with the idealized woman and spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about her and longing to be with her. This “falling in love” process creates a physical high as the brain releases dopamine and oxytocin when they are sexually and romantically

- attracted to another women. These “feel good” chemicals are potent for most lesbians, and for the addict they can be addictive.
2. Love addicts have difficulty setting boundaries and holding on to their individual identities. They tend to trust too quickly and become vulnerable without maintaining healthy boundaries. Lesbian love addicts pursue and get deeply involved with women before knowing enough about who their potential mate is and if there is any potential for compatibility.
 3. Love addicts have unrealistic expectations for a relationship and need constant “unconditional positive regard” from their partners. Due to their attachment issues and childhood and societal trauma, they suffer greatly when their unrealistic need is not met and the high of falling in love is threatened.
 4. A love addict will stop caring for herself in the relationship—emotionally, physically, or financially—and neglect friends and family. She will value pleasing her partner at all costs, compromising her own sense of self.
 5. Because they secretly feel unlovable, love addicts use love, relationships, sex, and romance to stave off feelings of unworthiness, emptiness, loneliness, sadness, grief, anger, guilt, and shame.
 6. Unable to tolerate being alone, some women will jump from relationship to relationship, taking no responsibility for why the last one didn’t work and pursuing the high of a new romantic love at all costs.⁷

MARY’S ADDICTION INCREASES OVER TIME

Over the years, Mary and Jane ran into each other at various events. One such event was an afternoon lesbian gathering in the spring of 2013, about two years after they met. It was a beautiful sunny day, and the party was made up of women in good moods socializing. The food was delicious, and the vibe enticing. Mary arrived with her current girlfriend, Tina, whom she loved deeply, but when she saw Jane across the yard her heart stopped. Again, she felt that exhilarating jolt, that thrilling feeling of being alive. “Wow,” she thought, “Jane looks hot.” Since Jane was also with another woman, they said “hi” to each other

and moved on, but Mary couldn't ignore the energy she immediately felt in Jane's presence.

Over the next few months, Jane and Mary connected on Facebook and Instagram, where Mary would occasionally find herself following Jane's activities to see what she was doing. Whenever she ran into Jane, Mary would experience that raw, animal-like attraction all over again—her heart would race, her palms would get sweaty, and that rush would return. Mary was fairly confident that Jane shared these feelings, but much as she desired a relationship with Jane, one of them always seemed to be in a relationship with another woman. The timing was never right.

MARY IS NEVER ALONE FOR LONG

Like many love addicts, Mary was never single for very long, if at all. If she wasn't in a relationship, she was chasing after the promise of a new one. Being in a relationship addressed Mary's normal, healthy needs—feeling safe, loved, and secure in the world—but it also fed Mary's love addiction. Being chased by women made her feel attractive, desirable, and powerful. Not all of her relationships had the same level of sexual and romantic stimulation, but each meant something very special.

Such was the case with Tina, a charming, soft butch with short auburn hair, a contagious smile, and a big heart. Unfortunately for Mary, Tina struggled with sobriety and love addiction. Though each of them often claimed to be the love of each other's life, Tina's feelings toward Mary would fluctuate, and when the heat waned she would become emotionally avoidant, distancing herself until she was emotionally gone from the relationship, or leave it all together. Their connection was intense, but it constantly cycled in and out. The two were always hot or cold, getting together or breaking up. In fact, it was during this on-again, off-again eight-year pattern with Tina that Mary met Jane. Each time she pursued Mary, Tina would express her undying love and promise that things would be different this time and that she had changed and finally gotten sober, and the two would reconcile. "Please," she would vow, "give me the chance to prove how much I love you. I'll be different this time, I promise."