

Inside Deceived by Claudia Black

Preface

I have been truly graced to have been working in the field of addictive disorders for thirty years. As a young social worker, I focused on alcoholics and their family members, and subsequently worked with people addicted to prescription pain medications, cocaine, and other drugs. Early in my career I became recognized for my work with young and adult children of alcoholics before we even had the language of codependency. Over the years my work has expanded to designing and implementing programs for families in a variety of settings. During this time as the field of addiction has grown, the recognition of sexual compulsivity has become more common. Nearly a decade ago I began to work with my first group of female partners confronted with sexual betrayal. It was this professional experience that inspired me to write *Deceived*.

Early in this work I quickly noticed three things. First, I saw how my experience with adult children and childhood sexual abuse survivors would be helpful, as the wives and partners frequently came from addictive, abusive, or otherwise impaired family systems. Second, I realized that the socialization of women reinforced much of the woman's behavior in these relationships *Give the man the benefit of the doubt. Don't trust yourself. Accommodate. Dismiss your needs in deference to the needs of others, particularly him.* Third, while there are many similarities between those addicted to alcohol and drugs and those who act out sexually, being the partner of someone who acts out sexually is a more personal, confusing, and shameful affront. The women I worked with experienced consequences that were disruptive on every level of life – morally, spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically.

During the group process, I witnessed the incredible courage from women in great angst and despair, courage which was professionally and personally awe inspiring. I would see them develop community as they shared their many feelings, experiences and questions along with much embarrassment, anger, confusion and shame.

In their despair, I saw these women grapple with self-esteem, self worth, and dignity at a level never before encountered in my work. Was this because of the particular women I worked with? Maybe, but I think not. I think the nature of betrayal they experienced, and their profound

personal histories coupled with the safety that was afforded them in the group to claim their voices allowed them to be authentic with each other and be true to themselves. All of these women came together as a force and they soared. In their anguish they cried; they were angry, oh so angry. They laughed and loved; bolstered one another and laughed some more. They came to love and support each other in ways they had never previously expressed or experienced. The common denominator was simply that they each had a partner who was a sex addict. Some of them had partners who became strong in recovery; others had partners who were never serious about recovery. Whatever their individual circumstances some stayed in their relationship, some ended up leaving, and some went through a divorce they did not seek. But each moved forward in her life and benefited greatly through the community of other women she found in her healing process.

Although I recognize that other people, men and women, are dealing with sexual deception in their relationships, the essence of what I am writing here would be lost if I were to try to address every conceivable type of situation involving sexual compulsivity and relationships. I have no doubt others will also find value in this book and it is my hope all will find community in which to begin healing.

This book is for you, the female partner, and I am honored to be a part of your journey. I continue to be in awe of the resiliency and spirit of women who feel so fragile, so vulnerable, and yet are so strong. In reading *Deceived* it is my hope you will better understand what is happening in your life, that you will garner validation for your experiences, and that you will find a path that offers you clarity, direction, and voice. Welcome to the community of women who came to call themselves Women of the Lodge.

Introduction

If you have picked up this book it is likely you are scared and upset about some aspect of your partner's sexuality. It could be that you caught your partner in an affair and now you suspect other affairs; it may be his frequent engagement in pornography, or spending more time at strip joints; or perhaps you've found credit card receipts or emails that don't make sense to you. It could be that his sexual acting out has become public or that he has confessed to sexual

behaviors of which you've been unaware. You may or may not have heard the term sex addiction, and while you have not thought of your partner as an addict, you may recognize that his sexual behavior seems out of control.

It is possible denial is allowing you to normalize behavior that your gut tells you is something more. You need to trust your instincts. As a dear client of mine said, "*You need to trust your worms when they are wriggling inside your gut.*" Even if you don't know the extent of the behavior, and it is very likely you do not, you owe it to yourself to read this book. What you have recently discovered, or possibly tolerated and normalized, is not necessarily "just what men do." In many cases his behavior has become addictive in nature, highly compulsive repetitive behavior that continues in spite of the risk and potential negative consequences. While his behavior is compulsive and addictive, and I use those terms interchangeably, it is also treatable. But for your healing, as well as the potential of the relationship, to occur, the truth needs to be acknowledged. That truth can begin with you, your truth.

Facing Deception

To live with sexual betrayal is to live with deceit. *Deception* means to cause a person to believe what is not true; to betray, mislead, delude, dupe. When your partner is engaging in sexual behavior that violates the values of your relationship he will go to great lengths to conceal his behavior. In that process his deception involves falsehood or the deliberate concealment or misrepresentation of truth.

To *Mislead* means to lead into error, but not invariably with the intent to harm. His behavior is not intentionally meant to harm you. More likely than not he has deluded himself by believing you will never know and if you don't know, you will not be hurt.

To *Betray* implies a faithlessness that brings another to a disadvantage or into danger. This faithlessness puts your relationship on an unequal playing field. Instead of an equal partnership you are set up for a "one up" and "one down" relationship, with you being the "one down." Without honesty your relationship is based on an illusion. While betrayal puts your relationship

in jeopardy, it can create physical danger for you with unsafe sex practices and/or the rage that comes from jilted lovers.

To *Delude* is to mislead to the point of rendering another unable to detect a falsehood or make sound judgment. Your partner, as if a magician, has become a master of deception.

To *Dupe* means to delude another by playing upon their susceptibility or naiveté. Time after time your partner has relied on your naiveté; your need to want to believe him and your fears of what it means to know the truth.

Deceived offers validation and hope to women who are living with sexual betrayal. It normalizes the craziness that comes with suspecting his sexual acting out of some sort, but not knowing for certain; or sensing something is wrong, but not sure what. By meeting other women who have walked a similar path and hearing their stories, you will learn that you are not alone, your shame will lessen, and you will realize you don't need to be in a victim role. By recognizing sexual compulsivity as an addictive disorder, his behavior becomes, while not excusable, understandable. You will see that you did not enter into this relationship by accident, and how family of origin issues strongly influences your choice of partner(s) and your behavior. Your urgent questions will be answered and you will begin to identify skills that will empower you. While there are no guarantees on whether or not your relationship will survive, you will find a path of strength, direction, and support so that whatever choices you make will come from a place of inner knowing and integrity.

The Chapters Ahead: What's to Come

In the chapters ahead, we'll be following the stories of six women who have faced sexual betrayal. They will share aspects of their lives from their initial awareness of the problem to their present day recovery. These women were members of one of the first groups I led for partners dealing with sexual acting out in their relationships, a group that came to call themselves Women of the Lodge. Throughout this book their voices offer you validation and hope, as they have been where you find yourself today. Each of these women, in various ways, found a path of healing and recovery. That path was in a community of other women who were facing their

husband/partner's sexual betrayal and acting out and looking for help. While the stories and lives of these six women are true, names and identifying information have been changed to provide anonymity. In addition to these stories, portions of other women's stories will be offered to provide a broader scope of the recovery experience. I refer to these women as the unnamed *Coaddict*. You will also hear the voices of unnamed *Addicts*. Just as hearing the voices of women in recovery is beneficial, so too is hearing the man – *Addict* – speak about his addiction and addictive behaviors.

The women you will meet refer to their behavior and thinking as *codependent* and themselves as a *coaddict* or *cosa*. These are lay terms commonly identified and popular in self-help groups and literature and used by many treatment professionals. These were not labels they readily accepted and, in fact, initially resisted or were confused by. In time they came to find these terms provided them with an empowering language.

The word *codependency* came into use in the late 1970s. Initially it referred to the partner of an addict. In time its meaning broadened to describe behavioral patterns developed when raised in an addicted family. Later it was recognized those behavioral patterns were also seen in those raised in impaired, shame-based family systems. The labels, *coaddict* and *cosa* include the dynamics of codependency but also addresses the more specific issues related to spouses and partners. Think of these labels as both a (verbal) semantic container for your painful feelings, negative beliefs and self defeating behaviors; and an opening onto a new path, a direction to transform your negative beliefs to self enhancing beliefs, an opportunity to realize the gift of feelings and empowering behaviors. The terms *cosa*, *coaddict* and *codependent* are meant to support you as deserving of your own healing and recovery, not to blame you for anything, or to shame you. Don't let them be a roadblock to your own healing. You don't have to take on any labels you don't want; for now, simply be open to what may be a new language.

Chapter One: You Are Not Alone

“Why me?” “How could he?” You will meet six women, Therese, Vanessa, Jacque, Sara, Maite, and Jenny, each of whom was confronted with her partner's sexual acting out ranging from pornography, multiple affairs, Cybersex, to prostitutes. In addition to the betrayal of their

coupleship, love, and commitment these women also confronted legal issues, children sired with other women, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and how to address their partner's behavior with their own children. Each one of these women is angry, scared and confused about what this means for her relationship.

Chapter Two: In the Face of Truth

“This can't be happening.” Denial, the core of all addictive disorders and one's coaddiction—the self-defeating thoughts and behaviors created in response to living with an addictive disorder—will be explored. You will realize you aren't alone in your rationalizations and minimizing. The common issues and themes of trying to control your partner, the incessant preoccupation that overwhelms your life, rage, sideways anger, and image management are discussed. The roller coaster of feelings you may be experiencing will be explained and you'll understand how you have been defending against the pain of your situation and the constant state of grief in which you may find yourself. You'll have the opportunity to reflect on ways you emotionally disconnect from yourself. The chronic stress that accompanies living with addiction and often leads to health problems will also be discussed.

Chapter Three: His Behavior Is Not About You

“Why won't he just stop?” A natural aspect of your coaddiction is focusing on the addict and his behavior. For that reason, I chose not to focus on him at the beginning of this book. You deserve the focus. You deserve your recovery and it is not based on his recovery. Certainly we all want the addict to recover. But, more important, this book conveys that you can find answers to your pain by taking ownership of your recovery process. I will help you to understand how sexual behaviors can and do become addictive for some; how this addiction is very similar to substance and/or other behavioral addictions; the possibility of multiple addictions and depression; and the neuroscience of addiction. Addiction is defined as a compulsive behavior that dominates someone's life and which they continue in spite of adverse consequences, becoming willing to sacrifice what they cherish most in order to preserve and continue their unhealthy behavior. None of this explanation is intended to excuse his behavior. I want to help you understand why it is so difficult for him to stop but that if he seeks appropriate treatment through a professional or self-help program, he is more likely to be able to stop his acting out.

Chapter Four: You Didn't Get Here by Accident

“Why does this feel so familiar?” “What did I do to deserve this?” Let’s be clear: You don’t deserve this. No one deserves to be treated with disrespect. While you are not responsible for your partner’s behavior, it is not coincidental though that you are in a relationship with an addict. In this chapter you will come to understand how original family wounding creates the foundation for impaired relationships and how family of origin issues influences both you and your partner. Abandonment and trauma repetition will be described. You’ll have the opportunity to reflect on how the sexual messages you have internalized influence your life today. You will see the natural dance that occurs between an addict and a coaddict, and identify the influences of family script for both of you. By recognizing the need to speak to the past and complete unfinished grief work you will be free to work on your recovery and be present in your relationships. By recognizing both the basis and the characteristics of your codependent traits you will find a direction for your healing.

Chapter Five: Learning the News

Learning about your partner’s behavior can come in a variety of venues, sometimes as a surprise, other times after a lot of suspicions. This chapter offers you a model for healthy disclosure and discusses the ‘dribbling effect’ – hearing the news in bits and pieces over time. This is a time of great shock and pain for many cosas and I will assist you in putting one foot in front of the other until you can make more sense of your situation. There are many questions and issues that confront you with the initial discovery of his behavior. I’ll discuss the questions of being sexual shortly after disclosure; to stay or to leave; why it is you love him in spite of the situation. I’ll introduce the meaning of a therapeutic separation, a means some couples ultimately find very supportive of their relationship. Hearing how others have responded to similar situations and found ways to resolve such questions will offer some validation and direction.

Chapter Six: What Do You Say to Your Children?

“How much do my kids need to know?” “What if they already know or suspect something?” If you are a parent you are probably asking yourself these kinds of questions. Talking with your children regarding sexually addictive behavior is undoubtedly a situation that no parent wants to

anticipate or face. Parents seldom want to share their secrets, their pain, or their betrayal with their children. They want to protect their children from pain. Unfortunately addiction within a family takes that possibility away. Perhaps you are frightened about using the word *addiction* and how that might be portrayed or interpreted by your child. This chapter provides you with information about how to approach a conversation with your children of varying ages about what is happening between you and your partner. It will also reinforce how your recovery influences your parenting skills.

Chapter Seven: Your Time to Heal

“What is the price I am paying by trying to manage and control that which I cannot control?”

“What do I have the power to affect?” “What if he relapses and begins acting out again?” “Am I ready to seek help?” I’ll further the discussion about the grief process you are experiencing, look at the language of powerlessness and unmanageability and address boundaries. Boundaries are vital to your recovery process. I’ll introduce the concept of nonnegotiable boundaries that can offer you greater safety and security during this vulnerable period and share with you ways to lessen living in your head, being so preoccupied you can’t think straight. You will find validation for the vast array of feelings that permeate your life. The Women of the Lodge share their experiences of reaching out to other women and help to shine a light and provide some hope when you can’t seem to find it. You don’t want to do this alone. You don’t need to do this alone. There are others who will walk this path with you.

Chapter Eight: Finding Your Serenity

“Can I ever forgive him?” “Do I even want to try?” When you say you forgive but you have not claimed your voice, grieved your pain or owned your injustices that is when you talk the talk but don’t walk the walk of recovery. You won’t get to a place of heartfelt forgiveness without being emotionally honest. The Women of the Lodge and I will talk about what we think forgiveness is and how they came to find it for their partners and themselves. These women found that their healing included a spiritual path. Some were already steeped in a particular faith in which they found solace and support, while others had to sort out the differences they found in their religion and their spiritual path. Still others found their spiritual path in nontraditional ways and that a

greater peace is found in a connection with a Higher Power. Whether or not you subscribe to a specific faith or set of beliefs, simply be open to what is shared here.

Chapter Nine: The Women of the Lodge

“Trust and give voice to your reality.” Recovery is a journey all the Women of the Lodge have embraced. Here they share with you where they are in their recovery and in their relationships. They no longer live in a crisis state; they no longer live in shame. They have found tools that give them the structure and safety to know they are okay irrespective of what their partner’s behavior might be. They invite you to come out of your emotional isolation, to shed your secrets, your shame and discover the beauty and power in yourself.

Reflective Thoughts and Questions

At the end of each chapter I offer questions and/or thoughts for you to consider. There are no right or wrong answers. You may choose to address them as you finish reading each chapter or, you may come back to them after reading the entire book. I strongly encourage you to respond in writing, as putting your thoughts down on paper frees you of being too analytical or intellectually defensive and allows you to become more connected to your feelings and the truth. These thoughts and questions are also a good structure to use as a format to begin sharing with other women in recovery or a therapist.

Recommended Reading

A significant tool in your healing process is reading not only books on sexual compulsivity and coaddiction, but also books related to codependency, growing up with addiction and sexual or physical abuse. Books about emotional healing and spiritual practices are also valuable. While I offer you a suggested list of reading materials, I strongly encourage you to browse the self-help section of bookstores, ask other women in recovery what was helpful to them or, ask your therapist.

Taking the Next Step

While sexual betrayal and deceit is devastating, those in recovery are eventually able to find meaning from their history and gifts in the process of healing. With an openness and willingness,

you, too, can take the next step and find healing. The emotional isolation and shame you feel will lessen; you will let go of unneeded defenses. False pride and image management won't be needed as cover-ups; perfectionism will go to the wayside. You will be willing to get help for your depression and anxiety, and any of your addictive disorders. It will be possible to let go of defensive emoting and learn to express your needs and feelings with clarity; you will speak from a place of respect and listen with openness. Boundaries will be your lifeline; they will provide you protection and safety. Your self esteem and self acceptance will grow; self love will be your guide to healthy boundaries. You will listen and trust your intuition; you will trust in your knowing. All of this is possible as you find your community. May that all begin with this book.