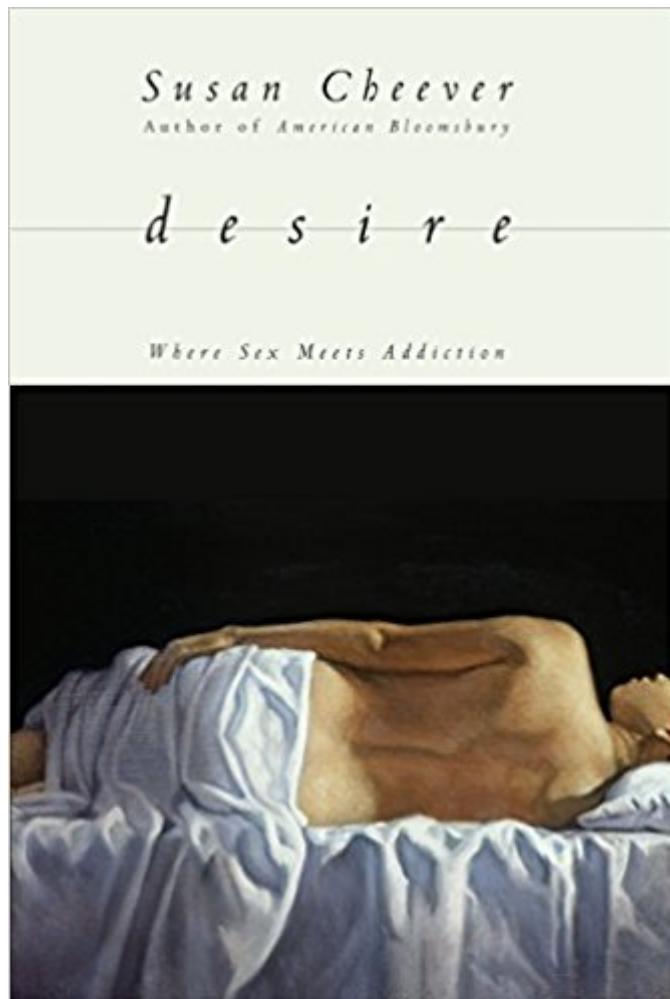


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# Desire: Where Sex Meets Addiction



## Synopsis

We've all felt the giddy flutter of excitement when our new lover walks into the room. Waited by the phone, changed our plans...But are we in love, or is there something darker at work? In *Desire: Where Sex Meets Addiction*, Susan Cheever explores the shifting boundaries between the feelings of passion and addiction, desire and need, and she raises provocative and important questions about who we love and why. Elegantly written and thoughtfully composed, Cheever's book combines unsparing and intimate memoir, interviews and stories, hard science and psychology to explore the difference between falling in love and falling prey to an addiction. Part one defines what addiction is and how it works -- the obsession, the betrayals, the broken promises to oneself and others. Part two explores the possible causes of addiction -- is it nature or nurture, a permanent condition or a temporary derangement? Part three considers what we can do about it, including a provocative suggestion about how we describe and treat addiction, and a look at the importance of community and storytelling. In the end, there are no easy answers. "A straight look about some crooked feelings," *Desire* shows us the difference between the addiction that cripples our emotions, and healthy, empowering love that enhances our lives.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

We are a nation of puritanical love junkies, proclaims Cheever (*My Name Is Bill*) in her inquiry into the growing scientific and psychological evidence that suggests a chemical basis for sex addiction. Drawing on a hodge-podge of addiction literature, neurobiological studies and her more informal

(but most persuasive) role as a seasoned battler of her own obsessions, Cheever believes that American idealism taints our expectations of relationships: In our world, addiction to other people... is the only addiction that is applauded and embraced.... But for Cheever, a lover's destructive behavior can be just as traumatizing as that of an alcoholic, a bulimic or a compulsive gambler. Cheever is best when writing personally; her candid memories of emotionally abusive parents, repeated adultery and consuming love drive an otherwise meandering text. Her cultural subjects are titillating enough and range from the voyeurism of *To Catch a Predator* to speculation that Bill Wilson, founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, struggled to hide a sex addiction. But the reader strains to connect slim narrative threads of this unstructured meditation on obsession. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

There is a thin line between intense passion for one's beloved and a frantic desire to sexually possess a casual acquaintance, Cheever argues between animated exuberance that is enthusiastically encouraged and excessive behavior that lies at the outer limits of what society deems acceptable. In a provocative and deeply personal look at the least acknowledged of all addictions, Cheever examines the ways in which sexually obsessed people confuse lust with love and the damage they do to themselves and those around them as they distort affection and desire with abuse and deception. Through interviews with scholars, behaviorists, physicians, and psychiatrists, Cheever endeavors to uncover the underlying similarities between those who are sexually promiscuous and others who are addicted to alcohol or drugs. Such clinical investigation, however, is secondary to the intimate revelations Cheever shares about her own troubled past and addictive behavior. She candidly chronicles her irrational love affair with a man she would ultimately marry, and addresses the subject readers will be most curious about, the overwhelming influence of her famous father's complex sexuality and her mother's response. --Carol Haggas --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Susan Cheever is most often mentioned as the daughter of literary great, John Cheever. However, with this book she has entered a new arena of her own. With this book, Susan has presented us with a novel that explains that sex addiction should be treated not as a failure of morality or character but as a disease of brain biochemistry resulting from a combination of genetics and life events. This is a groundbreaking effort and one that is a great read. In 'Desire: Where Sex Meets Addiction' Susan Cheever has given us an entrance into the world of all addicts and what it means

to be addicted. In the end, she says, "there are no easy answers. A straight look about some crooked feelings. Desire shows us the difference between the addiction that cripples our emotions, and healthy, empowering love that enhances our lives." In this book, we learn that Susan has been an alcoholic and a sex addict. She has detailed the conversations she had with experts in neuroscience and psychology of addictive behavior. People who are addicted to alcohol, sex and drugs share common traits. Some sort of "otherworldly suspension of will" comes over addicts, and they cannot stop themselves nor do they understand at the moment the will is not there. In fact many addicts are attracted to more than one agent. Many alcoholics smoke. Food addicts who have gained so much weight they need gastric by-pass surgery, find that after losing weight they may turn to gambling, or alcohol or sex. One addiction may lead to another. A person who has a predilection to addiction, may go for years without acting out on that addiction, and then one day, bam, it has started. There is a loss of will from the activation of similar brain pathways no matter what the fix is. Susan Cheever shares her own story of alcoholism and sex addiction. Her three marriages, her affairs, the stories behind the stories. She also shares many stories of friends or acquaintances to provide us with a basic understanding of the humans inside these behaviors. She interviews many behavioral scientists and psychologists. Some have conflicting views and several disagree with Cheever. She dissects the scientists opinions and forms one of her own. Addicts do not have control over their behaviors. They try, but always fail. One addiction may and usually does lead to another. This may be a combination of genetic and life experiences. It leaves me with a feeling of *deja vous*. These wonderful people in my life have no real control over some of their behaviors and it is not until they come to an understanding and want to change these behaviors that their life may change. No amount of nagging in the world will affect this kind of change. Good to know, is it not? We all hate nags, don't we? I found this book to be forcefully written. Susan Cheever shares her belief that sex addiction is much more accepted than alcoholism or drugs. "She says, and this is a central theme of the book, that "in our world, addiction to other people -- especially addiction to a sex partner -- is the only addiction that is applauded and embraced." But the havoc it causes to self and family is tremendous, just as it is with alcoholism and drug addiction. A thoughtful and insightful look into the area of addiction. Highly recommended. prisrob 10-05-08

My Name Is Bill: Bill Wilson--His Life and the Creation of Alcoholics Anonymous

Home before dark / Susan Cheever

Ms Cheever writes an amazing analysis of the components of addiction. She includes both her personal and familial experience, and a very useful smattering of analysis from the professional expert community. It is a fascinating account of her lifelong struggle, as well as a lifelong quest to

learn what experts have to say on the matter. Her inclusion of sexual and romantic addiction into the mix with alcohol and drugs is especially helpful.

I just received it in excellent conditions. Thanks so much.

Good reading. Very informative, not only about sex addiction but a great teaching/learning experience of all addictions. Hits the nail right on the head.

brave of Susan to write it to speak it to acknowledge it to share it and it was very readable too

I wanted more than what could serve as foot/endnotes to a term paper. That said, Cheever is a good writer. I'll try one of the novels for a better perspective.

I have known Susan Cheever - not well, but just enough to like her and be glad to see her --- for almost thirty years. We met when I was writing a New York Times Magazine profile of her father. I loved those stories, and, because I was young and naive, I did not grasp that the man who wrote them might also have invented himself. My John Cheever was a recovering alcoholic who lived in the country with a classy wife, dogs, wood fires --- the whole country squire bit. What I did not know about John Cheever --- and what he very much feared I did --- was that he was bi-sexual, probably leaning more toward gay. Had I known this, I would never have written it, nor would the Times have published it. This was 1979, when gays were beautiful young men in discos. Secrets run in families. Susan Cheever struck me as a talented young writer; like any number of children of the famous and troubled, she seemed to want nothing more than to do her work and have a quiet life. It seemed absolutely right that she would write a biography of Bill Wilson, the father of Alcoholics Anonymous, the program that saved her father. And I'd admire anyone who could write a book called "American Bloomsbury: Louisa May Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry David Thoreau". So it was quite a surprise to open 'Desire' and discover this was more than a smart third-person exploration of sexual addiction. It's also a first-person account of four decades of personal trouble. Susan Cheever's parents had told her she was unattractive and would have a hard time finding a husband. She found three --- and countless lovers. "Whenever there was a crisis," she writes, "I found a man to help me take the edge off the feelings of helplessness and pain." But if you're looking for a lurid tale of hotel rooms and low times, you'll be disappointed by this brief --- 169-page --- book. Cheever's problem is a launch-point, not an opportunity to bleed on

paper. Right at the beginning, she states her goal: This is a book that explores the boundaries between the kind of love on which a life can be built, and the passionate kind of love that is an addiction.... The most familiar addictions in the world we live in are addictions to alcohol and drugs. Unlike those addictions, the addictions which use people as a substance are often hidden behind our ideas about love. Addiction to people, she notes, is not like other addictions. No one praises addiction to alcohol and drugs --- but who says love is a bad thing? Especially falling in love, when the world seems fresh and life looks thrilling. But at the end of the day, she says, we must ask ourselves: Is addiction to "love" really different from the chemical addictions? Cheever has read a lot, and she has the great journalist's ability to find the right quote and telling statistic. In these pages, you'll learn that a study found that "more than half of cocaine users had sexual compulsion problems." That men who abuse substances and women who starve themselves just might have the same addiction. And that Bill Wilson, founder of AA, wasn't free from addictions after he stopped drinking; he was a philanderer. In form, this book may seem to veer from memoir to academia. The through-line? It's all fascinating. And provocative. It helps that Cheever is a sharp, colorful writer: "Adultery is the drunk driving of sex addiction." And that she has a clear take on the dimensions of the problem: "Many addictions primarily cause pain to the addict. Sex addiction causes a huge amount of collateral damage. In fact, collateral damage sometimes seems to be its primary result." What makes "Desire" important even for readers who don't think sex addiction is their issue is that it expands its focus to include all addiction. See if this idea resonates. It's from Samuel Johnson, the dictionary maker and essayist: "He who makes a beast of himself at least rids himself of the pain of being a man." Yes, and also the pain of being a woman.

Susan Cheever gives a lot of good information about addiction in general while focusing specifically on sexual addiction, but nothing she says is earth shattering or unique. It can all be found in other's books. That being said, it is useful as a compendium mixed with personal anecdotes that gives the issue a face behind a theoretical construct. The worst part about the book was her writing style. Several sections seemed disjointed from the others. There were times I was left wondering what a particular paragraph had to do with the rest of the chapter. It was almost as if some sections were placed in as filler, or were originally part of a larger section that was removed during the editing process. It's a short book and you won't spend much of your life reading it, but I'd recommend anything by Patrick Carnes over Cheever.

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