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Male Sports Addiction: A Clinical Profile

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Untreated mental illness is one of the greatest tragedies of our society. Vast human potential is wasted by demons in the mind.

One such disorder afflicts primarily males and is so pervasive that it is often seen as “normal” in spite of its devastating effects. This disease has spawned a huge legalized industry of pushers and traffickers who provide the vulnerable victim with the illusion of happiness. Like cocaine and alcohol, this addiction draws the victim away from productive pursuits and encourages him to neglect his family and responsibilities as well as his own health and future.

I am speaking, of course, of spectator sports and their insidious hold on the male brain. The average male, if given the opportunity, will watch sports all day and all night, discuss sports continuously with other males and act as though sports really meant something, while all constructive and meaningful activities fall by the wayside.

Why does it matter who Notre Dame is playing this weekend? It doesn't mean anything! Which team wins the game has absolutely no bearing on any conceivable human problem. It is hard to see how sports can even qualify as “entertainment.” A ball gets thrown around a field in exactly the same way it was done last week, while in living rooms around the country, you have clusters of males gathered around the screen, transfixed and thoroughly engaged as though something important was happening.

Every so often, the room erupts in communal groans, explosive cheering and vigorous whoop-whooping, and you have to wonder, “What kind of insanity is this?”

Obviously the sports gene must have passed me by, because I have never felt the urge. For a while I tried fit in, forcing myself to watch, but I never had the same feelings I saw in my brethren. Eventually, I had to admit that the lust wasn't in me. I have since “come out” to my close friends and family, who recognized from the beginning that I was different, but I am still reluctant to discuss my sports disinterest in public for fear that I might be seen as “fruity” and somehow not a man.

The male's obsession with sports resembles in many ways his inexplicable interest in pornography. Both are useless, repetitive “watching” behaviors that serve no productive function yet seem to fascinate the male to no end. I mean, how many times can you view jiggling breasts and the crude sex act and not get bored? Quite a lot, it turns out, but the man's interest only lasts up to the moment of his own release, at which point the whole fascination with gynecology, phallic operations and the female form instantly vanishes.

Sports are more dangerous than sex because there is no obvious point of satiation. An average male can watch mindless sports until all the pizza is gone and the fridge runs out of beer—and he's ready to do it again as soon as those supplies are restocked.

Pornography has an evolutionary basis. Obviously, there is a reproductive role in a male wanting to inseminate anything with two breasts. The sports obsession is harder to explain. Perhaps it is the modern expression of a “war” gene. There appears to be a primitive emotional urge within the male brain to band together with other males in a “team” and beat the crap out of other teams. In modern society, males rarely have an opportunity for physical

warfare, so watching it done in a staged environment could serve the same neurological need.

Males also seem to have a built-in predisposition to the collection of statistics and arcane facts, an illness I call Male Data Collection Syndrome (MDCS). Give the male access to any kind of useless and repetitive information, and he will be inclined to write down the numbers, build a spreadsheet and plot a graph, no matter how meaningless the data may be. Sports provide ample opportunity for such vapid statistical analysis, as numbers are generated every time someone throws a ball or swings a bat.

The people who suffer most are the families. The world is full of children who are forced to grow up without fathers, even when the sperm donor is physically present in the home. All potential “quality time” is absorbed by the sports addiction, and unless the children can quickly learn the language of sports and join Dad in front of the tube, they're effectively left to raise themselves.

I pity also the man's spouse or significant other, who thought she would be at the top of the man's list of interests and not seventh behind the NBA, NCAA, NFL, MLB, NHL and PGA. The legend of the “football widow” is no joke. Everyone tries to laugh it off, but how can you have a meaningful relationship with someone whose first love is a team of muscular guys? Sadly, due to the year-round, 24-hour sports cycle, there is now no relief from widowhood for these long-suffering victims, who see their romantic dreams being sucked away by ESPN.

It's not unfaithfulness exactly, but it isn't the kind of undivided attention the woman thought she would get.

—G.C.

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