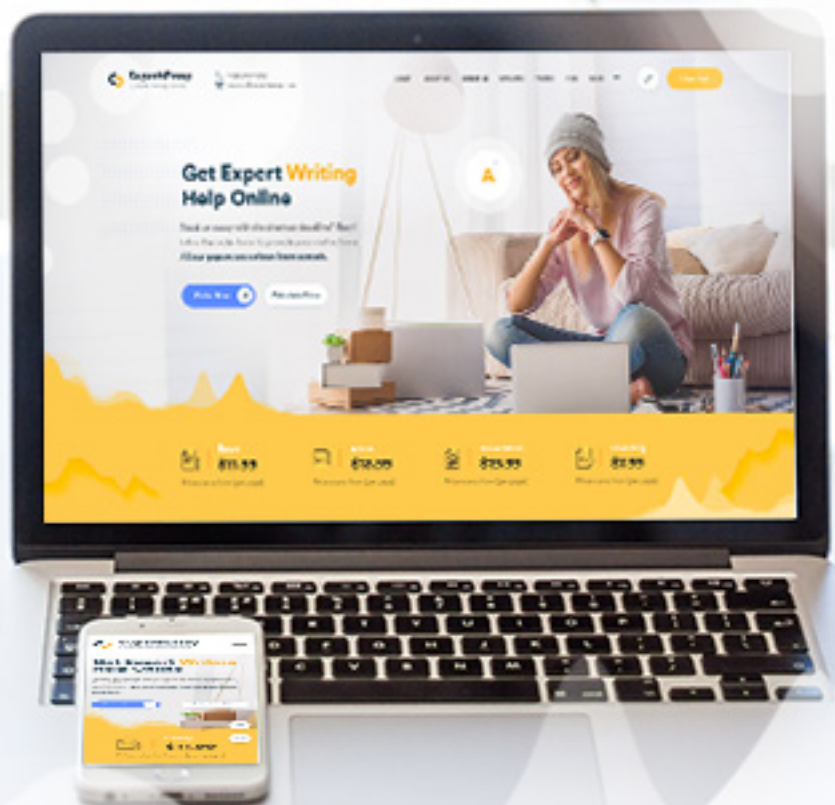


Synopsis

Author's Name

Institutional Affiliation



Nature of Addiction

Unlike substance abuse that has long been identified, the debate around pathological gambling is still topical. Numerous research papers are being published analyzing the nature of such compulsive behavior proving it to be an addiction (El-Guebaly, Mudry, Zohar, Tavares, & Potenza, 2012, p. 1726). As gambling can be a non-compulsive pleasure activity, many addicts find it hard to admit their problem. It is the case of Alissa, whose story is presented in the fourth episode of *Intervention*. Alissa seems to have a good life: she is a good student with supportive parents and a loving boyfriend. However, underneath this normality, she is tortured by doubts, low self-esteem, and profound unhappiness that fuel her addiction.

Alissa's problem is grave and long-standing. Although she plays the slot machines betting only 25 cents, she loses thousands of dollars every year. To sponsor her addiction, she gets money from friends and relatives, which according to Reith and Dobbie, is "extremely common" for gamblers (2012, p. 517). Even when she wins, Alissa keeps playing in the hope of hitting the jackpot, and any attempts to stop her are met with irritation on her part. The only time when she is smiling broadly and looks happy is when she is left alone in front of the machine.

At the first glance, Alissa seems to have no reasons to gamble. She grew up in a close-knit family, with her parents supporting her. She is a college student studying international relations, speaks four languages, has her own opinion and is in all respects a bright young woman. Furthermore, Alissa has a loving boyfriend who works hard to support them both financially. However, deep inside Alissa is desperately unhappy and does not know what to do with her life. All attempts to find a job fail, which depresses her. Moreover, she feels ugly, and no matter what anyone says about her looks, she believes to be extremely

unattractive. Her dislike of herself is rooted in a car accident in which she nearly died. For Alissa, who had to have her face reconstructed twice, the accident is a horror that stares back at her whenever she looks in the mirror. The casino is the only place where she feels good about herself, where she does not care about her look, and finally feels alive. It is a 'happy place,' where she hides from her problems hoping that a jackpot will someday make everything right.

Alissa's story is not uncommon. Her addiction is not a sign of weakness but a desperate attempt to feel good, and find a sense of her life. Feeling lost, with no clue to what she should be doing, Alissa finds a rescue in sitting in front of the machine in the hope of a big win. With her face damaged in a car crash and no professional success in view, she centers her life round the casino, which gives the sense of accomplishment, peace, and happiness allowing her to escape from real life.

