



Understanding Sex Addiction

TEXT DR KIT S. NG

The issue of sex addiction has been the center of discussion for years. Authors like David Ley who wrote "The Myth of Sex Addiction" and Patrick Carnes, author of "Out of the Shadow: Understanding Sexual Addiction" are just some of the experts who do not see eye to eye on this issue.

The arguments and discussions get more intense when news of well-known individuals admit to the media that they have sex addiction or were admitted to rehab for sexual compulsivity. The label of whether or not one has sex addiction is one thing but the immediate and lasting impact of such compulsive activities

have on that person is another. Such uncontrollable activities can rob one's self-esteem, negatively affect one's sex life and intimacy, destroy family and marriage relationship, and affect health and job performance among many other things.

What sex addiction is not Sexual addiction is not sexual desire. Sexual addiction is defined not by the type of sexual act performed or even by the frequency of sexual activity.

Instead, it is defined by the compulsive use of sex to address non-

sexual emotional needs. In essence, sexual addiction is not about sex. It is the utilisation of sex activities as replacements for unmet emotional needs and/or a form of an escape...it has to do with why we have sex to begin with.

If you enjoy sex, it does not mean you are addicted. However, if your sexual activities hinder you from forming a long-term, honest, and loving relationship, or compel you to be deceptive, you may struggle with being addicted.

What is sex addiction?

According to Patrick Carnes, a well-known authority on sex addiction, it is often defined as "any sexually related, compulsive behavior which interferes with normal living and causes severe stress on family, friends, loved ones and one's work environment." Such sexually oriented activities or behavior could include internet pornography, infidelity,

exhibitionistic sex, paying for sex, anonymous sex, and more.

How do you know when your sexual activities are too compulsive and out of control? The basic way to gauge is to compare it with other physical every day needs such as eating. Eating is not detrimental and should be enjoyable. But if you cannot stop eating before it becomes a negative force in your life, then you are out of control. Having an intense sexual appetite is not addictive. If satisfying your sexual needs bring you and your partner closer together, then you are not addicted. If your sexual needs lead you to promiscuity, distant relationships, Paedophilia, short-term flings, compulsive masturbation, or a dependency on pornography then you are very likely out of control. Sexually addicted people do not have a sexual problem. They have a relationship problem that manifests itself sexually.

Sex addiction is a symptom of intimacy problems. If you do not have someone close to you in an intimate way, you are probably very familiar with the pain of loneliness. Sexual addiction creates obstacles to ending your loneliness.

Causes of sexual addiction

The causes of sexual addiction are as complex as the treatment and the disorder itself. Different suggestions from biochemical abnormality to common pathways within our brain for reward systems are quite common. A national survey reveals that most sexual addicts come from severely dysfunctional families. Usually at least one other member of these families has another addiction. This is true in 87% of the cases. Sex addicts often describe their parents as rigid, distant, and uncaring. Inconsistent parental nurturing and love definitely can

contribute to sexual addiction. It destroys a child's natural desire for intimacy and makes them suspicious of the 'good times.'

Still, others believe that sex addiction is a byproduct of loneliness, pain and the need to be loved and accepted. It is a substitute for these and is a counterfeit way to meet legitimate and real needs. However, it fails to really meet these needs, so greater and greater amounts are sought in a futile search for what is missing.

According to some mental health professionals, sex addiction may be related to other psychological disorders (e.g. obsessive-compulsive disorder), other addictions (e.g. alcoholism, drug abuse), or other impulse control disorders (e.g. compulsive stealing/kleptomania, pathological lying, or gambling). Eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia, also may be associated with sex addictions, especially in women. 

Breaking Free from Sex Addiction

If you are addicted...

1 Admit that you have a problem. If you do not think you have a problem, no one can help you. Change cannot occur until you have admitted the need for change.

2 Seek professional help NOW. You cannot do it by yourself. I am sure you have tried to quit many times but failed. If it is really an addiction, you need professionals who have the training and experience to help you.

3 Get help along with your significant other. This may happen in the later phase of intervention.

4 Start joining some recovery support groups, preferably a sex recovery group.

5 Finally, always keep your focus and do not give up if you fail or relapse. There is life beyond sexual addiction. I can testify to lots of people who get help and get well.

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