

What is Sexual Addiction – Sexual Compulsion?

There is no category for “sexual addiction” in the current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) and there’s debate in the medical community as to whether addiction to sex even exists; rather some believe it might just be a heightened desire for sex.

The DSM IV does, however, describe certain sexual disorders which are characterized by, or include among their features, excessive and/or unusual sexual urges or behaviors. Under the listing “Sexual Disorders Not Otherwise Specified, the DSM IV describes sex addiction as “distress about a pattern of repeated sexual relationships involving a succession of lovers who are experienced by the individual only as things to be used.” The DSM IV lists the symptoms of sex addiction as “compulsive searching for multiple partners, compulsive fixation on an unattainable partner, compulsive masturbation, compulsive love relationships and compulsive sexuality in a relationship.”

The Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health further defines sexual addiction as a persistent and escalating pattern or patterns of sexual behaviors acted out despite increasingly negative consequences to self or others.

Behaviors Associated with Sexual Addiction

Some out-of-control repetitive behaviors, which may reflect sexual addiction include:

Masturbation

Simultaneous or repeated sequential affairs

Pornography

Cyber sex, phone sex

Multiple anonymous partners

Unsafe sexual activity

Partner sexualization, objectification

Strip clubs and adult bookstores

Sexual aversion

Prostitution

Sex Addiction can involve a wide variety of practices. Sometimes an addict has trouble with just one unwanted behavior, sometimes with many. A large number of sex addicts say their unhealthy use of sex has been a progressive process. It may have started with an addiction to masturbation, pornography (either printed or electronic), or a relationship, but over the years progressed to increasingly dangerous behaviors.

Consequences of Sexual Addiction

The essence of all addiction is the addicts' experience of powerlessness over a compulsive behavior, resulting in their lives becoming unmanageable. The sex addict is out of control and experiences tremendous shame, pain and self-loathing. The sex addict may wish to stop --- yet repeatedly fails to do so. The unmanageability of sex addicts' lives can be seen in the consequences they suffer:

- losing relationships
- difficulties with work
- arrests, financial troubles
- a loss of interest in things not sexual
- low self-esteem and despair

Sexual preoccupation takes up tremendous amounts of energy. As this increases for the sex addict, a pattern of behavior (or rituals) follows, which usually leads to acting out (for some it is flirting, searching the net for pornography, or driving to the park.) When the acting out happens, there is a denial of feelings usually followed by despair and shame or a feeling of hopelessness and confusion.

Written by HealthyPlace.com Staff Writer (Dec., 2008)