



TOWARD A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF SEXUAL ADDICTION:

Developing a Foundational Framework...

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GOALS FOR TODAY...

- Context...
- How do we define sexual addiction?
- How does the addiction develop over time?
- What is happening on a physiological level?
- What are the greater societal implications?



CONTEXT...

- Undergrad, Graduate studies
- Field placement
- Initial agency work
- Private Practice



WHAT CONSTITUTES SEXUAL ADDICTION?

- The National Council on Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity has defined sexual addiction as “engaging in persistent and escalating patterns of sexual behavior acted out despite increasing negative consequences to self and others.”
- In other words, a sex addict will continue to engage in certain sexual behaviors despite facing potential health risks, financial problems, shattered relationships or even arrest.



- While there is no official diagnosis for sex addiction, clinicians and researchers have attempted to define the disorder using criteria based on chemical dependency literature. They include:
- Frequently engaging in more sex and with more partners than intended.
- Being preoccupied with or persistently craving sex; wanting to cut down and unsuccessfully attempting to limit sexual activity.



- Thinking of sex to the detriment of other activities or continually engaging in excessive sexual practices despite a desire to stop.
- Spending considerable time in activities related to sex, such as cruising for partners or spending hours online visiting pornographic Web sites.
- Neglecting obligations such as work, school or family in pursuit of sex.
- Continually engaging in the sexual behavior despite negative consequences, such as broken relationships or potential health risks.



- Escalating scope or frequency of sexual activity to achieve the desired effect, such as more frequent visits to prostitutes or more sex partners.
- Feeling irritable when unable to engage in the desired behavior.



HOW DOES THE ADDICTION DEVELOPMENT OVER TIME?

- Case Study
 - Initial affair...
 - Craigslist/POF/etc. connections...
 - Sex clubs...
 - Increasingly risky behaviour...
 - Initial attempts to stop...
 - Suicidal ideation...
 - Eventual confession...
 - Treatment...



○ Arousal Template

- According to Patrick Carnes, Ph.D., author of *Facing the Shadow: Starting Sexual and Relationship Recovery*, an arousal template consists of "the total constellation of thoughts, images, behaviors, sounds, smells, sights, fantasies, and objects that arouse us sexually."



- This constellation encompasses vast categories of stimuli that come from our early experiences with family, friends, religious affiliations, media, and teachers. Much of what is arousing to us registers subconsciously - a person's pheromones, the tenor of her voice, the feel of his skin, the way she carries herself. One is often aware of being attracted to a "type": blond and busty, slim and intellectual, or intense and outspoken.



- In the past arousal templates were thought to be fixed, meaning once your “type” was established, it would remain relatively the same over the course of your life.
- With the current ubiquity and availability of pornography, the ability to shift ones arousal template is unlike any other time in human history.



- Norms in family of origin...
- Trauma history, and the ability to compartmentalize...



WHAT IS HAPPENING ON A PHYSIOLOGICAL LEVEL?



SEROTONIN & DOPAMINE



Technically, the only two things
you enjoy



BRAIN CHEMISTRY

- The following chemicals are released during sexual activity – serotonin, dopamine, oxytocin, and norepinephrine.
- Today we will focus briefly on serotonin and dopamine.



DOPAMINE

- Commonly associated with the reward system of the brain, provides feelings of enjoyment and reinforcement to motivate a person proactively to perform certain activities.
- Dopamine is released by rewarding experiences such as food, sex, drugs, and neutral stimuli that become associated with them.



SEROTONIN

- Responsible for the regulation of mood, appetite, sleep, as well as muscle contraction. Serotonin also has some cognitive functions, and is present in memory and learning.



- All of these chemicals work together to provide a powerful payoff for the brain, reinforcing the behaviour.
- Farm road analogy.
- Brain vs. Mind...



WHAT ARE THE GREATER SOCIETAL IMPLICATIONS?

- Micro level...
 - The steady creep
 - Relationships
 - Self-worth
 - Erosion of potential
 - Consistent focus on serving self
- Macro level...
 - Removal of personhood
 - Sex industry as a whole
 - Links between increased consumption of pornography and increased demand for sex workers
 - Increased sexualization of society



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