

The Unadulterated Truth About Sexual Addiction

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

There is nothing sexy about sex addiction. Compulsive sexual behavior is not a pastime or hobby. Sexual addiction is not a pretty picture. And despite the portrayal by tabloid magazines of the latest celebrity going to rehab for sexual, addiction, it is not glamorous.

Sexual addiction, like any other addiction, brings with it a certain amount of pain. Yet, sexually addicted people use all kinds of excuses and defense mechanisms to deny the truth to themselves. The naked truth about addiction is that once it is addiction, the sexually compulsive behavior does not produce the joy or relief that it once did. The sex addict persists in the behavior despite the fact that it brings about isolation and unhappiness. The addict becomes socially, emotionally, and spiritually withdrawn, not only from the people who love them, but from themselves.

While there is great variety in the types of sexual activities that represent one's "sexual drug of choice", compulsive masturbation is the common denominator in sexual addiction. Masturbation is something that most people do, at least at some time in their lives. It is not, however, something that everyone does compulsively. The psychological defense mechanisms used by sex addicts are common to other addictions. Some of the most common rationalizations include, "Everyone does it", "It reduces tension, helps me relax", "I'm now hurting anyone".

Some people try to make themselves believe that masturbation or other compulsive sexual behavior is actually helping their relationship. They rationalize that they are using it as a substitute and are not fighting about sex as much as they have been. Compulsive masturbation does not reduce tension in a relationship. It exacerbates it. When an addict thinks of masturbation in terms of "just getting it over with--with the least amount of hassle", or "that it is just easier this way", they are avoiding and withholding intimacy in the relationship. In sex addicted marriages, sex with the spouse often gets less and less frequent. Other important relationship issues are probably being avoided as well.

Prostitution, internet sex, phone sex, and serial one-night stands are different ways that sexually addicted behavior can be manifested. Compulsive sexual behavior won't tide you over until a good relationship comes along; it prevents one from coming along. You are not honing your sexual skills. You are replacing relationships with an empty substitute. Anything that objectifies other people divides you from them. It does not connect you to them.

Addicts think, "I'm not hurting anyone with this", or "I'm only hurting myself". Sexual addiction is hurtful. It is not just hurting the addict. It is hurting those involved with the addict. When an addict withdraws emotionally and physically from the spouse, preferring compulsive masturbation, pornography, strip clubs, phone sex, online chat, etc., not only the spouse suffers, but so do the children. Even if your children do not

know what about the compulsive behavior, they are affected. The conflicted or troubled spousal interactions, the overall tension present in the home, the money spent on the addiction, and the time away from them, affects the kids.

Secrets carried from one generation to the next, help perpetuate dysfunctional family themes. Sexual addiction is one common theme passed from generation to generation. Many sex addicts, in the recovery process discover that a parent was also sexually compulsive. They may or may not have known that as a child. They may have seen or heard rumors that the parent had affair(s), or acted out in some other way. The children of sex addicts are vulnerable to the same addiction, especially when they discover a hidden porno stash, or some other prop. Many addicts identify this as an inciting event in the development of their sexual addiction.

When you are married to an addict, sex takes on a qualitatively and quantitatively different form in your marriage. The emotional intimacy is typically missing. Because the compulsive behavior is an addiction, it is hidden and secret. Because it is hidden and secret, there is a lot of lying going on. All this lying and dishonesty affects relationships in a huge way. The trust that is destroyed may never be recovered.

When addicts believe that they are not hurting anyone else, they are deluding themselves about the impact on the family. There are often massive expenses involved in addictions. These expenses are not just for purchasing the goods and services. Expenses are also involved in cleaning up the problems caused by the addiction (e.g., attorneys, fines, bounced check fees, etc.).

Sexual addiction can destroy a marriage. The spouse often knows that something is wrong and wracks their brains to figure out how to solve those problems—for a long time before they ever correctly identify the problem. When the sexual acting out is finally discovered, they often believe that they have caused the addict to act out. The spouse inevitably believes (if only temporarily) that the addict's acting out is due to some personality, skill, or attractiveness deficits of their own. During the progression of their spouse's addiction, the non-addicted spouse's self-esteem takes a huge hit. They are often aided in this belief by the addict's blaming them.

Below are common excuses that sex addicts make:

"My spouse and I haven't had sex regularly in a long time". "I am not stimulated intellectually by my spouse". "I am not sexually attracted to my spouse". "I go to strip clubs and massage parlors because I need some basic human contact". "I keep thinking that I will meet someone that I can actually have a relationship with". "All men are like this". "Every body does this". "It's not hurting anyone". "If my spouse would get off my back..." "My spouse is critical and belittles me". "It's cheaper to pay someone than to date and in the end you know you're going to get sex". "It's my money and I'll do with it what I want". "The 1-900 telephone sex services tricked me".

The first step is recognizing that there is a problem. Help is available for the addict and for spouses of addicts.

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