



Sex and the Executive: The Drama of Sexual Addiction

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This article sheds light on the problems associated with sexual addiction, using a lengthy case example of a businessman prone to this disorder. It asserts that, when sexual thoughts and activities completely consume a person's life, it can be labelled as a 'sexual addiction'. Notwithstanding the stress that these sexual addicts experience, these people seem to be unable to stop or change their particular sexual behavior patterns. It is alleged that they use their sexual activities as a form of self-medication to manage underlying emotional conflicts. Furthermore, it suggests that sex addicts may be trying to mask their insecurities by overpowering them with sex. The article also points out how their behavior can have a destructive effect on their relationships with their partners, family, and friends. In addition, it may affect their work, cause financial and legal problems (having contacted sex workers), and may even endanger their health.

The article also clarifies that, if sex isn't a shared act between two partners, it only promotes solitary auto-arousal that precludes care and intimacy. But as suggested, sex addicts seem to confuse sensuality with sexuality. To clarify the difference, it points out that sexuality per se refers to the physiological responses of sexual stimulation, while sensuality includes a real appreciation of the other person. It implies therefore that sex addicts may use their sexual highs as a substitute for a longed-for support and intimacy that they are afraid to experience. In fact, it suggests that, underneath their compulsive sexual needs, there appears to be a deep desire to be loved and to assuage feelings of loneliness.

This article also includes a self-assessment test that appraises whether a person suffers from a sexual addiction. Although research about this subject tends to be rather limited, it suggests that sex addiction is much more common than most people realize, and its explanation appears to include biological, psychological and societal factors. It is pointed out that some of the theories as to why sex addiction occurs tend to be of a more neurophysiological nature whilst others are more developmental. From a neurological perspective it refers to the theory that sexual addiction may be due to abnormalities on both temporal lobes. A contrasting hypothesis that adopts a developmental point of view, is that, for these people, sex has become a way of escaping from various emotional and psychological problems which may include coping with early trauma, including sexual trauma.

The article also includes a discussion of various forms of treatment. One option presented is a psychopharmacological one, suggesting that certain anti-depressant and hormonal drugs may help to reduce these people's sexual drive. Another suggested form of treatment is that of one-on-one cognitive or psychodynamic therapy. In addition, group-oriented forms of intervention are referred to, including inpatient treatment centers. In some instances (if appropriate), couple or family counseling may be the treatment of choice; a further option this article cites is a 12-step program similar to the recovery model adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous, such as Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA).

This article concludes by reiterating the fact that sex and sexual reproduction are a natural and everyday part of life. However, contrary to animals, people are endowed with reasoning powers that include the ability to make independent decisions about their sexual endeavors above and beyond instinctual compulsions. In other words, Homo sapiens has a choice with respect to their sexual behavior. From a societal perspective, it also points out that sex can be a force for both the good and bad, using the drama of sex addiction as an illustrative case. Once more, the article reinforces the negative societal impact of sex addiction. Unfortunately, as is alluded to throughout the article, sex addiction is often shrouded in a conspiracy of silence, but as a relatively common disorder that has significant personal and public health ramifications, it is time to consider this addiction more seriously and implement more societal action.

Keywords: Sexual Addiction; Hypersexuality; Relationship Disorder; Attachment Behavior; Sensuality versus Sexuality; Intimacy Disorder; Sexual Trauma; Treatment; Psychodynamic; Cognitive; Group Intervention; Sex Addicts Anonymous

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The behavior of a human being in sexual matters is often a prototype for the whole of his other modes of reaction in life.

—Sigmund Freud

Of all sexual aberrations, chastity is the strangest.

—Anatole France

I have no objection to anyone's sex life as long as they don't practice it in the street and frighten the horses.

—Oscar Wilde

It is unfair of women to say that men want only sex. In fact, men are prone to two emotions: horny and hungry.

—Anon.

Being in a wormhole

“Monogamy is boring but serial monogamy can be quite expensive,” muttered Leonardo to himself, as he eased himself into his seat on the plane to London. Be that as it may, he had to admit that his sexual escapades were not exactly the cheapest form of entertainment. And Leonardo knew what he was talking about. Officially, he was going to a business meeting in London, but the real reason for this trip to the city was to engage in yet another sexual adventure. Even though Leonardo seemed to have it all—wife, children, dogs, sports cars, and a beautiful summer house in Tuscany— it didn't seem to

be good enough. Having it all, just felt too settled. He had convinced himself that life without sexual adventures would be quite boring, and this sense of boredom included his relationship with his wife.

At times, Leonardo wondered whether he had only married because that was what a person was supposed to do. In hindsight, he had come to realize that he wasn't really the marrying type, and if he was to give his marriage further thought, he knew that it had morphed into more of a brother and sister relationship. Whatever sexual desire he once may have had for his wife had completely disappeared, and rarely did the two of them have any physical contact. If sex could be considered the barometer of their marriage, this barometer had stopped functioning a long time ago.

Leonardo had concluded that domestic eroticism wasn't for him. As things stood, he had very little to say to the person who once took up such a prominent position in his bed. In fact, if he was truly honest with himself, he no longer liked to sleep in the same bed as his wife, and, although he wouldn't say it out loud, the occasional sex with her was like one drowning person trying to save the other. Despite the way his marriage had unfolded however, divorce was out of the question. It seemed to be too much of a hassle; his life was just too comfortable. He wasn't about to take the same route as a number of his friends, concluding that it was far better to try to live with his present situation. Leonardo recalled once suggesting an open marriage to his wife, but given her reaction, it obviously wasn't her cup of tea. Consequently, it was easier and more convenient to stick to his secret adventures.

What Leonardo had also come to realize was that looking at porn, fantasizing about bondage or sadomasochistic activities alone wasn't good enough. It was a one-person show that failed to satisfy. He needed more, and fortunately, he had found other ways to get his fix. In fact, it had been a very lucky break when one of his acquaintances had given him the address of a high-class brothel in Soho—he had now become a regular visitor.

Leonardo was quite pleased with how the hostesses in this establishment knew how to take care of his fantasies. Despite the considerable cost of these visits, he thought it was well worth it. He always found it extremely exciting to enter the place—it was like being a kid in a candy store. Of course, he was always somewhat ambivalent before entering, but it was a matter that could be overcome with a few strong drinks. Alcohol had always been a good way to overcome his inhibitions.

Unfortunately, it was not completely safe to visit this establishment. Once, he was almost caught in a police raid. No wonder that the worry of being found out was always present—being caught would be *very* embarrassing. It wasn't a good sign that his boss had recently asked Leonardo why he needed to visit London so frequently. Wouldn't it be much more convenient (and far less expensive) to deal with some of these business issues on Zoom? Leonardo's response had emphasized the importance of face-to-face contact in making deals. Still, the words of his boss lingered on. Was it possible that some people in the company knew what he was up to? Were they on to him? To the best of his knowledge,

he had been able to wing his expenses by dividing the costs of his visits to this house of ill repute into small amounts. Still, Leonardo knew that what he was doing was risky—there was always the question of how long his luck would hold out. Would the accountancy department eventually figure out what he was up to?

Leonardo vividly remembered how, in his previous job, he had been caught fiddling his expense account to pay for his sexual adventures. Having to finally face the music was a downer to say the least, and he was told in no uncertain terms that he had to leave. Fortunately, he had always been a great contributor to this company's bottom line. In fact, it was his role as a "producer" that allowed him to make an "elegant exit" after persuading the company CEO not to pursue the matter. Looking back, it was not an incident that he liked to remember, and it was all the more painful conceding the fact that he had really liked working for that company. The situation was only complicated further by the "white lies" he had to resort to vis-a-vis his wife and offering some explanation as to why he was leaving. What this incident had taught him, however, was to be more careful, although he found himself repeating his past behavior. It was as if he couldn't help himself; he just seemed unable to stop.

These feelings raise questions as to why he felt compelled to pursue these sexual escapades. Why couldn't he help himself? Leonardo recalled how he had once opened up about his life situation to someone else, explaining his feelings to a psychotherapist that he had become acquainted with during his university studies. One of the things the psychotherapist had said stuck with him—that he might be trying to mask his insecurities

by overpowering them with sex. She had suggested that wanting sex to an obsessional extent might be a sign of distress, and that underneath his compulsive sexual needs might be a deep desire to be loved. In fact, Leonardo's understanding of these comments, was that his behavior could be seen as a desperate attempt on his part to feel less lonely. The psychotherapist made him question: "If sex is everything to you, why is it that you always end up feeling so sad and lonely? Why does it leave you with a sense of emptiness?"

Leonardo had to admit to himself that having sex with people for whom he didn't really care only made him feel even lonelier than before; no matter how many times he had sex, it failed to assuage his feelings. This psychotherapist had made him realize that his sexual adventures didn't quell his desires or satisfy him. She had added that, if sex wasn't a shared act between two partners, it was merely a form of solitary auto-arousal that precluded intimacy and care, and that satisfactory sex was all about connection. She pointed out too, that his continuous pursuit of sexual activities might be a sign that he was depressed and cautioned that his high turnover of sexual partners might only leave him emotionally stunted.

What this discussion made Leonardo realize was that, for him, real intimacy might be quite scary. Consequently, he could view this compulsive need for sex to be a form of self-medication—a way of fighting a kind of deadness within. This could be one of the reasons that he felt compelled to repeat his sexual adventures over and over again. It might be his way of feeling alive.

The topic of on-line pornography was also raised in these discussions concerning his sex life. Here, his university acquaintance had said that people obsessed with this kind of material would become familiar with creative sexual possibilities that they never knew had existed. The danger, according to her, was that such explorations were creating entirely unrealistic expectations with respect to real life sexual interactions. Once more, Leonardo had to admit that she had hit a sensitive mark.

Leonardo remembered that this acquaintance had also encouraged him to explore the reasons why he was behaving the way he did. When he hesitated to respond to this idea, she had pointed out to him that it was important to figure out the origins of his compulsive sexuality. Why was he so compelled to act in this manner? Could it be that his problem was of a neurological nature—that certain neurotransmitters in his brain were working overtime? Did his brain pathways need more sexual stimulation than others to feel satisfied? Or could it be that he had experienced specific traumas while growing up? Was there a connection with the specific family dynamics in which he was raised that might explain his condition?

Reflecting on the latter, Leonardo admitted that it hadn't been very encouraging to have a father who never said a good word about him. His relationship with him had been quite painful, and, as a sexual philanderer himself, his father wasn't exactly an exemplary role model. And then there was his mother, who he remembered had always acted like an ice queen. She was not a person he had been able to come close to. Leonardo's experiences with others in his age group were not much better. He recalled how often they were trying

to take advantage of him. Given the way he was treated, it could very well be that he had come to the decision that he couldn't really rely on anybody and needed to fend for himself.

True enough, Leonardo had always felt that being close to others was fraught with danger. No wonder that he might, if his university acquaintance was to be believed, have some kind of relationship anxiety—meaning an anxiety of intrusion coupled with an anxiety of abandonment. This past history could well explain why he had ended up systematically wanting to have sex with one anonymous person after the other; it freed him from the anxiety of being invaded and all the more so being abandoned. If his university acquaintance was to be believed, it could be that his sexual addiction had become his way of avoiding a truly meaningful relationship.

What Leonardo had understood from this exchange was that his pursuit of sexual highs was a substitute for the support and intimacy that he really longed for but was afraid to experience. It could very well be that his sexual obsessions were propelled by the belief that using somebody else's body might alleviate his feelings of loneliness; it had become his way of dealing with the deadness within. In essence, what this university acquaintance had been alluding to was an intimacy disorder—he was afraid of closeness. It made him wonder whether his fear of abandonment was exceeded only by his terror of intimacy. Could it be that his sexual frenzy was masking a denied affective deficiency, something that had become a means of dealing with a host of deeper psychological problems?

Unconsciously, he may have been looking for love, but this had materialized in frantic sexual activity.

Having listened to all this acquaintance had to say, Leonardo had to admit to himself that he didn't really like what he had heard. Deconstructing his obsessional need for sex made him feel uncomfortable, but deep down he admitted to himself that she may have been on the right track. The possibility that he was stuck developmentally and that his patterns of manic sexual behavior were anything but sexually mature resonated with him. Therefore, it may be that his sexual activities should not be looked at as a form of intercourse, but more as a form of discourse. Perhaps they were his convoluted way of relieving his insatiable need for contact and communication.

The more Leonardo thought about it, the more uncomfortable he grew. He even asked himself whether he was engaged in some form of "biological warfare" with his body. Could it even be the case that he was experiencing temporary psychotic episodes? The reason that the word psychosis crossed his mind was because of the sense of unreality that accompanied his sexual activities. When he was visiting this brothel, it was like he was losing contact with reality—entering a delusionary state, in which he lost his moral bearings. He would do things that he very much regretted afterwards. What if his family members and friends were to find out?

Also, if Leonardo was truly honest with himself, all of his sexual activities seemed to blend into nothingness. There had been so many nameless and faceless encounters. In fact,

by using sex whenever he wanted to and with whomever he wanted, he was devaluing sex, making the act almost meaningless. Once more, he recalled the cautionary statements of his university acquaintance, if he was using sex outside its proper context, he would not only hijack his emotions, but also put himself into risky situations (like having to deal with the police or having a sexually transmitted infection). In fact, the temporary relief that sex provided seemed a poor counterweight to the stress that he was experiencing.

Despite all Leonardo's efforts to push these thoughts out of his mind, he had to admit that this university acquaintance had been quite astute in her observations. Deep down, Leonardo recognized that none of his sexual adventures had ever been truly satisfactory. It would explain why he always felt compelled to search for a new "fix." Clearly, he had become some kind of addict. At the same time, Leonardo found it hard to accept this idea, but, addict or no addict, the truth was that he seemed unable to stop.

Reflecting on his present life situation, Leonardo realized the precariousness of it all. Given the predicaments he had found himself in, he had asked himself repeatedly whether life was worth living. Every morning, he would wake up to fight the same demons that had left him so tired the day before. It was like this compelling need for sex had become a monster that lived inside him, fed on him, was taking from him, controlling him, and, if he wasn't careful, was eventually going to destroy him. As an afterthought, Leonardo recalled how this university acquaintance had noted that his addiction to sex

might be life's perfect solvent: it could dissolve marriages, families, careers, and even lead to financial ruin.

The sexual conundrum

For most people, sexual behavior doesn't cause any serious problems. Although their sexual journey may not always be smooth sailing, people will learn how to make the best out of it and integrate a sexual dimension into their lives. This situation will be different, however, for people who are sexual addicts. For these people, sex seems to be an obsession by which they are incessantly haunted. This obsession, however, may be a cover for something else, or connected to a host of psychological issues, a major one being the way they deal with attachment issues.¹ Clearly, people like Leonardo appear to have serious problems in regard to intimacy. For them, it is a conflict-ridden issue that makes it very difficult for these people to really commit themselves to another person. By focusing only on the sexual act, they are depersonalizing the relationship with the other.

Individuals like Leonardo confuse having a loving relationship—being intimate and caring towards another person—with engaging in sexual acts. They may not realize that there is quite a difference: that being sensual relates to making love, whereas being sexual relates to having sex. They seem unable to recognize that sex is only *part* of a relationship with another person or appreciate that making love isn't a mere physical activity that involves an alignment of body parts. In fact, being sensual is much broader than being merely sexual: it has to do with the overall *quality* of a person's relationship with the other. It has

¹ John Bowlby (1983). *Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.

to do with intimacy, care, and emotional attachment. In other words, sensuality means truly experiencing the presence of the partner in the sexual encounter. It may often be the case that people have sex, but not that many people necessarily make love. For this reason, if people think that a relationship with another person is exclusively about the sexual act, then truly sensual experiences will pass them by.

For sex addicts it is only the physical act that counts, and the intimacy and care that contribute to a truly sensual experience are strange to them. Their focus appears to be on the physiological responses to sexual stimulation, and the primary purpose is to arrive at orgasmic release. It seems that these people try to replace what they lack in sensuality in a relationship with sexuality—their primary focus is physical gratification. Sex addicts do not understand that when people are connected at a strong emotional level, sensuality and sexuality intertwine. It can become an extremely satisfactory, transcending experience. For sexual addicts, however, their obsessive need for yet another sex “fix,” indicates that their sexual experience fails to satisfy.

The condition such individuals are suffering from has been given many names: hypersexuality, hypersexual disorder, sexual compulsivity, sexual impulsivity, and sexual addiction disorder. With a gender-specific perspective, terms to describe males with this condition include Don Juan syndrome, satyriasis, and priapism, while for women the terms clitoromaniac, nymphomaniac, and andromaniac have been used.

The behavior of a typical sexual addict includes a wide variety of sexual activities such as the compulsive use of pornography on the Internet, cybersex, consistent use of prostitutes, resorting to sexual massages or escorts, multiple affairs, frequent sex outside of primary relationships, anonymous sex and compulsive masturbation. Even though many of these practices are common to the sex life of many people, it is when sexual thoughts and activities completely consume a person's life that they should be considered manifestations of a sexual addiction. What should also be noted, and that is integral to Leonardo's case example, is that these people use their sexual activities as a way of managing underlying emotional conflicts.

People who are sexually obsessed behave in a similar way to those who have substance-abuse problems. Like the buzz people with an alcohol-use disorder obtain from a drink or people with an opiate use disorder get from using opiates, sex addicts are also characterized by a compulsive need for a repeated "fix". It is as if their sexual thoughts, desires, urges or behaviors have become uncontrollable.

From a cultural perspective, this condition has been exacerbated by the emergence of the internet, providing an information portal for sexual services through online dating services, classified ads, and discussion boards. In fact, the Internet has made it easier for sexual addicts to find outlets that help them manage their needs.

Despite the stress that sexual addicts experience, they seem unable to stop, control or change their particular behavioral patterns. In fact, when the opportunity arises in respect

to sex, they may be observed to enter into a trancelike state, that blocks out the potential consequences of their actions. Much like people who suffer from a substance addiction, these sexually obsessive individuals persist in their often-destructive pursuits regardless of the consequences; temporarily or otherwise, they seem to be very much out-of-control. They're engaged in a constant battle, trying to control behavior that seems to occur on autopilot. Consequently, these people feel compelled to significantly alter their life and activities in order to perform sexual acts extremely frequently, while ignoring its negative consequences. As we noted in the case of Leonardo, these people continue engaging in risky behavior despite their sexual activities having clear negative effects on their relationships, finances, professional lives, and health. This includes appearing oblivious to the possible legal ramifications in soliciting sex workers.

In the context of this addiction to sex, however, it is important to reiterate that sexual behavior is a normal, healthy part of human life. What also needs to be kept in mind is that sexuality will never be the same for each person, and there exists a wide range of activities that turn people on. In this context, cultural difference also has a role. When it comes to individual sexual predilections, some people tend to be quite monogamous whilst others may enjoy being active with multiple sexual partners. Different people may seek out many different kinds of sexual experiences: a person's sexual inclinations become problematic, however, when they cause significant distress to people, putting them at risk of harming themselves and others.

The difficulty of diagnosis

When seeking to assess the presence of sexual addiction, the following questions can be helpful, all of which would be answered in the affirmative by the typical sex addict:

- Do you feel overly distracted by, obsessed with, or preoccupied by your sexual fantasies and behavior?
- Is it very difficult for you to resist the need to engage in sexual behaviors?
- Does the use of pornography occupy a considerable amount of your time?
- Do you need greater variety, increased frequency, or more extreme sexual activities to achieve the same level of excitement or relief?
- Do you rely on sex as a means of reducing stress, anxiety, or boredom?
- Do you have difficulty concentrating on tasks because your thoughts are always shifting to sexual fantasies?
- Do you live a double life, feeling a need to keep secrets from other people about your sexual behavior?
- Does your preoccupation with sex cause disruption in your family life, social life or work routines?
- Do you feel remorse, guilt, or shame after your sexual activities?
- Do your casual or anonymous sex activities keep you from having more long-term intimate relationships?

Concerning assessment, the diagnostic criteria for sex addiction have remained both vague and quite subjective. For that reason, the paucity of empirical research and consensus validating sexual behavior as an addiction explains why this disorder has been

excluded from the fifth edition of the “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.” Notwithstanding this fact, sex addiction is still a very valid concern written about and studied in psychology and counseling circles.² After all, it has significant negative societal consequences. Here, it should be noted that the International Classification of Diseases, 11th edition (ICD-11) by the World Health Organization does include compulsive sexual behavior disorder as a diagnosis.³ What needs to be added is that some researchers see this disorder as a problem of regulating behavior, while other experts suggest it derives from a higher sex drive or impulse control problems.

While research about this subject remains rather limited given people’s reluctance to discuss these matters, sex addiction seems to be more common than most people realize. For example, it is estimated that between 3% and 6% of the general adult population in the USA suffers from sex addiction. Some studies even indicate an upper range of 10 percent. What should also be added is that sex addiction seems to be more common among men than among women, with an estimated 80% of sex addicts being men.⁴ But despite these studies, the secretive nature of the topic means it remains difficult to assess the global prevalence of sex addiction. Equally, its sensitive and personal nature means identifying a compulsive sexual disorder will always be a challenge. Unless these

² American Psychiatric Association (2022). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (Dsm-5(r))*. Washington, DC: APA.

³ https://www.who.int/health-topics/sexual-health#tab=tab_1

⁴ Laurent Karila, Aline Wéry, Aviv Weinstein, Olivier Cottencin, Aymeric Petit, Michel Reynaud, and Joel Billieux (2014). Sexual addiction or hypersexual disorder: different terms for the same problem? A review of the literature, *Current Pharmaceutical Design*, 20 (25): 4012–20; B. R. Sahithya and Rithvik Kasyap (1922). Sexual Addiction Disorder— A Review with Recent Updates, *Journal of Psychosocial Health*, (4), 2, 95-101; <https://medium.com/@infinitepassion/sex-addiction-80-are-men-4fe2b5874df7>.

people volunteer to address their disorder, they are not likely to discuss their problem. Furthermore, as with other impulse control disorders, the physical and psychological signs of compulsive sexual behaviors tend to be subtle or quite hidden. Consequently, without the existence of large epidemiological studies, the exact prevalence rate will continue to be speculative.⁵ Complicating the matter further is the important role that culture may play in referring to sexual addiction. In fact, cultures that view sexuality in a more positive light may not be so quick to label people as suffering from a sexual addiction.

From an emotional perspective, many of these sex addicts experience a sense of guilt, shame or remorse, yet appear to have no control over their actions. In fact, they experience a sense of hopelessness and helplessness with respect to their addictive behavior. Hence, many may become depressed, feel lonely, fearful, anxious, and even suicidal. This host of negative feelings raises the question of the origins of the condition, and, as the case of Leonardo exemplified, biological, psychological and societal factors may all play a role.

Theoretical perspectives

Some of the theories as to why sex addiction occurs are neurophysiological, whilst others tend to be more developmental.⁶ A neurological perspective, for example, might argue

⁵ Timothy Fong (2006). Understanding and Managing Compulsive Sexual Behaviors, *Psychiatry*, 3(11), 51–58.

⁶ George Koob and Nora Volkow (2016). "Neurobiology of addiction: a neurocircuitry analysis". *Lancet Psychiatry*. **3** (8): 760–773; Katherine Derbyshire and Jon E. Grant (2015). Compulsive Sexual Behavior: A Review of the Literature, *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, 4(2), 37–43; Shane W. Kraus, Valerie Voon, and

that sexual addiction is due to abnormalities on both temporal lobes. It has been suggested that frontal lobe damage may result in disinhibited behaviors which could partially explain the increased sexual activity, along with decreased control. It is also hypothesized that sexual disinhibition may be the result of imbalances in some neurotransmitters such as the highly addictive dopamine. Further investigation, however, is needed to understand the specifics of these aberrances.

Other theories hypothesize that, for some individuals, sexual addiction emerges as both a consequence and way of coping with early childhood trauma, including sexual trauma. Dysfunctional family dynamics during childhood for example, may mean the needs of these sexual addicts were not met at an early stage. Some of these people—Leonardo being a good case in point—act out sexually because they never learned how to be intimate in a healthier way. Furthermore, many sex addicts may have had a history of childhood physical (including sexual) abuse. For these individuals, compulsive sexual activities have become a source of well-being. In other words, they use sex as a form of escape from other emotional and psychological problems—it has become their way of coping with stress, anxiety, depression, and feelings of social isolation. Also, people who grew up in households where one or both parents displayed addictive behavior, appear significantly more likely to suffer from a sex addiction. Given the seemingly uncontrollable nature of their activities, it is quite likely that sexual addiction may also co-vary with

Marc N. Potenza (2016). Neurobiology of Compulsive Sexual Behavior: Emerging Science, *Neuropsychopharmacology*, 41(1), 385–386; Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. (2023, April 19). *Compulsive Sexual Behavior*. Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/compulsive-sexual-behavior/symptoms-causes/syc-20360434>

impulse control disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, relationship disorder, and substance use disorders.⁷

Sex addiction treatment

People like Leonardo are unlikely to ask for help. This appears to be the case for many sex addicts, given the social stigma attached to their behavior. Many, given the way they behave, are haunted by feelings of shame and guilt. Stigmatization in the media and the criminalization of sexual offenders has also created an atmosphere that does not encourage treatment and prevention. It is no wonder that many of these sexual addicts feel as if they are imprisoned by their condition. Compounding these feelings further, various personality disorders may co-vary with their sexual addiction. For example, substance abuse, in particular, has been quite common among individuals with sex addiction. It is as if these people use drugs or alcohol to release their inhibitions, overcome feelings of shame and guilt, or relieve their feelings of depression. Considering there are so many converging variables, it is no wonder that these people will be reluctant to ask for help.

What these people may not realize is that there *are* various intervention techniques available that can help them to deal with their sex addiction.⁸ Naturally, the first step these people must take is to recognize that they might have a problem. Clearly, to disrupt their

⁷ Vincent Estellon and Harold Mouras (2012). Sexual addiction: insights from psychoanalysis and functional neuroimaging, *Socioaffective Neuroscience & Psychology*, 2: 11814, [10.3402/snp.v2i0.11814](https://doi.org/10.3402/snp.v2i0.11814).

⁸ Eli Coleman, Nancy Raymond and Anne McBean (2003). Assessment and treatment of compulsive sexual behavior. *Minnesota Medicine Magazine*, 86, 42–7.

obsessional activities and thoughts, these people need to be willing to ask for help. Too often, however, sex addicts tend to ignore the darker side of their addiction. In doing so, as we saw in the case of Leonardo, they put their relationships, their career, their finances, their health, and the health of their partner in jeopardy. What these people need to realize is that they have a choice: either eliminate their addiction or it is quite likely that their addiction will eliminate them.

As far as possible treatments are concerned, there are psychopharmacological routes. It seems that certain anti-depressant and hormonal drugs may help addicts to reduce their sexual drive. These medicines appear to act on the brain chemicals linked to obsessive thought processes and behaviors; by lessening the chemical “rewards” that these behaviors offer subsequently reduces their sexual urges. However, even when this treatment option is used, rarely does medication eradicate or evolve compulsive sexuality long term.

A more effective way of dealing with sexual addiction appears to be one-on-one cognitive or psychodynamic therapy. These treatments can be helpful as a means of reframing experiences and/or addressing unresolved traumas and past emotional pain. Such therapies may help these people to identify the thought patterns and false beliefs that have contributed to their addictive behaviors. In this context, trauma-informed therapy may help people process traumatic childhood experiences and develop healthier ways of coping.

In addition, there are various group-oriented forms of intervention, including inpatient treatment centers. These places offer sex addiction recovery programs that typically include in-depth individual and group therapy sessions. Essentially, sex addicts who decide to take this option are required to remove themselves from their normal daily lives in order to regain control of their impulses and start healing. One of the advantages of these group-oriented intervention techniques is that it makes people feel less isolated. Realizing that they are not alone in suffering from this addiction may help to reduce their feelings of shame and guilt about their particular condition.

Furthermore, there are also 12-step programs comparable to the template followed by Alcoholics Anonymous, such as Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA). In that respect, SAA provide a self-help recovery model and support group that can be highly effective for people with compulsive sexual behavior and some of the issues that it can cause. The additional benefits of these sex addiction groups are that they provide a support network that encourages individuals to maintain a sense of accountability to others. What must be noted, however, is that participants in these kinds of programs aren't required to give up sex entirely but are encouraged to refrain from compulsive and destructive sexual behavior.

In some instances, couple or family counseling can be a treatment option when appropriate. This kind of therapy may help to restore trust, reduce feelings of shame and guilt, and establish a healthier sexual relationship between partners.

As seen in Leonardo's case, people addressing sex addiction face a unique set of challenges. But as is the case for other addictions, overcoming their condition may not be easy, but will very much be worth it. In reviewing the many negatives of addictive behavior, doing something about it beats the alternative and will lead to a more fulfilling life. As with any other addiction, whatever steps are taken to address it will take time, sacrifice, and willpower. Equally, it is always very easy to fall back into that darkness.

Homo sapiens or homo sexualis

Sex and sexual reproduction are part of life. As in the animal kingdom, mating is programmed into our DNA: Homo sapiens eat, sleep, have sex, and raise their offspring. Even though sex is a fundamental force of nature—a primary instinct of genetics that compel us to reproduce—human beings have also managed to divert themselves from this basic activity. For human beings, sex isn't only about procreation, nor is it merely about producing offspring but has the added value of being a potentially very pleasurable activity. In this respect, human beings seem to have transcended their evolutionary destiny. In other words, despite sex being a primitive mammalian impulse, compared to our animal "cousins", instinct isn't the only guiding force for Homo sapiens. Endowed as human beings are with reasoning powers, they can make independent decisions concerning their own behavior that are of mere instinct. In other words, they do have a choice. In fact, Homo sapiens is the only mammal that can have sex purely for pleasure.

As a result of this added dimension to having sex, it can also be a means of enriching connections between people. Consequently, it is the one the great equalizer in human

life: whether we are rich or poor, smart or stupid, good looking or ugly, everyone is capable of having orgasmic experiences. In this respect, sex is an equal opportunity provider. In fact, for many people, a loving sexual connection is the closest they will ever get to a transcendent sense of benevolence, bliss, and the sense that all is well. For this reason, a satisfactory sex life should be seen as a great form of self-care—a strong “glue” between people that has the potential to benefit society and act as a force for the good. As we have seen, this is not the case for people who suffer from a sex addiction, whereby it can easily become a force for the bad and the cause of great damage.

Whether it is a force for the good or the bad, sexuality greatly influences the world we live in. As the American novelist Henry Miller once said, “What holds the world together, as I have learned from bitter experience, is sexual intercourse.” In fact, sex is so important that it underpins politics, economics and a society’s general psychological well-being. Sexuality can elevate and connect people. It provides a social structure to society, and it is at this point when morality also begins to play a role, including sexual morality. Here, ‘morality’ is used as a broad term that generally describes the adherence (or lack of adherence) to a set of behavioral standards or norms. This notion of morality introduces sin to the picture, in which there is a failure to adhere to certain moral standards or engage in immoral acts or human transgressions.

While animals know no sin, for human beings sexuality always seems to be tied up with sin and morality. For this reason, sexuality has been subjected to many rules delineating what are considered morally allowable actions and correct behavior. As a result, there

have emerged moral guardians who determine what is and what isn't permitted, and a means of 'policing' this moral behavior. Often, however, there appears to be a gap between such general social pronouncements regarding sexuality (which tend to be quite restrictive) and its actual practice. Clearly, this will always be a balancing act, whereby conservative sexuality tends to be procreation-focused whilst a sexual libertarian perspective emphasizes pleasure. Once again this indicates the controversial nature of sexuality.

Given the power wielded by these moral guardians with respect to sexuality, avoidance tends to be the name of the game, and sexual matters are often swept under the carpet. We see, but we don't want to see. Given this conscious and unconscious blindness, our personal sex life tends to remain a subject of taboo in day-to-day conversation, despite the extent to which sexuality permeates public life. While sexuality will always take a considerable amount of space in people's mind, most people are still fairly squeamish about sex, and uncomfortable with the more instinctual parts of our behavior. In fact, what should be a natural thing is often perceived as dirty—most people don't have a conversation about what they did last night in bed. Although sex is everywhere, it is rarely talked about, and particularly not its importance for people's mental health. Sexual addiction is even more of a taboo, and often subject to a conspiracy of silence. Many people seem to deny its existence, however. And as we have seen, cases such as that of Leonardo demonstrate how their sexual activities can cause great harm and pain to both themselves and others.

Despite the discomfort a discussion of sexual addiction evokes; it is a subject that needs to be addressed. Even though the guardians of public morality may fear the transgressive nature of sexual disorders, not talking about it, doesn't make it go away. As a relatively common disorder that has significant personal and public health ramifications, it is high time that it is brought out of the shadows. As much as sex can be fun, playful, and meaningful, to be obsessed by sex represents trouble. As Leonardo's case cautions, our sexual desires should not become self-destructive, nor an all-devouring monster. As the English writer Gilbert Chesterton said so succinctly, "The moment sex ceases to be a servant, it becomes a tyrant."