

# **Addiction Beyond Substances**

## **An Introduction to Problematic and Compulsive Sexual Behavior and Sex and Love Addiction**

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EAGALA 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference

March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016



**Presentation and Resources can be  
found at  
[www.SexTherapy-Online.com](http://www.SexTherapy-Online.com)**

# About the Presenter



- Rhiannon Beauregard, MA, LMFT-S, EAP-A CST is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and Certified Sex Therapist. EAGALA Advanced Certified and Mentor
- Licensed in five states: Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Texas
- Specializing in Sex Therapy and therapy for individuals and relationships struggling with sexual compulsivity

# Objectives

- Participants will discuss the controversy within the mental and behavioral health field around the definition of sexual compulsivity, problematic sexual behavior, and sex and love addiction.
- Participants will identify the basic characteristics of clients who have problematic sexual behavior, sexual compulsivity, and sex and love addiction.
- Participants will be able to understand how problematic sexual behaviors are recognized and diagnosed in their clients.

# Objectives Continued

- Participants will be able to identify the close relationship between drug and alcohol addiction and sex and love addiction.
- Participants will be able to identify inpatient and outpatient treatment options as well as resources for those struggling with compulsive sexual behavior.
- Participants will discuss how the EAGALA model can assist with treating problematic and compulsive sexual behavior and sex and love addiction.



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# Can someone be addicted to sex?

- Controversial
- Field is split
- Professionals are split
- Lots of online blogging, comments, and literature about this
- Some research arguing for both sides



**Regardless of what the controversy  
says, listen to how people are  
talking about it....**

[Terry Crews on Porn Addiction](#)

**Regardless of what the controversy  
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[Dr. Ley on Anderson Cooper](#)

# Sticky Situation: My Solution

- I let my clients determine how they would like to describe the issue they are coming in for.
- I use several assessment tools if there is confusion to help them get insight on their behavior.
- Since denial plays a huge factor in understanding an addiction, in addition to some of the assessment tools, I may suggest some readings of stories of problematic sexual behavior to help the clients understand their behavior better.

# Language Matters

- For the sake of this presentation, I will use the terms problematic sexual behavior, unhealthy sexual behavior, sexual compulsivity, sex addiction, and sex and love addiction interchangeable but you will likely hear me say problematic and compulsive sexual behavior more often than the others because I believe it encompasses the behaviors while avoiding the controversy.

# Basic Characteristics of Problematic Sexual Behavior

- Usually survivors of early-life trauma (does not necessarily need to be sexual in nature)
- Troubled attachment with primary caregivers
- Poor body image
- Problematic behavior with other compulsions (drugs, alcohol, gambling, food, etc.)
- Shame
- Have difficulty stopping even if they want to
- Keeping secrets
- Making excuses
- DENIAL
- Low sexual self confidence
- Out-of-control sexual behavior that has negative consequences in peoples lives
- Self-soothe with sexual behaviors
- Can eroticize and reenact an aspect of their trauma
- Behaviors exacerbate feelings of shame and emotional discomfort, creating a progressive need to self-soothe
- Co-occurring sexual dysfunctions
- May have sexually transmitted diseases

# Characteristics of Sex and Love Addiction

- Having few healthy boundaries, we become sexually involved with and/or emotionally attached to people without knowing them.
- Fearing abandonment and loneliness, we stay in and return to painful, destructive relationships, concealing our dependency needs from ourselves and others, growing more isolated and alienated from friends and loved ones, ourselves, and God.
- Fearing emotional and/or sexual deprivation, we compulsively pursue and involve ourselves in one relationship after another, sometimes having more than one sexual or emotional liaison at a time.
- We confuse love with neediness, physical and sexual attraction, pity and/or the need to rescue or be rescued.
- We feel empty and incomplete when we are alone. Even though we fear intimacy and commitment, we continually search for relationships and sexual contacts.
- We sexualize stress, guilt, loneliness, anger, shame, fear and envy. We use sex or emotional dependence as substitutes for nurturing care, and support.
- We use sex and emotional involvement to manipulate and control others.
- We become immobilized or seriously distracted by romantic or sexual obsessions or fantasies.
- We avoid responsibility for ourselves by attaching ourselves to people who are emotionally unavailable.
- We stay enslaved to emotional dependency, romantic intrigue, or compulsive sexual activities.
- To avoid feeling vulnerable, we may retreat from all intimate involvement, mistaking sexual and emotional anorexia for recovery.
- We assign magical qualities to others. We idealize and pursue them, then blame them for not fulfilling our fantasies and expectations.

# Comorbidity of Drugs and Alcohol and Problematic Sexual Behavior

- It's been my experience that often times people who have drug and alcohol issues also have sexual compulsivity issues
- Many times I see clients who use drugs and alcohol and have problems with their sexual behavior are actually using drugs and alcohol to “act out” sexually due to issues with sexual functioning and sexual self-esteem
- If we only treat the drug and alcohol issues, and not the sexual compulsivity, there risks a high rate of relapse

# Drugs, Alcohol, Sex, and Sexual Dysfunction

– Case Study 1

# Drugs, Alcohol, Sex, and Sexual Dysfunction

- Case Study 2

# Three Legged Stool Model of Treatment

- Carnes recommends the 3-legged stool model for the person/relationship struggling with problematic sexual behavior:  
INDIVIDUAL,  
RELATIONSHIP, & GROUP  
THERAPY
- A few different variations:
  - Individual therapy, relationship therapy, and 12-step
  - Individual therapy, family of origin therapy, group therapy
  - Individual therapy for person with problematic behavior, individual therapy for partner/spouse, and couples therapy for both



# Treatment

- Inpatient treatment programs are plentiful all over the country
- Outpatient treatment programs are a little more difficult
- Many major US cities will have therapeutic groups for both partners and those struggling with the behavior
- Online classes and online groups are also available
- 12-Step Programs are available

## How the EAGALA Model Can Help Treat Problematic, Compulsive, and Unhealthy Sexual Behavior

- Etiology of problematic sexual behavior is multi-casual and therefore the treatment should focus on a variety of causes and generally should involve systemic treatment of the issues
- EAGALA model work is PERFECT for resolving the early trauma and attachment issues that are the main source of the emotional dysregulation.
- To deal with some of the sexual issues, it is important to work within your scope and work with a qualified professional who specializes in the work.

## Big Take Home

- Problematic sexual behavior needs to be assessed for and treated, especially if you are working with someone with trauma, attachment, and/or addiction issues
- By not attending to these issues, you might be missing a big piece of the puzzle!

**Any Questions?**



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# Contact

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