Ethical Considerations in Treating Sex Addiction in the Digital Age

Deborah Schiller, LPC, CSAT-S, CMAT-S
Program Director, Gratitude Sex Addiction Program
Objectives

1. Participants will learn ethical considerations to keep in mind when working with clients who struggle with compulsive sexual behaviors.

2. Participants will be able to identify indicators that a client with problematic sexual behaviors may be struggling with an addiction.

3. Participants will have an expanded knowledge of ways to talk about sexual health issues with their clients.

4. Participants will learn how to share with their clients a reliable internet based self-evaluation for sex addiction.

5. Participants will be exposed to ways their clients may be looking for love and/or sex on the internet.
Ethical Standards

- Ethical Standards are mandatory in nature
- A moral code to do the “right thing”
- Enforceable rules of conduct to which the professional must adhere
- Ethics Code Examples
  - National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
  - American Psychological Association (APA)
  - National Counseling Association (NCA)
  - American Psychiatric Association (APA)
  - National Substance Abuse Certifications
  - American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM)
Professionalism

- Society *needs* and *wants* professionals to exist
- Society must feel and see trustworthiness
- Professional status is given in trust by society
- Professionalism: both individuals and groups
Principles of Ethical Decisions

• Any decision concerning a professional boundary can be evaluated based on the ethical premises of:
  – Autonomy
  – Beneficence
  – Non-Malfeasance
  – Fidelity
  – Justice
Autonomy

- Will it foster client independence?
- Does it serve the patient’s interest?
Beneficence and Non-Malfeasance

- To do “good”
- To do no harm
- To safeguard the welfare and rights of clients
- Conflicts of interest are resolved in a responsible fashion
- These principles guard against personal, financial, social, organizational, or political factors that might lead an individual to misuse their influence.
Fidelity and Justice

**Fidelity** -- the degree to which it reflects what was promised and is true to the articulated goals of the professional service

**Justice** -- avoidance of unjust practices
Tell Clients the Truth “UP FRONT”

- Inform prospective clients about the limits you intend to impose on confidentiality
- Explain any roles or potential conflicts of interest that might affect confidentiality
- Obtain informed client’s consent to accept limits as a condition of receiving services
- Reopen the conversation if/when patient’s circumstances or your intentions change
“People are lonely. The network is seductive. But if we are always on, we may deny ourselves the rewards of solitude.”

“Technology doesn’t just do things for us. It does things to us, changing not just what we do but who we are.”

Sherry Turkle, Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other
Addiction is a Brain Disease
Chemical Addictions
Process Addictions

Much like compulsive gambling, hoarding, exercising, work, and spending.
How are Process Addictions and Chemical Addictions alike?

- Numb feelings in order to escape painful parts of life
- Mood altering experience
- Becomes most important need
- Used to avoid intimacy
What is Sex Addiction?

A compulsive behavior that completely dominates the addict's life. Sexual addicts make sex a priority more important than family, friends, and work.
What is Sex Addiction?

Sex becomes the *organizing principle* of an addicts' life. They are willing to *sacrifice what they cherish* most in order to preserve and continue their unhealthy behavior.
Criterion for Sex Addiction

1. Recurrent failure to resist sexual impulses in order to engage in specific sexual behaviors
Criterion for Sex Addiction

2. Frequently engaging in those behaviors to a greater extent, or over a longer period of time than intended
Criterion for Sex Addiction

3. Long-standing desire, or a history of unsuccessful efforts to stop, reduce, or control those behaviors
Criterion for Sex Addiction

4. Excessive amounts of time spent in obtaining sex, being sexual or recovering from sexual experiences
Criterion for Sex Addiction

5. Obsession with preparing for sexual activities
Criterion for Sex Addiction

6. Frequently engaging in sexual behavior at times when expected to fulfill occupational, academic, domestic or social obligations
Criterion for Sex Addiction

7. Continuation of the sexual behavior despite knowing it has caused or exacerbated persistent or recurrent social, financial, psychological, or physical problems
Criterion for Sex Addiction

8. The need to increase the intensity, frequency, number, or risk level of sexual behaviors in order to achieve the desired effect;
   or diminished effect with continued behaviors at the same level of intensity, frequency, number, or risk
Criterion for Sex Addiction

9. Giving up or limiting social, occupational, or recreational activities because of the behavior
Criterion for Sex Addiction

10. Becoming upset, anxious, restless, or irritable if unable to engage in the sexual behavior
Sexual Addiction Screening Tests

• **Therapist Resources:**
  - [www.recoveryzone.com](http://www.recoveryzone.com)
  - [www.sexhelp.com](http://www.sexhelp.com)
  - [www.iitap.com](http://www.iitap.com)
    - Sexual Addiction Screening Test (SAST-R) Free
    - Partner Sexuality Survey (PSS) $6.50
    - Sexual Addiction Risk Assessment (SARA) $29.95
    - PATHOS Worksheet

• **Certified Sex Addiction Therapist Administered:**
  - Sexual Dependency Inventory (SDI)
  - Post-Traumatic Stress Index (PTSI-R)
  - Money and Work Adaptive Styles Index (MAWASI)
Cybersex Defined:

- The use of any electronic device to carry out activities or fantasy for sexual or romantic pleasure.
Healthy Computer & Internet Use

- Legitimate dating sites, Flirting
- People with common interests can meet and perhaps develop deeper relationships
- Couples who live far apart can continue a healthy sex life (virtual sex, sexual talk)
Healthy Computer & Internet Use

• Erotica to enhance sex life in a committed relationship
• Learning about sex, educational sites
• Purchasing sex toys for enhanced pleasure
Pornography Addiction

- 12% of all websites are porn
- 25% of search engines are porn related
- 35% of all downloads are for sexualized imagery.
Types of Cybersex Activities:

- Viewing of still pornographic images & videos
- Sexting nude photos, videos, and texts
- Phone or Skype sexual encounters
- Video chat rooms for anonymous cyber encounters
- Hook-up sites
- Prostitution
Porn Industry

• More and more digitalized rather than xxx movie theaters, porn stores
• Business model
• Designed to hook kids
• Designed to pull you in, take you to places you never intended to go
Indicators of Problematic Porn Use

- Excessive or late night computer use
- Requiring privacy when using the computer
- Going to bed at a different time than partner
- Private credit card, post office box, locked cell phone, email or Facebook page
- Hyper sexual or lack of sexual interest
- Defensive about porn use
- Sexualization of others
- Isolating
- Cybersex Addiction

Screening Test
Sexual Problems with Porn Use:

- Less interest or ability to be aroused with real partner
- Intrusive thoughts during sex with partner Requiring partner to engage in acts that are emotionally or physically uncomfortable
- Sexual behavior becomes riskier
Sexual Problems with Porn Use

- Living in a bubble; not being fully present for real life sex
- Gives up relationships rather than curtail porn use
- Neglecting family and friends
- Loss of ability to experience emotions
Problems with Porn Use

- Comparing self and others to individuals viewed in pornography
- Behaving contrary to one’s values
- Self disdain, suicidal thoughts (attempts)
Problems with Porn Use

• Manipulating and lying to loved ones
• Anxiety and depression
• Falling behind at work
• Irritability
Virtual Adult-Oriented Sex Games

- Customized fantasy avatars (Second Life, Anime)
- All sexual orientations, fetishes
- Produce individualized porn (scenarios, music, camera angles, customized body parts)
- In the near future: 3D and touch sensitive for use with Xbox Kinect and eye tracking technology
Digitally Available Sexual Activities

- Phone apps, web sites to find casual (perhaps anonymous) sex
- Communities that share sexual interests
- Chat rooms for romance or sex
- Hook-up sites for romance or sex
- Fetish sites, Cheater sites, news groups
- Viewing/downloading porn photos/videos
Digitally Available Sexual Activities

- Commercial, professional and amateur porn
- Webcams for mutual masturbation, voyeurism, exhibitionism, real time sex acts
- Finding sexual massage, escorts, prostituted individuals
- Buying, selling, distributing porn
- Using social media to find arousing photos, potential hook ups
Predicting the future
The Orgasmatron

- Woody Allen, Diane Keaton
- Sleeper, 1973
- In real life during trials for a potential spinal cord stimulator an implantable device that stimulates the pleasure centers of the brain was discovered. Expensive, requiring electrodes surgically inserted near the spine.
Someday? Personalized Robots!
Will look and behave to your specifications

- **Her** 2013
- David Levy expert on artificial intelligence predicts that by 2050 “humans will fall in love with robots, humans will marry robots, and humans will have sex with robots, all as ‘normal’ extensions of our feelings of love and sexual desire.”
Cyber-Enhanced Sex

- Kiss-Phone measures lip pressure, temperature, movement and reconstructs this kiss at another Kiss-Phone
- Soon: Tech bed; special fiber sheets and sleepwear allow partners to feel intimate sensations
- Soon: Contact lenses that change the way a person looks to the viewer
Other Customized Pornography

- Eye tracking technology (Pornographers can detect within a nano-second time spent gazing at a body part or behavior)
- Muse, iBrain (tracks intra-skull electrical activity ... thoughts become activity)
Teledildonics

- Warms, lubricates, responds to a partner’s movements
- Loved one, performer, stranger, prostituted individual
- Virtual oral or manual stimulation
- Devices for male or female genitalia
Differentiating Client Risk Levels

- Casual User
- At-Risk User
- Addicted User
- Offender
The Casual User

- Intermittent/occasional
- Driven by curiosity, novelty, education, or entertainment
- Life stage specific (adolescent, single, loss)
- Healthy self esteem, lacking toxic shame
- Stable long term relationships
- Balanced life of work, play, diet, rest
- Honesty within a committed relationship
The At-Risk User

- Secret keeping
- Sacrifices intimacy
- History of other impulse control problems
- Highly reactive to emotional stressors
- Challenging primary relationship
- Struggles with empathy/narcissistic traits
- Abnormally sensitive, takes things personally
The Addicted User

- Lives a double life
- Emotionally distant
- May be abusing chemicals, food, other compulsive behaviors
- High levels of anxiety and depression
- No empathy for others, strong narcissistic thoughts and behaviors
- Loss of personal relationships
- Damaged intimacy within committed relationship
- Childhood or adult trauma often present
- Avoids commitments, does not follow through
Sexual Addiction or Offending?

- **Sexual addiction** involves *consenting* adults or sex with self.
  - Obsessive
  - Loss of control
  - Negative consequences

- **Sexual offending** involves *nonconsensual* forms of sex involving those who:
  - don’t want it
  - don’t know it’s happening
  - are too young to give consent
  - are mentally handicapped
  - are having sex forced on them
ACA- Section H

- Distance Counseling Technology
- Separate Personal and Professional
- Informed Consent (Limits to confidentiality)
- Respect Privacy (Don’t Google Pt.)
- Avoid Disclosing Confidential Information
A brief lapse can negatively impact the entire profession.
• Google yourself
• Stress/Burnout
• Privacy settings
• Delete accounts
• Separate Accounts
• Accountability
Modern Hippocratic Oath

- “I will respect the privacy of my patients, for their problems are not disclosed to me that the world may know”
Cybersex References

Ethics References


• Romero, B. *The Death of Conversation: I Photograph People Obsessed With Their Smartphones* Available at http://www.boredpanda.com/the-death-of-conversation/, including photographs.


