

Sex Addict or Highly Sexed?

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Where does a healthy sex drive end and sex addiction begin? Daniel G Taylor investigates.

All "Troy" wanted was a happy ending. But when he busted up with his first boyfriend, quantity of sex became the source of his self-esteem. Up to 12 hours a day were devoted to masturbating and seeking unsafe sex with unattractive men. Was he a sex addict or simply highly sexed?

"An addiction is the urge to indulge in thoughts or behaviours so frequently that it interferes with normal everyday living," says Dr Janet Hall, clinical psychologist, sex therapist, hypnotherapist, and author of *Sex-Wise*.

"It also has a negative impact on our essential humanity in terms of physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and economical parameters."

She specifies negative consequences including STDs, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, suicidal ideation, bankruptcy, and relationship difficulties – all things Troy experienced.

But Dr Charles Silverstein (pictured), author of *The Joy of Gay Sex*, objects to the concept of sexual addiction. "Such a term is a further means of making gay men feel guilty for being gay, and we've had enough of that kind of oppression.

"My second general objection is the emphasis on sex instead of talking about human relationships. The gay man who tricks every night and, for instance, never sees the other man again, is not suffering from compulsive sex.

"His problem is his inability to form intimate relationships. His nightly forays probably feed his loneliness, at least until the next day when his fear of being alone drives him to find the trick of the day. He's not suffering from compulsive sex, as if to say "bad boy," rather it calms his fright of human relationships."

Hall plainly doesn't want to guilt-trip anyone about sex and she thinks a healthy high sex drive can be terrific. "With a high sex drive it's contained, such that it's integrated into normal living. You would rather have sex than watch TV!" Highly sexed people "plan for sex and also take advantage of spontaneous opportunities. Sex benefits them."

Such benefits include an end to boredom, appreciating the body beyond the genitals, and it's a recreation activity you can do wherever you and a willing partner find yourselves.

Slimming and fitness is another bonus. "A long, energetic sex session can help burn calories and keep your heart rate healthy," Hall told blaze. "Having sex twice a week is the equivalent cardiovascular exercise of jogging 60 kilometres per year."

People who love sex instead of needing it take better care of themselves and are happy, calm, and less stressed. Both enjoy greater success at work and work smarter, not harder.

Troy labelled himself "sex addict" and sought a solution, everywhere from religious fundamentalism to 12-step Alcoholics Anonymous-style groups. At one church, despite its homophobia, he overcame his fear of connecting to people intimately and non-sexually. He also came to realise he loves casual safe sex, but now it's a part of his life and not an obsession.

He's found his happy ending.