

The “Seven Motivations” of Destructive Sex

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In the early 1900s, Alfred Adler argued that human behavior is goal-driven. For Adler, this teleological perspective was foundational to understanding why people make the choices they do. While it might sound odd, our behaviors actually have “payoffs” – desired goals that are met through specific behaviors. Consider the following seven motivators and how one or more of them may be motivating your own behaviors.

Motivator #1. *Excitement*

Physical excitement is one of the strongest payoffs for sexual “acting out.” While this may seem like stating the obvious, it is worth taking a closer look. A healthy sexual arousal pattern also includes the excitement stage. But forbidden sex adds an “adrenalin rush” that magnifies the anticipatory and excitement phases of the arousal cycle.

High-risk sex with unknown persons introduces important elements of fear and risk. Research shows that a person is more attractive when the subject perceived fear or risk either to him/herself or that person. Fear, risk, and novelty are well-documented neurochemical escalators of the sexual experience.

“Considerable evidence also indicates that PEA and sexual arousal are highly affected by the presence of fear, risk, and danger. For instance, PEA concentrations have been measured as extremely high in connection with divorce court trials. Experiments with attraction have shown that fears serves as an important escalator of desire. For example, in one study students were interviewed by an attractive interviewer. Those who were (falsely) told they might receive an electric shock rated the interviewer more attractive than those who were not given this warning.” Craving the Ecstasy: The Consciousness and Chemistry of Escape, Harvey Milkman and Stanley Sudnerwirth

Reminiscent of the variable rate of reinforcement that gives gambling its powerful drive, the same holds true for sexual “gambling.” Every new lover, each visit to a chat room, etc. holds the promise of the idealized sexual experience. The fact that the ideal is actually a glossy fantasy and attained infrequently only reinforces the variable rate of reinforcement and proves to create an even stronger habit.

Motivator #2. *Comfort*

Sexually “acting out” can bring about relief from life stressors. Research shows that an integral aspect of sexual arousal and orgasm includes the release of oxytocin and vasopressin, which are powerful chemical relaxants. A few years back, a popular series of beer commercials featured hardworking men and woman toiling at oil drills, coast guard rescues, etc. At the end of their arduous day, they all get together for a beer, with the announcer voice-over saying, “*And now it’s Miller time.*” Many high-pressured professionals find themselves locked in the grip of sexual addiction. Looking at their lives, one sees a clear pattern of sexual acting out as a means of relaxation from the chronic stress they live under – called the “Miller-Time” phenomenon.

Motivator #3. *Escape*

Acting out can provide a means of escape from the mundane “grind” of daily living. Is your life boring? Exotic fantasy worlds are just a click away on your personal computer. One of the features of sexual addiction is the creation of “trance states of mind.” Trance is a common, everyday occurrence for all of us. Simply defined, it involves an intense focus on an image while becoming less aware of one's physical surroundings, allowing the mind to wander while the body is in a relaxed state (on automatic pilot).

Once in trance, a person's normal inhibitions, including sexual, are relaxed and they are able to experience events that seem very real, and can include sight, smell, touch, relationships and deep emotions. Trance also has a way of putting “time” on hold – hours can pass in what can feel like mere minutes. That's what happens as a person views traditional porn or engages in a cybersexual relationship. In the privacy of their own room, they can disappear to alternate worlds that feel intensely real.

Motivator #4. *Affirmation*

A universal longing is to “matter” – to have our value as a human being affirmed by someone else. Cybersex can provide desperately sought after affirmation, but with a price.

- Exhibitionistic Sex – With words or posted pictures, the internet addict draws attention to sexual topics and parts of their body. Sexual arousal stems from reaction of the viewer whether of shock or interest. A longed for hope is that the recipient will approve of the exhibition, thereby affirming the sex addict's value and attractiveness.
- Paying for Sex – Purchase of sexual services on the Internet. This is a form of affirmation – even if it is only temporarily “renting” it from another human being.
- Ongoing relationships – in the illusory world of the Internet, a person is able to enter into relationships with other sex addicts and find mutual affirmation. The irony is that both cybersex partners are typically lying about who they really are, so the affirmation is towards a falsely created “self.”

Motivator #5. *Power*

In it's raw form, sex can represent dominance and control over another person. In turn this affirms a sense of power that the sex addict lacks in his or her real world. Arousal is based on the notion of conquest and diminishes rapidly after initial contact.

Motivator #6. *Revenge*

Sexual compulsions can act as a means of revenge against perceived betrayals in the present or in the past. Hurt can come from an inattentive spouse, a condemning church, or childhood abuse.

Motivator #7. *Helplessness*

Destructive sex can affirm a person's self-belief of a “victim” or “helpless” condition. In a variety of ways, the motivation of helplessness affirms that the person really has no control over their sexual desires, and reinforces myths/rationalizations - “*Men are genetically unable to be monogamous*” or “*It's a generational curse, my father was this way and so am I.*”