

BOOK REVIEW

Understanding and Treating Sex Addiction

Paula Hall. London, UK: Routledge, 2012.
ISBN-13: 978-0-415-69191-8. Price: £19.99.
Pages: 216 (paperback)

This is an important book. Yes, many Journal readers will never treat – or even meet – a sex addict, but those who do will benefit hugely from the expertise and guidance this book offers. And those who don't encounter a single sex addict in their entire professional lives will nevertheless by reading this book greatly enhance their understanding of what has recently become, in media speak, a 'hot topic'.

We can hardly fail to have noticed that there is ongoing discussion about whether 'sex addiction' really exists – the words 'Michael' and 'Douglas' come inexorably to mind. Surely it's just a convenient medicalisation of a lack of erotic self-control? Or a weak excuse for narcissistic self-indulgence?

So surely we should – as individual professionals or as a civilised society – not give sufferers attention, but simply tell them to keep it in their pants?

In the context of this debate, *Understanding and Treating Sex Addiction* is important first because it argues coherently and convincingly that sex addiction does exist and should be taken seriously. The author, an addiction specialist, devotes the first third of the book to a confident and informed explanation of just what sex addiction is, how it develops, how it ruins lives – and why, for everyone's sake, it merits treatment.

The ensuing nine chapters detail how such treatment can enable the addict and their significant others to rebuild their lives again. Whether the reader is a health professional, an addict or a family supporter, the book offers not only theoretical underpinnings and insights, but clear ways forward, practical exercises and a signposted path to recovery.

The whole is based firmly not only on Hall's academic knowledge, but also on a survey she has conducted with 350

addicts and on her extensive work with individual clients, couples and groups. These sources are apparent not only in the illustrative case histories dotted throughout the book, but also on the evident face-to-face experience that characterises every paragraph. (And, not a given for many such therapeutic books, the work is well written, with an easy yet neither patronising nor trivialising voice.)

In short, while not relevant to everyone, to those for whom there is relevance, this book offers an insightful justification of the concept of sex addiction and a comprehensive guide to treatment. Hall knows full well what addicts suffer, and she knows how such suffering can be resolved.

Reviewed by **Susan Quilliam**

Freelance Writer, Broadcaster and Agony Aunt,
Cambridge, UK; susan@susanquilliam.com



CrossMark

J Fam Plann Reprod Health Care 2014;**40**:288.
doi:10.1136/jfprhc-2014-100989