

Can you be a sex positive sex addiction therapist?

Part of me wishes to say “YES” and have that be the end of this post. However, given the prevailing stigma against sex addiction therapists, I feel that this needs much more explanation.

A recent *Psychology Today* blog post by a clinician I respect has the sex addiction treatment community all abuzz. This blog post makes assertions against the CSAT community, lumping us all into a sex negative, conservative group. Though I am truly disappointed in this post by a man I respect, I can understand how he could feel this way, having been through the training long ago. But times, they are a changing.

First, what does it mean to be sex positive? According to the International Society for Sexual Medicine (<http://www.issm.info/education-for-all/sexual-health-qa/what-does-sex-positive-mean>), being sex positive means a few things. First, being sex positive means that you are open to learning new things about sex and sexuality. This is not just about the physical aspects of sex but also the emotional and psychological components to intimacy. Someone who is sex positive understands the importance of STI and HIV education and prevention. Someone who is sex positive sees sex as a healthy part of life and can talk about it without shame. Finally, to be sex positive, you accept the sex practices of others as long as they are consensual and feel safe, without judgment even if these practices go against your own beliefs.

The Women and Gender Advocacy Center based at Colorado State University feel that being sex positive is a simple idea. It is the idea that all sex, as long as it is healthy and consensual, is a positive thing (<http://www.wgac.colostate.edu/sex-positivity>).

I consider myself and those in my practice sex positive sex addiction therapists. I often tell my clients that we are not the sex police, relegating healthy sexuality to sex after 10 pm, in the dark, in bed, in the missionary position only. These fears are understandable for clients and, I guess, to the community at large. There are some in the CSAT community that come from a very conservative, religious base. This is their prerogative and point of view as a therapist. However, I feel compelled to say they do not represent the entire CSAT community. I also feel compelled to say that just because a client engages in a sexual practice that a therapist doesn't believe in doesn't mean that the therapist will impose their beliefs on a client. A good therapist will do their own self reflection work. If they cannot work with a client based on a conflict of beliefs and behaviors, it is their ethical obligation to refer the client to someone who can work with them without bias or issue.

As I write this, I own that I am feeling somewhat defensive of my chosen field of work. I am not happy to be lumped into a stereotype. I am not happy that people make inappropriate assumptions about me, my beliefs or how I do my work based on a few letters after my name. Because we should treat all of our clients as individuals who deserve respect, I would appreciate same treatment. Please don't judge us all by a few experiences you have had that were troublesome.

When someone comes to therapy, they have their own goals. My job as a clinician is to help them achieve their goals, not my goals for them. When I do supervision, this often comes up. If a clinician is frustrated with the progress of a client, I often ask, whose goal is it? Is this your goal or your clients? As a sex addiction therapist, I am not here to tell you what to do or not do sexually. I am here to help you come to understand what is healthy or destructive for you and help you achieve your own personal goals around your sexuality.

I am a sex positive sex addiction therapist. I run a sex positive sex addiction treatment program. I make no judgment about what my clients are doing sexually as long as it is healthy and consensual. If it is neither of those things, then it is a problem. Only my clients can identify what is unhealthy for them.