



# Open Book

## *Overcoming Sex Addiction With a Little Help From My Friends at SAA*

BY DAN HARARY

**I** happened to mention to my brother that during the course of the week prior, I'd spent well over \$7,000 on my little "hobby" — sexual gratification for pay. Disgusted, his wife emailed me the phone number of a behavioral health center in Los Angeles. She insisted I find a new therapist immediately and made me promise to do so.

"Why are you here?" the founder of the clinic asked me.

I told her about my recent expenditures with my dominatrix and countless call girls, my sexless marriage, my list of short-term girlfriends, my phone sex habits, my three-times-weekly visits to "whack shacks," my nightly masturbation ritual, etc.

"You've found the right place," she said. "We have many, many men and women who come here to talk about similar issues. You are not alone by any means. Obviously, you need to talk about these troubling behaviors. I'm really glad you found us."

The woman assigned me one of her best therapists, Meredith. After less than 10 minutes into our first session, Meredith stated, simply, "So, you've been a raging sex addict your whole life."

"I am?" I replied, incredulous.

"You didn't know that?" she asked.

I confessed that, while I'd heard the term, I honestly had no idea what that actually meant.

"Wow, you are a classic sex addict, Dan."

Meredith explained to me that sex addicts got "high" not just

from the sex act itself, but from planning their actions around how they would be getting that sex. She said that my whole array of rituals behind hiring women for sexual favors was as enthralling to me as the high alcoholics or drug addicts got from their vices.

"Your objectification of woman has eroded your capacity for intimacy, sabotaging any chance of developing a meaningful, loving relationship," she said. "You aren't seeking love, you're only trying to screw as much meaningless pussy as you can possibly find."

She continued, "You are infatuated with call girls and strippers because these women are just fantasy figures. They are simply transactional. Your immaturity with women has you stuck living in fantasy. You don't have the ability to share your emotions or feelings with 'real women.' They scare you, especially once they develop feelings for you. You're incapable of returning their feelings because you're more comfortable living in the land of make-believe. You have no problem spending a fortune on meaningless sex, but you can't seem to spare real time or real emotions for women who aren't 'drop-dead gorgeous' and willing to screw you for money. You're unable to share your life with a normal woman who maybe has a few extra pounds. You're a 'cum junkie.' The only thing you're in love with are your own orgasms."

Wow! I'd had many therapists, but Meredith was the first to simply "nail" me 100% accurately. She wasn't just scolding me; she seemed to care passionately about my well-being. She wasn't

watching the clock, laughing at my tales and collecting a check at the end of each 50-minute session. Meredith “reached” me. I “heard” her. She opened my eyes to my compulsive behaviors and made me see what I was doing, really for the first time.

She strongly urged me to join Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA), which she said would allow me to connect with other men like myself. She wanted me to know that I was not the only person in the world with an obsession for all things penis- and orgasm-related.

The first time I went to an SAA meeting, I was shaking. I was terrified. How the fuck was I going to talk about my 30-year history of jerking off, fucking call girls, hiring a dominatrix, going to whack shacks, and paying for phone sex, in front of a

group of strange men?

The idea felt super-naturally frightening.

“I’ll just sit here, way in the back, and observe,” I told myself. “There’s no way on planet Earth that I’m going to be able to ‘share’ any of my stuff with these creepy guys!”

The meeting was held in a small side room of a church, with the men sitting in semicircles around a fireplace. The demographics of the attendees covered the full gamut of society: white, Black, Asian, Hispanic, South Asian, and even an occasional woman.

I learned that SAA meetings were based essentially on the Alcoholics Anonymous model. A group leader — different each time — read the preamble for the gathering, which explained who they were, why they were there and what was going to take place during the next 90 minutes. The leader then spoke for 15 minutes about his own struggles with sex addiction, followed by a series of talks from attendees, each taking four minutes to share. The group’s secretary then made announcements about future meetings, community events, etc. before passing the toy truck, which was used to collect the “seventh tradition” — usually a buck apiece.

The things I heard during that very first meeting reminded me of a line from “Amazing Grace”: “I was blind, but now I see.”

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Hearing others share what was already so familiar to me triggered the opening of my own “secret life mental strongbox” and forced me to examine what was inside. Men in the group spoke about how addiction to internet porn lost them their jobs, their wives and their families.

That first session at SAA was mind-boggling. Over the decades I’d been pursuing my private “cum-centric” hobby, the only person with whom I ever shared even a glimpse of these secrets was the psychiatrist who prescribed Prozac to help with my depression. Now here I was, in a room of men from every possible walk of life confessing their deepest, darkest and most shameful behaviors in front of an entire community. I was deeply moved by their bravery and painful honesty — more than a few men cried during their “shares,” something I couldn’t yet even imagine doing.

Toward the end of that first meeting, the group leader asked, “Are there any newcomers here tonight?” Reluctantly, I raised my hand, and announced my first name.

“Would you like to share with us tonight, Dan?” he asked.

Caught off guard, but not wanting to feel like a total pussy, I said,

SEE OPEN BOOK PAGE 66



Dan Harary is a veteran Hollywood publicist. His new memoir, “Carrots,” is now available on Amazon.com.

# Early Exit

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

path of getting hard, having sex and ejaculating. For many straight couples, sex ends when the man ejaculates, even if the woman has not reached orgasm. Complying with this linearity is an uphill battle that generates anxiety. It is framed in multiple beliefs such as the misunderstanding that the female orgasm is best achieved through penis-in-vagina sex, or the manufactured need to reach orgasm simultaneously as a token of love in the heterosexual romantic love story. Fulfilling all these socially imposed responsibilities generates the need to control ejaculation at all costs. This only serves to create anxiety in situations when men should be enjoying themselves.

## Reframing premature ejaculation

The first thing a man dealing with PE needs to learn is that sex is not about performing perfectly, but is about feeling pleasure and being erotically creative. This has little to do with ejaculating after an “acceptable” amount of time. Similarly, in a heteronormative context, the masculine notion of “alpha male” status conferred by sexual performance and the misplaced expectation that the penis is the key to achieving a woman’s orgasm are beliefs that must be dismantled.

The educational work that we have to do in society is deep. To start, understand that the time it takes to ejaculate is very varied. The truth is that “normal” ejaculatory time is whatever is satisfactory for the individual. ■

# Open Book

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

“Sure, OK, I guess.”

I have no idea where the words came from, but in just four minutes, I revealed a significant amount about my sexual history: My parents not telling me the facts of life; listening to them screw in the bedroom next-door during my adolescence; fantasizing about my mother’s friends; stealing Playboy magazines; my childhood best friend Dustin molesting me; my sexless marriage; my brief relationships with my girlfriends Sharon, Bella and Sarah; my visits to whack shacks; my addiction to phone sex with a girl named Shannon in Canada; the massive amounts of money I’d spent in the past few years on call girls and on Zoe, my dominatrix.

I felt like a shark that had been caught, raised into the air on a pulley and publicly gutted. Things came out of me that, in a million years, I would never, ever have imagined I could have revealed to others — especially not in a large group setting!

At the end of my share, the room was silent. I had 50 men smiling at me and applauding. When the evening was over, at least six guys came up to me, hugged me and said, “That was one of the most amazing ‘shares’ I’ve ever heard. We are so glad you’re here with us. Thank you so much for coming.”

For the first time in my entire life, I was embraced by a group of peers whom I could relate to, sympathize with, and spill my guts to about my sexual secrets.

The feeling I had driving home that night was one of pure elation. I felt higher than I usually felt even after a particularly good fuck session with one of my gorgeous call girls. I realized that my whole life, I’d never discussed my sexuality with my father or my brothers, or with my best friends, co-workers or cousins. I’d had zero “male bonding” in the area of my sexuality for almost my entire life.

That “aha” moment was extremely powerful for me. A few tears trickled down my cheeks as I drove home. I felt like I was no longer alone in the dark void of my weird sexuality. I had found my “missing tribe” of long-lost brothers. I’d found my “peeps.”

While I continued to work with Meredith, I developed my “circles” chart. There was my Inner Circle — my most destructive behaviors, including sessions with Zoe, call

girls, phone sex, whack shacks, strippers and massage parlors. There was my Middle Circle — behaviors that I should try to steer clear from, such as watching porn online, paying for videocam sex shows or collecting old-school “girlie” magazines. And there was my Outer Circle — behaviors to pursue that were nonsexual in nature, such as exercising more often, reading and spending more time with my children and friends.

After attending perhaps six SAA meetings, I decided to try an experiment. I wondered if I could become celibate. I stopped masturbating for three full months, not knowing if that would even be possible for me. During that time, I experienced a new form of gentle contemplation. I completely sublimated any sexual thoughts and desires — if I saw a pretty girl in a short skirt or tight jeans on the street, I looked away. If a gigantic billboard presented me with a shot of a goddess model in bikini lingerie, I turned my head.

Instead of my ongoing pursuit of fantasy sex sluts, I decided to jump back into the dating pool and attended a new series of singles parties and events, where I talked with women. I developed a number of great relationships this way, connections not structured solely around sex.

With Meredith’s help, this new approach to my life began to take hold, and it began to seem possible that I could rewire my brain. I was attending SAA meetings three times a week and was committed to the redesign and restructuring of my behaviors with women and my relationship with my penis. I was ready to pursue this new world and live a revised life of non-addictive sexual behaviors.

SAA meetings changed my life. I strongly recommend that anyone, regardless of gender, who reads this column and recognizes their own behaviors in it, should consider going at least once — just to know that you are not alone. “Sex addiction” may sound funny, but it’s a real illness. Facing it head-on requires commitment and willingness to recognize that you are, in fact, an addict. Only then can you work on your inner demons, with the help of your SAA brothers and sisters and the insight of a good therapist.

*This article is adapted from Dan Harary’s “Carrots: True Confessions of a Hollywood Sex Addict.”* ■