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Thanks largely to us—to the gay liberation movement—there is now unprecedented frankness about sexuality in our arts and media. Nowhere is this more apparent than in HBO's sitcom/soap *Sex and The City*, which looks and pokes fun at every conceivable aspect of our sex lives through the eyes and experiences of four heterosexual women. The show might also be called *Sex as it Really Is* or *Sex as We Know It*. What we see is that these women and their partners are just like us, like gay men and other real-life folks—sex-obsessed with numerous partners and often dysfunctional. The show could almost have been written by a gay man, so closely does it seem to follow from our own lives and sensibilities. For example, one episode was called *The Fuck Buddy* and was all about trying to cross the barrier of anonymity with a fuck buddy into friendship or something more and having the whole thing then become unglued. What you see week to week is an endless parade of sexual encounters and partners and fantasies and obsessions interspersed with a few ongoing relationships, punctuated by breakups and dysfunction, and almost all of it funny. The issue of drugs and addiction gets touched on—one of our ladies of the night and day ended up with an alcoholic and brushed up against his recovery issues. But for all the frankness about sex and

Sex and the City: Are We All Sex Addicts?

and our obsession with it, the series has had almost nothing about a phenomenon that hovers around all of their lives, and ours: sexual compulsivity and addiction, a subject still so touchy and taboo—not so unlike the way sex itself was—that even this unprecedentedly bold (however otherwise lite) exploration of our sexual lives seems to be evading it.

Is there such a thing as sexual compulsivity? Addiction to sex? Is it real or just a way pathologizing what's pleasurable? This is a big subject and there is lots of debate about it. There are some activities/patterns we have little trouble being persuaded about as examples of these phenomena—e.g., rape, sadism (nonconsensual), pedophilia. Someone whose greatest sexual pleasure is rape or having sex with toddlers and who repeatedly seeks out those encounters even in the face of catastrophic consequences is easily seen as suffering from compulsion rather than lifestyle preference. These aren't situations where we can just say "live and let live." But what about those of us who feel like we are sometimes, well, driven by sex at costs we can't clearly see, but which we suspect are nonetheless there. For example, if sex weren't such a huge consumer of our time and energies, what else—what other things we really wanted—might we be doing with our lives? And what better or more stable kinds of relationships might we be having?

One of the great social forces of our time, at least here in America, has been the phenomenon of Recovery, the premiere and best example of which is Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) which utilizes spiritual principles and tools. In recent

years, several branches of this movement have emerged to deal with issues of what have been primitively defined as sexual compulsivity and addiction. These programs of "Sexual Recovery" include the following groups, each with its own experience and guidelines ranging from allowing everyone to develop their own individual "plans" for "sexual sobriety" to others that urge abstinence outside of sex in a primary relationship. What they all have in common is that they utilize the 12-Step model that is the foundation of AA. Some of these programs are: Sexual Compulsives Anonymous (SCA), Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA), Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (SLAA), Sexual Recovery Anonymous. (SRA). The Sexual Recovery movement appears to be gaining momentum. One reason may be conservative trends and drifts, in the gay community as well as in society at large, and in the wake of the AIDS epidemic. But a look at the new ways people are talking about sex in these programs suggests that it is part of a much bigger process of reevaluating sex and how it might better intermesh with our lives.

"These are the characteristics most of us seem to have in common," reads the heading of the so-called "fourteen characteristics" of SCA. Whatever suspicions one may have about this movement or its

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