

Questions / Answers

Nashville Lifestyles Magazine

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1. **Your practice focuses on relationship therapy, marital therapy, sex therapy and sexual addiction. Did anything in particular steer you toward this type of counseling?**

ANSWER: I thoroughly enjoy helping my clients achieve their life goals. I became interested in this population because of my strong passion to work with people who have a desire to experience true and lasting intimacy in their relationships. I feel my expertise in the area of marital therapy, sex therapy and sexual addiction allows me to successfully take a client and help him or her achieve relational health and sexual satisfaction. Hundreds and thousands of individuals struggle with relationship issues and sexual dysfunction. I feel a connection with this population and find it very fulfilling to work with these clients on a regular basis.

2. **After a lengthy education in the subject(s) and years of experience, does anything shock you anymore?**

ANSWER: The simple answer is “no.” I feel I’ve heard about anything that could be heard by a therapist who focuses on marital, sex and sexual addiction therapy. When listening to a client I definitely strive to never react to what I’m being told. I try to always remain neutral and not shame the client. I want my office to be a safe place where anyone with any issue can come and feel heard and not judged.

3. **How many undiagnosed sex addicts do you think are out there?**

ANSWER: Sexual addictive behavior has existed for years and has been misnamed, mistreated, ignored or completely undiagnosed. According to The Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health (SASH), a conservative estimate of those who could meet the criteria for sexual addiction and compulsivity is about 3 - 5% of the United States population. This is most likely a very conservative estimate, since these numbers are based on individuals who seek treatment. Due to many factors such as shame, lack of knowing what to do, etc. many, many cases of sex addiction go undiagnosed each year. Perhaps when we learn more about sex addiction and create safer environments for those who struggle with this issue, then we might discover a more accurate number of those who go undiagnosed.

4. **Are most sex addicts single?**

ANSWER: No! It is a myth that sex addicts are single. There are many, many sex addicts who are married. In fact, the research shows that married men struggle more with compulsive masturbation than single men. In my practice, I treat single adults as well as married adults.

5. **People are getting married today at a later age than at any other time in history, cohabitation without marriage is more prevalent than ever, and a couple’s chances**

for getting divorce are sky-high. Do you think the institution of marriage is on the wane?

ANSWER: I hope not! I am an eternal optimist and offer hope for those who find marriage overwhelming at times. I offer practical solutions that help couples manage the difficulties of a marriage relationship. I also provide answers to the tough questions about marriage. I work hard to help couples experience emotional and sexual intimacy at the deepest level. Cultural changes and other contributing factors are definitely causing the institution of marriage to go through some strong challenges. However, I believe marriage itself will remain a viable component of our society.

6. Do you think single people today face more or fewer challenges when it comes to forging a successful intimate relationship?

ANSWER: I think single adults face more challenges when it comes to forging a successful intimate relationship. I help my single adult clients rediscover the art of courtship when building intimate relationships. I also help them understand how to find the “right” person. Studies show the longer you wait to be married, the more likely you are to marry someone similar to yourself. Many single adults develop the mindset that time is running out; therefore, they choose someone thinking there is no one else. Forging a successful intimate relationship with the right individual takes time and patience.

7. What are the most common sexual intimacy problems you come across?

ANSWER: I am finding there are a variety of issues that create sexual intimacy problems in a relationship. In fact, the list would probably be too long to share in this interview. Some of the common issues that I help clients overcome include things like: low sexual desire, no interest in sex, fear of sexual intimacy, compulsive sexual behavior, pain during intercourse, inability to reach orgasm, erectile dysfunction and a lack of knowledge regarding healthy and satisfying sexual relations with a life partner. Now, these problems are definitely treatable. In fact, the prognosis is very promising. I’m seeing many individuals who leave therapy very satisfied that they spent the time and money working to overcome these issues.

8. Do you ever have to inform a couple they simply aren’t meant for each other?

ANSWER: This is a decision for each couple to make. There are times when circumstances create tremendous challenges for a couple. I personally believe that any issue that has created a barrier in the couple’s relationship can be overcome. The future of a relationship is often determined by how the couple views the problem, how motivated the couple might be to work on the problem, plus a number of additional factors that will either contribute to the couple’s ability to restore relational health or ultimately lead to a separation or termination.

9. Have earned a Master of Divinity degree and as a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors, the American Association of Certified Christian Sexual Addiction Specialists and the American Board of Christian Sex Therapists, do you ever find it difficult to reconcile your client’s particular problems with your faith?

ANSWER: I can appreciate the question in light of my credentials. I see clients every week who have problems that intersect my faith. However, as a practicing therapist, I subscribe to a professional standard of ethics that does not permit me to cross the line and attempt to impose my morals, ethics or values on my clients. Therefore, I strive to never allow my faith to create a barrier between me and my clients.

10. Do you take on non-Christian clients?

ANSWER: Absolutely yes! Even though I am a Christian, I do not “overly spiritualize” my sessions. My faith serves as a part of the foundation of my practice since I am committed to an integration of theology and psychology. However, I definitely don’t overtly share my faith in a way that causes my clients to feel uncomfortable.

11. You’ve got a book available now called *The Secret Seductress: Breaking the Destructive Cycle of Pornography*. Have you noticed in your practice pornography becoming a more prevalent symptom of unhealthy relationships?

ANSWER: Yes! We live in a culture where a porn epidemic exists. Compulsive sexual behavior involving internet pornography is definitely prevalent due to the fact that it is accessible, affordable and anonymous. Twenty-five years ago you had to go somewhere and purchase pornographic material. Today, you can sit in your home or office and have it on your computer screen with the click of the mouse. The use of pornography tremendously impacts the marriage relationship in a negative way. Many times men use pornography, fantasy and masturbation as a means of addressing their sexual urges. However, these behaviors are also practiced as a way of medicating some underlying hurt and/or pain from the past or present.

12. Obviously, intimacy problems aren’t the only hurdles to hit a relationship. What else do couples have to look out for?

ANSWER: The top three issues that create all kinds of challenges for couples are: money, sex and communication. As a therapist, I also successfully work with couples who face issues that involve power struggles, personal baggage that individuals bring into a relationship, disagreement on how to parent the children, how to manage the demands of life with the number of hours in a day, etc. All of these issues rob a couple of true intimacy where there is mutual satisfaction between two individuals who choose to be married and have decided to do life together and feel safe enough with each other to share their thoughts and feelings at the deepest level.

13. Does your practice see a surge in business at any particular time of year? February, with Valentine’s Day, for instance?

ANSWER: Not really. My practice stays busy with a steady flow of clients throughout the year. Now, I do see more depression during the Christmas holidays but not necessarily a surge in the number of clients who present for counseling.

14. Despite the prevalence of sexually explicit themes and products today, sex, for a lot of people, goes largely undiscussed . Why is it still taboo?

ANSWER: This is another one of those questions that has many answers. One of the very important things I do as a therapist is help couples talk about their sex life. It’s amazing how many couples live right here in Nashville and talk about everything except their sex life. Many people don’t feel comfortable to talk about their sexuality due to

the shame that they feel regarding the subject. My practice is also committed to helping those individuals who suffer from brokenness and sexual distortions. I assist people everyday who failed to receive a healthy sex education from their parents. The result is many people do not understand the depths of sex and can't create an atmosphere where true lasting intimacy can be experienced. The discussion of sex may be taboo even in the twenty-first century because of the negative messages people received about sex while growing up as children. The list probably doesn't have an end when you stop to consider why many people do not talk about their sexuality. However, I'm discovering in my practice that the more we talk about sex the healthier we become in this very important area of life.

15. Sex and the City, a vivid look at four healthy, sexually liberated women or a parade of dysfunctional relationships? Or something else altogether?

ANSWER: Oh yeah, *Sex and the City*. What a show! Maybe the women on the show might benefit from reading Paula Reinehart's book *Sex and the Soul of A Woman*. In the book, Paula talks about what some women lose by giving themselves away sexually. She also describes what really happens in sex and how to get your heart back. There are moments when I wonder if the show is pushing some agenda. I definitely think the women on the show are at times portrayed as people who are simply chasing sex verses longing to experience true intimacy. I help my clients understand that the greatest sex is not about a hormonal urge rather it is about true intimacy. Sex is not designed to just be about the "buzz" but rather about connecting with someone and expressing your deepest feelings of love and commitment. I teach my clients to practice 3-D sexuality and understand that people are more than just a "body." Individuals also have a soul and a spirit.

16. Most of our singles featured in our annual Single in the City section say a sense of humor is one of the most important things they look for in a potential partner. How do you rank it?

ANSWER: I agree with John Gottman, Ph.D. at the University of Washington who says humor is important in any relationship but especially the marriage relationship. I personally rank the ability to laugh and have fun very high as you look for a potential journey partner.

17. Must sexual attraction be present in order to start a successful relationship?

ANSWER: Sexual attraction does not have to be present in the beginning of a relationship. I believe that sexual attraction is one of basic components that must be present to experience a successful relationship. However, it may not necessarily be present in the beginning of the relationship. You might be attracted to someone in the beginning based on their interests, intellect, etc. The sexual attraction may develop later as the relationship develops. The thing we do know is that sexual passion or attraction is very important in long term relationships.

18. Do you ever get clients whose sex life is great but who otherwise don't get along? If so, what do you tell them?

ANSWER: In my experience that would be rare. Typically, I see clients who complain that their sexual involvement has decreased or totally become non-existent. After, close analysis, we discover that their communication stopped; their model for dealing with conflict has failed; they stopped connecting emotionally; they allowed scar tissue to develop in the relationship as a result of hurts and wounds, etc. Again, I help clients successfully remove these things that create barriers in the relationship. My clients come to see that if they are going to achieve a satisfying level of true intimacy, then they must resolve things like serious disappointments and resentments and anything else that has pushed them away from connecting emotionally.

19. What advice would you give Nashville's singles when it comes to finding the perfect relationship?

ANSWER: Well, I describe this process by often referring to the popular television show *The Amazing Race*. On the show, the challenge is to work with your partner during the race and try to end up at the check in points first before anyone else. I have never heard of a "perfect" relationship. On the show we are permitted to see the faults and failures of each participant. When I talk to single adults about finding a mate, I usually help them see the importance of choosing a partner they want to take on their life's journey. I ask my clients: "Who would you want beside of you during your journey more than anyone else?" Just like those people on the show, there will be days when you are not happy with everything about the person with whom you are sharing a relationship. Therefore, you would be wise to find an individual with whom you can share your journey through life and focus on building a meaningful marriage partner verses just being "an item" for everyone else to see and talk about.

20. In order to have a fulfilled relationship, how much sex, and I realize this is probably hard to quantify and varies wildly from couple to couple, but, for our reader's sake, please give it a shot.....is enough sex?

ANSWER: You are correct in saying that it varies from couple to couple. In my practice there are times when it would be unhealthy to place a number on the frequency of a couples' sexual experience. I try to help my clients discover what is healthy for them. If I am pushed to speak a number, then I usually recommend that couples strive to have sex somewhere between one and three times per week. However, I quickly give the disclaimer that says this will definitely vary if you have children, if you are fatigued, if you schedule is too demanding, etc. These numbers represent a goal instead of something that is to be used legally as a weapon in the relationship.