



Wanting It Bad

New book, DVD illustrate how sexual freedom can lead to sexual addiction

by Glenn Scofield Williams

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—Todd Ahlberg

For centuries, the act of love was, for gay men, illegal—subject not only to imprisonment, but banishment from society, brutality and even death. This mindset still flourishes in a sizable portion of American minds, judging from the number of queers still being fired, abused or killed for their proclivities.

So when our glorious sexual revolution began at Stonewall (or thereabouts), the most political act a gay man could commit was to have sex. Sex, and lots of it, was a gay man’s way of saying: “We’re here. We’re queer. Get used to it.”

Sex rapidly became an important part of the gay ethic. “A blow job is the gay man’s handshake,” we said. A novel wasn’t said to be gay literature unless there was gay sex in it. Gay Pride parades became a place to openly flaunt our sexuality and our uncovered, unashamed bodies. These were all our stiff middle fingers to the uptight, conservative society that had interfered for centuries with our private liberties.

The gay community has become fiercely and proudly sex-positive, and not even AIDS, Matthew Shepard or crystal meth will change that.

Besides, gay sex is also...well...fun.

But under all this positive ethic lies the potential for disaster. “While [sexual freedom] is a positive response to living in a shame-based, homophobic culture,” says addiction counselor Robert Weiss, it “can also serve to enable the denial of men who are locked into destructive, addictive sexual patterns.” And therein lies the rub.

Especially now in the Internet era, sex addiction can easily hide within the layered windows of online cruising and hooking up. Two new pieces of media are out that point to these issues within our community with precision and eloquence: *Cruise Control: Understanding Sex Addiction in Gay Men*, a new book by Weiss, and *Hooked*, a documentary now out on DVD.

Sex addiction, according to Weiss, is a serious problem for up to 10 percent of gay men. In *Cruise Control* (Alyson Publications, 2005; \$15.95 soft-cover), he clearly and frankly walks us through the “is and isn’t” of sex addiction using language that the average layman (no pun intended) can understand. For those of us who enjoy sex, the book is an indispensable guide to demarcate what is a positive,

“normal” gay sex life from what is addictive and destructive. Without judgment, while maintaining a sex-positive context and with a real inside sense of what it’s like to be gay, *Cruise Control* is a practical guide to identifying sex addiction, treatment options and potential obstacles to healing. The book contains information for finding an appropriate therapist, a section for partners and spouses of sex addicts, a chapter on love addiction and even a quiz to test if you might be a sex addict.

Hooked (Eclectic DVD) is an exquisitely filmed documentary that looks into the world of online hookups. As with *Cruise Control*, this film shows how a positive experience for many gay men can be come a nightmare for the sex addict.

In the same way that not every gay man who likes sex (even anonymous or nonmonogamous sex) is an addict, so too not all who enjoy online hooking up is an addict. “Considering that society mostly doesn’t support our relationships,” director Todd Ahlberg says, “it’s easy to find ourselves resigned to being single, on the prowl and, to some degree, lonely. So for some of us, the quick online hookup has become the loneliness antidote of choice, even if only temporary.”

But there are sex addicts who find the ease and anonymity of the online cruise an easy way to feed the monster. “Technology is great if we control it,” says one of the many men interviewed in the film. “But when it becomes sort of a major player in our lives, I think it’s really, really harmful.”

The documentary came about when Ahlberg, interested in exploring how online technology is affecting gay men’s sexual habits, invited chatters to talk about it. After hundreds of questionnaires and follow-ups, he narrowed the search to 45 interviewees.

From there he videotaped them in an online-style chat, then hit the road to interview many of them face to face. The result is a profoundly personal inside look at the way online cruising can serve to destroy the sex addict. The film is frank and ballsy and deserves every award it has received.

Get the book. Watch the movie. Addict or not, you will learn something new about yourself. **10**

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