

Can Voters Love a (Recovering) Sex Addict?

Yes, provided the candidate is honest and forthright when discussing the behavior, psychotherapist says. “Our country loves someone who has had a problem, gotten honest, and recovered from it.”

By Suzanne Kane



Recent headline buzz about the sexual peccadilloes of a trio of politicians either running for or currently in office may make it seem like there's something in the air or water that's causing such bad behavior or lack of judgment.

The fact that each of the three political figures involved denies having a sex addiction only adds to the controversy – and the confusion.

What is it with politicians and sex scandals? What happened to upholding the public's trust and behaving in a way befitting the office?

The travails of public figures have been in the limelight throughout history. [Anthony Weiner](#), candidate for mayor in New York City, ex-New York Gov. [Eliot Spitzer](#), running for NYC comptroller, and San Diego Mayor [Bob Filner](#) are just the latest examples. John Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe are prototypes from the 1960s.

Lest anyone pounce on the fact that all of these were Democrats, numerous Republicans have also been involved in sex scandals.

Perhaps there was less public scrutiny in the past. Certainly it was a lot more difficult to ferret out the truth about such secret assignments when it required near gumshoe investigative reporting. Today's instant proclamation of every tiny bit of news worldwide makes hiding dark secrets highly unlikely.

We also live in a society that holds our public figures to the highest standards of conduct. We literally want to trust them. We need to trust them, for the world is a troubled and scary place and many of us are hurting in various ways.

To gain a little perspective on the topic of politicians and sex scandals, we spoke with Dr. Anita Gadhia-Smith, psychotherapist and author of *From Addiction to Recovery* and *Practical Therapy*.

Sex Addiction or Hypersexuality?

According to Dr. Gadhia-Smith, addiction is a condition that operates on three levels of the individual: physical, emotional and spiritual. “Whether or not [hypersexuality](#) is a true brain-based addiction is not the most important issue here. The fact is that politicians and others are exhibiting behavior that is consistent with addictive disorder: attempts to stop or control the compulsive behavior, obsession and continued engagement in the behavior despite adverse consequences.

“When there is impairment in a major area of life, like work, health, family or marriage, you have a serious problem. These are some of the commonalities that we see in all addictions, including drug addiction, alcoholism, work addiction, eating disorders and compulsive spending.”

Treatments

Whether it’s John Q. Public or a public official, making the decision to get help is the first step to overcoming a problem that’s wreaking havoc in life. What kind of treatment might be appropriate here?

“Treatment for these officials could include intensive psychotherapy, which can provide individual and private treatment from a bio-psycho-social perspective,” said Dr. Gadhia-Smith. “We need to assess the distress in different dimensions of their lives. If there is an underlying biological depression or anxiety issue, therapy, medication and behavioral change may be indicated.

“Therapy can also be helpful in addressing psychological and cognitive patterns that lead to the compulsive behaviors. Social distress, including loneliness and isolation, are also triggers for acting-out behaviors.”

Having worked with many VIPs in her psychotherapy practice, Dr. Gadhia-Smith sees a common thread. “High-level officials and VIPs in general have often reached a level in their lives that leaves them feeling lonely, stressed and isolated. The higher up you go on the ladder, the smaller your peer group becomes. There are few people they can really talk to and even fewer that they can trust who don’t want something from them.”

The Shadow

Dr. Gadhia-Smith referenced [Carl Jung’s “shadow,”](#) the part of personality that is repressed and often emerges at midlife.

“Whatever has not been expressed in early life often rises to the surface and demands expression at midlife,” Dr. Gadhia-Smith explains. “This can sometimes take the form of self-sabotage, as we have seen in the case of some of our political figures.

“Part of the human condition is that we all have a dark side. We need to learn how to deal with it in a constructive way.”

Filling the “Hole In The Soul”

Having climbed to the top or near-top of their careers, some public figures and celebrities feel a deep sense of emptiness. Life lacks meaning and they find themselves bereft of spirituality. In a desperate attempt to fill the “hole in the soul,” they may turn to whatever appears to self-soothe.

Dr. Gadhia-Smith says this can lead to depression and self-destructiveness. “Further complicating the issue is that many personality types drawn to limelight positions are narcissistic and grandiose and they feel a sense of

entitlement or of being special. They believe they are more special or different than the rest of us and are not held to basic norms of conduct.”

They also “delude themselves into thinking they can get away with doing what they want,” said Dr. Gadhia-Smith.

Can They Come Back?

Having destroyed or seriously damaged public trust, can politicians and other public figures embroiled in sex scandals come back? Can we forgive and let go?

Dr. Gadhia-Smith believes so. “The public is intelligent and can recognize the ‘ring’ of truth when they hear it. If politicians are honest and speak to the public from the heart, the public can be very forgiving.

“It is when the public knows that a politician is lying and trying to cover up that they are less forgiving. This is when it takes much longer for politicians to recover, if at all.”

Bottom line, in Dr. Gadhia-Smith’s view: “Our country loves someone who has had a problem, gotten honest, and recovered from it. We will forgive almost anything if we sense that the recovery is genuine.”