

The following is Frank L's story as it appeared in the November 7, 1973 edition of The Advocate magazine, a magazine for the LGBTQ community. Frank L. was the founder of Sexual Compulsives Anonymous (SCA) in Los Angeles. Note that some of the language has been updated to harmonize with current norms. Other language has been retained, to reflect the time in which it was written.

Where Do Sexual Compulsives Come From?

"The participants in tearoom sex are of no one type", wrote Laud Humphreys in *Tearoom Trade*, his somewhat controversial sociological study of men having sex in public toilets.

As a founding member of Sexual Compulsives Anonymous, an organization for those with a desire to stop having compulsive sex, I would like to add my own spiel. Lest the phrase "compulsive sex" seem confusing, let me point out that in its early days SCA was a group of people with uncontrollable legal and other problems stemming with their sexual behavior.

I started Sexual Compulsives Anonymous because I needed help myself. I had been to a number of psychologists and other so-called experts. I received only minimal help. After I talked to leaders of the LGBTQ community, I decided to start an organization for people with a problem similar to mine, where we could help each other.

Because the Alcoholics Anonymous Twelve Step program has helped so many *other* compulsive types (gamblers, over-eaters and others), I felt this would make an ideal format. And so it is.

As sexual compulsives, most of us do some self-analyzing: we come up with at least some possible answers as to why we have sex in bathrooms. In my case, it was related to heavy personal unhappiness. For three years I had been infatuated with a guy who wouldn't tell me, "I love you", which was what I wanted to hear. Without this esteem-building phrase, I gradually began to detest my life. I became increasingly depressed by the bar scene and by my job. And as my feeling of unimportance increased, I even contemplated suicide.

On my lunch hour one day, I happened somewhat innocently to go into a public restroom. In a booth, I was turned on by what I read on the wall and by certain vibes I got from the fellow in the next stall.

I began to masturbate, and when the fellow in the next booth reached under the partition, I realized he wanted to touch me. It was an extremely exciting experience, my first in the "john scene".

In some ways, my entrée into this underground life could be seen as an extension of my compulsive obsession with masturbation. Following my sister's death when I was twelve, I had masturbated three or four times a day, every day. For many, masturbation is not extremely compulsive and is okay (as all the books tell us); but with me, it was an intense obsession.

The result of the initiation that began in that public restroom was slow social suicide. What little hold I had in the social life of the LGBTQ subculture more and more ceased to be.

I was arrested ten times in the period of as many years, in fairly similar circumstances. It is a story like that of many others who experience this tragedy of multiple arrests. The arrests ruined my job, made it difficult to get others and generally lowered my self-respect.

It was, however, an addiction, and I found I could not stay away from these places of fast pleasure. This, in spite of the fact that as the years went by, the pleasure often seemed to be diminishing. And the fast pace was physically tiring, as well as psychologically exhausting.

No Way to Save Face

The extent to which I felt compelled to live a double life was conducive to a great deal of embarrassment. When interacting with business contacts or friends, I was truly ashamed. Somehow I had a strong fear they might suspect what I had been doing. Often, I felt entirely "wiped out". I felt there was no way to "save face," even though I knew they had no logical way of knowing I had just come from some park or tearoom.

The problem was partly in the fact that I did not generally accept the way my own nonconforming sexuality was being expressed. And there was a certain satisfaction after arrest that at least I was being purged and felt atonement for the unhappiness with my gender expression.

I will say that from my experience in tearoom cruising, and from talking to others compulsively addicted to this habit, most of us do not *consciously* wish to be caught or punished. In fact, it is quite the reverse. We very much hope to get away with our sexual acts in public places.

As to whether I *subconsciously* wanted to be caught, that was quite a different question and much more difficult to answer. Definitely the excitement of danger was part of what drove me to flirt with the unknown by cruising in parks and restrooms. The challenges and risks seemed often to produce an additional adrenaline boost.

In the terminology of Eric Berne's Games People Play, I was certainly playing "cops and robbers". Much satisfaction came from the numerous times I was able to outwit the police in their disguise as potential sex partners.

As someone with an addiction to sex in public toilets, I became increasingly unable to maintain friendships with others in the LGBTQ community. There was a lack of motivation to work at social relationships with the people who represented that part of myself I did not accept.

Anonymity Important

The anonymity of not knowing whom I was going to have sex with and his not knowing me was enticing. Indeed, if I saw one person frequently in a public restroom and had sex with him once or a few times, one of us usually would lose interest. One would begin to resent the other being around. Sometimes I even resorted to attempts to eliminate this competition, whether or not I had previously felt attracted to him. This could mean sitting on a neighboring commode for an hour or more while each of us tried to out-wait the other.

I have been trying, in the preceding, not to pontificate too much, but rather to give my own story. There are, however, certain more general observations that I might try to point out. Some sexual compulsives choose tearoom sex with its greater risk, rather than using more conventional means of meeting like-minded people where greater caution and selectivity may be exercised, primarily for two reasons: Public toilets often offer the very quickest obtainable sex; and in johns, one can easily protect his anonymity.

In many cases, the compulsive is trying to protect their relationship to a partner or spouse—someone who might cause problems if they knew what was happening. These people have relationships they are trying to maintain, which would be more difficult if more open and time-consuming cruising were substituted. At least this is the type of reasoning these people use.

For the closeted person who is married, it is the spouse waiting at home and their concern with where he is that motivates the guy to get the sex over with quickly in a notorious gay john, rather than in a bar or bath house where it would probably take more time.

And as long as he doesn't get arrested or rolled, it seems less expensive to go the john route. Most tearooms have no entry fee and beverage charges are unnecessary.

As people trying to solve the problems of this kind of addiction, what do we actually know about these compulsions? We know that to compulsively go to a known gay john involves making a decision. And we know that substituting

another habit for the old one can be increasingly effective to eradicate or modify the compulsion.

The alternatives *are* available. There *are* ways to meet people other than by cruising dangerous restrooms and parks. It is in this area of substitution that the tearoom addict or other such addicts (even with numerous arrests) can find hope. Sexual Compulsives Anonymous is an organization that offers a program geared to restructuring compulsive sex drives. SCA members are experimenting with modifications to their way of life. We define sexual sobriety ourselves. Instead of going to dangerous johns, the member is encouraged to find alternative forms of expression. These can include socializing with people we might find in inclusive organizations, places of worship or even being in places where it is safe for us to be around other like-minded people. Where we once denied our gender expression or identity, we now try putting ourselves in the picture. Then we decide for ourselves whether we belong there.

We encourage our members to build a system of social networks with people who share their values. One of us became interested in volunteering for a crisis hotline and found fulfillment there. Another, after years of tearoom sex, began to spend weekends with a young LGBTQ activist. Modifying one's way of living in this way can result in a person's being happier and more productive. It is easier to do this with the encouragement of the group.

Interested readers can pursue these ideas further by visiting the Sexual Compulsives Anonymous website. Meetings are held on a regular basis in many cities.