

Why is porn on my list of bottom line behaviors?

I was asked to think about why pornography is on my list of bottom line behaviors. The first and most obvious reason is that using porn was part of my acting out behaviors in my addiction, so of course it must be on my list of bottom line behaviors I need to give up in Sobriety and Recovery. I lived and experienced the trap of pornography. What started out as "innocent" looking at a magazine or reading a sexualized story, over decades turned into a whole series of behaviors that put me and those I most loved in literally mortal danger. I was doing things that were reprehensible, abusive, illegal and physically dangerous. I was on a path to lose the life I had built, my wife, my children, my extended family, possibly my freedom and even my actual life. But that is my story. Your story may be different.

When I say that pornography was part of my acting out, I immediately hear in my head what I have heard from more than one Fellow in the rooms of Twelve Step recovery, "Porn was not really my 'main thing'. Sure, I used porn once in a while, but my problem was with strip clubs..." ...or massage parlors, or affairs, or chat rooms, or sexual and emotional anorexia, whatever it may be... To those Fellows, I ask you to openly and honestly consider all the reasons below and that you may want to still put porn on your bottom line. I ask you to consider why you wouldn't put porn on your bottom line? In what way is porn adding positively to your life?

In fact, even if you don't identify as a Sex Addict at all, I would ask you to consider the risks and reasons below to stay as far away from porn as you can. I am not someone to preach at others and attempt to regulate and moralize - or at least I didn't think I was! That said, I wish I could magically share my own experience with everyone - not just sex addicts or those dealing with similar challenges, but everyone. We are inundated with sexual images and content today. Whether it is the billboard on the highway, the gratuitous sex scene in the TV show or movie (PG-13, R, or X), the pop-up ad in our web browser, or the soft and hard-core porn that is just one click away, we can't get away from it. It may not all be classified as 'pornography' by society or by any individual, but it is still dangerous to a greater or lesser degree and we need to be aware - aware of ourselves and aware of those around us. For all the reasons below, I urge you to approach with extreme caution and the best self-awareness you can muster. You owe it to yourself and those whom you love and who love you.

Here are the reasons that porn is on my bottom line.

Porn was a "gateway drug" for my acting out. Before I acted out with other people (either virtually or physically), I spent so much time looking at and thinking about porn. Porn helped me to escape from and numb my emotions. Porn generated that dopamine rush in my brain which was part of my addictive payoff. I kept returning to porn, over and over and over again. Because I can recognize porn both as part of my acting out and as a "gateway drug" for other behaviors, I feel it is critical for my sobriety and recovery to stay far, far away from it.

Porn does hurt others. Porn is cheating. It is easy to think that because porn is something I do alone, that it doesn't hurt anyone else. That is false thinking. When I am using porn, I am not thinking about my wife. I am not thinking about my family. I am thinking only about myself. By thinking about others in a sexual context, I am cheating on my wife. I am hurting my wife. Whether it is my intent or not, I am sending a message that I need others to satisfy my sexual needs. I am sending a message that she is not enough. I am demonstrating, through my actions, that I am willing to go to others to satisfy my sexual needs. If that is done in secret, that is cheating. Whether done in secret or not, it is intensely hurtful to my wife. Understanding that now, and knowing the impact my porn use had on my wife, I want it on my bottom line.

Porn impacted my sexuality. Years and years of experiencing pornography in many forms (images, videos, stories, etc.) distorted my own sexuality. The inherent nature of escalating behavior in addiction (needing more to achieve the same payoff) drove me to constantly explore new and different and more extreme types of porn. I lost my own sense of what "sex" even was in this ever expanding ocean of pornography. Recognizing, in hindsight, the impact porn had on my own sexuality, I never want to see it again.

Porn impacted my wife's sexuality. I began to incorporate aspects of things that I saw through porn into my own sexual relationship with myself and with my wife. This exposure to artificial and extreme sexual behaviors normalized things for me that are not normal and drove me to hope for, fantasize about, or pressure my wife into doing. This impacted my wife's sense of her sexuality and because she had no idea where any of it was coming from, made her question both her sense of herself and of me. Understanding now how my "private" porn use leaked out into the real world of my sexual relationship with my wife and impacted her sense of her own sexuality, I regret every moment I spent looking at it.

Porn encourages objectification / sexualization. Repeated exposure to artificial sexuality encouraged me to look at the world through the lens of porn. Sometimes, when my eyes were pointed at someone, I did not see that person. Instead, I saw how that person might fit into some kind of porn scenario. I didn't think about getting to know that person. Instead, I wondered what sorts of sexual positions they might enjoy or what their sexual fantasies might be. This objectification / sexualization, which came directly from porn, impacted my ability to interact with my fellow human beings in a healthy way. It has taken years, literally, for my brain to rewire itself and dull the lens of porn that led to this kind of objectification / sexualization. I want porn on my bottom line so I can continue that process, not go backwards.

Porn was something I kept secret. I did not openly share the fact that I was looking at porn with my wife. This was something I did in secret. Keeping secrets, in general, is an unhealthy thing in a relationship. Keeping secrets about something involving sex and sexuality, is a very high risk thing to do in a relationship. Of course, I did not really recognize that at the time, but knowing now how impactful such secrets are, my bottom line is exactly the right place for porn to be. With porn on my bottom line, not only must I refrain from using it to maintain my sobriety, but I know that if I do slip and look at porn, I will need to tell my wife about it right away - thus saving myself from the additional trap of keeping secrets.

Porn hurts those involved in creating it. The porn industry is not, in general, a productive, good and empowering thing. It takes advantage of the powerless to make money. It feeds unhealthy appetites in those who consume it. There are certainly corners and niches within it that are explicitly abusive and illegal. The recent pivot to user created content encourages non-consensual sharing of private content, which impacts the unwilling participants by violating their privacy, exposing them to risk, and creating a trail of content that is effectively impossible to ever eradicate. I no longer want to support, even in any incidental way, this insidious and evil monster.

Even if I didn't recognize all the reasons described above, I would put porn on my bottom line solely because my wife asked me to. After all the ways I have hurt her, it is so important for me to honor her requests and her boundaries. Giving up porn because she asked me to would be a microscopic sacrifice compared to the sacrifices she is making every day to attempt to repair the relationship I damaged in so many fundamental ways through my actions. I would do it out of love and respect for her.

I hope this is helpful to those who read it.

Why is porn on my list of bottom line behaviors? (annotated)

There are so many reasons... In no particular order:

Green ones feel like they are "about me" and yellow ones feel like they are "about you"? It feels about half "about me" and half "about you". I'm not sure I understand what you feel may be missing from this? I can't think of anything. Is it more that you are feeling the yellow parts should be *omitted* so that it is only about me? I could see that, but in speaking to other addicts, I would certainly want to highlight the impact that porn has on those around us too. I could see reordering it, and perhaps labelling and introducing the sections? Do you think that would help address the concern / reaction you had in looking at it this week? I did add one bullet (orange), which was kind of implied and worth saying clearly.

- Port was *part* of my acting out behaviors, so of course it needs to be on my bottom lines.
- Porn was a "gateway drug" *in* my acting out. Before I acted out with other people (either virtually or physically), I spent so much time looking at and thinking about porn. Porn helped me to escape from and numb my emotions. Porn generated that dopamine rush in my brain which was part of my addictive payoff. I kept returning to porn, over and over and over again. Because I can recognize porn as a "gateway drug" for me, I feel it is critical for my sobriety and recovery to stay far away from it.
- Porn *does* hurt others. Porn *is* cheating. It is easy to think that because porn is something I do alone, that it doesn't hurt anyone else. That is false thinking. When I am using porn, I am not thinking about my wife. I am not thinking about my family. I am thinking only about myself. By thinking about others in a sexual context, I *am* cheating on my wife. I *am* hurting my wife. Whether it is my intent or not, I am sending a message that I need others to satisfy my sexual needs. I am sending a message that she is not enough. I am demonstrating, through my actions, that I am willing to go to others to satisfy my sexual needs. If that is done in secret, that is cheating. Whether done in secret or not, it is intensely hurtful to my wife. Understanding that now, and knowing the impact my porn use had on my wife, I want it on my bottom line.
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