

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

My husband Bob is a good man and a great father. He's almost perfect, except for the fact that he is a porn freak. He buys nasty magazines that make "Playboy" seem like the Sunday church bulletin. He spends at least an hour every night on Internet pornography sites. I've told him that I hate this habit, and that it is degrading to women. He says that I'm 'uptight,' and that all men enjoy pornography, and that I should just accept it. Do I have a right to be upset with him?

-- Brenda

Dear Brenda,

You always have a right to feel exactly what you feel. You don't need anyone's permission. In spite of Bob's conviction that "all men" enjoy pornography, I beg to differ. Pornography has been described as the "systematic practice of exploitation and subordination based on sex that differentially harms and disadvantages women." That definition and recognizes that pornography objectifies women, turns them from human beings into sex objects, and perpetuates the adolescent fantasy that women's main purpose or aim in life is to satisfy some guy's sexual whim. In spite of the fact that pornography represents a \$57 billion dollar a year industry worldwide, (and when I googled "pornography" I came up with almost five million hits), many men find it to be sophomoric, reprehensible and demeaning to women. I'm sorry that Bob is not among them.

One doesn't have to be like the Dana Carvey character on Saturday Night Live -- "The Church Lady" -- to feel uncomfortable with pornography. It's not necessary to be uptight about sexuality, judgmental, or uncomfortable with eroticism to believe that pornography is a negative influence in marriages, families, and society. And -- hey -- what about Bob's investing an hour every night online when he could be spending time with you and/or your kids? And couldn't the money spent on those magazine subscriptions be better spent on a set of encyclopedias for your kids?

The Internet -- with all its wondrous possibilities for communication and knowledge -- has also made it easy to connect with everything from airbrushed nudity to violent, hard-core pornography that puts women and children at risk for predators. In fact, anyone with a computer and online access can connect with all kinds of images and information that have nothing to do with commitment or enlightened values. Perhaps Bob is more comfortable with the anonymous and non-physical relationships on Internet chat rooms and pornography sites, than he is with a real-life relationship with you. If so, this is a sign of deep-seated insecurities, and needs to be addressed.

It's time to just say "no." Let Bob know that he needs to change his behavior, and that you are over his pornography Jones. If he is addicted or compulsive in his use of pornography -- and quite a few people are -- then urge him to seek professional help to find ways of relating to you and to his own sexual energy without this crutch. If he is a more casual porn aficionado, then he should have less of a problem in turning off the computer and canceling the magazine subscriptions. Suggest that he start to interact with

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and be present with his real life relationships and turn off the fantasized ones. Confront Bob's "What's the big deal?" attitude by telling him how you feel. It's time to do that.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2004 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.