

attitude

**How much
porn is too
much porn?**

**Dr Joe Kort
has the answer**

**TEAM
GINGE!
NICOLA
ROBERTS
BREAKS
OUT**

***Festival
Fashion***
*Look good
in a field*

**Hot boy
hotspots**
Where to
manwatch
this summer

*Meet the
men behind
your sex life*

**JOHANN
HARI
UNMASKS
AMERICA'S
SECRET GAY
PRESIDENT**

EXCLUSIVE

**WHO YOU
CALLING
SIDEKICK?**

Rupert Grint's on fire

**PLUS JUSTIN BOND
ALAN HOLLINGHURST
CARL BARÂT**

July 2011
attitude.co.uk
U.K. £4.25 S.A. R99.95



Gay relationship experts Alan Downs and Joe Kort answer your questions

THIS MONTH: JOE KORT ON PORN ADDICTION

'I'm addicted to porn'



Dear Attitude,

I seem to spend all my spare time watching porn. I was never really into it during my teens, I'm 30 and it became a bit of a thing after a boy I was seeing introduced the idea while we were having sex a year ago. At first I was a bit surprised that he would do such a thing but I was turned on. Now I find myself spending hours watching it when I'm on my own at home. I'm single and it's eating into my life in a not very positive way (I'm not seeing friends at the weekends, or arriving late when I do arrange to meet them, and not feeling particularly into going out on dates). I seem to be quite into the thrill of it but I'd quite like to be free of the compulsion. Even when I've thrown out all my DVDs to make a fresh start I find myself going online to find more stuff to watch. **MIKE, LEWISHAM**

Hi Mike,

Thanks for posing a couple of questions that lots of men – gay, bisexual and straight – all struggle with: a) How much porn is too much? b) And if I get really caught up in it, what should I do?

I don't have any hard-and-fast judgments about pornography as a whole. There are too many arguments as to why it is either bad or good – or both. As a sex and relationship therapist, I see my job as dealing with how people use porn, not porn itself.

When clients reveal they look at porn, the first thing they tell me is, 'I'm a sex addict'. That may be true. Sex addiction is real. But there are many other reasons why they (and possibly you) are drawn to looking at porn compulsively. First, let's consider some of the normal reasons:-

1. You may feel ashamed for watching porn

Talking openly about sexual fantasies – especially ones that aren't so common – is usually taboo. As a result, people often think if they enjoy porn, then something is wrong with them. But the feeling of shame can make the 'forbidden' seem more desirable. The feeling of transgression is itself a thrill that can heighten interest to the point of compulsion. Once the shame is reduced, the compulsion is eased as a result.

What to do: tell someone you trust about your sexual fantasies and behaviour. There are many good books to help you feel more comfortable about them. I believe all sexual fantasies are good, and individuals just need to understand what to do with them.

2. Being new to porn can cause compulsiveness

A first exposure to pornography – the novelty of it – can cause obsessive-compulsive sexual behavior for up to a year. In the 90s, porn's increasing availability on the internet brought many men into therapy

offices. Online porn was eating up so much of their time that it interfered with their lives. Once the novelty of internet porn wore off, many of these men's obsessions died down.

What to do: if the obsession lasts for longer than a year, seek a therapist to see if any other factor might be at work.

3. *You may be broadening your fantasies*

Sometimes porn can trigger new sexual fantasies you never knew you had. You can find yourself watching for longer until you satisfy your curiosity. Again, this can be normal and often doesn't last.

What to do: be open and curious about new sexual fantasies. It's OK to explore.

4. *Coming out often includes compulsive behaviour*

In their first three years of coming out, men tend to develop promiscuous behaviours. This is delayed adolescence. During our teenage years, we don't have any healthy outlets to experiment with. Shamed into stifling our feelings, we make up for lost time, preoccupied with pornography just like straight male teenagers would be. Again, this is a healthy, normal stage of development that usually subsides over a three-year span of time or less.

What to do: be aware that this may be a temporary situation. Perhaps talk to a gay-affirmative therapist about your new-found sexuality kicking in to avoid pathologising or shaming yourself.

5. *You may have Sexual Attention Deficit Disorder*

Sex therapist Ian Kerner coined this term to describe how watching too much porn can prompt disinterest in a partner. In my office, I hear men tell me that they can't focus on whatever guys they're dating because their minds stray, recalling choice moments from the porn they've watched.

What to do: stop watching porn for a period of time. When men become 'hard'-wired to porn, enjoying it more than sex with another person, stopping for a while can reactivate their desire for a partner. You can still masturbate, but let your imagination create the fantasies.

Before the internet, men who found themselves struggling with porn had a much easier time of quitting, because hard-core movies were a lot harder to find. Now cyberspace has introduced what the late sex therapist Al Cooper called 'the Triple-A Engine': Access, Affordability and Anonymity. Those three dynamics make the search for porn so simple that men can become porn connoisseurs, endlessly clicking on link after link, hour after hour, in search of the most arousing images and sequences.

None of the five suggestions above are pathological reasons why men watch pornography compulsively. There can be dysfunctional reasons as well. These are the three I see most often:

1. *Sex addiction*

Research shows that only three to five per cent of people suffer from sex addiction. But if you are one of them, you'll want to be on the right path for recovery. If you have a little more than a year of compulsive porn watching, your behaviour might possibly meet criteria for sexual addiction. Internet porn is to sexual addiction what crack cocaine is to chemical dependency. It might take as long as 30 years for alcoholics to drink enough to ruin their lives, but with cocaine and crack, addicts can manage that far more quickly. The internet speeds the end result.

What to do: attend a Sex And Love Addicts Anonymous (SLAA) meeting. In the UK, there are gay and bisexual male meetings that you can find listed at slaauk.org. If you can, find a certified sexual addiction therapist.

2. *Childhood sexual abuse and trauma*

When boys or girls are sexually abused, the effects of their trauma often don't surface until later, when they are grown adults ready to form relationships that include sexual intimacy. Having been traumatised by childhood sexual abuse, they never develop the basic non-sexual skills needed to form and maintain intimate relationships with others. Instead, close relationships make them experience fear, shame and

anxiety. To avoid re-experiencing early feelings of powerlessness, they discover that 'meaningless' sex is a highly effective technique for keeping intimacy at bay.

3. *Intimacy and courtship disorders*

Mike, I wonder if your attraction to porn is actually your way of numbing your grief over the ending of your relationship — as well as an excuse to not start dating again.

Relationships demand expressing and experiencing deep feelings of both joy and grief. You may be resisting the normal process of grief. If you were raised in a home where love was rarely shown or was replaced by emotional, physical and verbal abuse, then you may have learned that close relationships feel scary. This can leave you with what we therapists call a courtship disorder, in which you seek to avoid most, if not all dating and relationship skills. If so, then compulsive sexual behaviour can seem like the ideal solution, since it can't ever reject you, abandon you or hurt you.

What to do: read materials on breaking up and experiencing grief. Seek out support groups where you are encouraged to interact with others and improve your skills in relating to others in a friendly, positive atmosphere.

And finally, I recommend that while you look for help in identifying — and resolving — any of these problems that may apply to you, get back out there and date. I don't believe that we need to get well before we start dating and entering into relationships. It's often through dating and building relationships that we heal ourselves and each other.

Ed ads: Try reading In The Shadows Of The Net by Patrick Carnes

Email us with your relationship or sexual problem to advice@attitude.co.uk

Dr Joe Kort is a licensed clinical social worker and board-certified sexologist. He is best known for his book *10 Smart Things Gay Men Can Do To Improve Their Lives*. JoeKort.com