

279. Overcoming Sexual Shame While Quitting Porn



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Sara Brewer

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You are listening to the *Overcome Pornography for Good* podcast episode 279.

Welcome to the *Overcome Pornography For Good* podcast. I'm your host, Sara Brewer.

Hey everyone. Welcome to the podcast episode this week. I'm so glad you're here and really excited to talk to you all about sexual shame today. If you haven't heard me before, if you're just introduced to me, I help people who quit porn in a shame-free and sex-positive way. And sometimes people get confused, and they're like, "What do you mean? How can you be sex-positive and help people quit pornography?"

And I want to kind of dive into that a little bit today and give you some of my answers here and teach and help you to get rid of this sexual shame. Because in order to quit porn shame-free and sex-positive, we have to really question and look at this sexual shame.

So, anyway, before we get into that, I just want to share an awesome review that one of you, my listeners, left for me on Apple Podcasts. It says, "Change comes from love. With pornography and with mental health, stigma and shame block progress more than anything else. This podcast has helped me see that I can't shame myself into changing. True change comes from a place of love."

Thank you so much for leaving me that review and sharing that with me. Every time that you guys go and leave me a review, it just helps more people find this who want this material and helps me get my message out there quicker and better. And so thank you so much.

If you haven't yet left me a review on Apple, I would ask you and encourage you to go do that. It just takes one quick second from your phone. It's really simple. They make it really easy to do. Thank you so much. And that review, I want to expound on this review a little bit today.

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This podcast has helped me see that I can't shame myself into changing, right? We understand that. But I want to dive into that even deeper and challenge more of these shame-producing beliefs, especially when it comes to sexual shame and shame around our sexuality.

Sexual shame is this feeling of profound responsibility and deep remorse associated with thoughts and fantasies around sexual activity. We're going to dive into this. But really quickly, what who this typically affects are religious individuals with more conservative religious backgrounds, which is fine. Right, you know, I'm very spiritual and religious, and I'm going to speak to you and in this light, in this spiritual, religious context today, a little bit as we talk about sexual shame.

So again, sexual shame is just feeling terrible for having thoughts about sex. It's feeling terrible for having thoughts and fantasies about specific types of sex or sexual things. It's feeling terrible for having normal, natural body experiences with your sexual body, like masturbation or climax, especially if you experience that before you're married, which, newsflash, many people do. And it's feeling terrible for being a sexual being, really, is what it comes down to.

A lot of it comes from those of us who weren't taught a lot about sex growing up, and it was kind of a taboo, hush-hush thing that there's just some shame sprinkled on top of it. And so we just kind of bring that into our adolescence and our adulthood. It's just basically this feeling like something is wrong with you because you have this part of you that is sexual and likes specific sexual things, and that means that there's something wrong with you, and we feel really bad about it.

So here's why this is so important to address because, and I really want you to listen to me here, for many of my clients, sexual shame does more damage than their pornography use does. Okay? For most of my clients, sexual shame does more damage than their pornography use. Because we're going to go through a lot of examples of why that is, but really simply, remember, shame causes us to hide and avoid. So you hide maybe from

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your partner and you create distance in your relationship because of the shame. Or you avoid God spiritually, right? When you feel crappy about yourself, you don't want to go and connect with God, right?

Or avoiding yourself. And this is crazy and I'm pretty sure I talked about this in one of my other episodes on shame in depth. But we also avoid ourselves when we feel shame and what that means. Like this is so crazy you guys, is that we avoid ourselves. We feel bad looking at for looking at the pornography. And what do we do when we feel bad?

Remember, pornography is a buffer, which means it's what we do to escape negative emotion. So if you're feeling really bad about yourself, what are you used to doing to escape that emotion? Look at porn. Right, so you look at porn, you feel terrible about yourself. Because you feel terrible about yourself, you're like, "Well, it just doesn't even matter anyways, I know that porn will get rid of this feeling for just a minute." You look at more porn, which trains your brain to want it more, creating more habits of pornography use. And then you feel terrible about it, and then you look at more, and it's just this crazy cycle that continues on and on and on.

This is why sexual shame is so important and such a big thing that we need to address when we're going and looking at quitting porn. So some specific examples, and I could, gosh, I could list so many, but here were just a couple that came to me as I was writing my outline.

Some specific examples of what the sexual shame does. I have clients who feel shame about previous porn use, and that causes them to avoid relationships, right? They have this great opportunity for a happy, healthy relationship, but this past porn use or their porn use keeps them feeling unworthy to go after this relationship that could be really, really good for them. Lots of clients who beat themselves up for wanting sexual things.

I had a client specifically that I'm thinking of who drove to a sex store and he stopped in the parking lot and then he just sat and breathed through his urges and then he drove away. But just because he wanted sexual things,

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he didn't even go in the store. He drove away. But just because he wanted it, he beat himself up for days and hid in his room, didn't show up to class or work. He was just completely out of commission for days because of it. Now, isn't that fascinating? Shame causes us to go do that even when we don't end up acting against what our values are. It's like something's wrong with me because I wanted this. That's what sexual shame is. Okay?

Other examples are viewing porn and then, you know, like we talked about, just feeling so, so terrible and sitting in a slump and in this depressed, dark room for days binging on porn. I've heard examples of people who, you know, they slip up, they think they go back to square one, and then just days and days and days binging on porn. That comes from sexual shame.

Or other examples are because they viewed porn or because they masturbated or both, they felt unworthy to be around God. So they avoided church, think they're going to hell, avoid God and praying, avoiding anything spiritual because of the shame. And this is what I call the shame apathy trap that maybe I'll get into a little bit deeper in another episode. But when we feel a lot of shame, especially around our spiritual life, we're not showing up and we're not good enough around our spiritual life, it eventually leads us to apathy, which is just not caring, and then we don't do any more of those spiritual things that were once so important to us.

So I want you to really think about this. Think to yourself, does God like the results of this sexual shame? Because something that really keeps my clients in sexual shame is this idea that somehow it's important and God wants me to feel shame for my sexuality. But really, if you look at this, think about God. I guess it depends on how you view God, right? But I view Him as a very loving, loving God. Like, does he like these results of avoiding relationships, of beating yourself up and staying depressed for days, of binging porn, of avoiding God and avoiding him?

All of those are results of sexual shame and not results of sexuality. Okay? Because you can experience these same things, being porn and masturbating, and not go into sexual shame because of it. But hey, I'm

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learning and figuring out my body. This is normal. This is okay. And I don't want to view porn. We're going to figure this out. And then you turn to God instead of feeling shame and running away from him.

Right, other examples, I want to just share a couple other examples of why this shame is so, this sexual shame is so detrimental. I know stories of people who had porn use and had so much shame around it, they hid, they didn't tell anyone. They felt like a fraud and felt so terrible that they engaged in self-destructive behaviors and ended up in the hospital. Now, listen to me. The reason that they engaged in these self-destructive behaviors and ended up in the hospital wasn't because of the porn. It was because of all of the sexual shame around it.

So many people use pornography and really demonize pornography in a way that's like, look at what porn did to this person. And many times it's not the porn that did it to that person, but it's all the sexual shame around that porn use that did it to them. And we're going to talk about that a little bit more here as we keep going.

Also, one other example is that we have so much shame around maybe seeing someone in revealing clothing and then having sexual thoughts after seeing someone in revealing clothing that, A, we demonize those thoughts, like push them away, push them away. No, no, no, that's bad, that's bad. And what that does is it actually creates more of an obsession with them, and then they keep bubbling up. You push them down and they keep bubbling up and you can't get rid of them.

So that's what it does, number one. And number two, we judge and we blame that person for what they're wearing. Like it's that person and what they're wearing that is creating these sexual feelings. And listen, you guys, this is so important. Those sexual feelings, they never ever, ever come from someone else or from what someone else is wearing or what someone else is doing. They always come from your thoughts. We know that this is true because many people will see the same thing, the person

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wearing the same outfit, and not have the same thoughts and not have the same sexual feelings.

So with that said, it's never someone else's fault for your sexual feelings or sexual thoughts ever. Ever, ever, ever. It's always coming from you and your thoughts. And with me saying that, that's okay. There is nothing wrong with those feelings. And having those feelings doesn't mean that there's something wrong with you. And hear me, like don't misunderstand me here. It also doesn't mean that you have to act on them. It doesn't mean that we can't be sexually conservative and respectful and loving towards people.

It's kind of like being angry, right? We can feel really angry towards someone. It's always what we're thinking that's creating the anger. We can feel that and not act on it and breathe through it and get past it, and it's fine. Right? And we wouldn't shame ourselves for being angry towards someone. And we would still take responsibility for that anger.

So again, right, like does God like these results? I don't think so. I don't think God likes these results. When we feel shame around having sexual thoughts when we see someone in certain kinds of clothing, right, we demonize those thoughts, and then they come back.

I'm thinking of *Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Have you guys seen that movie recently? It's been a couple years since I saw it, but I watched it and I was like, "Ooh, this is kind of dark." But there's that song that the priest sings towards the gypsy girl, and it's, ooh, kind of creepy where he talks about having these feelings for her and how they're evil and bad. And that causes him to repress and, like push them down and they keep coming back. And it causes him to judge and blame her and to think that something's wrong with her when in reality, listen, sexual thoughts and sexual feelings are normal and okay.

We can feel them and not respond to them and not react to them just like being angry. We can feel angry and not act on it. And I'll talk a little bit more about this here in a couple minutes, too.

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Okay, but here's one thing I want to say to you about sexual shame. Feeling shame around your sexuality is like feeling shame around being hungry. Because sexuality and sexual feelings, they're just a normal part of having a body. We can't make them go away. We can't never not have them.

Just like being hungry is a part of having a normal, natural body. Imagine, imagine if we shamed ourselves for being hungry. That would be ridiculous. And it's the same thing for having sexual feelings. And that doesn't mean that I believe that you should just do whatever you want sexually. I believe in sexual conservatism, and if applied correctly, I know that that creates a very healthy life. Just like being conservative in what I eat. I don't think my healthiest life includes eating whatever I want whenever I want.

But I don't blame and shame myself for wanting sugar and wanting Cheez-Its. Right? Even though they're not great for my body, I can decide I want to stop eating sugar and Cheez-Its indefinitely. I can decide to never have sugar and Cheez-its again without feeling shame about wanting it and without feeling shame about having it in the past.

I don't know if you can feel how passionate I am about this subject. I just want everyone to hear this message because it's so important. Sexual shame hurts us more than pornography use. Sexual shame makes unwanted pornography use much, much worse.

So how do we get rid of sexual shame? Here are my suggestions for you. Number one, shame always comes from your thoughts, so be curious about the thoughts that are causing you shame. Whenever you notice yourself feeling shame, just get curious. Why am I feeling shame? And here's something that's really important.

This is a key principle that I tell my clients all the time. Don't believe everything you think. So your brain is going to come up with a bunch of reasons why you should feel super bad. We don't have to automatically believe all those things. Especially if it's shame, you guys, if you're feeling

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shame, it's probably a lie. So just be curious, just see what's coming up, and don't believe it right away. Be willing to question it.

Number two, we are sexual beings and our sexuality is not bad. Okay, sexuality is a God-given gift and a very, very beautiful thing. Sexuality in itself is not bad. Morality comes into play with how we choose to use our sexuality, but sexual feelings, sexual thoughts without action, they're just part of being here and being a human being.

If you have grown up in a really conservative religion or house where maybe sex wasn't talked about, I want to encourage you to go follow more sex positive accounts, especially if you experience a lot of sexual shame. Some of my favorites are Jennifer Finlayson-Fife. You hear me talk about her a lot. I love her. I'm hoping to get her on the podcast sometime. Kristin B. Hodson, who's got a great Instagram account, and Shame-Free Chastity is another great resource.

Thinking, Jennifer Finlayson-Fife, she does a lot of marriage courses on sexuality. She has a lot of great podcast resources. Kristin B. Hodson is just a sex therapist in general who likes to help women and other people learn how to embrace their sexuality, and she helps you learn how to talk to your kids about sex. Shame-Free Chastity is very similar to those things. So those are my recommendations.

Number three, recognize that you are not your thoughts. This is kind of mind-blowing, and I remember I didn't really understand it or believe it the first time I heard it. So if that's you, that's okay. Just be willing to hold on here for a minute as I explain what I mean by you are not your thoughts.

You are responsible for what you do and how you show up and how you act absolutely. Sometimes we just have thoughts that don't represent who we are or who we're trying to become, right? Just because of all of our environment and stuff that's going on, right? Sometimes we just have unwanted thoughts and we do not have to make our thoughts mean something about our identity.

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With that, number four, recognize that sexual feelings do not equal unwanted sexual action. Okay? Let me say that again because it's really important. Recognize that sexual feelings do not equal unwanted sexual action.

So, kind of back to these last couple points, our brains do crazy stuff. Like sometimes, I don't know if anyone else does this, I hope me saying this doesn't make me sound like a crazy person. But sometimes when I'm driving down the road, I'll have a thought that's like, "Hey, I wonder what it would be like to suddenly swerve all the way through the lanes." I'm like, that is just weird. Why did I think that? And then I keep going, right? Our brains just think stuff that's random and crazy and think about doing stuff that wouldn't be good for us all the time. Right? And that's okay. That doesn't mean I'm going to go and drive through all the lanes and like swerve through all the lanes of traffic really quick and hit other cars. Right, even though my brain just comes up with these thoughts sometimes.

And this is just like, you know, we talked about before, other emotions, anger, stress. You can feel them. You can feel these feelings. They're not bad. And we can learn to manage them so that they help us create the life that we want instead of just feeling like we're always at the control of our emotions and our desires.

We can do that same thing with our sexual feelings, too. This is key, though, you guys, we cannot learn to control those if we're always trying to push them away. We can't learn to control our sexual feelings if we're always trying to make them go away and if we're demonizing them. In order to manage them and control them, we have to allow them, and we have to become very comfortable with them, just let them be there without acting on them.

I'm thinking of Daniel Tiger. Okay, *Daniel Tiger* is the PBS show that my toddler loves. The song about anger always comes up. "When you feel so mad that you want to roar, take a deep breath and count to four." Right, Daniel Tiger is teaching these kids how to manage their emotions, like

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anger. We can do the same thing with our sexual feelings if we don't demonize them and if we can decrease the sexual shame around these feelings.

Okay, number five, if you're struggling with sexual shame, I want you to avoid fear-based tactics around pornography. Fear-based tactics and research around pornography, number one, participate in just bad science and research, and there's just a lot of differing research out there around pornography. And so make sure that the research that you're looking at is helping you feel the emotions that will empower you to quit, not just trying to shame you into quitting. And notice that these fear-based tactics don't actually help.

And I see this all the time. And I just got a message from one of my clients. If you don't know, in my program, Overcome Pornography for Good, you have access to a board where you can come and ask me a question or submit work to me or get help anytime. You just email me and it goes to my VIP inbox.

And I was reading one of these and responding to him, and he had done this worksheet that helped him after he looked at porn, and what he realized was that a contributing trigger and factor in him going and viewing porn that day was an article that he read earlier that day that had a lot of this fear-based research around pornography. And he said it's so interesting for me to look back and notice how reading that article led me just to feel yucky and bad about myself, and I wasn't paying attention and then I went and viewed pornography. It's so fascinating for me to see that article, it didn't help me quit, but it actually led me to go and look at it.

Right, and I see this a lot. So give yourself permission to just let those out of your life while you're trying to decrease sexual shame. Just kind of let that go. We don't need it to quit. The reason that people like hop onto that is because they think that it's important for us to feel really bad in order for us to quit, when in reality what we find is it's the opposite. The worse you feel about yourself, the harder it is to quit. The better you feel about

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yourself, the easier it is to quit. And I'm not saying we shouldn't look at the research around pornography and how it's detrimental to our society. It is. But there's also a time and place for us to look at that. While you're trying to quit porn, if it helps you to not look at it, don't look at it. Don't go read all those articles that just make you feel bad about yourself. And then once you feel like you have a handle on it and you can go dive into that research a little bit more, you can look at it from a better perspective and a better lens that will help you actually drive change instead of keeping you stuck.

Okay, lastly, I want you to be willing to question beliefs that keep you feeling shame. There are a lot that I can talk about here, but I want to mention just a few of these beliefs that keep us feeling shame, especially in like LDS culture.

First is that scripture that sexual sin is next to murder. Now, first off, that's not what the scripture says. The scripture does not say sexual sin is next to murder. There are other ways to interpret that scripture and I had my mind blown a couple weeks ago when I read someone who posted another interpretation of the scripture. And I read it and I'm like, Oh my gosh, it makes so much more sense this way that what is it, Alma who says this?

What Alma says here, he's not saying that sleeping with this harlot was next to murder. He's saying leading people away from Christ is a sin next to murder. Now, that's very different than experiencing sexuality, okay? That is not true and I really want you to question that this is next to murder, even if you've heard leaders say that or had leaders say that to you. I want you to be willing to question that. Maybe I'll go into that a little bit deeper in another episode or on my Facebook or Instagram sometime.

Okay? Our beliefs about masturbation. Notice your beliefs about masturbation and be willing to question those if they bring a lot of sexual shame. Maybe like good people don't masturbate or we are never meant to masturbate. When in reality, masturbation is just a normal part of human development. Babies in utero, growing and learning about their body, and

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we see evidence of them masturbating, right? And in little kids, it's different than when you're adult, it's just mostly for comfort.

But I hear story after story of, you know, a girl who breaks down and starts crying, finally confessing to someone that she masturbated when she was 14 and then kept masturbating until she was 18, right? Like she didn't feel worthy. She kept herself from living a good life because of this. When reality, you know, that's normal.

Research shows that masturbation is normal and healthy, and listen to me, you guys, and that doesn't mean you have to continue it as a practice in your life if you don't want to, especially if it's contributing to unwanted results in your life like compulsive masturbation or using it to escape building relationships with your partner. I love what Jennifer Finlayson-Fife said about this. She said, "I'm not so much pro-masturbation as I am pro-not shaming yourself for normal, natural human behavior."

I've thought about that a lot, and I agree 100%. So right, I never tell my clients whether or not masturbation is good or bad. They have their opinions. I have my mind. What we do is we look at the results in their life and I let them decide what they want to think about it in a way that is serving them and helping them create the best life possible for them.

So specifically, right, in LDS church and in our LDS doctrine, there's so many differing opinions around it, and there's so many people who are on totally opposite sides of the spectrum that are very faithful, great members of the church who have great relationships with God and are doing life, you know, really well.

So the most important thing here is just to notice your beliefs around masturbation. If they're creating sexual shame, I would encourage you to be willing to question them because remember, sexual shame leads to worse results in our life. Our goal here is to get the best results in our life, in our sexual life and in our life in general, and sexual shame always makes it harder to get those results that we want in our life.

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Okay, lastly, last thing. I know this has been kind of a long episode, but the last thing I want to say is that sometimes my clients come to me and they have this realization that they don't need to feel terrible about themselves, and that they can feel good about themselves and not feel shame. And then they're like, "Well, why should I quit porn then? If I can feel good about myself right now and not feel shame, why do I need to quit porn?" My answer is always you don't. Like you get to choose.

But here is a much better reason to quit porn than I need to quit porn so I can finally feel good about myself and so I can finally feel worthy. That's not true. You can feel good about yourself and you can feel worthy. You can be a worthy church member and you can be a worthy child of God while working on a porn habit. Right?

So if the purpose isn't to just not feel so bad about ourselves, a much better purpose and reason to quit porn is to simply elevate yourself as a person and to learn how to do something hard, to learn new skills and emotional skills that will better your life so much more than just running away from your emotions and using pornography and feeling out of control. It's just simply to elevate your life, to learn some new skills, to create a really awesome life that is exactly what you want it to look like, instead of a life that looks like running away from what you're feeling.

This is why I love life coaching for quitting pornography, because life coaching isn't about fixing something that's wrong. Life coaching is about learning how to create a better life, how to get stronger, and to create the most meaningful life that you can imagine. All right? So, that was a lot. That was a lot. I hope you enjoyed today's episode.

Remember, sexual shame is not helping us quit porn. It's not required, and it's a lie. Instead, the better reason to quit porn instead of just so I can finally feel good about myself, the better reason is to learn how to live an awesome, amazing life, which is what you can have if you can learn to stop buffering and instead start creating a more fulfilling life, more fulfilling

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relationships, more self-trust, more self-control, not so that we can finally be good enough or finally be worthy.

All right, you guys, have a great week. Talk to you next week. Bye-bye.

I want to invite you to come and listen to my free class, How To Overcome Pornography For Good Without Using Willpower. We talk about how to stop giving in to urges without pure willpower or relying on phone filters so that you can actually stop wanting pornography.

We talk about how to stop giving up after a few weeks or months. And spoiler alert, the answer isn't "have more willpower." Lastly, we talk about how to make a life without porn easily sustainable and permanent. If you're trying to quit porn, this class is a game changer.

You can go and sign up at SaraBrewer.com/masterclass, and it is totally free.