

The Recovering Addict's Guide to Ethical Sex: Hefner and Hustler Had it Half Right

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Since boyhood, I've had a strong sense of moral justice. Whether putting myself in timeout for breaking the rules, saving stray animals from the streets, or buying food for the hungry, a virtuous character was the internal compass of my younger years.

Then came the season of sex addiction. This was a time of inner turmoil, as I pursued pleasures at the expense of myself and others. Believing in what was right, I too often ran to what was wrong. I lived an incongruent life and the shame of it was like leprosy in my soul.

In my early twenties, my path took an abrupt turn when I chose to pursue a new passion: my recovery. As I experienced the healing and wholeness I desired and deserved, I became more of the person I always was. I reconnected with myself and my values. I learned to live in alignment.

Now, as a sex addiction therapist, I help many others do the same. As people recover, they become who they really want to be and who they really are. They might become that woman who can finally be trusted, that father who learns to connect with his kids, that leader who walks with integrity in his step, or that person sharing a smile with the lovable human grinning back at them from the mirror. Where their agenda to numb-out was once self-seeking, the recovering sex addict learns to adopt new attitudes of humility, caring, and courage.

The process of recovery is the process of aligning with oneself. In recovery, our most valued principles are no longer led away to the slaughter. Instead, we learn to live them out, one day at a time.

In my book [Life After Lust](#) I explained how learning to live in alignment with our values is a major "[Mission to Accomplish](#)" in recovery. I wrote:

“As we grow in our recovery, we learn who we are and we gain the courage to live that out. No longer are we bound by secrecy, constantly trying to cover up choices that cause us shame. In recovery, we learn to live with integrity. We are the same person in the dark that we are in the light...The more we live in alignment, the greater our inner peace.”

In recovery, we seek alignment in **all** areas of our lives. A life well-lived is actualized at the convergence of both our sexual **and** moral values. Thus, making choices based on our **sexual** values is an act of misalignment if it violates our **moral** values. While this scenario describes much of the sex addict's acting out, in active recovery we learn a new lifestyle. In recovery, we learn that sex aligned with our moral values is not only possible, but is far more satisfying than the disconnected, shame-filled, and secretive sex life of the past. Searching for the benefits of the best sex, we no longer look to lust for solutions that only compromise our character.

The Principles of the Porn-Industry

If I'm honest, the porn-industry has some sexual values right. Evaluating the ethics of porn-industry pioneers Larry Flynt and the late Hugh Hefner, I hypothesize that they highly esteemed sexual enjoyment, excitement, spontaneity, freedom, and fun. These values align with my views of an optimal sex life. I concur with them that our sexuality is to be celebrated, not shamed.

But that's where our agreement ends. While a satisfying sex life is strengthened by some of these values, **Hefner and Hustler only had it half right**. The vision of sex they offered the world was paired with **moral** values that sucked the life out of society. If you're wondering what I mean by this, I've written about it this way:

“As a sexual addiction therapist, I continuously see the devastation caused by porn addiction. I sit with stunned spouses. I empathize with addicts caught in self-destructive cycles. I help resuscitate relationships ruined by pornographic obsessions and aid in the burial of relationships wounded beyond repair.

As a presenter on the harmful effects of porn, I see a younger generation that's predominantly unprotected from it. I see our youth unknowingly auctioning off present and future intimacy as they immerse themselves in the internet. Porn changes their malleable brains, affecting everything from their studying to later-life sexual performance. Many are drowning in addiction. I do my best to protect my children from this destructive drug.

As a sexual addict in recovery, I've felt deep disconnection. I don't blame the porn industry for my past addiction. I chose to soothe my pain in that way and I eventually chose help. But, sadly, I have seen demeaning acts charading as sex.

As a citizen who cares about the disenfranchised and defenseless, I believe the pleasures of porn are not worth those wounded by it. The porn industry might deny its ties to sex- trafficking, a trade that citizens heroically fight locally. Drug abuse, physical and psychological harm, and disease are commonplace; sexuality and humanity are commodities.

These characteristics grate against my most essential beliefs in love, freedom, and human worth. I adamantly oppose those who profit from such atrocities. I once contributed to this industry through my addiction – an uncomfortable reality I must wrestle with.

Yes, I have a problem with the porn industry!

Once enticed by the porn-industry's promise of pleasure, I now see it as a morally-bankrupt mirage. As I continue to seek out my sexual values of passion, pleasure, and play, my recovery requires me to do so within the confines of my character.

So, when a porn-giant like Hustler makes a home in my city, offering gadgets and gizmos to spice up my sex life, I cannot consent with my cash. My funds will never fuel the fires of sexual exploitation. Thank you for offering, but I'll pass on this Hustler. You may have a **legal** right to be here but not a **moral** right. If I buy anything to bolster my sex life, it will be from businesses not tied to objectification and degradation.

Alignment in Action

In [Life After Lust](#), I call the recovering reader to master the practice of healthy sexuality, to live in alignment with their values, and to stand against businesses that profit from the porn-industry. The great news is that these tasks are not in conflict. In fact, I believe that the benefits of great sex are amplified when we act from a place of inner alignment.

Sexuality experts [Drs Bill & Ginger Bercaw](#) present this promising vision of a sexual life that is both exciting **and** ethical:



*“You can know for perhaps the first time in your entire life what it feels like to embrace a passionate and fully satisfying sex life **while retaining your integrity** and while being more fully present.”*

We can savor a healthy sex life without stepping on our values. We can have the best of both worlds. Within the boundaries of our values, we can seek out the best sex of our lives.

Where You'll Find Me

This Saturday, a porn-producing pioneer is visiting our fine city of Fresno for Hustler's "grand opening" event. Meeting Larry Flynt in person with my "[Porn Kills Love](#)" T-shirt and picket sign would absolutely align with my values. But this time I am choosing a different approach. My protest will come through my promotion of love on that day. My plan Saturday is to man a LifeSTAR booth at Fresno's Recovery Summit, sharing the hopeful message of freedom from sex addiction and inviting others to join me in aligned living, as we pursue together the purposeful path of Life After Lust.

What I am facing in my community is one of many opportunities to stand up to an industry in conflict with our collective best interests. What a wonderful way for me to return to my roots, reclaiming an internal sense of justice. And I am grateful to report that I am far from alone in this mission. There is a groundswell of gifted individuals coming together in this pro-love, anti-porn Movement. Living in alignment with our values, we are changing the world, one victory at a time.

*To learn more about the ideas presented in this article and more, check out the inspirational new book [Life After Lust](#).