



Issue 18 March 2022; Learning; Georgia O'keefe; Sex Entertainment

I am currently learning to be precise. One of the most difficult aspects of writing The Talking Mirror is existing in the world as a writer and praying I am able to clearly communicate what I am trying to say. Of course it is impossible to predict how my readers will interpret or respond to the words I deliver, regardless, my intention is to say what I mean so you understand what I mean to say. When you ask how to ride the troubled waters of a long-term relationship or need assistance determining how to spend your creative energy— I am required, by the very nature of this publication — to offer relatable, diverting, succinct and helpful advice, if only to get you thinking about the question from a fresh perspective.

In my eyes, learning to write more precisely requires the same principles of practice and repetition an athlete or dancer might utilize. I feel I must commit myself to processes grander and conversely more demanding than merely enjoying myself. Free-writing in my diary has, for many years, served as an act of refuge and freedom yet these days I find it difficult to release into the trance of such writing. I crave to achieve mastery and thus, try to turn to my notebooks for study rather than introspection.

Sometimes I imagine how hard-edged I must appear: always reiterating that suffering is inherent to life or work is necessary to survival. Now I admit even learning has a certain rigor and strain to it. Do not assume I am immune to pleasure or opposed to the freedom of play, in no way is this true. Most of my days are filled with laughter and joy, loving touch, good conversation, rest, music and meaningful work. If it isn't obvious already, I fucking love life. Only, I ache to spin myself into a long skien of satin gold, a dense, finely gauged thread of knowledge able to slip through the eye of a needle. What is learning if not following one's desires where they lead; my desire is to be precise, razor sharp, a conduit for electricity. To connect one thing to another as strong thread does, for some larger purpose I do not yet have the ability to articulate the nature of. Must joy always be instantaneous? Can joy not be a sense of deep belonging, of knowing one's place in the web of things? Glimmering, such a thread reflects starlight from twenty-six billion miles away: a constellation, a pinpoint

precise.

Like you, I spend a lot of time thinking about personal fashion and crafts, and I get a lot of enjoyment out of planning and making my own wardrobe and putting together outfits. I have nothing but admiration and respect for those who work with fashion and/or craft as their main artistic pursuit or as a hobby, but in my case I worry sometimes that they act as a type of "lateral productivity" for me -- giving me a quick creative high while actually distracting me from the more challenging (for me), long-haul work of making art as a writer and illustrator. When I work with patterns, yarns, and fabrics designed and made by others, or when I put together outfits from the thrift store or my closet, there's a curatorial aspect to it that makes it feel easier for me to express my personal style (read: artistic identity) than if I'm staring at a blank page, tasked with creating something completely new, meaningful, and true. Is there a way for my interest in fashion and craft to support my other artistic practices rather than taking mental space and creative energy away from them?

Thank you so much for all you give through the Talking Mirror. I'm a true believer and will be subscribing for as long as you choose to continue to share your wisdom. <3

This question hits home for me, as I am openly obsessed with composing outfits, constantly wondering about how clothing shapes identity, and finding pleasure in both procuring and assembling clothes by any means available with consideration to my current financial position or access to free time; simultaneously I do not consider styling or making clothing my primary work. Much of my adult life I have been consumed with trying to find an outfit that best suits my identity. No matter how hard I tried to name my obsession petty or do away with a nagging need to figure out what I'm supposed to wear, I never could quite free myself by simply "letting go".

A year ago or so I studied poetry with Holly Wren Spaulding. During one generative writing workshop I wrote a poem called Notes on Choosing an Outfit and the writing of it unlocked for me a long-held hesitance to entertain my obsession. What I initially imagined as content for writing projects became instead a year or more spent learning to sew and fit clothes to my body and determining what colors, shapes and textiles helped me feel at home in my clothes. Now on the other side of that year, I know, with confidence, exactly what I want to wear and sew. I do not think a year is too long a time to settle a problem that has bothered a person most of their life. While it might seem my obsession distracted me from my professional practice, the truth is not knowing what to wear distracted me far more. Before my clothing year, I cycled through seasons of severe self-hatred. During and after my clothing year, I experienced no long-lasting depression. I am now free to write and draw, in a costume that affirms my sense of self and perhaps even the work I do in the world.

Do you know that Georgia O'Keefe sewed her own clothes? She was very particular about what she wore and paid close attention to her wardrobe and home design. I ask, did her work suffer for it? Writer Lesley Nneka Arimah sews her own clothes and she is a published author and graduate from Iowa Writers' Workshop. Does her work suffer for it? What is most important to note is that neither of these artists raise(d) children and therefore I wonder, are you raising children? Because in my world, free time is compressed into fleeting moments where I must choose between work, hobbies, or body care. I certainly do feel as though I am forced to be monogamous during my free hours, and I resent it. With young children especially, we choose familiar, accessible creative work we can cart around or pick at when our children are close by.

Despite how difficult it can be to find the time and privacy to write and draw and how simultaneously easy it is to do anything other than work, you do not need to give up the pleasure of making crafts or dressing yourself in a pleasing way in order to be a successful writer and illustrator. However, if you wish to write and illustrate professionally, it is essential to treat writing and illustrating as a job, even if you don't make money from it now. Give this work a primary place in your day, a required hour or two at least, and work with a hustler's sensibility. Writing and illustrating isn't more important or spiritual, less grueling or boring than any other work, and you are permitted to not make it your entire life. Work it like a 9-5 or a weekend gig and grant yourself the space to take time off. Artists can have creative lives outside of their studio practice, and most do. With a little organization and a strong will, you can live a rich life productive and creative across mediums, disciplines and domains, looking damn cute in your outfit all the while.

My partner looks at a lot of porn and pays to subscribe to individuals onlyfans pages. From what I've gathered through connected conversations, disconnected arguments, talking to my therapist and reading stuff on the internet - his relationship to porn is not a healthy one, but the the biggest indicator is - he hides it from me. The only reason I know about his use is from accidentally seeing it on his phone when I'm looking up a recipe, or in his camera roll when he's showing me a picture of our kid, or when he's trying to pull up an email about the house and I happen to see emails from OnlyFans. Like I said, we've had connected conversations - about his lonely childhood, his depression, his coping mechanisms, how it's a thing that helps him turn off his brain completely.

But despite understanding and having compassion for these things, the level of use, and the lack of sex/attention to intimacy in our own relationship troubles me and causes me a lot of suffering. I find myself comparing my body (which has birthed children and changed drastically) to the women he looks at on the internet. I find myself feeling shitty about myself asking questions like... what's wrong with me... am I not sexy enough... am I not hairless enough... are my tits not perky enough...why. am. i. not. enough.

And the hiding makes me feel really uneasy / distrusting. it's hard not to create stories about what else he might be hiding.

All of this back story to ask - What would you do if you were in my shoes?

Honestly? I don't really care that my husband looks at porn. He has little interest in learning to use his email so I doubt he would subscribe to OnlyFans, but may I take my honesty further? I ALSO like porn. The only reason I don't subscribe to my favorite channels is because I have a very limited budget and spend my selfish money on sewing supplies and those stupidly expensive high-waist Arq undies. I settle for watching the three-minute freebie shows produced by Yanks on Redtube or, in my more shining moments, replaying soft-core scenes from a roster of sexy movies: a brush of the hand between Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth in the Kiera Knightly version of Pride and Prejudice; the sexy scene on the stairs between the Duke and Duchess in Bridgerton; most of Love Jones and Blue is the Warmest Color. In other news, I also like to read sex, anything from Tom Robbins to Eloisa James suits me fine.

Which is to say, we get to engage with sex entertainment on our own terms, and we are not obligated to explain our motives or our desires to anyone, even our monogamous partners. Most people I know who admit to porn use prefer to observe sex entertainment alone and in private. Even though my partner and I are aware of each other's porn use, we rarely watch together and don't implore the other to divulge us in all the details. Perhaps your husband doesn't tell you about his interest in porn because it's totally normal and perfectly acceptable to keep

porn use private. In fact, I believe it to be perfectly acceptable and totally normal to keep other facets of our sexuality a secret, if it suits us. Our fantasies belong to us alone, and we ought to share them or not on our own terms.

From your question it is hard for me to tease out just HOW your husband's porn use is unhealthy or untrustworthy, i.e pursuing personal relationships with performers, spending more than his allotted fun money, is unable to orgasm without porn; or whether you simply have a personal problem with your partner using porn. I also wonder whether your sex life is dull because of porn use, or if he is using porn to cope with unfulfilling sex.

Either way, anytime a marriage is in the trenches (barring, of course, when the trench is caused by abuse) it takes the cooperation of BOTH partners to lift each other out and onto high ground. Disregarding your conclusion that his porn use is a problem, is your husband able to admit that your marriage has hit a rough patch? Get to the root of why you do not trust him or why you aren't having sex. Can you have a civil conversation about it? Marriage is a relentless project of unfolding our vulnerabilities to our partner(s) while simultaneously protecting our right to individuality. For some folks, sex is a playground and learning arena for testing vulnerability and self-knowledge. For others sex is too vulnerable an activity to be a learning lab.

In your situation, it may be beneficial to focus on repairing a connection between you separate from and regardless of the problems you face as a couple. It is almost impossible to open up to someone we don't trust, and similarly difficult to tell the truth to someone who distrusts us. Find a way to genuinely, if only momentarily, reconnect and perhaps generate some warmth to radiate to the dark corners of the room you find yourselves trapped in. Like lateral creativity, let us imagine a kind of lateral eroticism, where you and your partner can practice connection and physical play without the pressure or discomfort of focusing on your bedroom troubles with a laser eye. Could you try a new sport or movement class together, go on runs, take on a house project? Even working on a puzzle after the kids go to bed could work. Aim for close proximity, teamwork, negotiation and enough distraction that you don't have to talk about what you need to talk about, for now. The goal is to soften and re-connect, to practice vulnerability and loyalty to self.

When you do find yourself in the bedroom again, you may feel self-conscious about your body or obligated to perform. There is no easy path around the barriers built up in times of sexual dissonance. If you want to have a good-enough sex life, you must loosen yourself from the grips of shame, and come willing to be seen, heard, touched, sniffed – able to receive and offer love. Good sex is not a performance, good sex is an event! Go to the fucksphere as yourself: stretched out, fuzzy and dangling; nervous maybe, but willing to try. Do it for you. I cannot predict if your husband will be prepared to fuck you proper or too scared to try; I do not know if porn is a problem for him or if he's simply lost on the internet. Even if he disappoints, or you disappoint yourself, know this: your body is a beautiful, fuckable creation of this earth and you are both fools to miss it. Do not miss it.