

“The Destructive Power of Pornography”

**by
Victor L. Cline**

**LDS Business College Forum
February 7, 2007**

I'd like to say it's a real pleasure being here. It was mentioned that we had nine kids in our home, and most of them are gone now. As I was thinking about it, most of you are going to have that experience of marrying and having families. We had the great fortune and opportunity to have twin boys—identical twins. That was a great experience, growing up with them. In fact, when one of them was about six years old, he came to me and he said, “Dad, I want to ask you a question.”

I try to be a dad that's there for my kids, so I said, “Well, gee, what is it, Rick? What would you like to know?”

He said, “Dad, what's the difference between an elephant and a mailbox?”

And I was really taken aback by this, and I thought and thought about it, and I said, “Well frankly, Rick, I don't know.”

And he said, “Dad, I'll never give you a letter to mail.” It was fun growing up with kids like that, that are at times interesting and challenging.

The issue of pornography is a tender one. It's one that sometimes I hesitate to really talk about, but it's a problem that some people—good people, wonderful people in our society—have come up against and have to deal with. What I'd like to do is share with you now some of the things that I've learned in 25 years of working with people who have dependencies in this area.

Just a few weeks ago, I got a letter, and I'm going to read it to you. The name is Michael, who wrote the letter, but that's not his real name. He said, “My name is Michael. I'm a student at Brigham Young University, and I'm planning on getting married this summer. I'm a recovering sex addict, and I'm looking for additional resources to help me with some of the problems I still face.

“I've had a long history with pornography. I first started when I was in fifth grade, with another boy on the street. It wasn't long before I found myself searching out material on my own. My next exposure was in high school, and shortly thereafter I became involved with pornography on the internet. I accessed everything that could

possibly be accessed, and in that time period I developed some very abnormal desires, and struggled with other things as well.

“I’m trying my hardest to be whole again. I relapsed recently. It was the first time in six months that I gave in to the ‘wave.’ [That’s the wave of temptation.] I feel that now I’ve struggled with anxiety, depression, attention-deficit and many other effects of sexual addiction. I struggle with my relationship with my Father in Heaven. I think now I need to learn how to deal with these problems.

“I love my fiancée to death. She knows of my struggles and is very supportive of me. I just don’t want to create hardships for her. She knows of my relapse, and it crushed her, which was very unpleasant for both of us. I am genuinely looking for answers and help to completely overcome the problems that I struggle with. Do you know of anyone I could talk to, or things that might be of help for me? I would be appreciative of that help.”

And needless to say, I did contact him and I gave him a number of suggestions. I might say that, at the very end of my presentation today, we will give you a fact sheet that summarizes all of what I’m saying, and also information on things you can do that will bless your life, help you heal, if you or someone you know of or whoever stands in need of this kind of information.

I’ve been working in this area about 25 years, and have seen approximately 400 male clients. What I’ve found is that four things happen to them when they get involved with this. The first thing is addiction. They get addicted to it and they can’t get out.

It reminds me of when I was in the fifth grade in Los Angeles, where I was raised. One day a bus came up in front of the school and we all got on it, and we went out to West Los Angeles to the La Brea tar pits. Now, these tar pits were about a thousand feet deep, and in historic times, dinosaurs and other giant monsters would go there to water. What they didn’t realize was that the water was about one or two inches deep, and the tar went down about a thousand feet. So what they would do, with their big ponderous feet, is they would step out into it to get a drink, in that sticky tar. It would capture them, and then, trying to pull that foot out, they would put another one in there. And what happened was that they were swallowed up by this, and many, many animals were trapped there. It wasn’t until many hundreds, thousands of years later that scientists uncovered these bones and put them together and were able to estimate what they looked like as living creatures. They got caught in this and they couldn’t get out. And this is a little bit like what happens to the people I work with who get addicted to pornography.

I remember one day a wonderful guy came in—married, three children. And he said, “I’ve got a problem with pornography, and my wife says she can’t stay with me unless I get a hold of it, unless I get out of it.”

I said, “Well, would your wife be willing to engage in treatment along with yourself, so that she can see what you’re doing and be reassured that progress is being made, and that sort of thing?”

They both agreed, and so I taught them a lot of things about disengaging and getting out of the tar pit, and getting rid of the addiction. I said one day, “I want something that’s really going to be powerful.” So I said, “Zach, would you write me out a check for a thousand dollars?”

He said, “I don’t understand.”

I said, “What I want to do is take that check, put it in a special bank account, and if you can go 90 days and not get into any pornography at all, be 100% sober for 90 days, you get your money back. But if you relapse, even once, the money goes to charity. It won’t go to myself.” I didn’t want to profit, in a sense, by his illness that way. “But it will go to charity.”

Then he had a big grin on his face. He said, “Dr. Cline, you’re a genius! How did you know I was really tight with money?” He said, “I am so tight with money that, let me tell you, that’s the perfect incentive for me.” And so he wrote me out a check for a thousand dollars, and the next day I put it in a special bank account. Then we proceeded to meet every week or two, and guess what? He stopped looking at the stuff. He got out of it.

On the 87th day, he was in Phoenix, Arizona, which is a wide-open town as far as pornography goes, and he was in a rental car. He was driving down a boulevard and he saw this big establishment, an adult book store. He pushed on the brakes, pulled over to the curb and went in and for 90 minutes he went crazy. He did everything wrong, everything bad, everything he shouldn’t do.

When I saw him the next Tuesday night, he came in and he had a sad look on his face. He said, “Dr. Cline, I lost my thousand dollars. I relapsed.”

I said, “You went 87 days, and only had three more days to go and you went back into it?”

He said, “Yes.”

I said, “You know what? If you can go 87 days, I know you can go 90. What I’m going to do is I’m going to erase that from my memory. I didn’t hear a thing you said. We’re going to start over again.”

His wife had a big grin on her face, and she said, “At least we’re not going to lose that thousand dollars.”

So anyway, once again we started. And eight days later, he relapsed again, and the money went to charity. And then in a later meeting as we talked about it, I said, “Gee, it didn’t work—it wasn’t an incentive at all?”

He said, “Dr. Cline, I could have given you a check for \$10,000 and you know what? I would have still lost it. You don’t know the power of the addiction.” Once you’re addicted to that kind of stuff, to get hooked by it, you lose control. And so he went back to it.

So you know what? I never did that again. I never had people give me a check, or money as an incentive, because it just doesn’t work. There are other things that do work, but that doesn’t. So addiction is the first of the four things that we’re talking about that happens, and it is powerful.

The second thing is desensitization. After a while, the material you look at, instead of searing conscience and being distressing to look at or think about, you get desensitized to it. Pretty soon, it’s “old hat”. It doesn’t bother you. You’re not turned off by it. In fact, you enjoy, you lust after it. Desensitization is something that always happens in time, as you continue to immerse yourself in it.

The third thing that happens is “escalation”. This happens with every one of my 400 people that I work with. That is, you escalate to rougher material to get your turn on, to get your kicks, to get your arousal. You always go something more deviant, more abhorrent, more inappropriate. It’s always escalation.

And then the fourth thing that happens, and always happens to everybody, is you begin to act out. That is, you begin to act out the fantasies that are in your head or in your brain. And this creates a real problem.

It reminded me of a colleague I met at a professional meeting a few months ago who works out on the west coast and told me of a minister he was treating who was a sexual addict. He said this minister had maxed out all of his credit cards to access pornography, plus he stole \$7,000 from the congregation of the church that he was ministering to. But the members of the congregation had great compassion and concern for him when they saw how ill and sick he was, that he’d lost control, and urged him to get treatment.

You always lose free agency, and you lose the power to decide and to make choices in this area. They got him into treatment to help him with this addiction problem. But that gives you a sense of what happens with acting out. And of course, there are all other kinds of ways you can do it, which I’m not going to mention now.

I’d just like to mention a little bit about some of the research. A man by the name of Stanley Rachman in London did some research on this. Using pornography as a learning tool, what he did was actually condition people into deviancy using it. In other words, he proved for the first time that pornography as a conditioning device, in a sense it can hook

you. That is, you learn to be turned on by it and come to be dependent upon it and seek it out in a compulsive, addictive way.

And then there's a man by the name of James McGaugh at the University of California, Irvine, and what he found was that when you're aroused by any kind of very strong emotion, a very powerful chemical, epinephrine, is released in the system, the brain. And this epinephrine goes to areas of the brain having to do with memory. What it does is it locks those things in the mind. If it's pornography, it locks in the image. And so what happens after a while is when a guy gets into this, he creates an X-rated library in his brain, in the frontal lobes having to do with memory. And so, with that epinephrine working, after a while he doesn't even have to go to the internet. He has these very powerful memories that are stored there. This is what makes it so rough and so difficult to get out of, because you have those things that come back to be inflicted upon your consciousness.

I remember the deputy mayor of Los Angeles—I won't mention his name—it was in the newspapers, but no need to do that. He was a porn addict, and he went to a West Los Angeles porno theater, and when he was in there he got turned on by the film that was being shown and—this is a deputy mayor of the city of Los Angeles—he attempted to molest another patron that was there. It happened that the person he attempted to molest was a vice squad officer, so they slapped the handcuffs on him, booked him in the county jail, and he was brought to trial and he left in disgrace. It was a very, very sad thing. So even though he was very prominent in the community, the power of the addiction, in a sense, overruled his judgment and behavior.

Males especially, any age, are vulnerable to becoming addicted to it. For the most part, women tend to hate it because of its hostility to and degradation of their gender. Women's vulnerability is to chat rooms, where they sometimes hook up with very unsavory predators—total strangers who grossly misrepresent themselves. Women, we find, a lot of times have trouble with the chat rooms, getting involved with and then later talking on the phone with, and then later meeting at a hotel with these kinds of people. And some have had some very bad experiences when this occurs.

I find that ages 9 to 14 are the most common time for boys, for their first exposure, with the parents never having a clue. After that, it gradually increases in frequency and exposure, with accompanying masturbation leading to a mild and later major addiction. And the internet, now, is where most of the damage eventually occurs. This addiction may remain undiscovered by parents until a few years into their marriage, when the wife accidentally finds it on their family computer.

There's usually a buddy or a boyfriend who exposes the porn to your son, and neither is aware of its harmful consequences. They're just curious. These are good kids, like most of the kids that I see. These are not evil people, or anything like that at all. They're good people, but they do have a natural curiosity about these matters. Both are initially innocent victims. This means that parents need to teach them about the dangers of exposure to this material, and it means they need to put filters on the internet and block

out inappropriate TV channels, and monitor what their male children especially are up to and into. What this means is that parents should be talking to their children about these kinds of things, and protecting them.

Thus I find is that pornography is toxic. Its compulsive use makes you ill. Like a cancer, it wounds you more and more as time goes by. It's extremely tenacious. It always hurts and disturbs the marriage and family relationship. In time, the addict gets out of touch with reality, thinking becomes disturbed and distorted. They may lose their job. There's risk, as they get older, of acquiring sexual illnesses. Shame and depression become increasingly common. Lying about it and denying involvement is near universal.

I had one man I worked with who was a major executive in a large corporation. The corporation had a policy that if anybody that worked for them was using company computers to access this, they would be fired. So here he was, one of the major leaders of the corporation, and they had to let him go. They had to fire him. And he knew that the company had a policy of checking the computers of employees. He was aware of this, and yet he still went back and used his computer to access this material. Even being aware of this—and he is a very smart man—he still did it. And eventually, it had tragic consequences.

With porn addiction, you never mature out of it. Some people say, “Well, after a while you just get tired of it, and it no longer is a problem.” That's not true. You never mature out of it. It only gets worse with age. You cannot, I find, overcome it by yourself. Self-control, self-discipline and promises don't work. You need outside help to break the power of addiction, using a trained counselor and a support group. You can recover, but it will take time and requires a lot of work and effort.

What I'd like to do now is talk a little bit about treatment. I think we've all heard many talks by the prophet and by many people, religious leaders and others, about the risks and harm involved. But what do you do about it? On this paper, this fact sheet that we're going to hand out to you before I conclude, there will be a lot of information on that about things that people can do that will help them.

Now, in my experience, sex and porn addictions require therapists with special training if their patients are to have a good chance of recovery. These illnesses are very difficult to treat. Relapse is the norm. And there are no training programs in medical schools, graduate schools in psychology and social work, to deal with this kind of an addictive problem. They teach all kinds of other things, but none that I know of teach this. And while this will undoubtedly change in the next few years, anyone now seeking professional help will need to check very carefully the background experience of any therapist they might choose to have treat them. If you're looking for a sex addiction or porn addiction therapist, in many of the mental health healing disciplines who have training in this area a good track record in treating this problem and personal values that are congruent with the patient's values are really important. In fact, I hate to say this, but my experience—some therapists are addicts themselves—and that is, the healers, some of them, have serious problems in this area.

I remember a few years ago, I went to a seminar in Florida—this was for psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers—on treatment programs for helping people with this kind of disorder. Patrick Carnes, probably the most famous researcher in the field, was giving a seminar and, at the end of the first day he said, “You know, whenever I give this to professionals, I find there are a lot of them that are faced with the same problem. They’re addicted to this.” So he said, “Tonight at six o’clock in room such and such, those of you that would like, we will have a 12-step healing program.” I was sort of shocked. I hadn’t realized that this was a problem, even with some of my colleagues.

In addition to having a competent, qualified addiction therapist, the patient will also need to attend, 90% of the time, for two years or longer, weekly meetings of Sexaholics Anonymous or other 12-step support or therapy groups. These groups, mostly free, meet in nearly every fair or larger size city in America. Their addresses and location can be found in the business pages of the phone book, or by contacting a sister organization, Alcoholics Anonymous. They’ll always be able to direct you there.

The LDS Church has their LDS Family Services. They’ve organized a program throughout the world for these kinds of programs for people who are LDS. And they’re wonderful programs, they’re good programs and they work. They’re powerful. The core of it is a spiritual and religious factor which, at least in my experience, I have found to be very helpful. Through the power of the Atonement, healings can occur and people get their miracles and can be assisted and supported by attendance at these kinds of meetings. So while you go to these meetings, if you want to find a good therapist, you can ask the guys there. That is, “Who are you seeing that is really helpful, that is really making a difference in your problem?” And get a kind of consumer’s report. The people that really know are the people who are attending these meetings. They can give you some clues and some ideas as to who might be really helpful to talk to, and might be competent and helpful.

In my experience of 25 years in treating about 400 of these cases, I find that, if they’re married, nearly universally their wives are traumatized by the husband’s lies and deceptions and out-of-bounds behavior. The wives need treatment too, because they’ve been traumatized. If the wife decides to stay in the marriage for a while longer, I engage her in joint treatment with her husband. I have found that if I successfully heal the husband of these addictions, but have an angry, hostile, wounded wife who can never trust or forgive her husband even though she remains in the marriage, it greatly increases the risk of relapse in the husband as he attempts unsuccessfully to placate and deal with major marital turmoil. So I find that you need to heal the wife too. You need to help her. And she needs to see and have strong evidence of change and healing in her husband for that relationship to prosper and heal.

Staying in this support program for several years greatly increases the chances of successful outcome. And again, it’s free. It doesn’t cost anything. Self-control or just good self-discipline usually just doesn’t work by itself. You need that outside assistance.

It's kind of like being sucked under with quicksand. You need to have somebody there who reaches out to you and gives you support and helps you with the recovery process, the road to recovery. Those are some of the things that you need to do.

Also, you need to make sure your environment is safe. That is, I always check their computers and access to them and internet access. You have to have filters that are effective. Most filters are not very good, but there are some that are very effective, and I mentioned some in this fact sheet that you'll get in a little bit. So the temptation isn't there available nearby. You need to be sure that your environment is safe, that you're living in an area where it's not easily available to access. Sometimes addicts will get up in the middle of the night and go to the family computer. And if it doesn't have a good filter on it, sometimes they will relapse doing bad things.

Our time is almost up. I thought that maybe what I would do is for a few minutes is answer a few questions

Q: How long should a wife put up with it? Should she stay around or should she just say I'm out of here?

A: No, the wife can do a lot of things that can be helpful. This doesn't mean that she tolerates continual relapse. She also has to know that the husband can heal, even though this is a very tough, difficult problem to treat. But he has to get help.

I would say that most of the people that I see, if they'll stay with the therapeutic program, reach the point where they're not relapsing. But what happens sometimes is that a person will see me, where I do charge, for a few times, and they're not relapsing. They have three months of sobriety and they say, "Well, why should I waste money on seeing a therapist?" And so what they do is they stop that. They really get out of the program, and guess what happens? A few weeks later, a few months later, they relapse again. So they've got to stick with the program, say, at least two years.

Q: What do you do to protect your own family from this?

A: I have nine kids and 31 grandchildren, and some of them are at the age where they're vulnerable, and so I ask myself the same question: What can I do to protect these, especially the grandchildren? So what I did was I prepared a little talk called "The Crocodiles in the Swamp." I got a huge picture of a crocodile, the most vicious, awful-looking picture that you could see—very revolting to look at, this monster with his mouth open—and I say, "You know, this can weigh up to a ton and a half. In fact, our Corolla weighs only a ton. This is even more than what our car weighs. They can move up to 20 miles an hour, and outrun you. Their mode of attack is always ambush. They hit you from behind when you least expect it. This is exactly like this addiction. It comes to almost everybody unexpectedly." They never dream that it's going to happen to them. And so I give them the talk about the crocodile, and I get their attention with that. And then I associate it with not only the addiction to pornography, but also major drugs, and other things that could be destructive to them.

What you have to do is you have to teach them. Then you need to have frequent interviews with the kids where you talk about it, and you say, “What about in your school? Does this come up? Do you know any kids that have problems in this area?” And so the kids are taught. Then you even may have role playing. “What if a buddy gives you this? What do you do?”

And the kid will say, “I don’t know. I guess ‘No.’”

And I say, “Well, I’m going to be that buddy.” And so I’ll role play with them. And so I teach them how to say No to these kinds of temptations. But the parents have to take an active role. In my experience, most parents are clueless. They don’t even know that their kids are addicted, or they’re into it. So the parents can do an awful lot of things that will be helpful in protecting children.

Q: What are the signs that someone is addicted?

A: The only signs that I find is that the mother will find it on the computer at home. All of a sudden, you have pornographic imagery that’s showing up and she’s wondering, “Where in the world is that coming from?” But as far as behavioral signs, there’s really nothing there that will clue you in. But they’ll leave tracks on the computer.

Q: Is anything being done to address this problem?

A: That will take a little while to explain, but when I first got into this and I started speaking up publicly about it and the dangers and risks, and what I was seeing happen, and the divorces and all the bad stuff, a lot of my colleagues, who have very different values than I do, denied it. They said, “There is no such thing.” I testified before a Presidential Commission on the evidence of harm. For a long time there was a big controversy over whether pornography caused any harm. Now you don’t hear much, because pretty much it’s accepted that there can be a lot of harm.

But the main thing I want to share with you is there’s hope. You can get out of it. It’s not easy. The people I work with are some of the best people I’ve ever known—wonderful people, high in morals, and good. But they can still get caught up in it. Usually it’s accidentally.

Let me tell you it’s been a privilege to be here today and I just wish you Godspeed and if your friends or anybody needs help here, these [fact sheets] will help. Thank you very much.