

Exponent II

Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?



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The purpose of *Exponent II* is to provide a forum for Mormon women to share their life experiences in an atmosphere of trust and acceptance. This exchange allows us to better understand each other and shape the direction of our lives. Our common bond is our connection to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and our commitment to women. We publish this paper as a living history in celebration of the strength and diversity of women.

Silent Suffering

by Heather Sundahl

The first time I heard pornography addressed from the pulpit was twenty years ago at BYU. I don't remember much about the talk, but I remember my reaction: a big fat "Ew." I, and everyone around me, kept shifting in our seats. Those of us who were ignorant of pornography's allure squirmed because it made no sense that anyone would *choose* to seek out such images. Those of us who were ensnared by it squirmed, sure that everyone could read our shame. Two decades later, the reaction to talk of pornography addiction elicits much the same response from those in the pews. But it's changed for me as I have come to realize how common and wide reaching this addiction is.

One summer a few years back, I was visiting a dear friend of mine, Michelle. I knew something was up. I knew it had to do with Rob, her husband, and I knew it was bad. Honestly, I thought he was cheating on her. When she finally told me he had an Internet porn addiction, I felt so relieved and so determined not to be a judgmental Molly. So I tried to "normalize" it. I'm sure I said something stupid like, "There are worse things than looking at dirty pictures." But as I listened to her, it became clear that looking at pornography was much different than being *addicted* to pornography. It's the difference between someone who has a glass of wine on occasion and someone who is an alcoholic. Pornography ran Rob's

life; when he gave into the urges, he shut off emotionally from the family and lashed out at Michelle and the kids. How to be alone with the computer drove his daily decisions. When he was "good," he either spent his energy trying to outrun his addiction—being the *best* home teacher, attending extra temple sessions, reading scriptures—which also made him distant, or he refused to acknowledge that the demon might return, belittling Michelle's worries and how the issue took a sledgehammer to her self-esteem.

Over the next few years, the Church and I both seem to have learned from others and have a much deeper understanding of how pornography is a drug to its users. As more friends came forward and shared with me their families' battle with pornography, I e-mailed Michelle, got a list of resources (Michelle and Rob were in counseling at this point, doing wonderfully), and passed those on. Even so, I honestly had a hard time believing how prevalent it was and how no one is above it. At that point, when someone in our ward or stake would address pornography, I'd look around stealthily, wondering which seemingly perfect families were caught in its grasp—knowing that no one was immune and yet knowing that the stigma against it was so overpowering that very few people had the courage to get the help they needed. Sometimes I think it would be more socially acceptable to be a

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Journey to Hope and Healing

It's hard to imagine a time when pornography had no impact on my life. I had only been married a few years and had had my first child when I first discovered my husband looking at porn. I was devastated to say the least. We marched into the bishop's office the next day, which was also our first Sunday in a new ward. The bishop gave my husband and me some advice about reading our scriptures and praying and suggested a book about breaking cycles of compulsive behavior. He was very loving and supportive, and my husband was genuinely very sorry for his behavior. He read *The Miracle of Forgiveness*. We went on weekly dates. I prayed to forgive him and to forget the way the whole thing had made me feel. We worked on our relationship, and things were much better. I checked in with him monthly for a while, and we would talk about how things were going. After almost a year of checking and praying, we both felt like the weight of the problem had been lifted, and I was able to forgive him completely and stop thinking about it. We had good times and stressful times, but pornography never crossed my mind again after that.

Until three years later. I was trying to find a previous web page on my husband's laptop and hit the back arrow one time too many. Suddenly I was wading through porn—page after page of shocking images that I should have never seen, but I couldn't seem to stop until I had hit the back arrow all the way

through. I was trembling and sick to my stomach. So he went back to the bishop, reread *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, cried, and apologized. A few months later, we were on the road to healing, and my husband was staying close to the Lord by serving in a leadership calling, reading scriptures, praying, working in the temple, and being an extra helpful man around the house.

At this point, I began *my* journey into books and information. I found a friend who seemed to speak in code about her life experiences. Suddenly I understood what she was talking about, and I was able to speak with her about her husband's journey through his addiction. After a long and deceptive road, he was seeing a counselor who specialized in sexual addictions and was treating him with both medication and counseling. Her husband was now in a good space, and she offered to have him speak to my husband if my husband wanted him to. Of course my husband did not want to talk to him.

That year I also attended Women's Conference and sat through the lecture on pornography as well as a class on addictions. From these classes I learned that four things were mandatory to dealing with a pornography problem: first, the Lord; second, a loving priesthood leader; third, a professional counselor; and fourth, a support person or persons (preferably other than the spouse)

to check in with regularly. My husband had the first two, but it would take years and several regressions before all four were in place and the real healing could begin.

A couple of years after that, I discovered the problem had recurred without my husband's bringing it up to me. He needed help but he still refused to see a counselor. In desperation, I called his dad and said that he needed to talk to his son, that the problem was serious, and that he needed to call and keep talking until his son was able to disclose what needed to be said. They talked for hours. Unfortunately, his dad warned him of the dangers of therapy, especially group therapy, and instead suggested that they could work through it together. My father-in-law conceded that therapy was sometimes effective but finding just the right therapist for an issue like this would be very difficult. I sometimes wonder how much suffering we both would have been spared if we'd sought professional help at that point.

The two of them then began a reading program. They read and discussed every article with the word "pornography" in it from the gospel library on *lds.org*. My husband wanted to talk to me about them and would leave them out for me to read, but I just couldn't read them at that point. I really had nothing left to say or feel.

I was so angry at myself for staying in my marriage—which was otherwise a pretty good one. It is hard for me to compartmentalize my life, so this issue isolated me from my closest girlfriends since I was reluctant

to share this problem with them. Even though it was tearing me apart, the problem involved my husband's privacy, and I helped guard it. My husband suggested I tell my closest friend, my family—whomever I needed to. He knew that I had not talked about it out of loyalty to him and he knew that I was isolated by the secrecy of it all. To be truthful, I didn't want people to judge him or me—him for being the loser I sort of thought he was, and me for being the bigger loser who kept staying married and having kids with him over the years. I could just picture some airheaded Barbie doll saying, "But he said he was sorry and that he wouldn't do it again. . . ." I finally called and talked to a close friend. She was a great listener, and a small piece of my load felt lifted.

By now I knew a *lot* on the subject, and I wasn't trying to fool myself into thinking the problem ever really had or would disappear completely. I began using the terms associated with addiction with my husband and his father, and I believed that the win was if my husband would be able to tell me when he started to have trouble so that the secrecy and shame part could fade. I ordered more books, LDS and otherwise, online. I knew that a therapist was needed to help him dive in and address the underlying problems.

I told my husband that what I required to stay in our marriage was disclosure. I knew there would be times when things were harder than others or when he "slipped up"

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Journey to Hope and Healing

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or whatever, but I wanted him to come to me and tell me. I told him that I would not threaten to leave or scream in these cases and that we would keep addressing the problems together, but he had to be the one to bring the problems up with me and not force me to be the porn police. And I would stop saying things like, “Even if you don’t immediately lose this family, you will in the long run, buddy. Even if you trick us, the Lord knows, and you will lose your soul and basically rot in hell” type of lecture.

He spent the year reading and humbling himself. He was even able to call me from a business trip one time and tell me that he had “turned on the TV and watched something inappropriate” the night before. I only flipped out internally, and we had a calm but frank discussion that I hoped would send the message that it was the right thing to do to tell me but that I was never going to treat the behavior like it didn’t matter.

Seven months later, my husband was out working with some youth from our ward on a project, and I decided to check his computer. We had had a rocky few months but things had definitely improved over the past month, and I was even feeling safe enough that we were enjoying a healthy sex life together, something that definitely was not always the case. So I’m not sure why I checked except that I obviously did *not* completely trust him. I found porn. I had drawn a line regarding disclosure, and he had crossed it. I had even asked how he was

doing the week before. The lying was the final blow.

When my husband got home that night, I told him that I needed him to leave. Now, I had screamed this at him before. I had threatened, packed my own bags, what-



ever, but this was different. I felt calm and assured that I was doing the right thing. I told him how sorry I felt for him and that we loved him so much. I explained that I had to do what was right for the sake of my children as well as myself. I had asked for disclosure and he couldn’t do it. I hadn’t asked that he be magically unaddicted but that he be honest. I told him that he needed to figure out where to go, and I suggested that he call in friends and others who loved him to help him through.

He went to a Motel 6. He called a close friend and asked for a blessing. He called

an addiction treatment center and made an appointment with a counselor. He saw the counselor. I put together the last touches for Christmas by myself and told the kids that their dad had to go out of town at the last minute. Several days and several conversations later, he came home “ready to be a part of our family” in a new way.

From there, we have experienced and are experiencing true healing—a slow and ongoing process. I realized that I needed help, too. I went to a support group for wives of men with pornography problems. I learned, grieved, cried, and healed with brave women whose stories were all difficult at best and who would all need to have different outcomes. I went with my husband for couples’ therapy. I expressed the pain of repeated betrayal and my anger at his dishonesty. I expressed the irony that I probably thought about porn more than my spouse did because I felt I had to watch for it and worry about it all the time. So, even when he wasn’t thinking about it at all, I still was. I had to forgive him for that as well.

My husband and I work through hard times even still. I don’t bring home *In Style* magazine, but I also don’t feel angry about it like I needed to feel at one point. We talk openly about when we are or are not feeling connected in our relationship. We struggle occasionally and behind certain arguments part of me wonders, “Now is he going to go start having porn problems again?” I am given reassurances that he is doing well. My husband is working to earn my trust by talking to me about how things are going without

my asking. We have hard conversations. I am sometimes a bit withdrawn emotionally and physically even though we are going on several years of a fairly healthy relationship. This withdrawal is not manipulative but just a natural reaction. We both understand why things are as they are, and we both are working to try to improve things. We love each other and our family very much, and we are determined to raise our children with strong understandings of the importance of allowing yourself to feel things fully, to be connected to one another, and to live healthy lives. I want my kids to be able to not just filter out and avoid pornography (although I definitely want them to try), but to eventually be able to confront and respond to porn when it is encountered in a way that leaves no door open to invite addiction.

Porn is everywhere. You cannot live in a porn-free world, but fear and suspicion do not have to rule your life. I once thought those two demons would be my constant companions, holding my happiness hostage. For many years they were. But I know better now. My husband and I have worked together—with the Lord, with priesthood leaders, and with a professional counselor—to deal with vulnerabilities to pornography. While this struggle is a part of our lives, it does not define our lives or our relationship. It is possible to reclaim a healthy, hopeful life. I know because I am doing it. ❖ (TOC)

Porn Addict: Am I That Guy?

I was terrified to walk into the addiction center for the first time. I parked in the back, looked around before I got out of the car to see if anyone I knew was there, and then quickly went inside the building, where I hoped I could be just another patient in the waiting room. It was hard to blend in, though, with my mostly younger, mostly more rebellious, mostly court-ordered fellow waiting-room addicts.

I was thirty-five. I was an elder. I had four kids. I was married in the temple and active in church. And I had seen multiple bishops about my problem with pornography, none of whom had suggested that therapy was a necessary part of the solution. But my wife had more than suggested it; she had insisted on it. And to save my marriage, I had forced myself to come to this center.

The first few visits with the therapist were both embarrassing and encouraging. They were embarrassing because I fit the profile exactly of the average person he sees for pornography addiction:

- 34–38 years old — check
- first exposure at 9–12 — check
- married with kids — check
- professionally successful — check
- actively involved in pornography since a teen — check
- takes 2+ years to overcome with therapy — ?

- usually more than one relapse along the way — ?

Oh, my gosh! So I'm exactly like other people who also struggle with this? And I didn't know that? And I could have come in earlier? And there is hope? And I have a long, hard road ahead of me, but it's been done before? It was embarrassing that I was such a sheep but encouraging that someone might understand and be able to help me.

Because my therapist was LDS, he also addressed the issue of what bishops do and do not know about addictions and what role bishops can play alongside the therapist. He acknowledged that most bishops are still learning about how to help their ward members with addictions.

Then he proceeded to scare me. He told me that a lewd act in the presence of a minor is an imprisonable offense and that if one of my kids walked in on me while I was masturbating to pornography, my wife could call the police. One of his clients was dealing with this situation right now — sitting in jail, estranged from his

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kids. Oh, yuck! Did he say “masturbating to pornography?” How disgusting and debasing and weak—is that me? Does that describe me? That guy probably *should* be in jail. Wait—does that mean *I* should be in jail?

The therapist told me about clients who install software to monitor and control access and wives who patrol. He told me about clients who remove their computers or their modems or their high-speed Internet connections. Then he told me that none of these methods work. Pornography addicts are smart and clever. They know how to hook their computers back up, erase their tracks, use alternate connections. In short, people can get around any obstacles with their computers, and someone addicted to pornography will do exactly that, employing painstaking measures to hide the problem. This rang true. And addicts always get caught, no matter how careful they are. Unfortunately, this rang true also. And they generally believe that if they are just more careful from now on, they will not get caught again. True again. But they do. Ugh! I wish this guy didn’t know me so well. I’m disgusted with myself. How pitiful.

“Why do you do it?” the therapist asked.

“For the orgasm.”

“Nope.”

Silence.

He asked me a series of questions about

my habit to see if I was into violence or homosexual pornography or young kids. I assume he was profiling me further so he would know how to help me.

He told me about a young lady who came in to see him with her fiancé. Her fiancé was addicted to pornography, including violent pornography. They wanted the therapist to help him recover so that she could marry him and they could be happy.

“Run!” I couldn’t help thinking. “He will never fix it. It will never be good. You can still escape. Pornography will rule your life. There are hundreds of other guys. Run for your life! You will be miserable!” But wait a minute—I was addicted to masturbation when I got married. I had “kicked it” long enough to feel good about being married in the temple, but I hadn’t really. Is this the advice I would have given my wife—to run and not marry me? Probably so. Pathetic.

Okay, so in one thirty-minute chat, my therapist had done more to connect with my real disease than all the visits to all the bishops combined. The bishops were compassionate, spiritual, and encouraging, but they didn’t understand that I was dealing with an addiction. They didn’t understand that my very sincere insistence that I would “Try not to do this any more” was not going to work. Repentance through prayer alone was not going to work. I had needed professional help all along, but the bishops didn’t know how to spot that. (I think that is changing as bishops get more training.)

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I Will Not Be Afraid of Women

For most of my adult life, I have had two fantasies. One is to stand up in front of adoring fans and sing folk songs while I play the guitar. Of course, this would require possessing a God-given talent that I don't have. The song I would sing would be by Dar Williams, titled "As Cool As I Am." It goes something like this:

*Yea, there was a time I didn't like the love, I liked the climbers,
I was no sister then, I was running out of time and one liners,
And I was afraid, like you are when you're too young to know the time, and
So I watched the way you take your fear and hoard the horizon,
You point, you have a word for every woman you can lay your eyes on,
Like you own them just because you bought the time,
And you turn to me, you say you hope I'm not threatened,
Oh – I'm not that petty, as cool as I am, I thought you'd know this already,
I will not be afraid of women, I will not be afraid of women.*

I would scream "I WILL NOT BE AFRAID OF WOMEN" really loud, and everyone would love it!

My other fantasy is a little more outrageous but since I'm confessing, I'll share. I want to stand up in Fast and Testimony meeting and

reveal that my husband is a porn addict. You may think that this is a completely inappropriate venue for this sort of revelation, but I think it would be perfect. Everyone at church thinks my husband is perfect. Moreover, I know of other men in our ward struggling with this addiction, and everyone thinks they are perfect, too. No one knows. Pornography is an addiction that is all the more attractive because it can be easily hidden. It can be a secret.

My husband has some extremely fine qualities, but I would just like to be able to be real about our struggles and the way in which this addiction has contributed to them. I would also like the chance to share some of the spiritual gifts that have come to me because of my husband's addiction and to share the ways that I have grown because of it. I feel that doing this would give everyone a clearer insight into my life and perhaps bring an intimacy with ward members – and particularly with other women – that I have hungered for. I want the kind of intimacy that encourages other women to come to me and share their stories openly and honestly in ways that would help us to support one another. It has seemed to me that when I

I want to stand up in Fast and Testimony meeting and reveal that my husband is a porn addict.

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I want the kind of intimacy that encourages other women to share their stories openly in ways that would help us to support one another.

am honest in my church interactions, many other women who feel the same way or who have experienced similar challenges are more able to share.

I have yet to have the opportunity to

sing to a crowd of adoring fans and on several occasions have decided not to share my story in Fast and Testimony meeting because it is my husband's story as well. However, in September I was able to share my story with a group of women in a way that has changed me forever and has confirmed to me that sharing my story will continue to offer healing and empowerment.

My dear friend had been telling me for some time that I needed to attend the Exponent retreat in New Hampshire. I always had a reason why it would not work for me until this year when I desperately needed to get away and found this retreat to be the perfect excuse. When I first arrived, I was very apprehensive. I sat down to dinner with all of the attendees, looked around the room, and thought to myself, "Wow, she is beautiful," or "Wow, she is so smart," or "Wow I am sure that she is a great mother," "Wow she is skinny—she knits too?," "She has such a cute style—and she blogs?"... I could go on and on. I have struggled my entire life to relate to women because I have always felt this pressure of competition in my

relationships, and here I was embarking on a weekend with a bunch of women! What was I thinking?

It wasn't until further into the evening that I realized how perfect the weekend would become. That first evening we were asked to take two minutes to share with the group a recap of our last year. It was a recap that was to assume trust. We only had a weekend to spend with each other and so we were to dive in. As we went around the room and each sister shared the story of her last year, I felt my heart swell with magic. This was my dream! My Nirvana! Women who were being *real* about their lives. Women who were sharing the underbelly of their lives. This is what I had always dreamed of—sharing my story and having others share theirs in a safe place. All of my insecurities melted away as I heard about the struggles of some of the sisters. Every superficial thing that I had thought about these ladies disappeared.

The most beautiful part of the evening for me was that I was able to, for the first time in my life, admit to a group of women what was real about my life. I was able to share the beauty of my life as well as the ugly—the ugly that makes me real. I was able to share that my husband has been a porn addict for ten years. I was able to share that he had an affair when I was seven months pregnant. I was able to share that I was considering (for the millionth time) leaving him. I was able to say that I had kicked him out of our bed. I was able to share that I wanted a man in my daughters' lives who

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I Will Not be Afraid of Women

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would be able to be emotionally available for them. Sharing these things empowered me, and hearing other women's stories empowered me. I was able to see women who had decided to speak the truth in their marriages and demand more—women who were working through the hard stuff in their marriages. I was able to see the women who had come out more whole on the other side. Women who had divorced their husbands were still whole. I saw the divine in each sister there. I was able to see that no matter what I chose for my life path, it could be made into beauty. My eyes were opened, and I felt a glimpse of what our Heavenly Mother and Father must feel for us.

I spent the rest of the weekend talking to women about their stories and talking about mine. It was amazing the connections that I made because of my willingness to share the ugly in my life. Women came up to me to tell me that they were having the same difficulties in their marriages. I was *finally* able to use all of the knowledge that I have learned through study and therapy for someone other than myself. Other women came up to tell me that they did not understand about pornography addiction. They wanted to know more. They wanted to understand more. I was able to help them, too.

One thing that I have learned over the years of being married to someone with a sexual addiction is that one of the greatest problems with this addiction is the silence. We live in a culture, within the church, of

sexually silent women. I am not talking about being explicit with our sexuality but rather talking about it in healthy ways. Admit that it is fun or that it is not. That we like it or we don't. Admit that it sucked the first time or that it was great. Just *talk* about sex. Take away the secrecy. I think that if we stripped away some of the shame and silence we would be able to talk more freely about the reality of sexual addictions within the church. I am not suggesting that our formal church meetings are a place to explore our sexuality but rather that we should make a place for this kind of discussion within the culture. The more we speak, the more empowered we become. The more empowered we are, the less darkness surrounds "it" and us.

Speaking of our sexuality is important so that we in turn will be able to speak about sexual addiction—to bring this addiction out into the light. To refuse to think that we are the cause of it. To refuse to think that it is a "natural curiosity." And to educate everyone about it. As women who empower ourselves with the knowledge of sexual addictions and how they work, we will be more empowered to fight against them—and more likely to win. We will be better able to stand with our sisters who can't stand alone—our sisters who need us.

I was able to see that no matter what I chose for my life path, it could be made into beauty.

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We need each other to fight against this addiction. I was so excited by the women who just wanted to know more and who were not afraid to ask.

If we stripped away the shame and silence we would be able to talk more freely about the reality of sexual addictions within the church.

My greatest source of power to fight this battle has come in my associations with women. Many women in my life have silently held me in their prayers, thoughts, and deeds. I have been supported

by pure and honest relationships — relationships where my dear friends have not asked why I continue to stay (although I am sure they have thought that) but rather what can they do to support me in whatever choice I make.

Going to the Exponent retreat gave me the opportunity to live out at least one of my fantasies. Maybe next year I will live out the other one during the talent show! But for now, I am back to my real life where my associations with women are sometimes strained and difficult. I yearn for the complete unity that I felt that weekend.

I know that if we as women share our stories, speak our truth, and then give others the opportunity to do the same, we will be empowered. We will not “Be Afraid of Women.” We will be united, and we will be able to take our stories and create a

beautiful tapestry for all to look upon.

Those who look upon this tapestry will gain strength to know that their own life experiences can be beautiful as well — that their stories can be a nice warm blanket to wrap another sister in no matter how ugly that blanket was in the beginning. ❖ (TOC)

To Wives of Pornography Addicts

by Marci McPhee

It's not your fault.

I'll explain later, but that's the first thing you need to know. It's not your fault.

I recently finished a three-year part-time mission for LDS Family Services, working in the Addiction Recovery program in southern New England. Twenty years ago I began my own recovery in Al-Anon, the companion program to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Al-Anon is a 12-Step program for family and friends of alcoholics.¹ I am married to George McPhee, an alcoholic who has been sober for twenty-three years, and we have six children in a blended family—the oil-and-water kind of blend. When I was Relief Society president, I saw that other families needed help in this area.

Through all this, I've learned a lot about addicts of all kinds who make terrible choices that have huge impacts on their families. I've learned a lot about how family members can survive, even living with someone making crazy choices, without it making them crazy.

It's true that an increasing—and alarming—number of women are becoming addicted to pornography. It's also true that wives are not the only ones affected by a person's

pornography addiction. Children, parents, friends are also affected. However, I've chosen to write to wives of men addicted to pornography for the purposes of this article.

You are not alone

Though you certainly may *feel* alone, chances are that there are more people in your life who struggle with this addiction than you know. Pornography is a silent sin. Some addicts can go undetected and unsuspected for years. There may be people in your own life who are overcoming their own personal struggle with pornography, unknown to you. You may know but not be aware of invisible role models in wives of pornography addicts who are learning how to successfully meet the challenge. It's appropriate that these things not be common knowledge for a variety of reasons, but the result may be that it leaves you feeling isolated and alone.

Chances are that there are more people in your life that struggle with this addiction than you know.

On my husband's twentieth anniversary of sobriety, he bore his testimony in the ward in which he got sober and began investigating the church. There were lots of high-fives afterwards from people congratulating him on the remarkable changes in his life. Later, someone in the congregation approached

¹ LDS Addiction Recovery groups, AA, Al-Anon, and many other groups are based upon the same 12 Steps of Recovery.

us who we knew was a recovering pornography addict who had not engaged in his addiction for years. He said, “No matter how long I’ve been clean, I can never do what you just did. No matter how long it’s

been, people still will look at me differently. They may judge me and my wife and wonder if their children are safe around me. I may never be able to speak about it publicly in church.” His

admission was a sad summary of the current state of people’s understanding of this addiction, but hopefully this understanding is changing as the church and wards try to educate their members.

Once we were asked to give a presentation about the Addiction Recovery program in a ward council meeting. We thought we’d be talking to the home teachers and visiting teachers who could take this message of hope to those who needed it—you know, “those people.” Afterwards, one of those in attendance came up to us and confided that he was trying to overcome pornography addiction on his own. He was grateful to learn of the Addiction Recovery meetings and the textbooks that could help him learn to overcome his addiction by accessing the power of Jesus Christ instead of relying on his own will power. This person was someone on the ward council—and worthy in every way to be there! He’s continuing to be clean and is

a faithful attendee at Addiction Recovery meetings.²

One last example in case you’re not convinced that good people can have this addiction: I looked around the room in one Addiction Recovery meeting and realized that of the eight people in attendance, I had personally seen *every one* in the temple within the last few months. Again—they were worthy in every way to be in the temple, but they had gathered in an Addiction Recovery meeting² to continue to be clean from their addictions.

It is an addiction

There is some evidence that a pornography addiction may indeed be a chemical addiction.³ Regardless of whether it is a chemical or behavioral addiction, it can’t be overcome through sheer willpower alone. Twelve-step programs (the LDS Addiction Recovery program and secular AA, Al-Anon, and

2 Addiction Recovery meetings are confidential. People identify themselves by first name only, and identifying their reason for coming to the meeting is optional. Because meetings are open to anyone, visiting teachers and friends of addicts may be attending, so not everyone in a group is necessarily an addict. A sign is posted at each meeting which reads “Whom you see here, what you hear here, when you leave here, let it stay here.”

3 John L. Harmer gave a fireside in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 2005 in which he said: “Pornography is chemically addictive. We argued for years about whether pornography is a true addiction, but credible research using [Functional MRIs] show that the brain releases a chemical cocktail... intended to protect when frightened, in danger, or anxious in order to calm the body, as well as when there should be sexual arousal at appropriate times. It’s mislabeled as sexual feelings, but it’s actually a chemical cocktail released into the bloodstream when viewing pornography. Later, when the pornography addict is married and has appropriate sex without this chemical cocktail being released, he or she will often return to pornography.”

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Twelve-step programs can teach one how to allow a power greater than oneself to remove the very desire for sin.

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Sexaholics Anonymous) can teach one how to allow a power greater than oneself to remove the very desire for sin.

[T]he Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent . . . has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually. (Mosiah 5:2)

I am not abstinent today because I have a wonderful amount of willpower. I am abstinent because Jesus has taken away my desire for sin. (Phil Harrison, Clean Hands Pure Heart, 206)

Pornography is serious, but it is not an unpardonable sin. A person who looks at pornography can be forgiven.

It's not your fault

A common saying in recovery meetings is called the three C's: "You didn't *cause* it, you can't *control* it, you can't *cure* it." Some add a fourth C: "You *can* cope with it." Wives of pornography addicts face an even more delicate situation than wives of other addicts:

If a spouse is using drugs or alcohol, it is so much easier to view the usage as the spouse's problem. But compulsive sexual behaviors violate trust and emotional and sexual intimacy and may feel like a personal attack. (Rod W. Jeppsen, Lord, I Believe; Help Thou Mine Unbelief, page i)

With the first revelation that your husband

has a sexual addiction, you may be likely to blame yourself. *It's not your fault.* It's just that, under stress, he may turn to pornography to feel good, to temporarily reduce the stress. This is *his* addiction, his issue, and it really has nothing to do with you.

That also means that you don't own the cure. If you don't own the problem, you certainly don't own the solution. You can't fix it; only he can.

Compulsive sexual behaviors violate trust and emotional and sexual intimacy and may feel like a personal attack.

I found myself relying upon my wife to keep me abstinent, either by meeting my sexual needs or by being an instrument of correction if I slipped. I still had not turned to God. Instead, I made legal, marital sex and my wife, herself, my god. (Phil Harrison, Clean Hands Pure Heart, 212)

That doesn't mean that you can't do things to be helpful and supportive, especially at first, such as agreeing to look into Internet filter programs and to move the computer into a public area. It just means that you don't take responsibility for the problem. You especially must not feel that you have to cave into requests that make you feel uncomfortable so as to fix him.

[A] woman should be queen of her own body. The marriage covenant does not give the man

the right to enslave her, or to abuse her, or to use her merely for the gratification of his passion. (David O. McKay, Conference Report, April 1952, 86)

Your role in his recovery

The most valuable thing you can do for your husband is not to judge. The “Big Book” entitled *Alcoholics Anonymous* contains what is often called the “sick man’s prayer”:

We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. When a person offended we said to ourselves, ‘This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done.’ (Alcoholics Anonymous, 67)

My sponsor gave me a great gift when she pointed out the significance of one word in that prayer: you can *feel* the anger, but you don’t have to *be* the anger. You can *feel* it so that you’re not stuffing your feelings inside, just to have them build up for a later explosion. But then you can turn the anger over to God, asking Him to remove it. (Come to a recovery meeting to learn how to do this.)

For addicts, the Atonement is no intellectual topic of study. It’s a matter of daily survival.

He is a sick man. As much as you suffer because of his addiction, he suffers even more whether or not he realizes or admits it now. Be as compassionate and

supportive as you can. (Come to a recovery meeting to learn where to get the strength to do this.)

Try not to get discouraged. Some overcome addiction with one “mighty change of heart”; for others, it is a gradual process with many ups and downs. One Addiction Recovery meeting participant gains comfort as he struggles by thinking about the difference between a *lapse* (a temporary slip) and a *relapse* (reverting to bad habits and old ways). Even Paul didn’t overcome a personal problem in one sudden moment:

[T]here was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. (2 Corinthians 12: 7-9)

Your own healing

You, too, can be healed. Read the scripture below and look for the word “sin”:

And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to

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the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities. (Alma 7:11-12)

Couldn't find the word "sin"? There's a message in that: the Atonement of Jesus Christ is for *you*. Christ not only suffered to remove sins but to comfort us in our "pains and sicknesses." Turn to Christ for help and don't try to do it alone.

You need support, too. Understanding family and friends may be helpful. Support groups made up of others who are struggling living with another's addiction can be a tremendous help. LDS Addiction Recovery groups are for *you* as well as the addict. These meetings, as well as Al-Anon or other 12-Step groups for family and friends of addicts, may be as much a lifesaver for you as they were for me. I gained such strength from those who have been down this path, who could share their experiences in situations that were similar to mine. These meetings use all the same 12 Steps to come to know Christ and have him help you as well.

It's better for you and the addict to attend separate groups, if possible. Furthermore, when I began recovery, it was suggested that I try six different groups to find the one that felt like a fit for me.

Take care of yourself with healthy coping mechanisms. This exhortation may sound like "The List" — all those things that you hear in church that you know you're supposed to be doing — but it's not. Such

things as scripture study, prayer, temple worship, writing out your feelings, hobbies, exercise, support system, and *especially* service to others to get your mind off yourself are concrete things you can do for your own nourishment to tap into sustaining help from the Lord. Coupled with recovery meetings, these things took on a personal dimension for me that got me through my toughest times. All of these also increased the power of the Spirit in my life.

Live your own life. You are responsible to God, not to the addict.

Be determined that your husband's [addiction] is not going to spoil your relations with your children or your friends. It is possible to have a full and useful life though your husband continues to [be addicted]. (From the section "To Wives," Alcoholics Anonymous, 111)

I learned that I'm not responsible for what others choose to do, and that I make mistakes too. A slogan I like for times of crisis is "Do what you normally would be doing." In other words, concentrate on what you should be doing and force yourself to do just that. Choosing a later time to worry about my problems has really helped. (Hold Onto Hope, 56-7)

It can work for you

You don't have to believe me now, but one day you may see this as a blessing. Dealing with addiction and its effects has led me to

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a deeper relationship with Christ than I ever imagined possible as well as to a true sense of my own worth and self-confidence. One bishop said, “I look out over my congregation and see the addicts and their families, and I think, ‘They’re the lucky ones. For them, the Atonement is no intellectual topic of study. It’s a matter of daily survival. They know Christ in a way that is unmatched by those who have had lesser struggles.’”

I know my abstinence is absolutely nothing short of a miracle. I am thrilled as I watch the progressive restoration of a state of innocence that I thought I had lost forever.
(Phil Harrison, *Clean Hands Pure Heart*, 2)

Time after time, this apparent calamity has been a boon to us for it opened up a path which led to the discovery of God.
(From the section “To Wives,” *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 116)

Changing behaviors involves time, effort, faith, commitment, repentance, and maintaining a high degree of hope. We cannot force another person to change. We can only work on our own issues and lean on the Savior’s sure promise of hope, healing, and wholeness. (Rod W. Jeppsen, *Lord, I Believe; Help Thou Mine Unbelief*, page x)

After an Addiction Recovery meeting, I sought out one participant who has been engaged in a long, difficult, but successful ongoing struggle with pornography. His addiction began when he was helping a nonmember neighbor move and a

magazine fell out of a box. He opened it to see what it was, and that’s all the opening Satan needed. (Show me the justice in that—a guy trying to be a good elder’s quorum member who finds himself in a downward spiral, carefully constructed by Satan!) Over the year or so we’ve seen him in meetings, I’ve watched the light in his eyes, once shrouded by pain and shame, growing brighter and clearer and purer. I told him, “You’re my hero.” He laughed and looked at his shoes. “No, I mean it. You’re my hero. It’s easy for John Q. Mormon to stay active traveling on a relatively smooth road, but you’ve squarely faced the bumps that life has put in your road and continued to look to the Lord. God’s power is with you, and I see it. You’re my hero.”

He’s not only survived, he’s better than ever. I’ve not only survived, I’m better than ever. You too can not only survive; you can be better than ever.

God be with you. ❖ (TOC)

[Resources](#)

[The Twelve Steps - LDS Family Services Version](#)

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Resources

Support groups

1. LDS Addiction Recovery meetings – visit www.providentliving.org for the location of the nearest meeting.
2. Heart t'Heart – LDS-oriented meetings – but not officially affiliated with the Church – for all addictions. www.heart-t-heart.org
3. Al-Anon – for family and friends of alcoholics or other addicts. 1-888-4-Al-Anon or www.al-anon.alateen.org
4. Sexaholics Anonymous – 1-615-370-6062 or www.sa.org
5. Alcoholics Anonymous – www.aa.org

LDS resource books

1. *Lord, I Believe; Help Thou Mine Unbelief* by Rod W. Jeppsen – for family members of those with sexual addictions. Pathway Publishing, 2005.
2. *Clean Hands, Pure Heart* by Phil Harrison, a 12-step book written by a recovering pornography addict. Windhaven Publishing, 2004.
3. *He Did Deliver Me From Bondage* by Colleen Harrison (wife of Phil Harrison, above), a 12-step book for all addictions. Approved text for LDS Addiction Recovery meetings. Windhaven Publishing, 2002.
4. *Hold Onto Hope* with contributions by Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone and Dr. Rick H. For family members and friends of addicts. Discusses tough love, safe love, unconditional love, and self-love. Cedar Fort Press, 1996.

Secular resource books

1. *Alcoholics Anonymous*, original copyright 1939, Third Edition, published by Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1993.
2. *Courage to Change: One Day at a Time in Al-Anon II*, Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., 1992.
3. *Alateen – One Day at a Time*, Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., 1983. [\(TOC\)](#)

The Twelve Steps – LDS Family Services version

Step 1. Admit that you, of yourself, are powerless to overcome your addictions and that your life has become unmanageable.

Step 2. Come to believe that the power of God can restore you to complete spiritual health.

Step 3. Decide to turn your will and your life over to the care of God the Eternal Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Step 4. Make a searching and fearless written moral inventory of yourself.

Step 5. Admit to yourself, to your Heavenly Father in the name of Jesus Christ, to proper priesthood authority, and to another person the exact nature of your wrongs.

Step 6. Become entirely ready to have God remove all your character weaknesses.

Step 7. Humbly ask Heavenly Father to remove your shortcomings.

Step 8. Make a written list of all persons you have harmed and become willing to make restitution to them.

Step 9. Wherever possible, make direct restitution to all persons you have harmed.

Step 10. Continue to take personal inventory, and when you are wrong, promptly admit it.

Step 11. Seek through prayer and meditation to know the Lord's will and to have the power to carry it out.

Step 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, share this message with others and practice these principles in all you do.

As listed in Guide to Addiction Recovery and Healing, published by LDS Family Services and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (2005).

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Journal Sampler: A Woman's Problem, Too

March 2002

Today I stopped studying early. I actually slammed closed my IBM Thinkpad, stunned at my own behavior—looking at Internet pornography again. This is the third day in a row this week that I've looked at pornography. Rather than studying for my MBA finance final, I spent my time with pornography. I have to admit that looking at pornography is more than a passing curiosity; it has become a real problem. Such a thing is not supposed to happen to a girl like me: active in church, living my whole life on the right track—Primary, Young Women's, Seminary, BYU, a mission. Even now, I work in the temple and serve the youth of the stake. No one would ever guess, and I can't believe it myself. I have no idea what to do about this problem. All spring I tried to force myself to stop, but it's just getting worse.

August 2003

"It" is back and I am horrified. I'm looking at Internet pornography again. I thought I had put it behind me last year, and here it is again. Last spring I went to my bishop and we talked about my problem. After graduation and with my new job, the problem seemed to slow and then diminish. But now that I'm settled into my new home, it has started again. What is wrong with me? Am I just lonely after my break up with John? Am I stressed in my new job? Am I missing my old ward? Why have I started doing this again and why can't I stop?

January 2004

This month I felt prompted to visit a friend of mine and confide my problem to her. It was my first step in understanding my problem and getting better. Talking about the problem is often a big help to addicts.

Confiding in this friend was a real blessing because she had been struggling with the same thing for a few years. She really helped me to understand what was happening, find a vocabulary, and connect with a support group. It was the beginning of my healing. She and I had many ongoing conversations in the year that followed.

February 2004

I am learning to understand the root of my compulsion. It's amazing how powerful our thoughts are. I had always heard the maxim "Let virtue garnish your thoughts unceasingly," but I never really understood it until now. My thoughts and fantasies are the root of my whole problem, and they are the key to my abstinence now. When I use the three-second rule and just keep bouncing those ugly thoughts right back out, I feel so much better inside. If I let bad thoughts in, the battle begins.

Pornography is not supposed to happen to a girl like me: active in the church, living my whole life on the right track.

Next I am learning about my triggers:

- being tired
- feeling lonely
- failing
- being resentful
- having apathy
- having fantasy thoughts

*What is wrong with me?
Why have I started doing
this again and why can't
I stop?*

March 2004

I went to see my bishop, and he was the first bishop to really take my problem seriously. He counseled me, worked with me, advised

me, and made me accountable. His help and this accountability really held me steady through the process. I met with him for four months.

This bishop helped me see more pieces of my puzzle—the spiritual side. I realized that I did not trust God and that I was angry with Him. Pornography was my way of giving up and acting out. My bishop helped me learn to communicate with God again and feel His love.

Summer 2004

I have connected with an online support group called “Latter-Day Sexual Recovery.” I noticed that each time a new person came on the site, he or she said almost the same thing:

- I need help.
- I am tired, and I cannot continue this life I’ve been leading.

- I don’t understand how this thing could have become so powerful that it makes me do things that I loathe and that disgust me in the very act of doing them.
- I feel anger, even rage, directed toward the act and toward those influences that spur me to commit this act—raw, seething hatred of this most deadly enemy.
- I am simply confused at why can I not choose to stop when I absolutely want to stop.
- The compulsion is so powerful that it’s as if I no longer have control of myself, even though my mind and my spirit try to reason me out of the situation.

As I write on LDSR and read what my new friends write about their struggles, I learn more and more about my problem. And I learn to give myself boundaries and rules:

- I am not allowed on ANY computer after 10 PM.
- I should have no other plans the night I am packing for a trip.
- If tempted in bed, use the bathroom.
- If tempted with fantasy, use gratitude or the three-second rule.

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Journal Sampler

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Despite everything I am learning, I still struggle with ups and downs.

July 24, 2004

Ahhhggg! Why is it always like this? Alone, alone, alone. Something snapped inside this weekend. I can't take it anymore. I can't go to one more parade, concert, historical monument by myself. I can't come home to the lonely house one more night. I just wish one person in the whole world cared about just me.

I *know* this loneliness is a trigger for me, but I didn't listen. I came into work today after the three-day weekend with my e-mail bulging—and full of porn messages, too. I've been so good at deleting them, but not today. The first one came up and the bells were going off in my head, but I didn't listen.

I clicked it open. Damn. Then I clicked them all open! And the worst thing is, I don't even care. I feel as if it doesn't even matter. Nothing matters because nothing makes any difference. My life just goes on and on and on—endless days of loneliness—regardless of whether I'm “good” or not.

Winter 2004

Dear Bishop,

For the last four months, I feel like I've been fighting tooth and nail in a dark and bloody battle. My soul has been feeling pretty beat up from the struggle. Many times I thought I

would lose to despair. But I remember exactly when I felt the tide begin to turn in my favor. I was flying home from New Mexico, looking out the window and watching the clouds. Suddenly this feeling just came over me; it was as if the heavy bonds that had been wrapped so tightly around me snapped all at once and the light just came pouring in. I felt like I could breathe for the first time in months. It was an amazing moment.

It reminded me of the war in heaven described in *Paradise Lost*: Michael and his angels had been fighting and fighting when Christ appears and says to Michael, “I appreciate all your efforts in this war, but I think it's time for me to handle this” and with one sweep, He singlehandedly wipes out the evil forces.

Today I feel like *my* efforts are enough because I'd given all I could and because I have Christ to vanquish the foe. Today you said, “I think you've made some real progress,” and for the first time I agree with you. I feel such a quiet in my soul—like the stillness after a great storm. Now that I feel that I can breathe again, I never want to go back into the darkness.

My life just goes on and on—endless days of loneliness—regardless of whether I'm “good” or not.

I realize the war will continue to rage and I must be careful and cautious as I move forward, but today feels wonderful.

May 2005

Dear Ann:

A year ago I confronted my pornography struggle head on and made great strides in repentance and in moving forward. Because of my efforts, I haven't had to give it much thought this year. It has become less and less a part of my life. It is all but gone from my life—except for an occasional temptation.

It is this occasional temptation that has caused me to think that I ought to take some precautions and set up some boundaries for myself—just in case the temptations start becoming stronger in my life. I do not

want to be caught unprepared.

I acted too slowly on this premonition. A couple of weeks ago, on a late night when I was tired and frustrated, I gave in to a temptation and viewed some inappropriate pictures.

Though the slip

was brief, it has caused me concern. I have believed that I could be free of this terrible addiction, but it is obviously not completely behind me. For some reason I have not learned (or chosen) to be rid of it entirely.

In a talk by Elder Oakes (November 04 *Ensign*), two verses of scripture jumped off the page at me as I read his words about Satan's deceptions. This scripture is sometimes how I feel about my pornography struggle:

And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion: yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell. (2 Nephi 28:21)

Sometimes I think that I just feel like everything in my life is “okay” and so I don't prepare like I should. We had a lesson on being prepared last week in my Weight Watchers class. The message was basically that if you do the right things with your food and your exercise and prepare well, then you don't have to weigh on your home scale every day or stress out or starve: you can simply step on the scale each week with confidence, knowing that no matter the result, you are prepared and you have done the right things. Wow. What a concept. That is how I want to live my life. That is how I want to deal with this addiction—to move forward with confidence, being prepared to meet each temptation and challenge that comes my way.

Yea, and there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us. . . . nevertheless, fear God—he will justify us in committing a little sin. . . there is no harm in this. . . for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will

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That is how I want to deal with this addiction—to move forward with confidence, being prepared to meet each temptation and challenge that comes my way.

No One Tells You How the Wife Feels

The following is a letter that a Relief Society teacher requested from a friend whose husband was addicted to pornography. Having been asked to teach a class about pornography addiction, she asked her friend to describe her experiences so that the sisters in her Relief Society could better understand this addiction.

Dear R,

I've been dreading putting my thoughts and feelings about pornography down on paper. Reliving it in any way is abhorrent to me. But I want to get this off my chest. I want anyone else going through this to know she is not alone. Nothing is written about how the wife of a pornography addict feels and reacts other than what she's supposed to do to support her husband. Please keep me anonymous—this is way too personal for anyone who knows me to be aware of—but feel free to read this letter to the sisters in your Relief Society.

Last January my husband and I went into the bishop's office for what I thought was going to be some general counsel on how to stay close to each other through a busy time since my husband was starting a new business and I would be caring for our two little girls largely by myself. Instead, the bishop sat us down and, with my husband's permission, told me that my husband had been involved with pornography since five months into our marriage. I was so shocked

I didn't even know that I was numb. I remember being proud of my calm reaction as I rubbed my husband's arm and assured him, "It'll be all right." It wasn't until a day or two later that the sharp pain and bewildering confusion hit. That first week was awful. I remember feeling extreme warmth, love, and closeness to my husband—feeling that we were honest with each other and being totally committed to helping him beat this. A few hours later, I would be crying harder than I ever had before while he tried to console me. I didn't know how he could do this to me, and I felt like I hated him.

I didn't even know who he really was. Obviously I had been deceived, and I painfully wondered what other parts of my life with him weren't what I thought they were. I worried about our finances, his relationship with my daughters, and the women he worked with. I felt desperate to talk to someone about it, to tell someone my whole life felt like it was caving in, to beg everyone I met to cut me some slack. But since it wasn't my confession to make, I didn't feel as if I could share anything about what I was going through.

I couldn't even really find support through

I didn't know how he could do this to me, and I felt like I hated him.

I never felt truly connected to my spouse and wondered why I was always turning to friends and family members for emotional support.

research. All the information I could find focused on the person's trying to free himself from pornography and how to support him. There was nothing about how to deal with my own grief. Even our bishop didn't

seem to want to talk to me; he only had my husband come for follow-up interviews. In my isolation, I looked at all the women around me on Sundays at church and wondered which of them were bravely smiling

like I was—or worse, which of them thought things were great in their lives and in their marriages but actually were being deceived by the person they trusted most.

I know now that I should have been talking about all these feelings with my husband. He was waking himself from a long sleep where he had thought that his actions hurt only himself. A few times when I became angry enough to tell him what was bothering me, he was surprised that I was still “upset about that.” My cynicism and bitterness made him feel guilty and withdraw from my sharp comments. Finally, we decided to meet with a professional counselor, who forced me to voice exactly how thinking about my husband's viewing pornography made me feel in order to help my husband reconnect with me and with reality. He helped my husband to not be attracted by those fantasies by seeing through their lies.

Now that we have been through a year of the healing process, I can look back at that morning in the bishop's office as the best thing that ever happened to our marriage because it was the first step in fixing a problem I had felt but couldn't put my finger on. I never really knew what marriage was like without my husband's energy being drawn away from our relationship by pornography. I was incredibly lonely for the first seven years of our life together. I never felt truly connected to my spouse and wondered why I was always turning to friends and family members for emotional support. I was amazed time and time again at his selfish oblivion: it was as if he couldn't see me, my needs, or the duties his family needed him to perform. Our love life was empty of affection or emotion. He never seemed to excel in his church calling, nor was he eager to attend the temple. I gave up waiting for him and went on my own. A nameless sickness seemed to be sapping his love, attention, and motivation towards the church, our family, and our relationship.

Now all of that has changed. My husband is free; he is alive again! He now holds a responsible position in our stake and spends long hours in the service of others. He has connected with our children and delights to play with them. He knows their routines and their needs better and cares for them without being instructed. He sits and talks with me, and I feel connected to him as I never did before. He has told me he feels like he never really *saw* me when he was addicted to pornography. Now he tells me

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The “Porn Czar”: Interview with Darrell Rigby

by David Sundhal

Darrell Rigby is the person in the Cambridge Stake responsible for media safety. He has been charged by the stake president to lead the efforts in the stake (and community) to fight the problems associated with pornography. In researching the topic, Rigby has not only searched the literature but has also interviewed and worked with addicts and many organizations that focus on protecting families and children, including foundations, law enforcement, and groups of behavioral health professionals.

“Porn Czar” is your unofficial title. What is your official title, and when were you asked to focus on this problem?

Actually, “Porn Czar” isn’t even my unofficial title. It’s just an attention grabber I use to help people remember that we have resources available to address pornography problems. Our stake president, Kent Bowen, called me almost three years ago to serve as the Stake Media Specialist. My job is to help parents manage the media that their families consume rather than letting the media consume their families. The job description includes helping parents manage inappropriate usage of all media, including the Internet, television, and even video games. Unfortunately, one of the most common and perilous dangers of media abuse these days is compulsive consumption of pornography. That is where I am focusing most of my time.

In regard to this part of my calling, I have three objectives:

1. To limit or reduce people’s, especially children’s, exposure to pornography.
2. To help people overcome dependency.
3. To help those who’ve overcome pornography to stay on the path of recovery.

What statistics did you encounter regarding the prevalence of pornography abuse? Is it more common than we might expect?

The statistics are staggering.

- Pornography has become a \$57 billion industry, producing more revenue nationally than professional football, baseball, and basketball combined.
- 72 million Internet users visit pornography websites per year.
- 40 million Americans view Internet porn regularly.
- 2.5 billion e-mails per day are pornographic.
- 15 percent of online porn habitués develop sexual behavior that seriously disrupts their lives, leading to career problems, family relationship issues, and financial troubles.
- The average age at which a child is first exposed to Internet pornography is 11 years old.
- The average American adolescent will view nearly 14,000 sexual references per year.

- 70 percent of teens ages 15–17 say they have accidentally come across porn while using the Internet. One in five teenagers who regularly use the Internet have received at least one sexual solicitation.
- 750,000 predators (three-quarters of a million) each day are online trying to strike up relationships with children.
- Teens ages 13–15 rank entertainment media as the top source of information about sexuality and sexual health.
- Movies have an 87% likelihood of presenting sexual material.
- Youth exposed to sexual content on television are more likely to overestimate the frequency of sexual activity among peers and have more permissive attitudes toward premarital sex.

Sadly, I could continue with these types of statistics for hours, but you get the point: It is no longer possible to deny that pornography is a serious problem.

Many of these statistics are focused on children. Is early exposure more dangerous?

There is good reason to think so. I have discovered, in talking to people addicted to pornography, that many of them recall their first exposure in a vivid and strongly emotional—even physical—way. For them, that first exposure is still strongly present.

Also, children and their parents today face a bigger challenge than they did in the past. In addition to being more available, pornography has become more graphic.

Today's pornography commonly portrays human sexuality in deviant ways that don't teach proper respect for the opposite sex. Pornography implicitly teaches that other people are merely objects for our pleasure. This objectification is bad for everyone but especially damaging for pre-adolescents.

There is some controversy over whether pornography constitutes an addiction. What's your view on this?

Some people say that because only about 15 to 20 percent of users develop a dependency on pornography, it is therefore not a problem for 80 to 85 percent of people. There are at least two problems with this way of thinking. First, it ignores the loss of the Spirit that happens when people use pornography. Second, the percentage of people who develop a dependency on pornography is about the same for alcohol. We understand that alcohol dependency is both dangerous and all-too prevalent. Pornography dependency looks just like a chemical dependency (see BLAST sidebar, p. 30) in terms of its influence and effects on people.

My personal view is that pornography addiction is just as powerful as chemical dependencies and that not accepting it as an addiction prevents many people from getting the help they need. Some people attribute pornography use to poor character or a weak will, but in my experience that attribution is neither true nor useful. The insights gained from addiction and recovery, as well as the interventions developed from

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The “Porn Czar”: Interview

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them, are effective against pornography. Combining these insights with the power of the atonement and the Holy Ghost create a powerful force that has helped many people recover.

When did this problem start to come to the Church’s attention, and how are they advising ecclesiastical leaders to handle it?

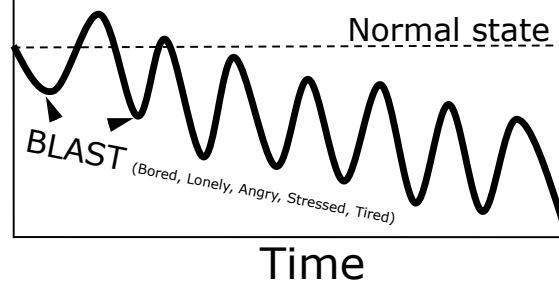
Church leaders have been talking about pornography problems for far longer than many of us have been listening. In my research, I found that when Church leaders began to talk about this—in the 1970s—people thought they were making too much of a fuss about pornography use. Now that we’ve begun to understand the danger and pervasiveness of pornography use, I find people saying, “Why didn’t the Church do something about this earlier?” From what I see, the Church was ahead of the curve on this one.

After I received this calling, I went to the *LDS.org* website and did a search on “pornography.” I was surprised to find more than 200 church talks and articles on the topic, starting in about 1970 and continuing until the present.

At this point, the Church and Church-related organizations (such as Deseret Book Company) have developed training programs for bishops, addiction recovery programs, educational videos, and volumes of printed material to help pornography

The Addiction Pattern

Happiness Index



The Addiction Pattern

Exposure to pornography can provide a temporary “high” that lifts a person’s mood out of the BLAST state (see diagram above). The high, like those of other addictive substances, is produced by a rush of neurochemicals. This temporary high is, however, followed by a “low.” For a variety of reasons—shame, loss of the Spirit, withdrawal from friends and family—this low is deeper than previous lows. Exposure to pornography during this low can raise a person’s mood back to or above normal.

In a significant proportion of people, this pattern of highs followed by lows starts a vicious cycle of addiction. Each low requires more and/or stronger versions of the addicting substance to raise an addicted person’s mood. The brain makes strong associations between the “lift” it gets and exposure to pornography, creating a pattern of dependence.

In Rigby’s interviews, recovering addicts often reported that their addictions led them to use a kind of pornography that they could never have imagined before they became users. The need to get a bigger boost out of a lower state of BLAST led them to seek out even more degrading types of pornography, such as child pornography and violent pornography. Ultimately, many addicted people arrive at a point where no amount or kind of pornography can make them feel normal again.

abusers and their family members deal with the problem. One of my favorite publications, which is available to anyone, is *Confronting Pornography: A Guide to Prevention and Recovery for Individuals, Loved Ones, and Leaders* by Mark Chamberlain, Daniel D. Gray, and Rory C. Reid (eds). The book contains the following sections:

- Understanding the Issues and Preventing Problems
- Supporting Those Who Struggle
- Overcoming a Pornography Problem

Therapy organizations (such as SASH—the Society for the Advancement of Sexual Help—www.ncsac.org/general/index.aspx) and support groups (such as SAA—Sex Addicts Anonymous—www.sexaa.org) do wonderful things to help people overcome pornography problems.

How effective have the support groups been?

The support groups are remarkably successful. The Cambridge Massachusetts Stake has been fortunate to have talented stake missionaries leading our Addiction Recovery Group. People who attend the sessions often express public gratitude for the role of the Addiction Recovery Group in their healing process. I highly recommend that anyone involved in the recovery process attend a support group.

What counsel do you have for the families of pornography addicts?

Unfortunately, pornography can sometimes lead to the breakups of families, and family

members need to be prepared for such sad outcomes. However, many families succeed in supporting pornography abusers through their recovery processes. It is a challenging but potentially rewarding experience.

Much of my learning on appropriate actions for family members has come from two sources: the book, *Confronting Pornography*, and the wisdom of experienced counselors, including Dr. Victor Cline. Their advice to the family members of pornography abusers often includes the following:

- Increase your knowledge of the pornography problem. It is far more than just a bad habit.
- Don't ignore the warning signs of pornography or tolerate inappropriate behaviors. Don't put yourself at personal risk.
- Remember that it's not your fault. Family members are not the source of the problem, and they can't make the problem go away. Only the pornography abuser can choose to eliminate the problem.
- Get help for the abuser, especially from Church leaders, but also from experienced therapists as well. Pornography is a problem that thrives on secrecy. It needs to be brought out into the open and addressed directly. Participate in the therapy and the healing team if you feel able to do so.
- If you need personal help, get support from others. Pornography addicts sometimes make family members feel guilty about getting help because it

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Who Is This Man I Am Married To?

February 2002

My husband told me last night that he has a problem with pornography. It is something that he has struggled with for a couple of decades—from the time that his brother brought home magazines and movies and invited him to participate in them. It is all very overwhelming. Of course, I feel a sadness and sorrow for P., imagining what it must be like to struggle with something like this for so long. He has wanted to put it behind him so many times and has been unable to. He has lived with the fruits of this disease as well: low self-esteem, low self-discipline, guilt, feelings of unworthiness, loss of sensitivity to the Spirit.

It is overwhelming for me not only when I see through P.'s eyes, but also when I see the situation through my own. I have had pornography in my life for more than two years! Having it in my life but not having had a choice in the matter is incredibly hurtful. It makes me almost physically ill to know that there has been pornography in my home for so long. It is so degrading, so vile, so destructive, so polluting. It hurts me that P. has been turning to another source besides me for the satisfaction of his sexual appetites, even though he says that there is no relation between me and his turning to that other source. I feel that it degrades me as a woman to know that my husband is turning to, placing value on, and deriving pleasure from women as objects.

I understand that this is an addiction for P.—that although he still has choice in the matter, the point where he is on the long road that he has chosen to go down makes it very difficult for him to exercise the choices that would lead him off that road. Not impossible, but difficult.

I am gratified to know that P.'s desires to leave this behind him are strong enough that he has taken concrete steps to do so, including speaking with the bishop. The forward-looking picture is bright.

It does not, however, change how I feel in the present. The reality is difficult for me to totally grasp because it differs so from what I thought was reality. Who is this man I am married to? What does he really think of me? What place do I really have in his heart?

The deceit is what hurts most. I have been deceived by the person I love and trust most in the world. That is difficult. It is only natural that I wonder, "Is this all the deceit or is there more?" It will take time to rebuild my trust. I feel a certain amount of loneliness, too—lonely because of the burden I must now bear, unable to share with an outsider. I know, of course, that I can always turn to

It makes me almost physically ill to know that there has been pornography in my home for so long.

the Savior. This situation teaches me a tiny bit about the atonement, about a piece of the burden the Savior bore, and about the loneliness He surely felt. And He was truly alone.

What I want more than anything from this marriage is true intimacy — emotional, spiritual, physical. We have to drive out this demon in order to achieve such an intimacy.

June 2007

On that desolate day in February, I could not have dreamed — naïve, if crushed, optimist that I was — that I would still have pornography in my marriage today, more than five years later. I had no concept of the outsized nature of the demon, nor of what would be required to drive it out.

This situation teaches me a tiny bit about the atonement, about a piece of the burden the Savior bore, and about the loneliness He surely felt.

That's not to say that P. hasn't come leaps and bounds from where he was. He has. He views far fewer pornographic images now than he has in decades. He has reserves of discipline and self-

control now that he could only yearn for five years ago. His self-esteem is miles ahead of where it was when we first met.

But this is not going to be quick and easy. We both know that now.

Our marriage is strong, but that doesn't mean that dealing with pornography has

been a cakewalk. Cakewalks aren't soaked with buckets of tears; they're not lined on both sides with hurt, anger, denial, self-loathing, defeat.

How have we faced this demon? A few years into our marriage, taking the lead from a local church leader, we began a system of checking in, a simple thumbs up or thumbs down from P. at the end of a defined period of time. First we went week by week; for a while it was day by day; now we're back to week by week. If it's a thumbs down, usually we talk a little about it. I let P. take the lead; sometimes I'll ask a question or two; I try to reiterate that I love him. We don't get into specifics. The intent is to build P. up and help to make next time's outcome more positive. P. says that this accountability is motivating.

The thumbs down weeks are relatively few at this point — which I guess is an accurate reflection of reality. I don't know for certain; sometimes I wonder, but I don't question any given week's verdict. My trust has to begin somewhere, and unless I sense a compelling reason for it to be otherwise, I've chosen for it to start here.

Some weeks, which have sometimes bled into months, I just can't deal with it — with the possibility, and sometimes probability, that P. has been satiating his desires with the images of other women. At these times — such as during the months after our baby was born and then when I spent some time in the hospital — I choose denial over facing

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Ten Myths about Pornography Addiction

Myth One: “Obsession with pornography is due to a character defect.”

The potential for porn addiction goes well beyond the issue of character. In short, men are especially vulnerable to porn images because these images have the power to hijack a male brain’s command center. This may explain why even the best character often proves to be inadequate protection when one’s computer is flooded with pornographic images. It also appears that just as some people are more prone to alcohol, drug, or gambling addictions than others, so too are some people prone to porn addiction. (www.reuniting.info/science/three_myths_about_porn)

Myth Two: “There’s no real evidence that pornography is an addiction.”

There is evidence that exposure to pornography leads to compulsive behavior in rates similar to exposure to alcohol. Secondly, pornography affects the brain’s reward system in ways similar to substance-based addictions (*see sidebar: “BLAST” in Rigby interview, p. 30*). There are still debates about chemical vs. behavioral addictions, but what is clear is that any addiction is a learned behavior that activates the reward circuitry of the brain. Finally, pornography addiction responds to the same interventions as substance-based addictions.

In short, the brain doesn’t have individual brain circuits for cocaine use, alcohol consumption, gambling, porn use, and so on. Rather, a reward circuitry exists in the brain that can become activated, depending upon a person’s learned behaviors. Anything that activates this circuitry intensely is potentially addictive. (www.reuniting.info/science/three_myths_about_porn)

Myth Three: “Those who suggest porn is harmful are anti-sex and/or religious extremists.”

If we think that it’s unwise to eat deep-fried Twinkies, are we anti-food? Porn readily leads to unhealthy isolation or shallow, risky relationships. It thereby interferes with relationships that have the greatest potential to nourish us. In this respect, porn is anti-sex, even if it is pro-orgasm. Moreover, like junk food, porn can give rise to an unruly addiction. You don’t have to be a zealot to see the harm in a compulsion that can sabotage one’s life. (www.reuniting.info/science/three_myths_about_porn)

Myth Four: “Only men are addicted to porn.”

One out of every six women struggles with an addiction to pornography. That’s 17 percent of the population. Women desiring to find companionship often prefer cybersex and online chatrooms to porn sites that offer

only pictures and graphic stories, but they eventually start surfing both. This need for connection doesn't always stop at cybersex, which leads to one of the more alarming statistics about a woman's addiction to pornography: More than 80 percent of women who have this addiction take it offline.

(www.internetfilterreview.com;
www.christianitytoday.com)

Myth Five: "Pornography is a victimless crime."

The victims of pornography are many. Not only are the users held hostage by their ever-increasing cravings, but porn consumption is linked with increased risk of sexual deviancy, which victimizes people in society. The user also experiences difficulty in his or her intimate relationships. Studies show that "cybersex addiction was a major contributing factor to separation and divorce for affected couples." (Jill Manning, *The Impact of Internet Pornography on Marriage and the Family: A Review of the Research*) Spouses and children become victims as well as the user. Further, the actors involved in cybersex and Internet pornography are victims as well. These actors are known to consume alcohol and take harmful drugs in order to numb themselves enough to participate in degrading activities. An even more detailed list of people victimized by Internet porn can be found on the website www.victimsofpornography.org.

Myth Six: "If you pray hard enough, the temptation will go away."

While praying for help is essential to staying healthy, prayer alone is not sufficient to curb an addiction. Even the Prophet recognizes that for many, counseling is necessary: "And may you have the courage to seek the loving guidance of your bishop and, if necessary, the counsel of caring professionals." (November 2004 *Ensign*)

Myth Seven: "Only an LDS therapist can help because non-LDS people think porn is a healthy part of a person's life."

Many people fear that only LDS therapists would appreciate the emotional and spiritual implications of pornography. This is not the case. While researching this subject, the majority of the online resources I found were not LDS. Other people fear all therapy—LDS and otherwise—especially group therapy. Yet many experts assert that "group therapy is acknowledged as the most effective form of treatment for sex addicts. Group therapy focuses on shame reduction, maintaining sexual sobriety through high levels of accountability, the value of honesty, being congruent in all areas of life, and expressing feelings." (www.centerforhealthysex.com) Even the Church's Addiction Recovery programs follow this model.

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Ten Myths about Pornography Addiction

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Myth Eight: “It’s all about sex—if the partner is sexy and puts out often enough, the addict will cease their dependence on porn.”

Two-thirds of compulsive cybersex addicts reported decreased sexual intimacy with their partners. Most LDS men who are addicted to Internet porn before marriage still engage in online sexuality when married, which suggests that the compulsion is not linked to the frequency of physical intimacy. Having “real sex” will not make the temptation of cybersex go away (Manning).

Addicts must identify the cause and not the symptoms of their compulsion. The symptom is viewing pornography. The cause is whatever thoughts or feelings are leading addicts to see pornography as an escape and a solution for the uncomfortable or painful feelings they have. (www.newlifehabits.com/2007/08/10/how-to-overcome-internet-pornography-addiction/#more)

It is never about the partner and whether or not she has big enough breasts or is skinny enough. As Marci McPhee states: “It’s not your fault.” It’s an illusion that you can control your spouse’s addictive behavior through increased sexuality or altered appearance.

Myth Nine: “Because we only have the computer in a public place and use NetNanny, no one in the house can access pornography.”

If only. Not only is porn available in hundreds of places outside the home, evading the blockades and filters and then erasing one’s cyber-footprints can be part of the high as well. This is not to suggest that precautionary measures are pointless, but if someone is determined to access the Internet, they will.

Myth Ten: “Once addicted, there is little chance for healing and spiritual recovery.”

False. While the road is not an easy one, each step away from pornography will bring the addict closer to peace. Rory Reid, an LDS psychotherapist who specializes in counseling with families struggling with pornography, writes: “Trusting the Lord enough to let go of pornography may be one of the most monumental steps people take on their road to repentance. But that’s what repentance is about—a change of heart and mind and a willingness to abandon behavior that is contrary to God’s will. Such abandonment replaces temporary gratification with permanent satisfaction in a healthy, meaningful marriage relationship, with closeness to God, and with the self-respect that comes from righteous living.” (*Ensign*, February 2004) ♦ (TOC)

Silent Suffering

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Mormon with a pot problem than a pornography one.

When I was a kid, people had to go looking for illicit images. Today, those kinds of images come looking for us in our inboxes, pop-up web ads, and heaven forbid if your seven-year-old wants you to help him find an “X-Men” website. Jill Manning, an LDS therapist who specializes in the impact of pornography on families, explains that Internet porn is “distinct from other forms of pornography because of the ‘Triple-A Engine’ effect of Accessibility, Affordability, and Anonymity.” This helps explain why many people “who would not have been involved in this material prior to the advent of the Internet have been drawn into problematic pornography consumption.” (See Dr. Manning’s website www.drjillmanning.com. It can direct people to counselors, books, articles, and other helpful websites.) Mary Anne Layden, co-director of the Sexual Trauma and Psychopathology Program at the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for Cognitive Therapy, asserts that porn is the “most concerning thing to psychological health that I know of existing today.” If pornography creates a physical addiction similar to the addiction produced by a drug like cocaine, then recovery is even more problematic “since coke users can get the drug out of their systems, but pornographic images stay in the brain forever,” Layden said. Her prediction is frightening: “To have a drug pumped into your house 24/7, free, and children know how to use it better

than grown-ups know how to use it—it’s a perfect delivery system if we want to have a whole generation of young addicts who will never have the drug out of their minds.”

So this issue has been fermenting in my head for years. I’ve seen so much silent suffering that I wanted to give a voice to those in the trenches battling pornography, both addicts and their loved ones. Marci McPhee’s article discusses the Church’s new programs, which are designed to help addicts and their families. (She literally helped write the book.) Darrell Rigby shares some statistics and how things are changing from an ecclesiastical point of view. The other articles are written by friends and associates of the *Exponent II* community, and we are grateful for their honesty and respectful of their need to remain anonymous. They speak for themselves but for thousands of others as well.

A few months ago, we had our combined third hour on the Addiction Recovery program. As I listened to the speaker, I had no “ew” moment, which I now realize had been just my way of saying, “I am so superior because I don’t feel the urge to look at porn.” Nor did I look around and secretly wonder who has what addiction. Instead, I saw the faces of people I love, who have all suffered, who all struggle, and who wrestle in dark places. And I really wished we could just talk about it, talk about the crosses we carry, and help each other bear the burden. So here are some of our stories. Pass them on. ❖ (TOC)

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Journal Sampler

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beat us with a few stripes and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God. (2 Nephi 28: 7-8)

Sometimes I mistakenly think that God will have mercy – that there is time, and any punishment will be small.

Though I believe these justifications to some degree, I reject them, too. I know this addiction is holding me back. It keeps me “average”; I hate that. Sometimes I feel that I am on the brink of true spiritual progress and even greatness, but I can’t tip the scale in my favor with this weakness at my heels.

I listened carefully during my most recent time at the temple to the words of the Lord as he tells the daughters of Eve that though the serpent will have power to bruise the

heel, they will have the power to *crush his head*. I was struck. The Lord tells *me* that I have *power* – power to crush the head of Satan and any wickedness associated with him.

Today

Here is where my story ends. I’ve basically been free of pornography since 2005, barring a few slips. I would encourage everyone to see that pornography is a women’s problem, too. Talk about it. Learn about it. Get help. Lean on the Lord. Exercise your power so that you can say, “I am ready, Lord. I am open to learning. I am not bound up by my own weakness and concerns. Teach me. Show me where I can serve.” ❖ [\(TOC\)](#)

Who Is This Man?

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reality and doing my part to keep pornography out of our marriage. Sometimes I am just not strong enough to bear that burden.

What is my role in battling this demon? Trusting marriage partner or vigilant porn police? Without trust, our marriage will founder; with pornography running rampant through it, our marriage will be destroyed. The hat I wear should be some loving amalgam of the two. With no readily available model, however, it is difficult to know what exactly that looks like.

Unfortunately for P., I am far from achieving that ideal mix of trust and vigilance. I try for the loving, but often I fall far short on all three. I have faith, though, that my patriarchal blessing speaks truth – that my husband and I will strengthen and assist each other. I do believe that the demon can be conquered.

So we press forward, doing as well as we can at any given moment, always hoping and praying for better – for ourselves, our home, our family. ❖ [\(TOC\)](#)

Porn Addict: Am I That Guy?

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My therapy continued for over a year. I talked to friends about my addiction. Wow! I had never done that before. My friends were compassionate and understanding. I got a blessing. I wrote in a journal. I learned to do some things, with my therapist's help, that I had *never* been able to do before without "self medicating":

- be alone with myself
- be lonely
- feel sad
- feel bored

My hairtrigger for "fixing" those feelings with pornography had been well developed. I remember lying on my hotel-room bed on a business trip feeling completely empty

I know what it is like to be in the depths of hopelessness, and I also know what it is like to find and hold onto hope.

and having my heart race in my chest as I fought off the urge to do something about it. Wow! So this is what it's like to be lonely, huh? I learned some things about myself

that night because I was alone with myself, without pornography, and I allowed myself to explore ideas and feelings. The next morning I got up early and went for a long run. I felt like a million bucks.

Each day was and is a struggle and a triumph. A friend of mine told me to pray every morning for the strength to get

through that day and to pray every night to thank Heavenly Father for another good day.

I can't emphasize enough how much of a difference it has made in my life to have dragged myself into that addiction center for the first time to begin talking about my problem with a professional. It is the reason I am still married today, and it is the reason I have hope for a long and happy life with my wife and kids and the church that I love.

My advice? Talk to your bishop, and then go see a counselor. You will thank your Heavenly Father for whatever source of courage you relied on to make that happen. It is the only way out, and still it is not easy. If you are struggling with a pornography addiction, I wish you the best of luck. I wish I could hug you and cry with you and help you find your way to the counselor. I know what it is like to be in the depths of hopelessness around this issue, and I also know what it is like to find and hold onto hope and to achieve some measure of success. May you also find hope as you seek to rid yourself of this power that has a hold on you. ❖ (TOC)

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No One Tells You

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over and over again how much he loves me, and I believe him because I can feel it. I am beginning to find myself in the type of marriage I always wanted. There are still hurts and fears and issues, but it feels so good to be working on them instead of ignorantly suffering from them. I am so grateful to have found out about the problem so that it could be solved.

Please tell the sisters you teach to go home and talk with their husbands and sons. Tell them not to ask *if* they've had encounters with pornography; tell them to lovingly ask *what* encounters they've had. After each response they should ask, "What else?" until the son or husband says, "That's all." This questioning may not prompt the truth if there is a problem, but it will give them the chance to ask for your help to get out of the pit they find themselves in. I can remember two times where I spoke with my husband specifically about pornography, asking him if he had had any experience with it where he evaded my questions "without lying."

Please tell your sisters not to judge people who are trapped by this curse. The men and women in my ward would be surprised if they knew of my husband's struggles. He is a wonderful, gentle, kind, good man. I don't want anyone ever to know because I'm afraid of the unchristian conclusions everyone will jump to. He has repented and it is over and he is clean "every whit." I don't want our ward members remembering what the Lord himself has forgotten.

Please also tell your sisters to stay away from anything that teaches them to love anything unchaste. I always fast-forwarded the bad scenes in movies out of duty but thought them a little exciting, sexy, tantalizing. Now anything other than sanctified married love makes me sick. Experience has taught me the truth: marriage is the only place where sexual love can be expressed without injuring other people's souls in a way that you can't fix. Please tell them to teach their daughters to see through movies and books that romanticize adultery.

I want to end by telling you that I know the power of the atonement of Jesus Christ is very real. I can see its effects in my husband. I have felt its gentle, steady healing power in my life over the past year. I know that He will help any who turn to him. ❖ [\(TOC\)](#)

The “Porn Czar”: Interview

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might expose their problem. But that is unfair. Pornography abusers need to learn the consequences of their actions, and the recovery process for family members is part of those consequences.

- Stay close to the Savior for inspiration and strength.
- Learn to forgive and trust again.

What counsel do you have for people who find themselves using pornography?

The initial perception of addicts is *never* that they’re addicted. But psychiatrists and psychologists have tests to determine dependency (link to *Wikipedia*, “Addiction”). The first step is for a person to recognize that he or she has a problem. Even mild consumption of pornography is more dangerous than people care to admit. The loss of the Holy Ghost is the first and most dangerous effect.

Also, users of pornography begin to feel distant from their Heavenly Father and their family. Addicts may succeed in stopping temporarily, but because they return to using pornography, they will feel a profound sense of failure and hopelessness. They may feel that they can *never* overcome this problem.

My advice to anyone who recognizes his or herself in this situation is to seek help. I advise people to go first to their bishop, who can direct them to many resources that will help addicts get longer-term help.

Therapists tell me that it can take three or more years of treatment for addicts to break free of the bonds of addiction.

What do those who have sought help report about the experience and effectiveness of treatment?

I have talked to many people who’ve been successful at overcoming pornography, and I consistently hear three things.

1) “I’m so sad I didn’t seek help sooner. My life is *so* much better now.” Put simply, life looks better when you’ve got the Spirit with you and when you are not being, essentially, controlled by pornography. People who have gone through this process see their lives in much more optimistic ways.

2) “I know that I need to continue to be vigilant in avoiding pornography.” Even though these folks are not currently using, they also know that one or two additional viewings could start a cycle for them. Just as alcoholics must be more careful about alcohol consumption than non-alcoholics, former pornography users understand that they’ve got to be extra cautious.

3) “If there is anything I can do to help people to avoid this trap, I will do it.” The unselfishness of people who have gone through pornography addiction is amazing. Their desire to help other people both avoid addiction and recover from it constantly amazes me. ❖ (TOC)

Exponent II Retreat 2008

Exponent II sponsors an annual retreat for women. Every gathering is designed to be a warm environment for open, honest sharing of life experiences, issues, beliefs, and ideas. The retreat features many workshops, a keynote speaker, discussions on a range of topics, a talent show, spiritual autobiographies, home-cooked food from locally grown organic produce. The 2008 retreat will be held at Friendly Crossways near Harvard, Massachusetts, September 26-28, 2008. The cost is \$170 per person, which includes workshops, lodging (linens), and food. For more information, visit www.exponentii.org/retreats.html.

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