

## Internet Porn: Worse Than Crack? By Ryan Singel

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Internet pornography is the new crack cocaine, leading to addiction, misogyny, pedophilia, boob jobs and erectile dysfunction, according to clinicians and researchers testifying before a Senate committee Thursday.

Witnesses before the Senate Commerce Committee's [Science, Technology and Space Subcommittee](#) spared no superlative in their description of the negative effects of pornography.

Mary Anne Layden, co-director of the [Sexual Trauma and Psychopathology Program](#) at the [University of Pennsylvania's Center for Cognitive Therapy](#), called porn the "most concerning thing to psychological health that I know of existing today."

"The internet is a perfect drug delivery system because you are anonymous, aroused and have role models for these behaviors," Layden said. "To have 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 mind."

Pornography addicts have a more difficult time recovering from their addiction than cocaine addicts, since coke users can get the drug out of their system, but pornographic images stay in the brain forever, Layden said.

Jeffrey Satinover, a psychiatrist and advisor to the [National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality](#) echoed Layden's concern about the internet and the somatic effects of pornography.

"Pornography really does, unlike other addictions, biologically cause direct release of the most perfect addictive substance," Satinover said. "That is, it causes masturbation, which causes release of the naturally occurring opioids. It does what heroin can't do, in effect."

The internet is dangerous because it removes the inefficiency in the delivery of pornography, making porn much more ubiquitous than in the days when guys in trench coats would sell nudie postcards, Satinover said.

Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kansas), the subcommittee's chairman, called the hearing the most disturbing one he'd ever seen in the Senate. Brownback said porn was ubiquitous now, compared to when he was growing up and "some guy would sneak a magazine in somewhere and show some of us, but you had to find him at the right time."

The hearing came just days after a controversy over a sexually suggestive Monday Night Football ad that has many foreseeing a crackdown on indecency by the Federal Communications Commission.

It is unclear what the consequences of Thursday's hearing will be since it was not connected to any pending or proposed legislation.

Brownback, a conservative Christian, is also scheduled to be rotated off the sub-committee in the next session.

When Brownback asked the panelists for suggestions about what should be done, the responses were mild, considering their earlier indictment of pornography. Several suggested that federal money be allocated to fund brain-mapping studies into the physical effects of pornography.

Judith Reisman of the [California Protective Parents Association](#) suggested that more study of "erototoxins" could show how pornography is not speech-protected under the First Amendment.

The panelists all agreed that the government should fund health campaigns to educate the public about the dangers of pornography. The campaign should combat the messages of pornography by putting signs on buses saying sex with children is not OK, said Layden.

However, as the panelists themselves acknowledged, there is no consensus among mental health professionals about the dangers of porn or the use of the term "pornography addiction."

Many psychologists and most sexologists find the concepts of sex and pornography addiction problematic, said Carol Queen, staff sexologist for the San Francisco-based, woman-owned [Good Vibrations](#).

Queen questioned the validity of the panel for not including anyone who thinks "pornography is not particularly problematic in most people's lives."

Queen acknowledges she can name people who have compulsive and destructive behavior centered on pornography, but argues that can happen with other activities, such as gambling and shopping.

Queen also criticized the methodology behind research showing that pornography stimulates the brain like drugs do, saying the research needs to take into account

how sex itself stimulates the brain.

"There's no doubt the brain lights up when sexually aroused," Queen said.

Queen too would like to see more money devoted to research on sex, but thinks it is unlikely that researchers on either side of the divide are likely to receive large grants any time soon.

Studies intended to show the harmful effects of pornography must contend with ethical rules prohibiting harm to human subjects, while sex researchers have a hard time getting any funding, unless their study is specifically HIV-related, according to Queen.



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