

Smith

One day I walked into the counseling center and asked to see a therapist, and they gave me a therapist.

Densley

Did the therapist have you immediately go to aversion therapy, or did he set you up with an alternative?

Smith

He set me up on aversion therapy during my first visit. When I told him what I was dealing with, and what I felt, he brought one of his colleagues in. They gave me a priesthood blessing, and then at the next appointment they began the process of setting up the aversion therapy.

Densley

When you were able to actually talk to the therapist, how did that process go? How did he treat you? How did you react?

Smith

He was the most warm and loving and accepting person I had ever met. I was surprised. I expected that anyone I told was going to get up and throw up all over me before they beat up on me. That was the attitude I walked in there with, but he was so warm and so loving. He wasn't afraid to touch me in a healthy, comfortable way. Definitely not sexual, but like a father would touch a ten-year-old son who doesn't want to be cuddled. That kind of appropriate affection that he was willing to give me, and I felt loved by him, I felt accepted by him, and when he brought this colleague in to give me a blessing, I remember I had the most beautiful feeling while he was doing it.

I felt so much acceptance by them. By the two therapists. I felt really good at that moment. I felt that I had a brighter future at that moment.

Densley

Going into the aversion therapy, were they licensed people?

Smith

Yes, he was a PhD in counseling psychology.

Densley

Did he tell you the risks involved in aversion therapy?

Smith

I don't recall a discussion about risks. He told me how the process would be, he told me that I was essentially taping a bare electrical wire to the back of my calf, and he told that he would be very careful about how much he administered, and the goal was that he wanted me to feel it, he wanted it to feel uncomfortable but not painful.

Densley

Did he succeed, or was it painful?

Smith

I don't ever recall it being painful. Also, I kept a rubber band around my wrist, and every time I had a thought I popped myself with a rubber band. I was following his instructions and was self-administering.

Densley

So you were hurt more from the rubber band than from the electric?

Smith

Yeah. Because you hear about a bare wire attached to your calf it sounds very extreme. It was uncomfortable, like he said it would be, that would be the purpose.

Densley

Besides the bare wire to your calf, can you explain more how the process went?

Smith

He gave me some slides that were porno pictures. A stack of slides that were naked men, and a stack of slides that were naked women. I had to pick the 8 men that were most attractive and the 8 women that were most attractive, so I had to rank order them from the least attractive to the most attractive. The goal was they would start, he was going to start with showing me pictures of the most attractive man and the least attractive woman back and forth, and I was supposed to fantasize about the woman, and then when he showed me the picture of the least attractive of the man. At that time the shock was created. It was based on Pavlovian conditioning. As the experience went on they moved me to down the line from most attractive of men to least attractive.

Densley

Did that work?

Smith

No.

Densley

Had you seen pornographic picture before this.

Smith

I had seen female porn as part of the sexual abuse as a child. Playboy magazines, to get everybody in the mood. I had seen female porn, but I had never seen male porn.

Densley

What was the effect of the aversion therapy?

Smith

Any positive effect was temporary. Very temporary. The long-term effect that I have, I have porno picture permanently embedded in my mind that I think about when I'm going to the temple and ready to take the sacrament. It's amazing that pictures I saw in 1973 I can still remember them. Another effect was that, when I went through a difficult period, I decided to use the rubber band and go to the porn shop and look at the gay porn and flip myself with a rubber band. That's one of the effects; permanently embedded in my mind pornographic images.

Densley

During this time that he was monitoring you, I'm sure that he wanted to check up to see the effects. One of the accusations is that the people administering the therapy is that they would pressure them to give positive results to get out of the therapy. Did you feel pressure from the therapist to make results that weren't there?

Smith

No, not that I recall. He was so kind to me, and so gentle, so accepting. There was no pressure, but I kind of wanted to be successful. There was no pressure that I recall. I'm pretty good about knowing when I'm pressured. He generally wanted me to be successful.

Densley

How did the therapy end?

Smith

The semester ended. So, it was just the end of the semesters and you moved on. It was winding down and I had gone through all of the... I was feeling comfortable with myself, more so than when I walked through the door, more so than at any point in my life. It didn't do anything to diminish the cravings or attractions.

Densley

Another issue that's frequently brought up when discussing aversion therapy, is that many people say that the church is the one that instituted it and pushed it on people. You said that he gave you a priesthood blessing, so I assume he was LDS? What fact do you believe that the fact that he was Mormon played in it?

Smith

I don't know how much. It was something that was done all over the US...the reality is, this is something that was done in universities and treatment centers all over the US during that time. It was a common practice during that day, and to blame the church for that is political. I had far more negative experiences with my antidepressants than I did with my aversion therapy.

My experience with aversion therapy was not positive, but I do not feel that I was abused, I do not feel that I was attacked, I don't feel I was pressured. They tried something and it didn't work. Doctors do that all the time. It's what happened with my antidepressants. None of them ever did any good for me. Who should I make accountable for my antidepressant life experience?