

Theology of Human Sexuality Assignment

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Abstract

Debate about human sexuality and the theology behind sexual development and behavior has been ongoing for decades. To explore human sexuality on a deeper level, Christian worldview perspectives are explored. In the first section, God's Biblical design for sexuality and what constitutes healthy human sexual development within this context are explored. The next major section is healing of sexual wounds. In this specific text, infidelity is the focus topic. The definition of infidelity is reviewed, as well as assessment and treatment realms. The last section is the authors review of her personal theology of sexuality.

Keywords: theology of human sexuality, Biblical sexuality, infidelity, healing

Introduction

The theology of human sexuality is something that has been both a topic of discussion and debate for decades. There are various theories that attempt to explain what human sexuality is, what impacts healthy sexual development, and the impact it can have on one's life. Sexual behaviors and sex itself are associated some of the strongest reward pathways in the human brain (Grinde, 2022). Because of this, there have been attempts to control sexuality through political agendas, religions, and society as a whole. One of the most misunderstood theologies of human sexuality is Biblical sexuality. As opposed to what the secular world describes as Biblical sexuality, human sexuality is celebrated within the right contexts. By exploring a Christian worldview, the reality of sexual wounds, and assessing personal theology of human sexuality, a deeper understanding of positive sexual behavior is established.

Christian Worldview Perspectives

God's Design for Sexuality

God's design for sexuality is a common secular misconception and is frequently misconstrued in the media, western society, and even within religious contexts. Oftentimes, verses like Colossians 3:5 (ESV), "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry," are quoted to showcase how sex is viewed as "bad" within the context of religion and church. However, this is not the intention of God's design of sex. Rather, this showcases instances in which Bible verses can be purposefully picked and selectively cited as strategically curated evidence to support a specific claim. It is imperative to assess human sexuality through God's intentional design, rather than the account of specific Biblical stories. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, sex is

taken for granted (Balswick & Balswick, 2019). It is the responses that reprimand sexual relations outside of the designed context that are used to portray a negative image.

Rather, God's design for sexuality is inherently good and purposeful. Sexuality is a gift given to humans from God (Balswick & Balswick, 2019). God designed mankind in His image (see Genesis 1:26-28, 31). When sexuality is explored within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, as God originally designed it to be, it can be a meaningful expression of feelings, thoughts, memories, connection, communication, self-understanding, attitudes, and behaviors (Balswick & Balswick, 2019). Believers of Christ are called to honor marriage (Hebrews 13:4, Genesis 2:24), keep their minds and bodies pure (Colossians 3:5), and flee from sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18). God calls believers to engage in sexual desires through marital sexual expression or Spirit-enabled self-control (Rogers & Tarwater, 2022).

Healthy Human Sexual Development

The development of healthy sexuality starts with the messages received regarding the topic and can influence sexual exploration and management strategies (Claney et al., 2020). Especially in the present societal and political climate, the development of sexuality begins in early adolescence- sometimes even before. Various sexual messages and norms are portrayed in the media, which can make healthy human sexual development confusing for a believer. As opposed to western society's mantras like "be who you are" or "do what makes you happy," Biblical perspectives are outlined to help believers be confident in their set-apartness. While there are no direct instructions to develop a healthy sense of sexuality in terms of the psychological or developmental sense, there are foundational principles that can guide this process. While the perceptions of sexuality rapidly change in society, Biblical philosophies and

beliefs never change- making it easier to frame practices as moral or immoral as one continues to develop (Baker et al., 2020).

It is imperative to develop a sense of identity and self-worth in Christ. Psalm 139:13-14 (ESV) states, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.” Christians will face the pressures of trying to fit in and may fall into the promises of the world. By anchoring one’s identity in Jesus rather than others and their expectations, a safeguard is put in place around one’s body and mind.

Another multidimensional aspect that must be taken into consideration is the reality of the fall of humanity (Yarhouse & Tan, 2014). Nearly ninety percent of Americans have sex prior to marriage (Smith & Wolfinger, 2024). There is no perfect being aside from Jesus, so mankind is bound to fall short of the Biblical expectations and guidelines. In terms of sexuality and development, this can lead to instances of heartbreak, attachment issues, sexually transmitted infections, feelings of shame and guilt, etc. While all of this is a part of human reality, the flipside to this is the redemption found in the Lord. In chapter 8 of the book of John, a woman who is accused of committing adulterous acts is brought to Jesus. Rather than condemn her, He shows her grace and encourages her to “sin no more” (John 8:11, ESV). This highlights that a part of sexual development, which can often be overlooked, is to ask the Lord for forgiveness when you sin and to make meaningful behavior change.

Healing of sexual wounds

What is Infidelity?

As previously mentioned, mankind is bound to fall short of the expectations and precautions set by God in one way or another. This is due to the existence of sin, and it can be a

difficult process to overcome sexual brokenness. Humans experience sexual brokenness and/or sexual wounds in various ways. One of the most common sexual wounds is sexual betrayal (infidelity), despite it being one of the ten foundational commandments of the Christian faith (Exodus 20:14). Instances of infidelity are not limited to a specific place, culture, race, etc. Spousal infidelity has been found to be the most common reason for a divorce/breakup across 160 cultures (Rokach & Chan, 2023).

The definition of infidelity has been a major debate amongst society as well as scholars. Especially in a world where the roles of technology, social media, and artificial intelligence (AI) are ever-growing, boundaries can be blurred and crossed within a matter of seconds. Generally, infidelity is defined as any type of emotional, sexual or romantic behavior that is kept secret and violates the exclusivity of a previously established relationship (Rokach & Chan, 2023). Infidelity can be further broken down into various categories of subtypes such as sexual, emotional, combined (sexual and emotional) and internet infidelity (Rokach & Chan, 2023).

According to Balswick & Balswick (2019), there are four types of affairs (instances of infidelity)- the accidental affair, philandering (seeking out an affair on purpose), the romantic affair, and marital arrangements (open marriages). Through a Biblical lens, sexual betrayal occurs when the covenant of marriage has been broken. Infidelity “pierces the core” of the promise of marriage and can occur for a number of reasons (Balswick & Balswick, 2019). These include unequal power, lack of differentiation, situational factors, moral reasons, relational problems, dissatisfaction in marriage or sex life, low religiosity, high interest in sex, parental divorce, and insecure attachment styles (Balswick & Balswick, 2019).

Assessment

Sexual betrayal (infidelity) is one of the more challenging sexual wounds to assess, as it is not an act or disorder listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5-TR). Rather, it is usually the outcome of infidelity that is assessed and later treated- whether in a relational or individual context. It is possible that the effects of infidelity can manifest into symptomology related to DSM-5-TR disorders, such as anxiety and depressive disorders. Sin and wrongdoing do not occur in isolation, making transgressions and moral lapses impact relationships (i.e., a spouse). Both spouses are impacted by the occurrence of infidelity in various ways.

It is important to note that doubt about marital fidelity will produce behavior change in the suspecting spouse. These behaviors include observing behavior changes, asking prying and/or purposeful questions and assess their reaction, check the location of their significant other, search through their spouse's belongings, involve third parties and friends for information, and objective evidence collection (Apostolou & Ioannidou, 2021). Objectively, these behaviors are not inherently healthy for a relationship. However, they showcase the impact infidelity and sexual betrayal can have on a relationship and the importance of assessing (1) why the betrayal occurred and (2) the depth of the wounds inflicted because of it.

Treatment

The effects of sexual betrayal can be devastating on a marriage and/or relationship. Realistically, many do not survive after instances of infidelity. However, this does not mean that all couples who experience infidelity choose to end their relationship. Every person has their own traumas, experiences, beliefs, upbringings, etc. In societal terms, one would say that each individual person has their own "baggage." Because of this, responses to infidelity may be different, making treatment options vary for each person. Various responses include threat, hurt, anger, frustration, guilt, shame, fear, depression, and apathy (Balswick & Balswick, 2019).

However, one thing remains constant at the core of sexual betrayal. In order work it (if that is what the couple chooses to do), the burned bridge of trust must be repaired (Balswick & Balswick, 2019). To heal from instances of sexual betrayal, the first step is admitting that the infidelity actually happened (Balswick & Balswick, 2019). This allows the sessions to progress based on truth and mutual acknowledgement. There are numerous treatment approaches to healing this specific sexual wound, as each couple or individual has different presenting concerns, feelings, and experiences. It is imperative, though, that professionals allow couples to sit in the tension of the revealed truth rather than quickly jump to solutions (Balswick & Balswick, 2019). This allows for accountability and opportunities to grow and really work out deeply rooted issues.

Individual treatment goals and couple treatment goals should be in alignment. Factors that impede recovery are continual betrayal/dishonesty, an unwillingness to take accountability, unwillingness to commit to therapy, an apparent lack of effort to truly rebuild trust and intimacy, and continually placing blame and resentful feelings rather than forgiveness (Irvine & Peluso, 2021). Because of this, it is essential to ensure that couples are working towards the same goal. Relationships lacking confidence and only maintaining fidelity through controlling behaviors are not successful treatment examples (Barraca & Polanski, 2021).

Summary of Personal Theology

It can be easily understood as to why human sexuality is a topic with vast opinions embedded within it and how it can be difficult to capture in just a matter of pages. Personally, I find a lot of truth in the first section of this assignment. I identify as a Christian, and I have reached new depths of my faith as I have gotten older. I find truth and freedom, rather than restraint, within God's intended design of sexuality.

While it would be nice to say that the only thing that impacts my personal theology of human sexuality is Biblical scripture, that would be a naïve statement. During my teenage years, I feel as though I rebelled against these teachings and went against God's design for sexuality. I really was encapsulated by secular messages regarding sexuality fed to me through movies, media, TV shows, music, etc. I admit these shortcomings to showcase the importance of Biblical sexuality and God's ability to redeem (1 John 1:9, James 5:16). These ideas are very similar to those shared and explained in the first section of this written work.

Through my own personal experiences and decisions, I have learned to really view sexuality and its related behaviors as a sacred behavior. I believe that it is best to save sex for marriage, but I wholly understand the temptations we face as humans. Sexual behavior is a core activity ingrained in our genes and biological bodies but is also closely associated with individual happiness (Grinde, 2022). These factors combined with societal norms quickly change the narrative/context described in the Bible in regard to sexuality.

No matter what mistakes one has made in the past, I believe that there is redemption, forgiveness, and healing that can be found in Jesus. No- I don't think it's bad or taboo to discuss. While I do believe that there are still very real, present gender inequalities that affect sexuality, I don't think these can be attributed to Biblical teachings. Rather, there are more related to human sin and culture. In essence, my personal theology has been heavily impacted by the grace of God and the scripture to help guide me. Proverbs 8: 33-35 (ESV), states, "Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord..." My personal testimony can be used as a way to showcase the impact sexuality can have on an

individual- both good and bad. Above all, though, I have learned God can take all stories and turn them for good (Genesis 50:20).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the theology of human sexuality has been explored in various realms. Biblical sexuality, specifically, is often misunderstood and misrepresented in the media, politics, movies, etc. by highlighting the premise of abstinence. However, if time is taken to truly understand what Biblical sexuality entails, it can be seen that God's design was not to restrict mankind. Rather, appropriate contexts for sexuality are celebrated and seen as good. Guidelines are outlined in the Bible to protect believers from the negative consequences that can revolve around sexual behavior.

Speaking on negative consequences, the healing of sexual wounds was also explored. In particular, sexual betrayal was focused on. Infidelity can have long-lasting impacts on a relationship. The assessment and treatment of infidelity can be ambiguous and look different for every person, as the effects are a combination of present-time reactions, previous traumas, and unique relationship dynamics.

Personal theology of sexuality is made up of a combination of aspects, such as some of the ones listed above. It is important to assess personal theology about sexuality in order to (1) ensure your life is aligning with your personal values, (2) avoid cognitive dissonance, and (3) become more secure in your spiritual beliefs. To continue to learn more about human sexuality, I plan to research sexual wounds and learn how the role of God's redemptive grace and counseling have positively impacted the healing process. It is my goal to learn more about the intersection of spirituality, the theology of sexuality, and sexual behaviors.

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Area of Interest and Resource List Assignment: The Role of Pornography in Adolescent Sexual Development, Expectation, and Satisfaction.

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Abstract

Human sexuality is a prevalent social, political, and academic area of interest. This topic presents a broad scope, as there are various disorders and areas of concern that fall under the umbrella of human sexuality. Some of the most prevalent contemporary issues are the effects of pornography consumption and the role it plays on adolescent sexual development, expectation, and satisfaction. To explore this issue, an in-depth description of this area of interest is provided after the introduction and rationale for topic choice. Societal and cultural impacts of adolescent pornography consumptions are explored. A Christian worldview of this topic is discussed, as well as both the clinical and spiritual responses for assessment and treatment. Recommendations for further action are presented in the conclusion. An appendix is attached after the references page and includes resources that can help address adolescent pornography use, unrealistic or unsatisfactory sexual relations and beliefs, and pornography addiction in adolescence and beyond.

Keywords: adolescent pornography consumption, adolescent sexual expectation

Introduction

The study of human sexuality is a contemporary issue that has and will continue to generate conflict and discomfort. The history of sexuality begins as early as fifth century BCE (Wiesner-Hanks & Kuefler, 2024). Throughout history, sexual behaviors generally remained private matters that were considered taboo to discuss due to heavy influence of religion, sexism, and various societal norms. It wasn't until the second half of the twentieth century that sexuality became a prevalent topic of social, political, and academic area of interest due to factors such as feminist movements and the work of sexologist Alfred Kinsey. Present-day, human sexuality remains a predominant topic in these domains. Views on what is considered a sexual dysfunction have evolved over time. For example, homosexuality is now generally viewed as a basic human right and is celebrated rather than condemned by the majority of society. However, there are still issues that prevail. Specifically, the impact of pornography consumption is an area of concern and is a contemporary issue in academic research and society as a whole.

Area of Interest

A large body of academic research exists on the effects of pornography. Research has shown both positive and negative effects for individuals and couples who engage in various forms of pornography consumption (Yarhouse & Tan, 2014). Recently though, the role of the internet has widened the scope of who has access to pornographic material. As the prevalence of sexualized material and access to online content increases, the age of those consuming pornography decreases (Jhe, et al., 2023). For this work, the role of pornography in adolescent sexual expectations will be addressed.

This topic was chosen as the author's area of interest because of how the internet has become an integral part of society and the everyday lives of humans. The level of exposure to

online content, specifically pornography, is an area of ample concern for parents, teachers, and the general public as it has the potential to impact sexual development (Jhe, et al., 2023). This is a prevalent social issue in today's society, making knowledge of the content imperative.

Description of the Issue

The issue goes beyond the debate of whether adolescents should be engaging with pornographic material. As previously stated, the reality is that exposure to explicit content is continuing to grow. Before the role of the internet had such a widespread role in society, the consumption of pornography was attributed to pornographic magazines, television, and rental movies (Lewczuk et al., 2023). In 2002, a survey assessing the prevalence and modalities of pornographic material revealed that 36.6% of men and 8.9% of women reported seeing pornographic content via the Internet (Lewczuk et al., 2023).

So, where does that leave the adolescents who are engaging with this material in the present-day? Between 2004 and 2016, 38% of adolescents (13-17 years old) and 26% of children (7-12 years old) viewed online pornographic websites (Lewczuk et al., 2023). Through interviewing school-aged young people, Meehan (2023) found that young boys' use of porn was considered normal and even expected. Concerns about potentially becoming addicted to pornography as a young (adolescent age) individual were also found to be a topic of concern (Meehan, 2023).

These statistics become concerning when assessing the impact of consuming such pornographic content. Any source that stimulates an individual has the potential to become addictive- whether viewed as good or bad (Jha & Banerjee, 2022). Pornography triggers the release of brain chemicals such as dopamine, and it can become problematic when chronically consumed because it can lead to neuroplastic changes within the brain (Jha & Banerjee, 2022).

Adolescent brains are not yet completely developed, raising ample concern for healthy brain development and meaningful relationships. Adolescent pornography consumption can lead to early partnered sexual behavior, more sexual partners, lower relationship satisfaction, lower sexual satisfaction, agreement with gender stereotypes and power dynamics in sexual relationships, acceptance of premarital sex, and obsession with sexual fantasies (Adarsh & Sahoo, 2023). Erroneous sexual beliefs are more likely to occur in adolescents who consumed pornography, especially those who are not yet sexually experienced (Wright et al., 2022). These effects raise major concerns, as they can lead to cognitive and relational dissonance, disillusionment about healthy/normative sexual development, unmet expectations (dissatisfaction), and anxiety (Adarsh & Sahoo, 2023).

Impact Beyond the Individual

Societal Impact

While it is clear that adolescent sexual development can be heavily influenced and impacted by pornography, it is also informed by perspectives of the self, relationships, generations, institutions, and culture (Kaestle et al., 2021). This is important to consider because as adolescents transition into adulthood, their developmental outcomes can begin to shift the societal norm. The adolescent population can serve as a reflection of current societal conditions, as well as a determinant of what behaviors can be expected in generations to come.

The effects of pornography consumption of the individual have been reviewed, but there are effects that go beyond the development of one person. Adolescent viewers are primed and influenced by the material, resulting in both arousal and desensitization, which can yield disinhibition and sexually aggressive attitudes and behavior (Balswick & Balswick, 2019). This becomes concerning as adolescents enter into sexual and emotional relationships. The quality of

the relationship may be lower, as the realistic expectations set forth by pornographic material leads to emotional detachment. Patterns formed during adolescence may heavily impact the quality of life in young and older adulthood.

As seen by psychological development theories/models such as the Family System Theory and the Developmental Model, one's behavior always has an impact on others around them. In this case, the unhealthy patterns established through pornography consumption in adolescence can affect marriage and family. Pornographic content has been found to promote extradyadic sex, double the likelihood of divorce, lower marital satisfaction, and is associated with higher breakup rates in relationships afterwards (Mestre-Bach & Potenza, 2023). This highlights the consequences on family dynamics. A child exposed to conflict and parental porn use may continue to have distorted views of sexuality. This is especially concerning because, as previously discussed, consuming pornographic material results in the release of 'chemical happiness' in the brain. The cycle can then repeat itself.

Cultural Impact

Another notable issue is the cultural impacts regarding the consumption of pornography. It has been explained how, if not interrupted and changed, the beliefs perceived in adolescence can carry over to later developmental periods of life. The intersectionality of culture further complicates the issue. Especially in conservative cultures, the exposure to such online content can lead to internal and external conflicts with religious beliefs and cultural taboos (Gesser-Edelsburg & Abed Elhadi Arabia, 2018). The state of enjoying the experience of consuming pornography and knowing it is viewed as wrong can lead to feelings such as shame and guilt.

Another cultural consideration is sexual minorities. Because sexuality is immersed in the perceived values and norms of society, sexual minorities are often left in states of moral

incongruence. This plays a role in the development of problematic consumption of pornography, and it reduces motivation to change or engage in sexually proactive behaviors (Droubay & White, 2024). Mainstream pornographic material can reinforce stereotypes and stigmas. Members of the LGBTQIA+ community face numerous barriers in their development of sexuality, partly due to online pornographic content showcasing internalized homonegativity (Droubay & White, 2024).

Overall, the cost of not adequately addressing the issue of pornography influencing adolescent sexual development, expectation, and satisfaction is having a generation that cannot form meaningful relationships with their own sexuality as well as others. This may become a burden on public health if societal norms continue to degrade. Engaging in the consumption of pornography during adolescence lays the foundation for aggression, mental health issues, and relational fallout.

Christian Worldview Perspectives

The word “pornography” is not explicitly used in the Bible. However, there are multiple instances throughout the Bible addressing topics such as lustful thinking and sexual immorality. Matthew 5:28-29 (ESV) clearly addresses lust by stating, “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.” It is made clear that actions such as adultery are morally wrong, however this highlights that biblical sexuality goes beyond the physical action. Followers of Jesus are called to uphold purity of the mind and body. When one engages with pornographic material, he or she is engaging with a worldly distortion of God’s intended design for sexuality. As seen in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (ESV), believers are called to

“Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

While it can be an awkward topic to discuss, the Bible highlights the need for God’s teaching regarding sexuality and sexual behaviors to be modeled and discussed. Proverbs 22:6 (ESV) states, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” As previously examined, the pattern of unhealthy sexuality has the capability to become cyclical. God calls believers to engage in meaningful conversations and teachings about purity, sexuality, and the influence of what we consume. Sin never occurs in a vacuum, so it is important to emphasize healthy sexuality and development. Sexual authenticity is marked by an individual taking responsibility for what he or she allows to enter their mind, heart, and soul (Balswick & Balswick, 2019). God’s mercy extends to all who believe in Him, so redemption is always possible and freely given through the blood of Jesus. As the world becomes more sexualized and the role of the internet is increasingly widespread, honest conversations and biblical teaching are imperative.

Clinical Responses

While the act of consuming pornography during adolescence (or at any age) is not considered a clinical issue within itself, it can become problematic when the degree of use becomes excessive and affects relationships, actions, behaviors, self-perception, and beliefs. As with any clinical disorder, there are various levels of intervention and treatment that can address problematic pornography use, pornography addiction, and other sexual disorders.

The first level of intervention focuses on prevention (Testa et al., 2023). This may not be appropriate for an adolescent who is already struggling with the use or consumption of pornography. For adolescents with problematic pornography use, psychoeducational methods may be more appropriate to address the situation. While the intention of each intervention varies slightly, the main purpose behind them is the same: sharing information. Pornography education is rooted in empowering adolescents and providing appropriate resources that allow them to critically think about the nature of pornographic material, how and why it is produced, the reality of sexual experiences, etc. (Testa et al., 2023).

In addition, Jhe et al. (2023) also note that primary care providers are often an adolescent's first point of contact regarding topics such as puberty, sexuality, and behavioral health concerns. These medical professionals are encouraged to specifically assess for problematic pornography use using screening tools such as the Home, Education, Activities, Drugs, Sex, Suicide (HEADSS) Assessment, and then help facilitate non-judgmental, educational care and conversations between the child and their parent(s) (Jhe et al., 2023).

For adolescents who may need more intensive intervention for problematic pornography use, other clinical approaches may be warranted. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and mindfulness-based approaches have been successfully utilized to help adults who suffer with problematic pornography use and addiction (Testa et al., 2023). Additionally, a component of family-based therapy has proven to be beneficial with this particular area of concern (Testa et al., 2023). Another option is seeking treatment through a certified sex therapist, who has been specifically trained to address various sexual concerns. Using a mental health professional that is knowledgeable in addictive behaviors, sexuality, informed consent and confidentiality, and

working with the specific age range of adolescence can change cognitive patterns and beliefs and mend the process of healthy sexual development.

Spiritual Responses

The church can address this topic through various facets. On the most general level, pastors can address ideas of sexual purity, meaningful marriage, and intentional singleness in sermons and Sunday messages. While this can be uncomfortable, addressing these issues helps alleviate the stigma and taboo perceptions of such topics. The role of relationships in human life is substantial, making biblical guidance and teaching invaluable. Learning about such topics in church on a general/communal level can help facilitate meaningful conversation between parents, children, families, mentors, etc.

On a more individual and specific level, pastoral care and guidance can be a spiritual response to adolescents who are engaging with and consuming pornography. Early interventions can lead to positive behavior change prior to as habit becoming addicting and overwhelming. Arrieta (2023) provides the proposition that all human sin, in this case it would be the consumption of pornography and an impure heart/mind, is a result of a deeper-rooted issue. To address the use of pornography in an adolescent, the deeper-rooted issue must be uncovered and discussed. Sexual addictions, including the use of pornography, are rooted in the family of origin and trauma (Breed, 2022).

Discussion of these issues typically do not occur at the first meeting. Pastoral care, especially in regard to adolescents and sensitive subjects, require caution, rapport, care, and understanding. The role of shame can be debilitating, so it is important for the pastoral care team to be sensitive to the details regarding the issue (Was this self-reported or did a parent request support? Has this individual experienced any abuse or neglect?). To help an individual through

such a complex issue, the core of the conversation should be debunking the “web of falsehoods” that pornography engrains and mend his or her relationship with the Lord (Groves, 2013, pg. 8). Once the lies are recognized, three ways to address the issue further are to (1) identify the role of pornography in one’s life, (2) utilize scripture to restore godly relationships, and (3) discuss what victory over pornography actively looks like in practice (Groves, 2013).

Conclusion

Overall, the impact of pornography consumption on adolescent sexual development, expectations, and satisfaction has the potential to be detrimental. Pornographic material is often used by adolescents as an informal sex education source, which can lead to engaging in various dimensions of sexual practices at earlier ages, physical and chemical changes in the brain, permissive sexual attitudes, instrumental attitudes toward sex, and gender-related stereotypical thinking (Testa et al., 2023). Frequent consumption of pornographic material also can cause less sexual and emotional satisfaction, anxiety, internalized shame, and familial breakdown (Mestre-Bach & Potenza, 2023). With children’s access to the internet actively increasing in today’s society, this is a pressing issue. If sexuality and “normal” sexual behaviors are shaped by inauthentic and scripted acts, societal norms may shift to reflect these beliefs. This can lead to modifications in public health policies/concerns and exacerbate the continuing rise of mental health issues.

To address problematic pornography use, there are various levels of intervention. In general, it is recommended that sexual literacy and open conversations about pornographic material and its possible effects serve as a foundational baseline (Jhe et al., 2023; Testa et al., 2023). If individuals require treatment that is more thorough and clinically based, various forms of psychotherapy have been found effective in addressing these issues (Testa et al., 2023).

Intervention may also come through other forums, such as the church and pastoral care. Lustful behavior, adulterous thoughts, and sexual purity are addressed various times in the Bible and can be used as a source of motivation to change.

To continue addressing this issue, it is recommended that meaningful facets of sex and relationship education programs become available (Testa et al., 2023). These should include topics such as physical safety, intimacy, the unrealistic representation of sexual experiences in pornography, body-image and self-perception considerations, expectations of sexual performance and pleasure, and violence (Testa et al., 2023). Based on the previous topics discussed, it is also imperative to facilitate discussions that would address gender, various sexual orientations (LGBTQIA+), sexual minorities, and culture. If approaching the subject through a faith-based lens, it would be recommended to review God's intended design for sexuality and focus on that fact that God designed sex to be a positive part of the human experience. Rather than focus on the restricting elements of Christianity, it can be beneficial to understand how sexual purity can lead to improved and more fulfilling relationships.

Because there are limited studies that focus on prevention strategies and treatment for pornography use in adolescents (Testa et al., 2023), the author recommends that longitudinal research that focuses on the long-term effects of pornography be completed. These studies could seek to measure the positive or negative associations between adolescent pornography consumption and variables such as relational satisfaction, long-term relationship success, intimate partner violence, self-perception, levels of confidence, etc.

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Appendix

Resource List

Books

1. Youth and Internet Pornography: The Impact and Influence on Adolescent Development

Behun, R., & Owens, E. W. (2019). *Youth and internet pornography: The impact and influence on adolescent development*. Routledge.

Youth and Internet Pornography: The Impact and Influence on Adolescent Development is an academic, research-based book that explains the effects of adolescent pornography consumption. It includes non-judgmental views and explanations on contemporary issues such as the development of adolescents, legal and ethical challenges, and generational distinctions.

2. Facing the Shadow: Starting Sexual and Relationship Recovery: A Gentle Path to Beginning Recovery from Sex Addiction

Carnes, P. (2005). *Facing the shadow: Starting sexual and relationship recovery: A gentle path to beginning recovery from sex addiction*. Gentle Path Press.

Facing the Shadow is self-help book written by Patrick Carnes, Ph.D., that allows readers to work through sex and pornography addiction that is based on the thirty-task model of recovery. This book includes reflections and exercises that can help readers work through denial and ambivalence regarding the role of sex and pornography in one's life, which promotes meaningful healing.

3. Good Pictures Bad pictures: Porn-Proofing Today's Young Kids

Jenson, K. A., & Poyner, G. (2018). *Good pictures bad pictures: Porn-proofing today's young kids*. Glen Cove Press.

Good Pictures Bad pictures: Porn-Proofing Today's Young Kids is a literary piece that can be used a resource for parents, but it can also be shared with children. The overarching goal is to educate parents and children about the use of pornography. There are statistics, resources, explanations, and discussion questions throughout the book to help engage in meaningful conversation and early prevention practices.

Online Resources

1. How to Talk to Kids about Pornography (blog by Jacqueline Nesi, Ph.D. and Margaret Nail)

<https://www.brownhealth.org/be-well/how-talk-kids-about-pornography>

This blog discusses how the role of the internet has impacted teenagers access to pornographic material and the impacts it can have on development. This resource provides meaningful steps and tips on how to approach conversations. It also includes additional resources for parents and children.

2. Resources to Deal with Online Pornography (by Internet Matters)

<https://www.internetmatters.org/issues/online-pornography/resources/>

This resource is provided by Internet Matters, an organization dedicated to the online safety of children. This website links to additional resources for children and parents and provides assistance in finding appropriate mental health services. It is a good first step when assessing your intervention options.

3. Talking to your Child About Online Pornography Exposure (Q&A site via the American Academy of Pediatrics)

<https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/media-and-children/center-of-excellence-on-social-media-and-youth-mental-health/qa-portal/qa-portal-library/qa-portal-library-questions/talking-to-your->

child-about-online-pornography-exposure/?srsltid=AfmBOopgoDBEL7ajmitP4-p-1Uqp9GvWQ9mZufSaWLZ2ZZhP3wQkeFKg&utm

This online resource responds to be specific a question regarding how to discuss exposure to pornography with your child in a healthy manner. This site gives parents practical steps to facilitate uncomfortable conversations and lists additional resources.

Clinical Counseling Agencies

1. New Life 360°

Website for general overview: <https://newlife360inc.com>

Link to pornography help specifically: <https://newlife360inc.com/addiction-therapy/sex-love-porn>

Brandon, FL Location

1067 E Brandon Blvd. Brandon, FL 33511

(813) 548-1166

Riverview, FL Location

10017 Water Works Ln. Riverview, FL 33578

(813) 210-4542

New Life 360 is a counseling service agency that offers individual and group therapy in the greater Tampa, FL area. There are multiple counselors on staff with various specializations in addiction and behavioral therapy. Clients of all ages are welcome. There is a specific webpage (linked above) for information on their sex, love, and porn addiction services.

2. Birches Health (remote)

Website for general overview: <https://bircheshealth.com>

Link to pornography help specifically: https://bircheshealth.com/lp/porn-addiction-lp?adgroupid=159666211856&device=c&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=Brand&utm_source=google&utm_content=718366486550&utm_term=birches%20health&hsa_acc=2036502996&hsa_cam=21052700314&hsa_grp=159666211856&hsa_ad=718366486550&hsa_src=g&hsa_tgt=kwd-2178612721090&hsa_kw=birches%20health&hsa_mt=e&hsa_net=adwords&hsa_ver=3&gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=21052700314&gbraid=0AAAApOpD_rbW-tBIEGerh0kZS_mI2qP5&gclid=CjwKCAjw9uPCBhATEiwABHN9K8pAFaA4igtD-MDPOk-PTFHTMvWJVS0YoWTALGmjYwe_o_9YCvEMxBoCIPIQAvD_BwE

hello@bircheshealth.com

(833) 483-3838

Birches Health is a behavioral addiction program that offers remote counseling for clients in various states including the state of Florida. Their listed specialties include gambling, sports betting, day trading, video gaming, pornography, and other addictions. Most major insurance companies are accepted, making this a great resource for those with limited availability or transportation.

3. Tampa Bay Christian Counseling Center

Website for general overview: <https://www.tbccc.org>

Link to pornography help specifically: <https://www.tbccc.org/porn-recovery>
admin@tbcc.org

18524 North Dale Mabry Highway Lutz, FL 33548

(813) 964-5511

Tampa Bay Christian Counseling Center offers in-person and telehealth counseling services.

They offer faith-based approaches and offer services to teens and adults. They offer specialized porn addiction services.

Certified Sex Therapists

1. Jennifer Betancur, Ph.D., Certified Sex Therapist

<http://metamorphosispsychtherapy.com>

jbetancurlcsw@gmail.com

Metamorphosis Psychotherapy

14321 Avon Farms Dr. Tampa, FL 33609

(813) 955-1481

Dr. Jennifer Betancur is a certified sex therapist through the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists (AASECT) and specializes in sexuality and intimacy issues. She also has experience working with the LGBTQIA+ community. She meets with clients in-person in Tampa, FL and via telehealth.

2. Scott Grupp, Licensed Mental Health Counselor, Certified Sex Therapist

Scott@CatalystHelp.com

Catalyst Center for Change LLC

4100 W. Kennedy Blvd., Suite 210 Tampa, FL 33609

(813) 287-9500

Scott Grupp is a certified sex therapist through the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists (AASECT). He provides counseling for individual, couples, and families that are suffering from sexual disorders and addictions, including pornography. He focuses on the traumas related to these behaviors and aims to treat the root of the problem.

Community & Spiritual Support

1. The Freedom Fight Program

<http://thefreedomfight.org>

info@thefreedomfight.org

The Freedom Fight is a Christian faith-based organization that aims to equip individuals to overcome problematic pornography use. Their program includes many resources such as a mobile app, books, recovery plans, free resources, and toolkits for ministry leaders. The program focus is on discipleship. They have specific resources for teens struggling with pornography use.

2. Teen Connect Tampa Bay

<https://www.teenconnecttampabay.org>

Text (813) 440-9595

Teen Connect Tampa Bay is a local nonprofit in Tampa, FL that provides a variety of services and support tailored to the local youth and teen population. Physical locations are located throughout the Tampa Bay region. Sexual health education and mental health counseling resources are included.

3. Crisis Center of Tampa Bay

<https://www.crisiscenter.com>

One Crisis Center Plaza Tampa, FL 33613

(813) 964-1964 or 211

While not specifically tailored to pornography use, the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay is an important resource to be informed about. 24/7 crisis intervention hotlines and navigation for mental health resources and referrals are available.