



Research Article

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Pornography is the Problem: Cogitations from a Novice Therapist

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Abstract

Unfortunately, in my program, I only had one class that addressed addiction. It glossed over some key terms and general strategies, but the takeaway was that it usually meant you were working at a residential treatment facility or hospital. With my limited knowledge base, I assumed that addiction wouldn't be in mainstream counseling, let alone private practice. Little did I know, that is not the case. Addiction can come in many forms and even varieties of forms, and so on. What I have learned so far is that addiction is not a standalone counseling strand, a certain "type" of client or even a separate diagnosis but rather derives from a bigger issue or problem. Working at a private practice for the past year, I have had the opportunity to work with clients of all ages and backgrounds who presented with a variety of concerns. One population that I work most with seems almost taboo, with an addiction that therapists don't want to address, don't know how to address or don't want to work with. Hi, my name is Shelley Harris and I am a licensed juvenile sex offender treatment provider.

Keywords: Juvenile sex offenders; Pornography; Addiction

Juvenile Sex Offenders

Working with sex offenders was definitely not discussed in my counseling program and I had extremely limited knowledge about this population. To be honest, I personally thought I would never work with sex offenders because it is a crime in the most intimate way possible and I just didn't understand how it could happen. No excuse would be good enough for my head to wrap around the offense. However, as I was introduced to boys, ages 12-18, who were attending individual or group treatment sessions, I started to ask questions. My supervisor is the expert. She has almost exclusively worked with this population for over 20 years and no topic or question is off limits. I have learned so much, and still learn from her every chance I can. My inner counselor finally awoke when I realized that people are messy – meaning that we all have

our issues, our past, our successes and failures, our good choices and bad. I began to separate the person from the choice. The choice may be intentional, opportunistic or due to lack of knowledge. A choice stems from our psychological processes, some in which develop thinking errors which can result in bad choices. Regardless, it is how we got there and what we are going to do about it. It is not learning from our past. We process our feelings from the past and begin to learn healthy habits and reframe what a healthy self and healthy relationship is. For many therapists, this is a tough population to work with and oftentimes, not even considered. It could be lack of knowledge. How can a 15 year old fondle a 12 year old? How can a 16 year old have sexual intercourse with a 13 year old? How can a 12 year old force oral sex with a 6 year old?

As therapists, we know there are many predictors to behaviors but no guarantees that behavior may occur. We may revisit the assessment and read the police report, reflect on Piaget's (1919) Stages of Development, Kohlberg's Moral Development (1958) or Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977) and how they may explain internal or external factors but not the offense. At this point, we empathize with the child but still may question how this heinous crime occurred. What made Child A do XYZ to Child B? From summarizing my questions and conversations from the local expert, analyzing personal letters from cases at a private practice that serves nine counties, and reviewing the scant literature on juvenile sex offenders, there is one glaring connection. Most juvenile sex offenders are addicted to pornography.

Technology

Researchers can agree that individuals from infants to adults overuse technology. Parents give their crying babies a tablet in order to keep them quiet. School-aged kids are using laptops for school from home or playing video games online. Adults play games, surf the web or conduct business on their phones and laptops. From TVs, computers, social media and smart phones, technology has monopolized our daily lives.

An increasing level of accessibility allows children to access the web, sometimes unnoticed. Hidden browsers, the dark web, the deep dark web and social media that deletes itself gives power to the children that adult controls or restrictions can't keep up. A simple Google search fetches pictures, videos and websites. You Tube and Tick Tock offers immediate feedback to fans who watch their channels. It is enticing, fun and convenient but can also be very problematic. Pre-teen and teen-aged boys who are going through puberty are naturally curious. Having access to the internet allows them to "Ask Siri" or "Alexa" what a body part is or what sex looks like. Once accessed, there are numerous sites, pages, games or groups to join. This can be pleasurable to watch and may include masturbation. If watched repeatedly, it becomes habitual. Grades, attendance to school or participating in common activities begin to diminish. The focus becomes watching pornography and transfers to action.

Pornography

The problem with pornography is what is being watched does not depict a healthy sexual relationship. Boys are only seeing the body part or sexual act, not any loving connections or intimacy. Conversations are quite brief and irrelevant. Sometimes, they begin to expand their search and watch different types of sexual acts, BDSM or fetishes. In turn, such as Bandura's [1-4] Bobo dolls experiment, they want to act out what they are watching. It now becomes a means to an opportunity. If a boy has not had sex education or is unable to discuss what sex is to his parents or guardians, then he is learning what he knows from what he watches online. He does not understand the concept of consent. He is unable to comprehend what is healthy or appropriate because what he is seeing online is portraying a different message. More often than not, he comes from a home life where he is left unsupervised, given a phone or access to the internet with no limitations, or with parents

who are uncomfortable to discuss sex. If he wants to experiment, he mimics the act he watched and doesn't fathom the consequence because no one has taught him any differently.

Solutions

There are many things we can do about pornography and juvenile sex offending behaviors. This is a learned behavior and reframing this behavior has its challenges. Nothing is a one-size-fits-all but understanding there is a pattern may bring awareness to parents and therapists alike. As a society, the first thing we can do is educate ourselves about the impact technology has on our lives. This would come from credible sources, such as our doctors and educators, about time spent online, age-appropriate sites and parental restrictions. Although it is a convenience, it can also be a hindrance to appropriate development if allowed to view any site, any time. Second, it is important to eradicate the stigma of talking about sex education with our children. Children need to learn about healthy sexual relationships and what is going on with their bodies at various stages of development. Being able to talk to someone they trust is a crucial component to their understanding of their body and how it works. With the presence of videos and social media, communication with a parent or mentor is needed now more than ever. The best thing we can do about juvenile sex offending and pornography is offer appropriate sex education to all students. This needs to be treated as a social issue and not a media construct. Effective Sex Education curriculum discusses life skills, communication, consent, self-worth, age-appropriateness and boundaries. If students understand consent, will sex offenses decrease? Yes. If students learn what a healthy relationship looks and feel like, do they have a better chance of creating one for themselves? Yes. Isn't this what we want for humanity? A couple of radical items not mentioned was to delete pornography, change parenting styles or get rid of smart phones. This is unrealistic and might be the cause for many therapists to not work with juvenile sex offenders because they feel it is someone they can't help or out of their reach. I beg to differ. We are all taught the locust of control. Working together with our parents and community will only bring about positive results. We cannot fix the increase of technology but we can approach it from a different perspective with new boundaries. This is an achievable task.

Conclusion

I have always searched for meaning in every transaction. With the addition of working with juvenile sex offenders, I surmise that societal ills have squeezed their way into our young adolescent and teen boys through technology. I can't imagine what one year or five years will hold in the technological age but I do know for certain that we as a society must not continue to place band aids on issues that can be healed. Talking about sex and educating ourselves and our children about healthy sexual relationships is critical. Together, let's change the offending landscape into something that is healthy and flourishing.

Acknowledgement

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Conflict of interest

None.

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