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CHRISTIAN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN THE HOOK UP WORLD

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Introduction

The 1960's largely represented a period of in which the Western world experienced a large social upheaval, resulting in a cultural revolution. The mores and customs of the day were challenged on every end. This included protests against the war, against the norms and expectations of parents, and against the norms that said it was wrong to have sex before marriage, or to live with each other prior to marriage. Organized religion was also challenged. One of the most popular quotes of the day was the Gestalt prayer of Fritz Pearls, which stated, " I do my thing and you do your thing. I am not in this world to live up to your expectations and you are not in this world to live up to mine. You are you and I am I, and if by chance we find each other, it's beautiful. If not, it can't be helped. " Little did we fully understand at the time that the very concepts of relationships were being redefined...not negated, but redefined. It was impossible for relationships to be negated, because we are created for relationships. Genesis 1:1 tells us God was in relationship when He created the earth. Genesis 1:27 tells us that both male and female were created in His image. Genesis 1: 31 tell us that He pronounced His creation as "very good." Lastly, Genesis 2:18 tells us that God said it was not good for man to be alone, so he created him a suitable helper (Genesis 2:20).

Not surprisingly, research now bears out what the scriptures told us years ago...it is not good for man (or woman) to be alone. In the report, *Wired to Connect*, the authors document the sharp increase in the number of children requiring mental health services. The authors attribute the crisis in the mental health needs of children to a lack of close connections to other people and deep connections to moral and spiritual meaning.

The work of Dr. Bruce Perry, a child psychiatrist and neurobiologist, also documents the need for human connection. In his book, *Born for Love*, he documents the importance of loving human connectedness to the ability for us to create loving, empathic human relationships. But just as in *Wired to Connect*, he also documents the decrease in connectedness among individuals. He notes that in the modern era the relational milieu has collapsed from a time in which the average household size was six-to today it being three or less. He also points out that a quarter of the population lives alone.

The drive for connections is so great, that in the absence of deep familial and relational connections, society has created multiple superficial ways in which to connect. One of the ways in which this can be seen is in the casual way that young people approach their sexual encounters, otherwise known as “hook ups.” In the book, *Unhooked* by Laura Sessions Stepp (2007), the topic of hook ups is defined and discussed with great candor. She explains that it is crucial to remember that hooking up, in the minds of this generation, carries no commitment. People hook up with the understanding that however far they go sexually, they should not become romantically involved in any serious way. The most defining element of hooking up is the ability is the ability to *unhook* at any time. The book discusses in great clarity the impact of this way of life on both the girls, who often use alcohol and a social lubricant to assist them both in their sexual hook ups, and then later, to deal with the disappointments when things don’t go as they had secretly hoped.

The book *Hooked* by Dr. Joe McIlhaney, Jr. M.D., and Dr. Freda Bush, M.D., details the bonding aspects of sex from a neurochemical perspective. In this book, they explain with great specificity the impact of dopamine, oxytocin and vasopressin on the brain and their involvement during sexual relationships. For example, when discussing the impact of vasopressin on the

man's brain, they note that men do not realize that a partial bond is formed with every woman they have sex with, which ultimately leads to an inability to have a committed relationship with anyone.

The scriptures repeatedly warn about participating in sexual immorality. However, for the majority of people within the church, participating in sex outside of marriage seems to be treated with the same mindset as is held by people who don't call themselves Christian.

Kinnaman (2007) points out that a majority of born-again adults in their twenties and thirties currently believe that gambling, cohabitation, and sexually fantasies are morally acceptable.

They are also more accepting towards of sex outside of marriage, profanity, drunkenness, pornography, homosexual sex, and illegal drug use. This means that even people raised in a church are not immune to the major cultural shift occurring in American society.

The shift in the culture as it pertains to the increased acceptability around sex may have increased the inclusion of sexual themes and behaviors into our everyday life, but this does not mean it has changed the inevitable consequences of the behavior. The consequences are everywhere if one stops long enough for thoughtful reflection. It is into this culture that the Christian social worker is called to action. The consequences will be seen in one's clinical practice with sexually damaged individuals who do not understand how they might be playing by all of the new societal rules, but with devastating emotional pain-. But there is another call to action that should not be missed. Colson (1999) emphasizes the responsibility that Christianity has not only for fulfilling the great commission, but also the cultural commission of creating a culture under the lordship of Christ. Social Workers have always been known as "change agents." How very important, then, that we not miss the calling to be culture makers.

Purpose

The purpose of this presentation is to examine the impact of the loss of deep social and familial connectedness on the individual and the family. Specifically, the impact of the cultural shift in the attitudes towards sex will be discussed, paving the way for the “hook up” phenomenon. The long term impact of this cultural shift will be discussed through the following four perspectives:

1. The impact of the loss of connectedness in our clinical practice;
2. The impact of the hook up culture and the relaxed casual attitudes in parenting;
3. The impact of the culture on the Christian social worker providing treatment;
4. Christian Social Workers as change agents in the current cultural milieu.

References

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