

Literature Review Assignment

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Abstract

This literature review will look at shame related to sex and sexuality with a minor focus on religious attitudes that relate. Throughout this short writing, it is discussed that there is a lack of appropriate sex education being given to youth to equip them to make good decisions based on facts rather than avoidance. The lack of healthy sex education has left youth open to sexual traumas, shame, and being pressured into sex acts that would likely not occur if basic sex education were being taught was the norm. There is evidence, within this work, that no sex education leads youth to typically make poor decisions regarding their sexuality that often plagues them on into adulthood. There is also a small section that will discuss the need for parental communication, in addition to education, and brief ideas regarding some counseling thoughts are also present throughout. The final area covered is some of the realities of the effects viewing pornography can have on the sexual fulfillment of individuals and couples.

Keywords: shame, sex, sexuality, pornography, taboo, sex education, religious

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As I was doing the research for the Literature Review Assignment on shame, I did not begin with a refined area of shame as my focus. However, as my research progressed, I did become more honed in on sexuality and shame with sex education and religious ideas about sex as an aside. Negative shame seems to be prolific in our world today, especially regarding sex and sexuality. We as humans have found creative ways to both cause others to feel shame and others to be making efforts to cause shame for others seemingly. Is the shame experienced productive or simply a method we use to force others in an attempt to control them.

Can shame be beneficial?

Allpress et al., (2014) communicate that shame can have positive and negative effects. Their writing divides shame into two categories: Image Shame and Moral Shame. Image Shame is associated with adverse effects, where a positive impact comes from Moral Shame. For example, image shame is more selfish, whereas moral shame indicates failing to fall in line with patterns found to be appropriate by society or some cultural groupings of people. Zhao (2021) points out the use of certain religious groups to attempt to keep their followers in line through shame. The idea is, one should give up the pursuit of self-glory and accept shame. Shaming was

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accomplished through the sermons and songs that were sung. Shame was a holy emotion that all should embrace. However, according to the writers, the Quakers were so sure they should not have shame; they had naked preaching to demonstrate the lack of shame. For one, I am thankful the naked preaching idea seems to have passed! The thoughts regarding shame produced from the effects of ignoring or being obstinate towards one's moral principles as causing positive shame has a reasonable notion about it that should lead to further research regarding its efficacy.

Lickel et al., (2014) had a couple of studies that had interesting outcomes. The first study indicated that shame and guilt were motivations for change but not embarrassment. However, shame had less of a definitive path to change than guilt. Shame sometimes pushed individuals to avoid the "emotion eliciting situation." The second study indicates that shame is a more significant motivator for change than guilt. Shame is, however, not guaranteed to move one towards actual change. Shame, while having motivating factors for change, also tends to cause one to withdraw from the subject matter, causing shame. Therefore, the issue ends up not being dealt with but instead ignored. There appears to be a fine line between the nuances of shame, guilt, and embarrassment. What we can glean is that embarrassment does not lead to positive change. However, there seems to be some disagreement about the positive effects of shame as compared to guilt. Some people are entirely sold on the benefits, where others find the ideas of intentional shame as being ridiculous.

Sheikh and Janoff-Bulman (2010) recount the occasion of a group going through a Catholic School in Canada where shame was used to make them believe sex is dirty and

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something to be avoided. As an adult, these students declared--We do not know how to feel or express ourselves. One of them said this education was beginning to show itself through suicide in my community. What may appear helpful in one period of life may have disastrous effects for individuals later in life. This life span effect should be considered when training youth. You should see the necessity for healthy, truthful sex education by the end of this writing.

Sex Education

Healthy sex education according to who? Kang et al., (2013) seem to be claiming that church groups are doing wrong by indicating that same-sex sex and sex with sex workers is inappropriate. The authors put forth the idea that by teaching negatively about these acts, churches are omitting the potential to share “safe sex” practices (i.e., condom use). According to the authors, these acts are not openly discussed due to the shame associated with them, contributing to the high level of HIV in the Eastern Caribbean. Lefevor et al., (2020) looked at Mormons with sexual preferences that did not align with the Mormon teachings. The writers believe that Mormons have discriminatory beliefs that should be adjusted to be more inclusive. These authors, seemingly, put forward the idea that one’s own “subjective experience” can make the disagreement of their sexuality choices with Mormon teachings okay and therefore bring themselves the inner peace and well-being that is desired. When you have researchers attempting to negate the religious views of church groups, one cannot help but ask who should be in charge. We can simply watch the news today and see one political group seems to believe the government should be telling the people what to do, where the other group believes the power

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should be in the hands of the people. Should the government be in charge, should religious groups be in control, should each man simply do what is right in their own eyes? Balance and truth would be a seemingly stable foundation from which to train future generations.

I would suggest that simply teaching the facts (actual facts) about sexuality and all associated would be a great place to begin. Gunning et al., (2020) mention it as beneficial for women to identify negative influences that may be causing shame regarding their sexuality (e.g., thoughts regarding menstruation, birth control, body image, abortion, intercourse). This knowledge helps them avoid the negative stereotypical dynamics that are often present. These thoughts are due to the lack of open communication between parents and their children, teachers and students, and religious leaders and their churches regarding sex and all areas involved. Many times, this is due to individuals feeling embarrassed by the subject of sexuality. Typically, there is either a very basic mention of 'just do not do it' or no mention of sexuality at all. Each individual is left to figure proper thoughts and behaviors regarding sexuality out for themselves.

Think about the adolescents who are left to figure out the facts about sexuality alone. The adults in their lives are too embarrassed or self-consumed to take the time to discuss sexuality with their children. I can remember a girl when I was in the third grade who got her period before any of the other girls. She was so embarrassed by this event that naturally occurs in every biological female on planet earth. In an interesting article regarding the correlation between women's menstruation shame, attitudes about themselves, and their sexuality, they found that women who tend to feel shame for their menstruation were less sexually active and had higher

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risk sexual activities. It also seemed that menstruation shame was more prevalent in those with body shame issues, including thinking their genitals were gross and therefore not desirable. The authors suggested a movement towards helping women's menstruation become less taboo to alleviate or lessen the shameful feelings (Schooler et al., 2005). Consider for a moment that the parents of my third-grade schoolmate could have simply educated their child of the beautiful design of the female reproductive system. This simple education could have eliminated much of the embarrassment experienced (as an aside, her mom was a teacher at the public school we attended).

Many have taken this view of silence on sexuality or are not sure what to teach. This silence, many times, is because sexuality has been distorted to include an 'anything goes' mentality. Further, the more extreme the sexual activities become, the more they are, seemingly, forced on others who may accept a more traditional view of sexuality. In a project by Each & Roberts-Dobie (2016), they interviewed faith leaders about their various methods of sex education. Many of these leaders expressed a willingness to teach sex education but felt they needed to be better equipped with information to do it well. One respondent shared the story of the compassion that Jesus showed with the women found in adultery (He who is without sin throw the first stone). The idea is that truth needs to be taught about sexuality while maintaining compassion for those who may have made mistakes. It is heartening to hear of a group of church leaders who want to teach about healthy sexuality and want to do so with compassion and love

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for those who may have done things that would not be acceptable to those seeking to live according to God's Word.

Effects of Unhealthy Shame

When shame is used rather than actual education on sexuality, you are apt to find dynamics similar to the following. In work discussing the sexuality of youth in Fiji by O'Connor et al., (2019), it is pointed out that shame is used to attempt to curve the desires of youth as it pertains to sexuality. The source of shame is through family traditions and religiosity typically. The research found that the topics of sex and sexuality are taboo. The view of sex as taboo causes sex education to not occur. Further, sex is avoided in conversations between youth and the adults the youth should be able to turn to for valuable life direction. The discussion shared that sex is typically dominated by the males, who can decide for the female if a condom would be used or not. The authors also shared that many females in this culture would just give in to sex due to the fear of being shamed, abused, or raped. There is a need for better resources in Fiji to help teach healthier sex practices. There are a likely number of females who become pregnant due to this lack of education. The lack of knowledge also allows them to let the pressure of shame be used to manipulate them to not only have sex but to have sex without the use of a condom. Simply unnecessary!

Naz (2014) points out that some cultures keep the subject of sexuality in the realm of taboo and therefore do not discuss or educate their youth regarding the realities of being sexually active. It is thought that if you educate the youth about sex, they will naturally be drawn to try

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out the things they have learned. The idea that some guardians believe it is better to ignore the realities of sexuality because it will cause the youth to become sexually active if they educate them is absurd! These adults do not see the youth are likely to be sexually active with or without their guidance or may be more apt to be active without proper training regarding sexuality.

A tragedy to consider is the following effects due to not educating youth properly regarding sexuality. The overarching idea of the research by Marwei (2019) in Ghana discovered that the lack of training by parents was directly related to the causes of some children who had experienced sexual assault. The author concluded that the lack of knowledge by the children led them to be vulnerable to the sexual assault they had experienced. Many of the participants said it is the custom in their culture to avoid sex talk before the child is at the age of marriage. If it is discussed, fear and shame are used to dissuade its practice. Further, the belief is that if you talk to children about sex, they will go out and try it, so it is to be avoided. The writer suggested a need for teaching in the community regarding better ways to educate their children about the realities of sexuality. Children should be protected from predators who will take advantage of ignorance by manipulating youth into performing sex acts and then convincing them it is their little secret or they will get in trouble if they tell anyone.

Positive Outcome Due to Communication

The dynamic of open communication between parents and their youth can indeed positively change the outcomes. Rose (2005) looked at both Danish and American ideas related to having sex as teenagers. There is what seems to be a distinct difference in the American

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perspective as compared to the Danish view. Danish teens appeared to indicate that an openly sexual relationship with a friend was acceptable to parents. The American teens suggested their parents would kill them if they found out they were having sex. Further, there was expressed a greater likelihood of the American female being shamed into having sex than the Danish female. The Danish seems to hold a non-gender bias about who should lead in a conversation regarding sex. The American teens were more apt to be pressured by the male to have sex and the female to go along with it to avoid negative thoughts about it themselves or others. The act of open sexual relationships may or may not be an acceptable idea to the readers (especially with youth). However, the information highlighted regards the implication of open communication between the Danish parents and their youth. This openness leads to a level of empowerment for both males and females. This empowerment leads to neither being apt to manipulate the other (out of ignorance), as demonstrated by the Danish youth.

Seeking Help

Another area of education that needs to be met is the ideas addressing underlying issues that may lead to improper sexuality practices. Briken (2020), in a study on compulsive sexual behavior disorder, discusses that shame issues (e.g., alcoholism) will need to be addressed to get at the heart of what is going on that may be a cause of, or an off-shoot of, the sexual behaviors. It is suggested that coping strategies be introduced to help avoid undesired behaviors. When individuals are left to their own thoughts and perceptions with little actual information from their adults, or even worse, information causing them to fall prey to shame and then attempt to cope in

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whatever way they can find, they may turn to a counselor for assistance. It is a need for therapists working with clients dealing with shame to equip the client with adequate coping mechanisms. These coping mechanisms are needed to help the client avoid inappropriate measures of self-coping (e.g., social withdrawal, fantasy, aggression (i.e., physical, verbal, relational focused towards self or others) (Schoenleber & Berenbaum, 2012). One of the tools found to be effective is Mindfulness.

Duma et al., (2020) looked at the effectiveness of Mindfulness to treat female sexual dysfunction. This work found that Mindfulness helped increase arousal in women even when subjected to abuse (in some cases even more effective for the abused women). The authors concluded by drawing attention to online-based Mindfulness treatments. This attention assists those who may not have local access or are dealing with feelings of shame and would find it more palatable to discuss sexual issues while not physically being face to face. Knowledge of modalities of treatment available that can help clients overcome issues of their past is valuable knowledge to have and a necessity of those in the counseling world.

Norms published about sexuality

Because of the lack of education and the knowledge to have a healthy, happy sex life free of unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, guilt, and shame, a large amount of the information published on sexuality to the general public and the academic level is skewed towards the negative. The study by Arakawa et al., (2013) looked at the occurrences of positive and negative peer-reviewed publications regarding sex. This research found overwhelmingly that

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more negative information is published (e.g., how to catch your mate cheating). This work indicates that the shame had regarding sex has led to the reactionary method of discussing sexuality, which comes across more in prevention (e.g., abstinence education) than having better, more enjoyable sexual encounters. However, the research did note articles have become more neutral (as rated by the researchers for this work) than negative.

Effects of pornography on sexuality

One last area of education that is needed is regarding the use of pornography and the effects it has on individuals. Consider the information you hear claimed or, at least, implied is that viewing pornography will make your sex life so much better. Perry & Whitehead (2019) look at the levels of pornography use among religious and non-religious individuals and its effects on their sexual satisfaction. Non-religious men and women who view pornography had little to no impact on sexual satisfaction outcomes. Religious women were not affected, where religious men, who were regular viewers of pornography, reported a much lower level of sexual satisfaction. It was suggested that this was due to pornography being inappropriate in religious circles. The inappropriateness leads religious men to use pornography in isolation (hiding their use), where non-religious are apt to view pornography as a couple or have no apprehensions regarding the use of pornography.

Sniewski & Farvid (2020) discussed the shame experienced by those using pornography to the extent of comparing the females in everyday life with those women in the porn they watched. The experiences with real women (even when those women were ready and willing to

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act out the sexual fantasies of their partners) could not live up to the sensations experienced while viewing pornography. Most of these men using porn indicated they experienced feelings of guilt and shame after viewing pornography. Volk et al., make a case for the level of religiosity in a person who uses pornography as a probable predictor of the person's level of guilt and shame will be exacerbated beyond that of a non-religious person. The counselor working with clients who may be dealing with internal moral conflicts regarding sexuality (specifically pornography use) should be aware of the potential for added levels of distress due to their spiritual ideals (Grubbs et al., 2017). The Cyber Pornography Use Inventory (CPUI) is a tool that can be used to access individuals' use of pornography and, by doing so, also see indications of the person's psychological distress. The authors of a study that investigated shortening the CPUI, Grubbs et al., (2015), found a relationship between psychological distress and the use of pornography.

Conclusion

We have seen some misinformation or no information being given by many guardians, religious leaders, teachers, etc. There are also questions about the value of shame on the positive outcomes that are desired. The reality is that many people in the religious world today are often a source of negative shame rather than positive shame. When relationships, bonds, and love, are shared by a group (rather than seeing the group as the enforcers of rules), we will likely see a more positive outcome regarding the value of shame on sexuality in our world. The morally astute person will, by necessity, open themselves up to the potential of shame while maintaining their autonomy. A person who chooses adherence to a set of moral standards opens themselves

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up to the consequences of those standards (Kwong, 2021). These words speak the truth. When a person thinks for themselves, can weigh evidence, and arrive at a conclusion for themselves, they are morally astute. This autonomy referenced allows the potential for shame to produce a positive outcome by making healthy, educated, and informed decisions (based on grounded morals) that will help a person avoid those behaviors and actions that have the potential for negative shame-producing outcomes.

Future Needs

It seems apparent that further research is needed to assist therapists, guardians, teachers, religious leaders, etc., to be better equipped with valuable ways to train youth to have healthy sex and sexuality practices that can be free from shame. This research needs to be focused on areas such as—Does abstinence in the light of personally astute autonomy produces a long-term positive effect (stability) prior to marriage, once married, or throughout life? Or—Is the free for all (anything goes) just as likely to produce the same or similar long-term positive effect (stability)? I look forward to seeing such studies that help to refine how we train youth to promote healthy life span development.

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