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No Stones: Women Redeemed from Sexual Addiction

Marnie Ferree, 2010
Downers Grove, Illinois: MP Press

Reviewed by Sara Hall

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Sex Addicts on a Christian Campus?

I hear the words *sex addict* and I immediately think, “I don’t know any.” Sex addicts don’t hold jobs, go to church, live on my street, and attend Christian colleges. My students aren’t sex addicts. Yes, they talk about sex, they have sex, they are curious about sex, they are very interested in sex, but they aren’t sex addicts. However, after reading Marnie Ferree’s book, *No Stones: Women Redeemed from Sexual Addiction*, my eyes were opened in a different way to how much sex, its power, its distortions, its pervasiveness affects those I work with as a counselor on a Christian college campus. Ferree is married, a mother, a pastor’s daughter, and a recovering sex addict. With her experience and insights, I found much to think about concerning this subject—sexual addiction in Christian women.

Ferree addresses eight ways sexual addiction presents in women: 1. Relationship or Love Addict: When a woman goes from relationship to relationship either in rapid succession or with multiplicity, trying to fill the void within her. 2. Romance Addict: Women who are hooked/lured by the romance and intrigue of it all, but then lose interest once the chase is over. It’s more exciting to find someone new than to try to deal with a real, lasting relationship. 3. Fantasy Addict: This woman’s relationships exist primarily in her mind, creating magical men that do not really exist, providing an escape from her daily grind, boring life, or bad situation. 4. Pornography or Cybersex Addict: Many women in this

category develop intense online relationships that feel safer, and more often than not, lead to physical acting out also, so accessible, affordable, and anonymous. 5. Masturbation: Ferree talks about this as a way of escaping problems, avoiding true intimacy, soothing yourself, and of course, pornography is commonly used with this addiction. 6. Exhibitionism: Ferree challenges the reader to not just think in terms of strippers and prostitutes, but in sexual dressing, provocative body language, etc. These actions provide a certain high from the attention the women garner. 7. Addict who sells or trades sex: The author is not just referring to money exchanges. Sometimes a woman will give sex in exchange for favors, security, gifts, or because a man took her on a date. 8. Partnering with another addict: This category is a complicated dynamic that often switches between “the thrill, the chase, the closeness, the sense of power of the other person” and the co-addict who “influences another to win them over, manipulate them, or keep them in a relationship” (p. 67).

I retain a small caseload of clients at the university, about fifteen at a time. When I read this book, I could place a client or two in almost every category. Ironically enough, most were not coming to address sexual issues specifically, but other problems brought them my way. Student Life Professionals, think about the students God keeps at the forefront of your mind (or their actions put them in your path more often). Might they fit into one or more of these categories? If you think in terms of a continuum, I doubt you will have to look too far. Even though this book is addressed to female addicts, I found it described some of my male clients also. The author helped me think about the help I provide to male clients in a different way. In sessions, I was challenged to spend more time feeling the intense pain and abandonment feelings that often are a precursor to addiction. I was challenged not to soft pedal how difficult the road to recovery is. Also, Ferree stresses that successful recovery is multifaceted. This resonated immediately with my work in Student Life and Counseling at several different Christian colleges, as we often talk about building support networks and accountability. I started to concentrate on those aspects of counseling more thoroughly as well.

Like mentioned earlier, Ferree is a recovering addict. Because of this, I think she tends to come across with a “Do-It-This-Way-or-Else-It-Won’t-Work” attitude. Part of this seems forgivable given her years of recovery. Part of me balks at it, since all of you working with students know what works and is meaningful for one does not necessarily translate to working for another. Still, when I work with students, we often talk about having an entire toolkit of resources when we are trying to rid our lives of unwanted sins, and Ferree gives many solid ideas for recovery.

The author addresses several other issues intertwined closely with sexual addiction, but are also more common experiences. She spends a lot of time addressing family patterns, unspoken rules, and family roles/labels. She devotes an entire chapter to the idea of abandonment and trauma and includes a few helpful categorizing charts. An unexpected benefit for working with Christian students is how Ferree addresses issues surrounding being a pastor’s kid. Throughout the book, she talks about some of the burdens and issues

she faced because of this and the distorted spiritual messages that well-meaning Christians sent her, which are all too common. I always have a ministry kid on my caseload, so this gave me a deeper understanding of the history of these particular students.

Each chapter has a few discussion questions at the end to help an individual or a recovery group process from topic to topic. The final one-third of the book deals with the recovery process. Ferree includes many tools of recovery, reminders of the lengthy recovery process, and a chapter specifically for clinicians/husbands.

Unfortunately, the book is painfully void of any discussion of sexual identity, sexual confusion, or homosexuality. It is mentioned in passing, but not addressed or discussed to any degree. Student Development Professionals, I ask you: Does a week go by without talking to at least one student about homosexuality, same-sex attraction, gender identity, gender confusion, or something similar? If you want more information on this topic, look elsewhere.

Most of my students are professing Christians. When one of my supervisors told me about this book, I thought it might have an impact on one or two of my clients. Even after more than ten years working with Christian college students (and being a graduate of a Christian college myself), how naive and surprised I was to find it relating to so many! Get a copy for your library, let me know what you think. Or try a small group—let me know how it goes. 