

**Lunch & Learn Webinar:**

**Understanding Sex and Love Addiction**

**PRESENTED BY**  
 Madeline Stiers, Ph.D., LCSW-S  
 Chief Clinical Officer

1

---

---

---

---

---

---


---

---

## Gateway to Hope University (GTHU)

We offer evidence-based mental and behavioral health training, educational resources, and ongoing support to individuals, faith communities, schools, and workplaces.

We developed GTHU to provide you with the training needed to recognize, refer, relate, and effectively and compassionately respond to those in mental distress.



2

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Mental Health Coach Training

- Evidence-based training incorporating ongoing research and feedback from GTHU network of Mental Health Coaches.
- Learn essential information, skills, practical scenarios, and actionable steps to compassionately respond to those in mental distress.
- Deepen your knowledge and response skills through our Specialization Trainings:
  - Addiction and Behavioral Health Disorders
  - Child and Adolescent Mental Health
  - Aging and Elder Care
  - Trauma



3

---

---

---

---

---

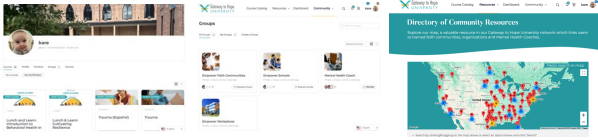
---

---

---

## Mental Health Coach Benefits

- Personalized Learning Profile
- Access to Mental Health Coach forum to connect with other Mental Health Coaches
- Access to Directory of Community Resources map
- Certification at the end of Mental Health Coach Training
- Mental Health Coach meetings and online events



4

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Agenda

- Substance vs behavioral addictions
- Sex and love addictions
- Patterns and behaviors
- Treatment
- Social support
- Religion and spirituality



5

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Substance VS Behavioral

- Substance
  - Much research
  - Treatment is available
  - Societal understanding of disorder
  - Shame
- Behavioral
  - Emerging research
  - Treatment is less available
  - Less understanding of disorder
  - Shame



6

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Love & Sex

- Romantic love, love addiction and sex addiction are not the same
- Romantic Love
  - Emotional connection and mutual support that creates positive, healthy emotions
- Love addiction:
  - Intense fixation on a romantic relationship marked by compulsion and dependence on a person despite negative consequences
- Sex addiction
  - Compulsive Sexual Behavior Disorder; Compulsive participation in sexual activities despite negative consequences or wanting to stop



7

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Love Addiction

- Behavioral addiction
- Presence of a person brings pleasure, yearning, thinking about them; absence causes distress and is soothed by reconnecting
- Romantic love and love & sex addiction activate the same reward system in the brain (mesolimbic)
  - Intoxication, tolerance, salience (attention), craving, withdrawal
- Thus, love addiction occurs when these are present enough to such a degree that they compromise functioning and wellbeing



8

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Sex Addiction

- Behavioral addiction
  - ICD-11 compulsive sexual behavior disorder; not diagnosable if only due to religious/moral incongruence.
- Distinct from love addiction
- Sex addiction is focused on the need for the physical act of sex
- Partners may be nonspecific
- Main motivation is to seek relief from sexual tension
- 2018 US survey – 10.3% men & 7.0% women reported general distress over compulsive, excessive or out of control sexual behaviors; Globally, 5%



9

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Components of Addiction

- **Saliene** – the urgent need to get in contact or meet with their partner
- **Withdrawal** – unpleasant emotions and altered arousal when not in their company
- **Tolerance** – increased amount of time spent with partner needed to feel satisfied or happy
- **Mood modification** – using time spent with partner to cope with their own unpleasant emotions or to mitigate stress
- **Relapse** – inability to control regulating the amount of time spent with partner
- **Conflict** – tendency to neglect other responsibilities, interests, or social relationships to be with love interest



10

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Addiction Signs

- **Control** – experiences difficulty controlling sexual urges
- **Coping** – uses sex to cope with unpleasant emotional experiencing or in response to stress
- **Consequences** – experience negative consequences related to sexual behaviors



11

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Sex Addiction Development

- Trauma
- Substance use
- Mental health comorbidities (64%-81%)
- Hormonal imbalances
- Brain injuries or deteriorating brain function



12

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Infidelity

- Infidelity does not mean someone is addicted to sex or porn
- Infidelity is typically related to a specific person
- Addiction is thought to induce more shame than infidelity alone
- Addictive behaviors:
  - a difficulty in stopping
  - escalation of behaviors
  - continued disruption of life
  - in high amount of time spent thinking about the behavior to reduce distress

13




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

13

## Patterns & Behaviors

- Limited research on the overlap in the two behavioral difficulties (sex & love addictions)
- But there are some studies that show low overlap between the two
- Sex appears in both:
  - Cope with emotional distress and suffering
  - Searching for closeness or presence of a partner or person
  - Interferes with well-being, life, and other relationships
- Difficulty in regulating emotions is a topic of interest in research

14




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

14

## Treatments

- 12- step treatments
  - Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (SLAA)
  - Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA)
- CBT-based treatments
  - Cognitive distortion & behavioral dysregulation
- Medication
  - Reduce cravings & withdrawal symptoms
- Integrated
  - Indicate that medication and therapy may be effective

15




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

15

## Social Support

- Individuals with both sex and love addictions perceive that they have less social support than those without
  - Friend, family, and significant other support
- Social support:
  - encourages emotional wellbeing
  - provides ways to deal with problems
  - is a source of resilience
  - is a protective factor against physical and psychological ailments
- People may be more vulnerable without social supports in place



16

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Religious and Spiritual Support

### Negative

- Often feel shame on moral grounds as it relates to sex
- Higher R/S associated with higher self reports of sex addiction
  - Higher self reporting is linked to more negative religious coping and more spiritual struggles
  - Likely due to moral incongruence

### Positive

- Religious individuals are less likely to have substance use issues
- High potential for social support and compassion
- Feeling more social support helps with general mental health



17

---

---

---

---

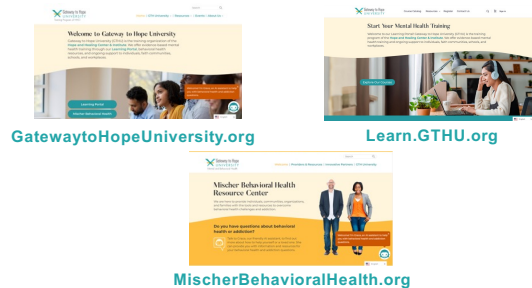
---

---

---

---

## GTHU Websites



[GatewaytoHopeUniversity.org](http://GatewaytoHopeUniversity.org)

[Learn.GTHU.org](http://Learn.GTHU.org)

[MischerBehavioralHealth.org](http://MischerBehavioralHealth.org)



18

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## GTHU Resources

- Unlock the Power of Knowledge with Grace**  
 Our goal is to empower you with knowledge and support, ensuring you never feel alone on your journey to better mental health. Learn more at [MischerBehavioralHealth.org](https://MischerBehavioralHealth.org)
- The Hope Line: Relief. Just a Call Away.**  
 Are you going through a tough time? Do you need someone to talk to? Call The Hope Line.
- Download our Mental Health Gateway App**




19

---

---

---

---

---

---

---


---

## Survey

Thank you for attending today's Lunch & Learn event!

We value your feedback! **Please take a moment to complete our survey by scanning the QR code below.** Your input helps us improve future events.

Thank you for your participation!



SCAN ME

20

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



GTHU: GATEWAY TO HOPE UNIVERSITY

**Follow Us on Social Media & Stay Connected**





**@GatewaytoHopeUniversity**

**GatewaytoHopeUniversity.org**

21

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---