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**The Use of the Concept of New Identity in Christ when  
Counseling Promiscuous Teen Girls –  
The Spiritual Makeover**

Dr. Roberta J. Wilburn, Ed.D., Th.D.<sup>1</sup>

Associate Dean, Graduate Studies in Education & Diversity Initiatives  
Whitworth University, Spokane, WA<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> She is co-author with James Takona of *Primer to Developing a Successful Pre-service Teacher Portfolio* (University Press of America, Inc., 2004); a book chapter, “Parental Anger: Causes, Triggers and Strategies to Help,” in *Behavior – A Beginnings Workshop Book* (Child Care Information Exchange, 2006); a book chapter, “Leveling the Playing Field: The Challenge of Preparing Globally Competent African-American College Students” in *Brown v. Board of Education – Its Impact on Public Education 1954-2004* (a publication of the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund 2005). She is the recipient of the McLemore Award for Teaching Excellence, LeMoyne-Owen College (2004); recipient of the LeMoyne-Owen College American Humanics Spirit of Service Award (2003); named Outstanding Educator (1992-93). She has been awarded more than \$2,000,000 in grants and contracts from various federal, state and local agencies and foundations, including two international-development partnership grants. She has chaired and organized planning committee for Spokane’s 1st National International Education Week Symposium, in conjunction with Mukogowa Fort Wright Institute (2008). Prior to current position she was chair of School Counseling Professional Education Advisory Board (PEAB) and member of the School Administration PEAB (2009-10); chair, NCATE Steering Committee (2005-2007); chair, Division of Education and NCATE Curriculum Committee (2001-05); founder and director, LOC International Students and Cultural Awareness Initiative (2003-2007); founder, Afro-Latino Studies Program for Teachers (2004-05). She conducts workshops and professional presentations locally, nationally and internationally on topics related to teacher training, education, children and families, diversity, cultural awareness and international studies.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.Whitworth.edu](http://www.Whitworth.edu), 300 W. Hawthorne Road, Spokane, WA 99251, (509) 777-4603.

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### **Introduction**

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.<sup>3</sup>*

There are several areas that should be considered when deciding to use the concept of new identity in Christ when counseling promiscuous teen girls. It is important to address foundational areas first so that one can effectively help young girls desiring to leave a life of promiscuity by empowering them to achieve the complete transformation that is available to them through a new identity in Christ. It is important to understand the underlying cause of teen promiscuity and the reality of growing up in a highly sexualized world.<sup>4</sup> An examination of both the psychosocial and theological perspectives of teen promiscuity will be explored in order to gain more insight into this issue. This is prudent so that counselors can be enlightened on how to address the problems faced by these girls holistically and better assist them in embracing their new found identity through the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Additionally, this information is critical if we are to end the cycle of heartbreak, shame,

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<sup>3</sup> II Corinthians 5:17 New King James Version . Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references will be from the New King James translation.

<sup>4</sup> American Psychological Association,, Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls. *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls.* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2007). In 2007, the American Psychological Association formed a task force to study the sexualization of girls in the United States. The report explores how the media and other facets of society impose inappropriate sexual images and connotations which can negatively impact the development, identity and behavior of girls.

abuse, and other potential problems such as sexually transmitted diseases and teen pregnancies. However, more importantly, this knowledge is needed to help teen girls with a history of promiscuity to learn how to fill the void in their lives caused by separation from God as a result of sexual sin. This article will attempt to shed light on these major issues while offering practical strategies on how to counsel promiscuous teen girls using the concept of new identity in Christ.

### **A. Growing Up in a Sexualized World**

Today's adolescents are growing up in a world where they are bombarded with sexual images in a variety of formats. The *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls* found that even from an early age young girls are socialized into a world that emphasizes their value in terms of physical beauty and provocative sexual images.<sup>5</sup> In the prevailing cultural environment, Christian parents find it is almost impossible to shield their children from inappropriate information portrayed in the media and in many aspects of everyday life that are presented in a highly sexualized manner. As a pastor and father of six daughters, Jim Anderson found this to be true in the United States and in the United Kingdom as well. When Pastor Anderson was traveling through London, he was appalled to learn that the newest lip gloss from a cosmetic company was called *Hot Pants*. Here are some of his views as a Christian parent:

Wearing Hot Pants lip gloss won't singularly cause the destruction of a daughter's life. However, if you add Hot Pants lip gloss to the sex lyrics on the radio, the latest television show full of young people having sex, the most raunchy music video, and Abercrombie and Fitch's thong underwear for 11-year olds with the words "eye candy" on them, an eclectic puzzle picture begins to emerge with clarity. As each new piece of the puzzle is added, it reveals a toxic atmosphere that encourages young people to participate in their own self-destruction through unrestrained expression of sexuality.<sup>6</sup>

Growing up in a sexualized world creates an atmosphere where teen girls are forced into seeing themselves through a primary lens of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Jim Anderson, *Unmasked Exposing the Cultural Sexual Assault* (Spokane, WA: Lifeline Ministries, 2012), 81.

sexuality and other aspects of their lives become secondary. As stated by Anderson:

Unfortunately, the...prevailing message is this, “You better give yourself to this seductive image. You better learn to walk a certain way, talk a certain way, look a certain way, and give yourself away because everyone else is doing it, and, if you don’t, no man is every going to want you.” Their constant bombardment with this message, combined with their fear of a future alone, causes many daughters to give in. They then focus on and develop their sexual identity to the exclusion of the other parts of their being, denying their deepest needs and desires, and risk everything in the hope that those needs will be met by giving themselves to men.<sup>7</sup>

Patricia Davis’ views on counseling adolescent girls is consistent with Anderson’s, however, she places a greater emphasis on the fact that many young girls are victims of rape and sexual abuse. She cites the findings of the 1995 report of the United States Justice Department which indicates that “over 500,000 girls and women were victims of rape, attempted rape or other sexual assault, or threats each year in 1992 and 1993. She also includes findings of the American Association of University Women which found in 1993 that “65% of girls have been grabbed, touched, or pinched in a sexual way in high school.”<sup>8</sup> In addition to these findings Davis identified other data that supports her views that today’s sexualized world is assaultive to the developing girl. Her conclusion is:

The central fact of every North American adolescent girl’s life (whether she realizes it or is mystified by it) is this: She is indeed a stranger in a strange land. She inhabits a world that presents itself as safe, but which will in actuality, probably ignore, devalue, or hurt her. Statistically, she will be no safer when she becomes a woman.<sup>9</sup>

## **B. Is Promiscuity and Sexual Activity Atypical for Today’s Teens?**

As the topic of promiscuity among teen girls is explored, it is helpful to determine whether promiscuity and other sexual activities among this population is currently typical or atypical behavior. Yet before we can get to that issue it is necessary to clarify what is meant

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 69-70.

<sup>8</sup> Patricia Harris, *Counseling Adolescent Girls*, (Minneapolis, M.N.: fortress Press, 1996), 18.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

by promiscuous behavior. It is difficult to find a consensus for the definition of promiscuity. However, for the purpose of this article the author will utilize the definition of Drs. Clinton and Clark in conjunction with a definition from the *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* when discussing promiscuous behavior. Promiscuity involves “casual, indiscriminate sexual relations between people who do not necessarily have an emotional attachment.”<sup>10</sup> Additionally, promiscuous behavior typically involves having sex with multiple partners.<sup>11</sup> For many of today’s teens this is the reality of their lives and it is something that is not only accepted among many groups of young people, it is also expected. Clinton and Clark go on to describe the life of many of today’s teens:

Gone are the days of courting and dating. Today, teenagers live in a culture of “hooking up,” which could include anything from innocent kissing to oral sex or intercourse, depending on whom you ask. Thirty percent have admitted to hooking up with someone they just met that day. Sixty percent have hooked up with someone they consider a friend. When a generation is taught to do what feels good, it seems preposterous to them to think of guarding the heart, as we’re taught in Proverbs 4:23. With meaningless, superficial relationships come increased loneliness, hurt, hopelessness, and tears. Teens are left relationally empty over and over again, and the adult who watch don’t know what to do.<sup>12</sup>

The pressures and consequences felt by teens are real. It is often difficult to stand your ground and stay true to your convictions, when your peers are saying that the life you are living is wrong and theirs is right. The author recalls an incident when one of her daughters stated that other teens in the community where they were living at the time, wanted to know why she wasn’t sleeping around and didn’t have any children; at the time she was still in high school. According to a study done in 2005 by Pure Hope, the following statistics emerge:

- 25% of girls have sex by age 15
- 21% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders have slept with four or more partners,
- 50% of 17 year olds have had sex,

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<sup>10</sup> Tim Clinton & Chap Clark, *The Quick-Reference Guide to Counseling Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Baker Books, 2010), 231.

<sup>11</sup> Harper Collins Publishers, *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Internet, available from <http://dictionary.reverso.net/english-cobuild/promiscuous%20behavior>, accessed, 3 July 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Tim Clinton & Chap Clark, *The Quick-Reference Guide to Counseling Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Baker Books, 2010), 8

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- 80% of teens have sex by age 19,
- 55% of teens ages 13-19 have engaged in oral sex
- 3 in 10 (27%) 13-16 year olds are sexually active
- Almost half of high school students nationwide and about 62% of students in the twelfth-grade have had sexual intercourse.<sup>13</sup>

A later study, the National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, was conducted in 2009 by the Center for Disease Control. This survey consisted of a sample of all regular public and private schools with students in at least one of the grades from 9-12 in all 50 U.S. states. The results of the survey showed that nationwide 46.0% of students have had sexual intercourse. Among the female population, the rate was 58.3% for Black females and 45.4% for Hispanic females. Both of these groups were higher than white females, 44.7%, indicating that there are cultural factors which come into play when examining the sexual patterns of adolescents. The survey also revealed that across the United States, 5.9% of students had sexual intercourse for the first time before they were 13 years old. In regard to promiscuous behavior, 13.8% of students had sexual intercourse with four or more persons during their life. The breakdown for females indicated that 11.2% had been sexually involved with four or more partners. At the time of the survey 34.2% of students had sexual intercourse with at least one person during the 3 months prior to the surveys administration, indicating that they were currently sexually active.<sup>14</sup>

Since this article is focusing on the behavior of promiscuous teen girls, we need to extrapolate what the data says specifically about the sexual behavior of teen girls. The Kinsey Institute provides an excellent source for this information. Based on their findings, they were able to determine the percentage of girls that first engage in sexual intercourse by age. The following table presents this information:

**Chart 1. Percent of Female Adolescents First Intercourse by Age<sup>15</sup>**

Age of First Intercourse	Percentage of Girls
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<sup>13</sup> Pure Hope (2005), Internet, available from [www.PureHope.net/teens.asp](http://www.PureHope.net/teens.asp) (12 June 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Center for Disease Control, (2009) *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System*, Internet, available from [www.CDC.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss5905.pdf](http://www.CDC.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss5905.pdf) 12 June 2012.

<sup>15</sup> The Kinsey Institute, (2006). Internet. Available from [www.KinseyInstitute.org/resources/FAQ.html#teensex](http://www.KinseyInstitute.org/resources/FAQ.html#teensex).

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15	26%
16	40%
17	49%
18	70%
19	77%

The chart demonstrates that the majority of teens have sexual intercourse for the first time prior to their 20th birthday. Although the data provided does not indicate the marital status of the teen girls in this study, it is highly probable that the majority, if not all, were not married at the time when they first engaged in sexual intercourse. According to the Guttmacher Institute, on average, adolescents have sex for the first time at approximately age 17 which is congruent with the information presented in the table above from the Kinsey report. Additionally, the Kinsey Institute found that from 2006-2010 the most common reason that sexually inexperienced teens gave for not having had sex was that it was “against religion or morals.” This represented 38% of the females.<sup>16</sup> This is an encouraging factor for the utilization of the concept of new identity in Christ with promiscuous teen girls.

### **C. The Identity Development of Girls from a Psychosocial and Theological Perspective**

The teen years or adolescents have been classified in different ways, one of the most common classifications being

1. Early Adolescence,
2. Middle Adolescence, and
3. Late Adolescence.

There is also a variation of age ranges for these classification categories: some going as low as age 9 and others going as high as twenty-one. The ACT for Youth Center of Excellence, a collaborative project between Cornell University, University of Rochester, and the New York State Center for School Safety classify adolescence with the following approximate age ranges:

1. Early Adolescence 10-14 years of age,
2. Middle Adolescence 15-16 years of age, and

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<sup>16</sup> Guttmacher Institute (2012), available from [www.Guttmacher.org/pubs/FB-ATSRH.html](http://www.Guttmacher.org/pubs/FB-ATSRH.html).

### 3. Late Adolescence 17-21 years of age.<sup>17</sup>

The use of the approximate ages allows for variance in the maturational process where individuals will move from one stage to another. For the purposes of this article, the discussion will focus on adolescences that cross all three stages but will primarily focus on teens between 13-19 years of age. Some feel that adolescence is a cross between a child and an adult. However, Clark sees it as a very distinct stage of development: “Adolescence is not a blend of both child and adult, nor is it an expanded phase of either. Adolescence is a unique phase of life that must be understood and dealt with on its own merits.”<sup>18</sup>

Psychosocial issues of identity during adolescence have been largely associated with Erik Erickson and the work of Carol Gilligan, while the theological perspective on adolescence has been postulated in detail by James Loder. When both perspectives are utilized together, the counselor has a comprehensive way in which to understand the theoretical underpinnings of identity development in girls as they explore the use of the new concept of identity in Christ when counseling promiscuous teen girls.

Erikson is well known for his work related to identity in adolescence. He characterizes this stage as one when teens struggle between role “confusion vs. identity.” Based on Erikson’s theory, this struggle constitutes a crisis for adolescence between the ages of 12-18.<sup>19</sup> Pastor Eric Geiger believes (as does this article’s author) that Erikson’s work has some bearing on the developmental tasks and difficulties of adolescence.

As someone who worked with teenagers for nearly a decade, I believe that Erikson’s model has some credence. Teenagers are searching for an identity, a reputation. For many, a bad reputation is better than no reputation. They experiment with their dress, their music, their friends, their hobbies, even their walk, attempting to define who they are. ... Erikson believed that if people do not establish a coherent sense of their own personal identity, they would struggle

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<sup>17</sup> Sedra Spano, *Stages of Adolescent Development* (ACT for Youth Center of Excellence, 2004) Internet, available from [www.ActForYouth.net/documents/fACT%20Sheet05043.pdf](http://www.ActForYouth.net/documents/fACT%20Sheet05043.pdf), accessed 06 July 2012

<sup>18</sup> Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today’s Teenager* (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Baker Academic, 2011), 9.

<sup>19</sup> William R. Yount, *Created to Learn: A Christian Teacher’s Introduction to Education Psychology* (Nashville, T.N.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 65.

throughout their lives with relating to others, and relating to the world around them. According to Erikson, if a teenager does not walk away from his [or her] adolescent years with a clear sense of who he [she] is, he [she] will never have a healthy personality. He [she] will be stuck. He [she] will be continually be confused about who he [she] is. He will live in perpetual adolescence for the rest of his [her] life.<sup>20</sup>

Another theorist that should be considered when discussing identity issues concerning girls is the work of Carol Gilligan. She identified that another important part of an adolescent girl's identity formation includes "a girl's process of coming to 'truth' about the self and how the self negotiates relationships."<sup>21</sup> This is particularly significant when talking about the issue of promiscuity in teen girls because promiscuous behaviors are directly related to the girl's perception of self and how she relates to those who become her sexual partners. From the work of Trevathan and Goff when counseling teen girls, they corroborate Gilligan's views because the teens they worked with expressed that dealing with relationships, whether with males or females, were some of the most difficult times in the teens' lives. They reported that someone said: "Relationships are the best and the worst things that happen to us."<sup>22</sup> Trevathan and Goff go on to say, "They [relationships] cause us stress. They make us worry. They are a part of our lives that determines not only what we think about, but much of who we are."<sup>23</sup>

However, the major element that both Erikson and Gilligan failed to address in their theories was that without having been transformed with a new identity in Christ teens will never be able to walk in their God ordain identity. This is a major contributing factor to why teens have issues of role and identity confusion. They cannot ever fully understand who they are and who they are supposed to be apart from Christ. That is why it is necessary to incorporate James Loder's psychological-theological perspective on human development in conjunction with the work of Erikson and Gilligan.

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<sup>20</sup> Eric Geiger, *iDENTITY: Who You Are in Christ* (Nashville, T.N.: B 7 H Publishing Group, 2008), 5-6. The word she or her was added since this article is dealing with girls while Geiger uses generic male terms when talking about teens in general.

<sup>21</sup> Patricia H.Davis, *Counseling Adolescent Girls*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> Melissa Trevathan, and Sissy Goff. *Growing Up With Out Getting Lost: Discovering Your Identity in Christ*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.), 81.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

The work of James Loder acknowledges the contribution of Erickson and others in the field of human development but expands the foundations laid by these theorists by adding the spiritual perspective which is based on the belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Loder believes that children and youth are not truly capable of achieving spiritual transformation until middle adolescence because they lack the developmental readiness for this process to take place. He also postulates that some of the difficulties that teens experience are because they have an unredeemed spirit.

However, the unredeemed human spirit most often reaches outward and finds itself caught up in ongoing styles of life waiting to lay captive to the spirit and bring it under some prefabricated pattern of socialization. The achieving society, for example, lies in waiting to short-circuit the dynamic outreach of the spirit, shielding it from the nothingness that haunts the ego and filling the emptiness with competition and productivity. ... Thus, an identity is constructed between the borders of one's preteen years and the powerful lifestyle patterns dominating the sociocultural milieu.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, Loder has confidence that the only normal identity is an identity that has been transformed by Christ. In examining the development of adolescence he has identified five different arenas where adolescence struggle with what he calls axis. The fourth axis deals with love, and this is one of the most significant pieces of his theory that directly relates to using the concept of new identity in Christ with promiscuous teen girls.

The adolescent longing for love and intimacy defines the fourth axis. The absence of an intimate, loving relationship during this life phase produces loneliness marking one end of the axis while the enjoyment of an emotional (not physical) male-female relationship characterizes the opposite end. Leaning too far to either of these poles creates not only crisis in sexuality and gender roles but also misguided pursuits towards sex as a means of achieving this intimacy. Authentic spiritual formation comes when one finds the genuine intimacy available in the spirit that never abandons or confuses.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> James E Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 207-208.

<sup>25</sup> Kevin M. Gushiken, "Nurturing Spiritual Identity Formation in Youth Curriculum From the Theological-Psychological Approach of James Loder." *Christian Education Journal* 7 no. 2 (2010): 319-333. available from <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=3&hid=11&sid=7b476946-b58f-4cd3-8115b3faddbf2a3c%40sessionmgr13&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001811280>, accessed 15 March 2012, 321.

In reflecting on Loder's psychological-theological approach, Gushiken further conceptualized how to work adolescence as they search for their identity in Christ. In doing so he identified four things for adults to take into account:

1. Each teen struggles with issues of identity differently.
2. It is important to help the teen to address deep issues of identity, rather than just focusing on superficial ones.
3. Remember to be flexible and allow opportunities for exploration to be incorporated into the work with teens because it is a necessary part of identity formation.
4. Acknowledge the individuation of God's divine design by integrating the emotional, physical and social dynamics of each teen.<sup>26</sup>

#### **D. Causes of Promiscuity Among Teen Girls**

Before we can begin to explore counseling promiscuous teen girls using the concept of the new identity in Christ, we must first know what causes promiscuous behavior. If we do not delve into the root cause, then we will only be scratching the surface of the symptomology of the underlying problems. In doing this, the counselor's work will only have limited effectiveness because one should not counsel a girl who became promiscuous as a result of being a victim of child sexual abuse the same way one would treat a girl whose promiscuity developed while she was suffering from adolescent depression and low self-esteem or one who had a family member to commit suicide. Every girl is unique but researchers have found that there are certain factors which put teen girls at greater risk for promiscuous behavior. Although there are numerous factors which can contribute to teen girls becoming involved in promiscuous behavior, one significant factor is early onset of sexual activity. Based on this information, we also need to examine why some girls engage in sexual intercourse earlier than others. Price and Hyde found that teens "who engage in sexual behaviors at or before 15 years of age

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 324-325.

[are] ...more likely to report having more than one sexual partner.<sup>27</sup> Vesely, Oman, Aspy, Tolma, Rodine and Marshall indicated that “approximately one in five teenagers have sexual intercourse before their 15th birthday.”<sup>28</sup> The Institute on Youth Development also found this to be the case. They examined early onset of sexual intercourse in conjunction with the number of lifetime partners a person had.

Studies show that the number of lifetime sexual partners for both males and females is directly related the age of first intercourse. Young people who participate in first intercourse before age 14 are significantly more likely to have more lifetime sexual partners. Fifty-seven percent of girls who initiate sex before age 14 report six or more lifetime partners compared to 10 percent of girls who initiate sex at age 17 or older.<sup>29</sup>

In an article by Meir entitled “Adolescent’s Transition to First Intercourse, Religiosity, and Attitudes about Sex,” her research found that “Females are more affected by the event of first sex ... having sex induces a change toward more positive or permissive attitudes in females.”<sup>30</sup> These are not the only factors that predispose teen girls for early onset of sexual behavior. According to the Institute for Youth Development, the following are additional risk factors for early sexual onset:

**Chart 3. Institute for Youth Development Risk Factors for Early Sex**

- Perceived risk of untimely death
- Paid work more than 20 hours per week
- Appears “older than most” peers
- Same sex attraction

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<sup>27</sup> Myeshia N. Price and Janet S. Hyde, *When Two Isn’t Better Than One: Predictors of Early Sexual Activity in Adolescence Using a Cumulative Risk Model* *Journal of Youth Adolescence* (2009) 38:1059-1071, Internet, available from <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=42&hid=127&sid=2eb60117-5422-46ba-948080e211bdede0%40sessionmgr111&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=psyh&AN=2009-23443-004>.

<sup>28</sup> J.R. Doss, S. K. Vesely, R. F. Oman, C.B. Aspy, E. Tolma, S. Rodine and L. Marshall, A Matched Case-control Study: Investigating the Relationship Between Youth Assets and Sexual Intercourse Among 13- to 14-Year Olds. *Child Care Health and Development*, 33, 40.

<sup>29</sup> Institute for Youth Development. *Sexual Activity and Youth*, Internet, available from [www.YouthDevelopment.org/download/sex.pdf](http://www.YouthDevelopment.org/download/sex.pdf), 12 June 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Ann M. Meier, Adolescent’s Transition to First Intercourse, Religiosity, and Attitudes about Sex. *Social Forces*, March 2003, 81 (3).

- Recent family suicide attempts/ completions<sup>31</sup>

The Institute for Youth Development also found that the age of the girl's partner also makes a difference in the onset of sexual intercourse as well as the number of partners she will subsequently have. They also found that many girls with early onset sexual intercourse did not do so voluntarily.

The age difference between adolescent girls and their first sex partners is related to their own age at first sex; the younger a girl is when she has sex for the first time, the greater the average age difference between her and her partner. Additionally, the greater the age difference between an adolescent girl and her first sex partner, the more partners she is likely to have during her teen years. ... Non-voluntary first sex is particularly common among very young girls. Among girls who had sex before age 13, nearly a quarter (22 percent) reported that first sex was non-voluntary and an additional 49 percent categorized it as unwanted.<sup>32</sup>

Early onset sexual activity can lead to increased sexual permissive attitudes as well as the increase number of sexual partners which can be equated with sexual promiscuity. However, there are other factors which may lead to early onset of sexual activity and subsequent promiscuity in teen girls. As previously stated the societal messages and the media are major contributors. Anderson presents an interesting metaphor on how enticing our culture makes sexual experiences which not only encourages early onset sex, but also sex with multiple partners:

If sex is like frosting, our culture says you need to find the biggest bowl available, fill it with frosting, get the biggest spoon possible, and eat as much frosting as you can, as often as you can with as many people as you can. In fact, our culture tells us frosting is what life is all about; it gives meaning to life and is the greatest human experience known to man.<sup>33</sup>

As inviting as society makes sex seems many teen girls are struggling with learning how to navigate interpersonal relationships and who they can and want to be in relation to others. During the teens quest for identity outside of Christ many additional problems surface. There

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<sup>31</sup> Institute for Youth Development. *Sexual Activity and Youth*, Internet, available from [www.YouthDevelopment.org/download/sex.pdf](http://www.YouthDevelopment.org/download/sex.pdf), 12 June 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Jim Anderson, *Unmasked Exposing the Cultural Sexual Assault* (Spokane, WA: Lifeline Ministries, 2012), 84.

are issues of identity diffusion, distortion and enmeshment that should be taken into account. Diffusion has to do with role confusion. According to Loder, "... role confusion is the diffusion that occurs when a person is persuaded by society to live according to its expectations rather than those of the Spirit. Role confusion diminishes as a person begins to discover his personal philosophy of life with its ideals and values."<sup>34</sup> Teens can experience distortions of their identity as well. Identity distortions involve an individual perceiving who they are through faulty lenses instead of who they really are. Bill Clem has identified three ways in which ones identity can become distorted. They are delineated below:

**Chart 4. Clem's Three Ways Identity Can Become Distorted**

Distortion #1: I am what I do

Distortion #2: I am what has been done to me

Distortion #3: I am my relationship, roles and responsibilities<sup>35</sup>

For teen girls with a history of promiscuous behavior, distortions 2 and 3 are probably the ones that counselors will find most prevalent in working with this population. Distortion #2 will likely surface with girls who have been abuse, rejected and abandoned because they see their identity through the lens of someone who is bad, damaged or unworthy. Girls who see themselves only as someone else's girlfriend or daughter with no identity of their own are suffering from Distortion #3. Clem says that "When we realign ourselves to the truths of what God has said about his redeemed children, we have an identity that is impervious to lies and is crisis proof."<sup>36</sup>

The issue of emotional enmeshment has to do with unhealthy and destructive relationships. This is often a trap which draws a teen girl with low self-esteem into a detrimental dating relationship with someone who is controlling and/or domineering. Clinton and Clark

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<sup>34</sup> Kevin M. Gushiken, "Nurturing Spiritual Identity Formation in Youth Curriculum From the Theological-Psychological Approach of James Loder." *Christian Education Journal* 7 no. 2 (2010): 319-333. Available from

<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=3&hid=11&sid=7b476946-b58f-4cd3-8115b3faddbf2a3c%40sessionmgr13&bdata=JNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001811280>, accessed 15 March 2012., 324.

<sup>35</sup> Bill Clem, *Disciple: Getting Your Identity from Jesus.* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 75-87.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 87.

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describe the process of developing and emotionally enmeshed relationship in the following manner:

Emotional enmeshment happens when an individual loses her identity in the overwhelming desire to be accepted by another. In a dating relationship, enmeshed couples try to be together all the time, are possessive of their partner, and often appear as “carbon copies of each other. Rather than celebrating the unique way God created them, emotionally enmeshed couples rarely discuss their differences or conflicts for fear it will cause them to break up. Individuals in this sort of relationship feel obligated to “rescue” their partner, and are quite likely to stay in a relationship even when abuse is present.<sup>37</sup>

Other issues that should also be explored related to the causes of promiscuity in teen girls, identified in the research include but are not limited to the areas enumerated below:

### **Chart 5. Other Causes of Promiscuity**

- Pressures from peers<sup>38</sup>
- Relationship problems with parents or problems within the family (ie. Divorce)<sup>39</sup>
- Disconnect between values and actions<sup>40</sup>
- Sexual Abuse such as rape, incest and molestation<sup>41</sup>
- Mental health issues such as depression and low self-esteem<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Tim Clinton & Chap Clark, *The Quick-Reference Guide to Counseling Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Baker Books, 2010), 103

<sup>38</sup> Myeshia N. Price and Janet S. Hyde, “When Two Isn’t Better Than One: Predictors of Early Sexual Activity in Adolescence Using a Cumulative Risk Model,” *Journal of Youth Adolescence* (2009 38:1059-1071, Internet, available from <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=42&hid=127&sid=2eb60117-5422-46ba-948080e211bdede0%40sessionmgr111&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=psyh&AN=2009-23443-004>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Kathleen Leonard Cobb, and Diane Scott-Jones. “A Belief-Behavior Gap? Exploring Religiosity and Sexual Activity among High School Seniors.” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 25, no. 4 (2010): 578–600. Internet, available from <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=3&hid=24&sid=226f6f6f-7dc54f4898bb1be8654c89a%40sessionmgr10&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=a9h&AN=51236598>, accessed on 22 February 2012.

<sup>41</sup> Patricia H.Davis, *Counseling Adolescent Girls*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996). 18, 66-82.

<sup>42</sup> Rachel Hershenberg, and Joanne Davila. “Depressive Symptoms and Sexual Experiences Among Early Adolescent Girls: Interpersonal Avoidance as Moderator.” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 39, no.8 (2010):967-976. Internet, available from <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=4&hid=11&sid=990cb09c-0ad6-47a4-9ca8+4897e9bc092d%40sessionmgr13&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=a9h&AN=51880866>, accessed 20 February 2012.

- Increased awareness of their sexual selves and the desires of the flesh.<sup>43</sup>

## **E. New Identity in Christ**

### **1. Must be Born Again**

In order to acquire a new identity in Christ we must first be born again.<sup>44</sup> This new birth comes about because “God so loved the world that he gave His only son, Jesus Christ, so that whoever believes in His son, would not perish but would have everlasting life.”<sup>45</sup> This is the gift of salvation which is directly tied to and cannot be separated from belief in Jesus Christ. That is why Acts 4:12 states, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”<sup>46</sup> In considering the magnitude of the gift of salvation, it cannot be fully comprehended unless we reflect on the fact that we did nothing to earn salvation, and that as depraved sinners, we did not deserve to be thought worthy of such a blessing. In his letter to the church of Ephesus, Paul illuminates this:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus....<sup>47</sup>

We are therefore saved by God’s grace toward us which He gave to us as an undeserved gift simply because we choose to believe and have faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>48</sup>

### **2. Called Out of Darkness to Receive a New Identity in Christ**

It is not God’s desires for anyone to be lost; therefore, He draws us with cords of love out of whatever degenerate state we are in, so that we will want to repent and come to know His son. When we do, God gives us the gift of salvation which includes a new identity in

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<sup>43</sup> David Powlison, Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2003).157-159.

<sup>44</sup> John 3:7. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references will be from the New King James translation.

<sup>45</sup> John 3:16.

<sup>46</sup> Acts 4:12.

<sup>47</sup> Ephesians 2:4-6.

<sup>48</sup> Ephesians 2:7-9.

Jesus Christ.<sup>49</sup> In other divine words, God “called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”<sup>50</sup> For promiscuous teens this new identity in Christ allows them to be redeemed from a life of sin in order for them to have an abundant life in Christ.<sup>51</sup>

What does a new identity in Christ mean for those who were once sinners like promiscuous teens?

It means that they do not have to live their life consumed by the lust of the flesh and the standards of today’s world. Being born again gives them access to everything they need to live their lives as God has ordained for them to live.<sup>52</sup> Does it mean that they will automatically be able to get rid of all of the bad habits that they embraced? No, it does not, but it provides them with the Holy Spirit as their guarantee that if, they allow Him, He can come alongside them to teach them how to live godly lives.<sup>53</sup>

### **3. Identity Transformation Through Christ – Spiritual Makeover**

II Corinthians 5:17 states, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” As a result of accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, promiscuous teens begin the process of identity transformation; presented in their terms, it is a spiritual makeover. It does not matter what they have done in the past, if they confess their sins, repent and turn from the things that they use to do that was displeasing in the sight of God, He will forgive them and cleanse them from all unrighteousness.<sup>54</sup> When one goes through a transformation, it is a process; meaning that there are usually several steps that need to take place before the desired outcome is achieved.<sup>55</sup>

Although God has infinite capabilities and can perform a miracle where one is instantaneously changed into the likeness of Jesus, in most cases, the identity transformation that will take place in a newly converted teen is a process that takes place overtime. The spiritual

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<sup>49</sup> II Peter 3:9; Hosea 11:4.

<sup>50</sup> I Peter 2:10.

<sup>51</sup> I Peter 1:18; Galatians 3:13; John 10:10.

<sup>52</sup> II Peter 1:3-9.

<sup>53</sup> Ephesians 1:13-14; Ephesians 4:30; John 14:26; I Corinthians 2:13.

<sup>54</sup> I John 1:9; Acts 3:19.

<sup>55</sup> Dictionary.com, Internet, available from <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/transformation?s=t>, accessed 08 July 2012.

makeover that will take place will enable them to grow in Christ in incremental steps, so that each step will bring them to another level of God's glory and His likeness.<sup>56</sup> As a part of this process, these formerly promiscuous teens need to be an active participant in the transformation process as they learn to become co-laborers with Jesus.<sup>57</sup>

Three key things that they must do to work in conjunction with Jesus are that:

**Chart 2a. Spiritual Makeover – Actions**

1. They must abstain from things related to lusts of the flesh which war against their soul.<sup>58</sup>
2. They must present their bodies as a living sacrifice in a way that is holy and acceptable to God, because this is a reasonable act of service given the price that had to be paid to redeem them from a life of sin.<sup>59</sup>
3. They must diligently strive not to conform to the world and the former things that drew them into a life of sin. In order to do this they must daily, on a continual basis, renew their mind by reading, studying, and praying the word of God.<sup>60</sup>

The benefits of this Spiritual Makeover provided to these teens formerly living a promiscuous lifestyle are clearly outlined in Ephesian 1, but are not limited to the following:

**Chart 2b. Spiritual Makeover – Benefits**

1. They are redeemed, or bought back, from a sinful lifestyle and the powers of darkness that have been influencing them;
2. They are adopted into the family of Jesus Christ;
3. They receive forgiveness for their sins (including any sexual sins that the promiscuous teens have been involved in);
4. They have access to knowledge of God's will for their lives;
5. They get the inheritance that was predestined for them according to God's purpose; and

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<sup>56</sup> II Corinthians 3:18.

<sup>57</sup> II Corinthians 6:1.

<sup>58</sup> I Peter 2:11.

<sup>59</sup> Romans 12:1.

<sup>60</sup> Romans 12:2.

6. They are sealed with the Holy Spirit which guarantees their inheritance.<sup>61</sup>

Eric Geiger in his book *iDENTITY: Who You Are in Christ*, sums it up nicely in the following passage:

The invitation to become a follower of Christ is also an invitation to a new identity. When you became a Christian, your identity changed. You have been made new through your relationship with Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Your old life, your old identity is dead (Gal. 2:20). ... To move forward in our faith, we must discover or rediscover the identity that God has given us. ... Knowing who you are is critical. ... As we understand who we are, we are enabled by God to live the reality of our identity.<sup>62</sup>

## **F. Using the Concept of New Identity in Christ in Counseling**

### **1. Appropriateness of Concept**

Using the concept of new identity in Christ to counsel promiscuous teen girls is most appropriate for those counselors who are functioning in the capacity of a pastor/pastoral counselor, a youth minister, or professional licensed mental health counselors trained in Christian Counseling. The level and skills of each of the previously mentioned individuals, who may provide counseling to teens, may vary. However, it is important for them to acknowledge their skills as well as their limitations, and to stay within the scope of their training and ability level.

For those pastoral counselors and youth ministers who do not possess formal counseling training, it is in their best interest, and the best interest of the teen girls that they are working with to partner with a licensed professional Christian counselor. This will enable them to have someone to seek advice from experts when they need it. Furthermore, it will also provide them with a professional who they trust to refer the girls that they are working with that may require more intensive therapeutic intervention than they are capable of providing. As stated by Clark, “For each adolescent in a given community to be cared for, regardless of talent, ability, or even

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<sup>61</sup> Ephesians 1:3-14.

<sup>62</sup> Eric Geiger, *iDENTITY: Who You Are in Christ* (Nashville, T.N.: B 7 H Publishing Group, 2008), 8-10.

attitude, programs with similar goals must work together.”<sup>63</sup> This also applies to professionals in the Christian community.

Teens with a history of promiscuity seeking guidance from a member of a church staff or a professional Christian counselor will benefit most from the use of the concept of new identity in Christ, if they have a personal commitment to faith values and/or interested in making such a commitment.

Research has shown that in terms of the sexual behavior of teens, it is not sufficient for parents to take their daughters to church and have a strong personal commitment, if the teen does not personally embrace these values.<sup>64</sup> Even if the teen has decided to align her actions with her previously held beliefs or her new commitment to living for Christ, it is important for counselors to help them to understand that the change and the new lifestyle they are choosing will not always be easy.

People need encouragement as they pursue the hard work of change. They need truths that will motivate and strengthen them. The gospel motivates us not only with the presence of Christ and the surety of his promises, but also with our brand new identity. In passages like Romans 6:15-17 and I John 3:1-3, Scripture lays out this new identity for us. We learn that we are not only forgiven, but have in fact been adopted into the family of God. We are children of the King of Kings! The God of the universe is our Father!<sup>65</sup>

The aforementioned statement by Tripp may be a very comforting beginning point when counseling teens that have been involved in promiscuous behavior, since most will probably have guilt and shame as a result of the psychosocial consequences associated with their behavior. The teen needs to understand that “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, knowing that they are forgiven and are now adopted into God’s family can give them a sense of peace and acceptance that they may not have experienced in the past. Also, if they have had problems with

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<sup>63</sup> Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenager* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 199.

<sup>64</sup> Ann M. Meier, Adolescent' Transition to First Intercourse, Religiosity, and Attitudes about Sex. *Social Forces*, March 2003, 81 (3) 1044-47.

<sup>65</sup> Paul D. Tripp, Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in *Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*.

<sup>66</sup> Romans 8:1.

their family and earthy father, particularly in regards to abandonment, rejection or incest, they now have God as their father and He will never leave them or forsake them.<sup>67</sup>

## **2. Developmental Concerns and Appropriate Bible**

In counseling adolescent girls with a history of promiscuity we need to make sure that their developmental level is taken into consideration as well as their spiritual needs and the impact that friends and family may have on their lives and behavior. Spiritual development is critical to the health and wellbeing of the developing adolescent. As they are beginning to embrace their new identity in Christ, Christian counselors and clergy should assist them in learning how to fulfill their previously unmet spiritual needs.<sup>68</sup> In doing this one should make sure that the counseling methods used is fully aligned with and faithful to the scriptures. As a part of this process it will be necessary for counselors to help the teen to examine their experiences from a biblical perspective which should involve assisting them in re-interpreting or developing a biblical narrative in which their experiences can be framed.<sup>69</sup> When utilizing a scriptural basis for counseling that incorporates the use of the concept of new identity in Christ in working with teen girls, it is critical to assess their reading abilities and to provide them with a Bible at level that they can read and understand.

The New International Version is a good Bible for those teen girls that have a reading level at grade seven or above. For those with reading levels below grade seven, choices to consider include: The New American Standard Bible (6.6), The Good News Translation (6.0), The New Living Translation (6.3), The Message Bible (6.0), The Contemporary English Version (5.4), New Century Version (5.6), God's Word (4.5), and New International Reader's Version (2.9).<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Hebrews 13:5.

<sup>68</sup> Kaili Chen Zhang, and Charlene Tan, “Exploring the Spiritual Needs of Adolescent Girls.” *Religion & Education* 37 no.2 (2010):146-161. Available from <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=3&hid=13&sid=08d13f52-84ee-486d754f78fd84cd%40sessionmgr15&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=ehh&AN=53466229>, assessed 2 April 2012.

<sup>69</sup> David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2003), 207

<sup>70</sup> Rose Publishing, *Bible Translation Comparison*, (2007). Parenthesis indicate the reading level of the difference Bibles.

### **3. Appropriateness of Tying Practical with Cognitive Concerns**

The counseling process should also tie the theoretical with the practical in order for the teens to be able to see the practical application to their lives.

We need to marry the practical with the supernatural in our training of the next generation. As leaders, we need to give them both. The excitement of the supernatural needs to translate into an intimacy with God that cause their roots to go down deep so that their “spiritual tree” can grow and bear long-term fruit that affects the everyday, practical areas of their lives.<sup>71</sup>

For those who are professional Christian counselors, using cognitive behavior therapy that is brief and solution focused can be effective with this population in helping them to attend to and address immediate difficulties which they may be facing. The successfulness of this approach is supported by research.<sup>72</sup>

Likewise, gestalt therapy may also be a good approach since it involves “putting oneself as fully as possible into the experiences of the other without judging, analyzing or interpreting while simultaneously retaining a sense of one’s separate, autonomous presence.”<sup>73</sup> This technique can help the counselor begin to develop the trusting relationship necessary for the challenging work of identity transformation of teen girls as they grow into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ.

### **4. Appropriateness of Biblical Discipleship the Core**

Practical application of biblical principles should be at the core of using the concept of new identity in Christ with teens with a history of promiscuity. Knowing that Romans 12:2 says that they should be transformed by renewing their mind is of no value to teen girls unless it is explained to them that it means that it is their role to play an active part in their spiritual makeover, thus, each needs good Christian discipleship. This goes along with being a co-worker with Jesus for their own identity transformation. Jesus is the one who is

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<sup>71</sup> Jim Anderson, *Unmasked Exposing the Cultural Sexual Assault* (Spokane, W.A. : Lifeline Ministries, 2012), 26.

<sup>72</sup> Michael S. Nystul, *Introduction to Counseling: An Art and Science Perspective*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (Boston, M.A. Pearson Publishing, 2011), 247-248.

<sup>73</sup> Gary Yontef. *Awareness, Dialogue, and Process* (Gouldsboro, ME: The Gestalt Journal Press 1993). Internet. Available from [www.Gestalt.org/yontef.htm](http://www.Gestalt.org/yontef.htm), accessed 9 July 2012.

ultimately responsible for the *Spiritual Makeover*, but it is up to the teens themselves to willingly yield themselves over to the process.

Yielding themselves over to the process consists of (a) not conforming to the world, (b) renewing their mind, (c) building up their faith, (d) casting down imagination, and (e) guarding their heart and mind. In order to keep from conforming to this world, teen girls may have to change their circle of friends, so that they are not pressured and tempted to pick up old toxic behavior patterns and habits. To renew their mind teens need to get in the practice of praying and reading their Bible.<sup>74</sup> That is why it is essential for teen girls to have Bibles that they can read and understand. It is also helpful if they join a youth group with other girls so they can support each other in positive ways such as praying and studying the Bible together. This is particularly vital for the younger teen girls because of the level of importance they place on peers and the significant influence of group behavior. Most teens have a desire to fit in and be accepted but the need is even greater for those who have low self-esteem and have issues of guilt and shame.

Everyone has been given a certain amount of faith, but in order to fully live out their new identity in Christ, teen girls need to understand there are things that they can do to increase their faith.<sup>75</sup> Increased faith will empower them to be able to withstand difficulty times, frustrating experiences and the disappointments that they will experience from time to time.

Some of the major ways teen girls can build their faith is by increasing their opportunity to hear the word of God by going to church regularly, listening to Christian music, watching Christian videos, and listening to other Christian teens talk about how God is working in their lives.<sup>76</sup> The imaginations of teen girls that become undesirable may be triggered by thoughts of past experiences, familiar places or music. Helping teen girls to learn to cast down their imagination by identifying and avoiding their triggers can be very empowering.<sup>77</sup> Assisting them in developing the ability to focus on

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<sup>74</sup> Romans 12:2.

<sup>75</sup> Romans 12:3.

<sup>76</sup> Romans 10:17.

<sup>77</sup> II Corinthians 10:5.

things that they have control over and how to problem solve can also aid in controlling over-active imaginations.

Girls in early adolescence will have a more difficult time with this because they may jump to conclusions and act based on faulty assumptions quicker than those who are in middle to late adolescence. Additionally, teen girls need to learn to guard their heart and mind by being intentional about the things they see and listen to.<sup>78</sup> Television shows, videos, movies, and music with highly sexualized content should be avoided. Since we are living in a highly technological age, it is critical that teen girls are taught how to protect themselves from internet predators and cyber bullying. Having a new identity in Christ involves adopting a new way for previously promiscuous girls to see themselves, interact with others and relate to their heavenly father. For most teens they will need the assistance of caring Christian adults to help them with this process.

### **Conclusion**

There are a constellation of reasons why today's teen girls find themselves living a promiscuous lifestyle, including such things as growing up in a highly sexualized world, the media, abuse, depression, coercion by an older man, or peer pressure. Regardless to what precipitated the behavior it is not God's will that any should be lost.<sup>79</sup> The utilization of the concept of a new identity in Christ provides a solid foundation and mechanism for pastoral counselors, youth ministers and other clergy as well as professional Christian mental health counselors, interested in supporting teen girls with a prior history of promiscuous behavior, through a counseling relationship. The work of Erikson, Gilligan and Loder provide a comprehensive theoretical framework upon which to base the therapeutic process. Research has shown that those teen girls who abstain from sex reported that they often did so because of their Christian faith and values. Therefore, using the concept of new identity in Christ – Spiritual Makeover – may be an extremely viable method to help previously promiscuous teens turn their lives around and embrace the identity which God created them to have.

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<sup>78</sup> Philippians 4:7.

<sup>79</sup> John 17:12, 18:9.

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