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SEXUAL PURITY

In the early days of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Prophet Joseph Smith prophesied that members of the Church “would receive more temptations, be more buffeted, and have greater difficulty” with sexual immorality than with any other single challenge (Brigham Young, 1860).

That prophecy is being fulfilled today. The so-called sexual revolution that started in the 1960s continues to impact society. Young and old alike are bombarded with images of immodesty and immorality. Youth are engaging in premarital sex at earlier and earlier ages. That which was once considered sacred, or at least private, is now spoken of casually and with little reverence. Those who speak up for moral values and advocate chastity before marriage and fidelity within marriage are often put down as being provincial and unsophisticated.

Unfortunately, many parents, school officials, and government leaders seem less concerned with the immorality of premarital sexual behavior than with the social ills that often come with it—teen pregnancies, abortion, and sexually transmitted diseases. Although these are very serious and damaging

ramifications of a sexually permissive society, there are yet other sobering consequences, such as the negative influence early premarital sexual activity has on the ability to form long-term relationships later in life (McIlhaney & Bush, 2008).

Numerous studies chronicle this pervasive culture of sexuality and the damaging effects of premarital sexual activity among teenagers and young adults. One study found that among 15-year-olds, 13% of girls and 21% of boys have engaged in sexual intercourse (Abma, Martinez, Mosher, & Dawson, 2004). The percentages steadily increase with age, so that 70% of unmarried 19-year-old girls were sexually active. Interestingly, fewer boys (65%) were sexually experienced at the same age.

A slight decrease in premarital sex was noted in the Abma report during more recent years. The percent of sexually experienced teenage girls ages 15 to 19 dropped from 49% in 1997 to 46% in 2002. The decline was more significant for boys, dropping from 55% in 1997 to 46% in 2002. While this modest change is welcome news, parents should not hold out hope that the frequency of teen sex will diminish. The emphasis on sexuality in general society and in the media messages bombarding teenagers will ensure that their level of sexual activity will remain high (Levin & Kilbourne, 2008).

These frightening trends generate questions about how Latter-day Saint teens are faring in this morally polluted environment. What is their level of participation in premarital sexual activities? What are the factors that discourage teenage sex? What, if anything, can be done to help strengthen LDS youth against the many influences that compromise personal purity? This chapter seeks to answer these questions.

Our study compares the premarital sexual behavior of LDS high school students to that of other youth in the United States. To provide meaningful information for parents, Church leaders, and other adults, we tested the correlation between premarital sex among LDS youth and the factors of friends,

religion, and family. We used a structural equation model that included peer, family, and religious factors to test how these factors predicted premarital sexual behavior.

THE INFLUENCE OF FRIENDS

Peer pressure is the most significant predictor of delinquency, including early sexual activity. The extensive literature linking friends' attitudes, examples, and pressure to sexual behavior is persuasive. Miller and Moore (1990) reviewed the literature of the antecedents of premarital sex among adolescents for the 1980s. Based on seven studies, they concluded that peer influences were the most significant predictors of adolescent sexual behavior.

Research in the 1990s continued to support the significance of friends' influence in initiating (participating in for the first time) sexual behavior. For example, a study of 1,496 students attending ten private high schools scattered across the United States tested four competing theories of teen sexual activity (Benda & DiBlasio, 1991). Differential association theory, one of the four theories, focuses largely on peer pressure. This theory accounted for two-thirds of the variance in sexual activity among these young people. This variance is very high for social science research and provides powerful support for the importance of peers. Interestingly, the authors suggested that future research should examine the effects of family characteristics on youths' susceptibility to peer pressure for sexual involvement.

Whitbeck, Yoder, Hoyt, and Conger (1999) attempted to unravel the relationship between peer and family influences on the premarital sexual activity of adolescent girls. Panel data (collected from the same students at two different times) were obtained from a sample of 451 two-parent families with seventh-grade students attending schools in a midwestern state. The initial data were collected in 1989.

In addition to peer pressure, the study analyzed the influence of older sisters within four years of the respondents' age.

Older sisters served as role models for a substantial number of girls. Data on sexual activity was collected one year after the initial data collection concerning friends and sisters. The model revealed that friends' sexual experience was the strongest predictor of girls' sexual initiation. Results also showed that girls with a sexually active older sister were more likely to engage in sexual activity and to respond to peer pressure to have sex.

In a later study, Whitbeck, Simons, and Goldberg (1996) attempted to identify the processes whereby peer characteristics influence adolescent sexual behavior. They used information obtained from 499 girls in the Iowa Youth and Families Project and the Iowa Single Parent Project. They included association with deviant peers along with several family-related measures. They found that girls who associated with friends who were breaking the law, who had been arrested, who were fighting with their parents, or who were not doing well in school were significantly more likely to have initiated sexual activity. It appears that delinquent peers included premarital sex among their delinquent behaviors.

An ecological risk-factor model was tested by Perkins, Luster, Villarruel, and Small (1998). This model included factors in a youth's family, neighborhood, school, and peer environments that put him or her at risk for engaging in sex. Data was collected from a sample of over 15,000 youth ages 12 to 17 in a large midwestern state. The model included a three-item peer delinquency scale that asked if the teen's closest friends drink, use drugs, and get into trouble at school. Association with delinquent friends was the strongest predictor of sexual experience for both boys and girls.

Whitbeck and his associates (1999) tested a multivariate model that included peer influences, family influences, and self-esteem to predict premarital sex. Nearly 500 adolescents in the eighth and tenth grades participated in two panel studies. The initial wave of data was collected in 1989, and the second wave in 1993.

Steady dating, a form of peer influence, increased the likelihood of having sexual intercourse by five times. This finding underscores prophetic counsel for youth to delay dating until age 16 and then to avoid steady dating. In addition, association with delinquent friends increased the chances of sexual activity by one and a half times. Interestingly, general delinquency of friends was more significant than friends' sexual activity.

In 1994, an interesting study interviewed 2,436 young people who were sexually inexperienced, and then these young people were interviewed again in 1996 (Sieving, Eisenberg, Pettingell, & Skay, 2006). Those who had initiated sex during this two-year period between interviews were compared to those who had remained virgins. The strongest influences on engagement in premarital sex were sexually active peers and friends who approved, encouraged, and lauded sexual involvement. For example, 42% of those who had sex hung out with sexually active friends, while only 28% of the virgins had sexually involved friends.

We could add dozens of other studies supporting the importance of friends in the initiation of adolescent sexual activity. The few reviewed in this chapter merely illustrate the extensive literature documenting the importance of peers in understanding why teens engage in premarital sexual behavior.

Recent studies have focused on a particularly pernicious type of extreme peer pressure—strong physical force. In such cases young women are literally forced to engage in sex. Miller, Monson, and Norton (1995) found that nearly 10% of young women included in the 1987 National Survey of Children had been forced to have sex. Significantly, they discovered that the girls who had been forced into sex had more permissive sexual attitudes and had engaged in voluntary sex at a younger age than those girls who had not been forced. This suggests that once initiated, even by force, the girls become more accepting of such behavior.

Abma et al. (2004) analyzed data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth. One-fourth of the girls under

age 14 indicated that their first intercourse had been involuntary. About 10% of the 14- and 15-year-old girls and about 5% of the 16- to 18-year-old girls reported they had been forced to have sex.

The young women were also asked to rate from one to ten the “wantedness” (or desire) of their first intercourse. Even among young women who had voluntary intercourse, about half rated the desire rather low (in the four-to-seven range) rather than in the upper end of the scale. They also found that the greater the age difference between the young girl and her partner, the higher the likelihood that force had been involved.

We suspect that LDS girls, because of their religious values and training, are more hesitant to engage in sex and so are at risk of being forced at a rate higher than the national average. In addition, we observed that LDS girls who date older non-LDS young men are most likely at greater risk of being forced into having sex.

MEASURING PEER PRESSURE

Based on this literature, we include five measures of peer influence in our model. First, we include the example of friends who have experienced sexual activity. These friends may not pressure the LDS youth to have sex, but they serve as negative role models.

Second, we included friends’ pressure to participate in premarital sex. This was the proportion of friends who encouraged, teased, and pressured the teen to have sexual activity.

The third measure of peer influence was friends’ pressure to engage in a range of light delinquent activities such as cheating on tests, smoking, drinking, and skipping school.

As noted earlier, some researchers have reported that peer pressure for general delinquency was more significant than pressure specifically focused on sex. We also included in the model the proportion of friends who were fellow members of the LDS Church. The rationale is that those with more LDS

friends receive lower levels of pressure to participate in sexual activity. Hopefully the teens actually receive pressure from their LDS friends to abstain from such behavior.

Finally, given the finding by Abma and her associates (2004) about coercion, we added whether or not LDS teens reported that they had been forced to participate in sexual activities.

THE INFLUENCE OF FAITH

Cochran and Beeghley (1991) reviewed a substantial number of studies testing the relationship between religion and premarital sexual behavior. They concluded that evidence of direct or indirect effects of religion and/or religiosity on nonmarital sexual attitudes and behavior can be found in more than 80 studies conducted during the past several decades (pp. 45–46). Research conducted since this review has confirmed religion's link to lower levels of premarital sexual behavior.

Religious affiliation or preference has frequently been noted as a significant predictor of premarital sexuality. Those youth belonging to, or identifying with, a religious denomination report lower rates of nonmarital sex than do the unchurched (Beck, Cole, & Hammond, 1991; Cooksey, Rindfuss, & Guilkey, 1996; Brewster, Cooksey, Guilkey, & Rindfuss, 1998; Smith & Denton, 2005).

These same studies have noted that teenagers belonging to Christian fundamentalist denominations participate in less premarital sex than do members of more liberal denominations (Cooksey, Rindfuss, & Guilkey, 1996; Brewster, Cooksey, Guilkey, & Rindfuss, 1998; Smith & Denton, 2005). This is not surprising, as fundamentalist denominations look upon unwed sexual activity as a much more serious sin than do liberal denominations.

Beck, Cole, and Hammond (1991) analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth collected in 1979 and in 1983. They found that both young men and young women who belonged to Pentecostal, Mormon, and Jehovah's

Witnesses denominations had lower rates of premarital sex than members of mainstream denominations.

We did not test the relationship between denominational affiliation and premarital sex, because we collected data from LDS youth only. If we had data from other denominations, we are confident that LDS teens would have a lower rate, as Church doctrine emphasizes that sex before marriage is a serious sin. In addition, to help LDS youth avoid sexual participation at a young age, youth are encouraged to delay dating until they are 16 and even then to avoid steady dating. We do compare the rates of sexual behavior of LDS students to national non-LDS averages, a comparison which provides some evidence that LDS youth are significantly less sexually active than their peers.

Church attendance, or public religiosity, has been found to be a strong predictor of premarital sex among teenagers (Studer & Thornton, 1987; Thornton & Camburn, 1989; Miller & Moore, 1990; Petersen & Donnenwerth, 1997). Attendance at religious services is assumed to be an indicator of the importance of religion in a teenager's life and thus is associated with lower premarital sexuality.

Day (1992) analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Market Experience of Youth, which was collected in 1979. This sample included over 12,000 white, black, and Hispanic teens. The model revealed that attendance at church was a significant predictor of lower premarital sex for all three samples of young women and for white young men. Perkins et al. (1998) discovered among a large sample of 15,000 adolescents living in a large midwestern state that attendance at church services, along with involvement in church activities and feelings of the importance of religion, was related to lack of sexual experience among white, black, and Hispanic teenagers.

Private religiosity, as indicated by personal prayer and feeling that religion is important, is also a significant predictor of lower initiation of sexual activity. Schroeder (1997) analyzed

data from the 12,000 teens in the 1994–95 National Study of Adolescent Health. He found that those young men and women who reported that they prayed often and that religion was important to them were less likely to engage in premarital sexual behavior.

Similar results linking private religiosity to delayed sexual behavior from the same data set were reported by Resnick et al. (1997). They combined affiliation, frequency of prayer, and a religious self-perception into a variable they labeled “religious identity,” and they found that it was significantly related to a higher age of sexual debut.

The National Survey of Youth and Religion collected data from a national sample of nearly 3,300 youth ages 13 to 17 (Smith & Denton, 2005). They grouped the youth into four groups according to their religiosity: devoted, regular, sporadic, and disengaged. The sexual attitudes and behaviors of these four groups were compared. The results revealed that religion had a powerful relationship to premarital sexuality. For example, 95% of the devoted teens plan on saving sex for marriage as compared to only 24% of the disengaged. Among the devoted teens, 18% had participated in petting, compared to 43% of the sporadic and disengaged teens. Finally, only 9% of the devoted teens had engaged in sexual intercourse as compared to 23% of the sporadic and 26% of the disengaged.

The authors noted that “again, we see across a variety of sexual outcome measures noticeable correlations between the degree of teen religious seriousness and cautious teen sexual attitudes and behaviors” (Smith & Denton, 2005, p. 235).

MEASURING RELIGIOSITY

Appendix A describes in detail the methodology for data collection and the kinds of questions that were included in the extensive questionnaire that was used in our study.

As seen in Appendix B, we examined five dimensions of religiosity in the statistical model predicting premarital sexual

behavior. They are (1) religious beliefs, (2) public religiosity (church attendance), (3) importance of religion, (4) family religious activities (family prayer, home evening, and scripture reading), and (5) acceptance in their ward by leaders and ward members.

THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY

Family structure has frequently been linked to early sexual behavior of teenagers. Most of the studies have focused on single-parent families. The argument is that a single parent has less time and energy than two parents to devote to monitoring teens' behavior. Consequently, teens living in single-parent families have more opportunities for sexual exploration. A second argument is that the single parent may be involved in a dating relationship and thus may be a role model of permissive sexual attitudes and behavior.

Miller and Moore (1990), in their review of the research from the 1980s, concluded that "adolescents—daughters in particular—from single-parent families are more likely to begin sexual intercourse at younger ages than their peers from two-parent families" (p. 1028).

Additional support for family structure as an influence on sexual activity has been found in a large number of studies, such as Hayes (1987), Newcomer and Udry (1984), Forste and Heaton (1988), Miller and Bingham (1989), Flewelling and Bauman (1990), Day (1992), Feldman and Brown (1993), Small and Luster (1994), and Upchurch et al. (1999).

Related research has also revealed that youth living with stepparents exhibit greater premarital sexual behavior than children in two-parent families, but less than youth in single-parent families (Rodgers, 1983; Thornton & Camburn, 1987; Miller & Bingham, 1989).

Interestingly, Capaldi, Crosby, and Stoolmiller (1996) examined "parental transitions" rather than single versus two-parent families. A teenager living with a single parent because

of a divorce was scored “one transition,” while living with a stepparent following divorce was scored as “two transitions.” Higher transition scores were assigned to teens whose parents had experienced multiple divorces and remarriages. They found that the greater the number of transitions, the more frequent the premarital sexual activity of the teenagers.

Limited support has linked maternal employment to early sexual activity among teenagers. Ku, Sonenstein, and Pleck (1993) found among 1,880 young men in the National Survey of Adolescent Males that those without a mother present in the home during the day had experienced sexual intercourse at an earlier age than those with a stay-at-home mother.

Brewster, Billy, and Grady (1993) reported that adolescent sexual activity was higher in neighborhoods where a relatively high percentage of women worked full time. They concluded that adolescents lack adequate adult supervision in such neighborhoods and thus are freer to engage in sexual activity.

On the other hand, Thornton and Camburn (1987) found that neither part- nor full-time employment of mothers was related to premarital sexual behavior. Although previous results have been inconsistent, we include maternal employment in our model.

Three parent-teenager relationships have been linked to early sexuality among adolescents. The first is the feeling of closeness or connection between parents and their teenage children. The second is regulation—the degree to which parents set rules of conduct for teens, monitor their compliance, and discipline disobedience. The third process is the use of psychological control over adolescents rather than encouraging them to develop their own psychological autonomy.

Weinstein and Thornton (1989) reported that children who had a close relationship (connection) with their parents adopted attitudes similar to their parents’ and thus engaged in sexual behavior less frequently than children who did not have a close relationship with their parents. Resnick et al.

(1997) analyzed the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, which included data from over 12,000 youth in the seventh through ninth grades. They reported that family connection was protective against early sexual behavior.

Whitbeck, Conger, and Kao (1993) found by using panel data that parental support (connection) was indirectly related to later sexual activity through a “depressing affect.” A strained relationship between parents and teens was linked to depression, which in turn influenced the teens’ sexual activity and their likelihood to have sexually active friends.

Feldman and Brown (1993) also analyzed panel data to test whether self-restraint was a mediating variable between family closeness (connection) and lower sexual activity. They found that connection was both directly linked to lower sexual behavior and indirectly through self-restraint. In the latter, distance between parents and teen led to lack of self-restraint, which in turn led to sexual initiation.

Family regulation includes setting family rules, monitoring teens’ compliance to them, and disciplining when appropriate, and has been found to be associated with lower adolescent sexual activity. Moore, Peterson, and Furstenberg (1986) analyzed the National Survey of Children, which was collected in 1976. They discovered that adolescents whose parents knew their teenage children’s friends had a lower rate of sexual behavior. Wu and Martinson (1993) noted among young men studied in the National Survey of Adolescent Males that strict family rules were related to delayed sexual activity. Hovell et al. (1994) found that family rules governing dating were associated with lower sexual behavior.

Interestingly, Small and Kerns (1993) discovered that youth whose parents failed to monitor their behavior were more often recipients of unwanted sexual attention. Studies by Small and Luster (1994) and Miller, Forehand, and Kotchick (1999) reported that parental monitoring of adolescents’ activities was related to lower sexual activity.

Harris et al. (2006) studied the relationship between assets, including positive role models, family communication, school connection, constructive use of time, and aspirations for the future to sexual experience. They interviewed over 1,000 parent/teenager pairs in two midwestern cities. They discovered that youth with parental supervision were less likely to have engaged in sexual behavior.

In addition, a self-care youth's sexual experience was significantly reduced by access to these assets, especially supervision by adults. Overall, the evidence suggests rather strongly that parental regulation of teens' behavior is an important deterrent to early sexual initiation.

A growing literature emphasizes the importance of adolescents developing psychological autonomy from their parents in the process of becoming competent adults (Barber, Olsen, & Shagle, 1994). Autonomy fosters teens' confidence in their own ideas, feelings, and perceptions. This in turn enables them to make more rational decisions about their sexuality. Small and Kerns (1993) found that psychological overcontrol (lack of autonomy) by parents was associated with greater unwanted sexual contact. Upchurch, Aneshensel, Sucoff, and Levy-Storms (1999) also found that youth who experienced excessive psychological control from their parents were at greater risk of sexual activity.

MEASURING FAMILY FACTORS

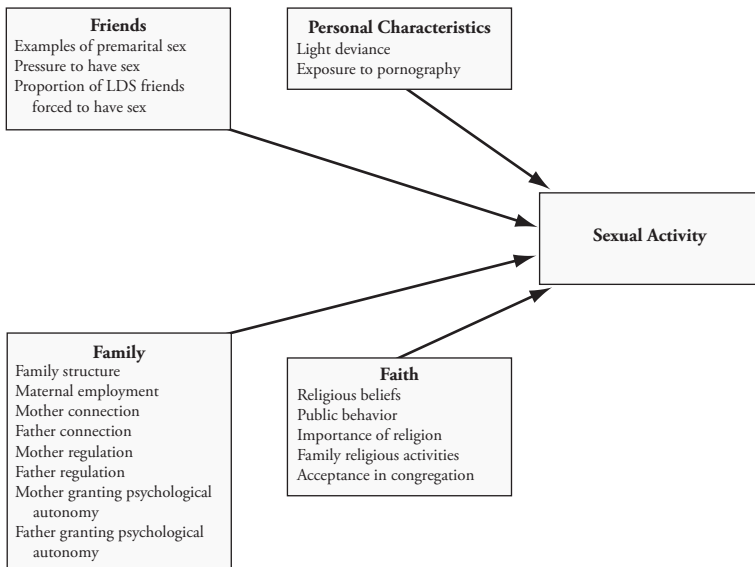
Based on this literature, we included family structure, maternal employment, parental connection, parental regulation, and parental granting of psychological autonomy to their teens in the model predicting premarital sexual behavior. The theoretical model predicting premarital sex that was tested in our study is presented in Figure 1. As can be seen, we included several measures of friends' influence, religiosity, and family factors that competed to explain premarital sexual behavior. Family factors were placed in the model so as to test both direct and indirect effects on the teens' sexual activity.

Many of the studies observed different causes of sexual activity among young women as compared to young men. For example, Rodgers (1999) noted that family processes seem to impact girls more than boys. Therefore, we tested the model for young men and young women separately.

The data collection procedures and the response rates for the various samples are reported in Appendix A. In addition to the questionnaire that was completed by thousands of LDS youth, we interviewed 50 young women in Utah County who were under the age of 20 and who had given birth to a baby out of wedlock.

This source of data provides a unique and interesting perspective. Researchers are very concerned about the validity, or truthfulness, of answers from teens in a questionnaire about their sexual experiences. The birth of a child prior to marriage was adequate evidence that these young women were sexually experienced before they married. These interviews provide valuable insights into the sexual initiation of LDS young women.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model Predicting Premarital Sex



MEASURING PREMARITAL SEXUAL BEHAVIORS

Premarital sexual activity was measured by asking the students if they had ever read pornographic materials, watched pornographic movies or videos, participated in heavy petting, or engaged in sexual intercourse. Those who indicated yes to any of these activities were asked how often they had ever done so. Since LDS youth have rather low rates of these sexual behaviors, it was necessary to ask if they had *ever* engaged in the activities rather than if they had done so during the previous year.

Table 1. Percent of Young People Who Have Ever Had Sexual Intercourse, by Religious Affiliation and Age

Religious Affiliation & Age	Young Men		Young Women	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Ages 15–17				
LDS Youth				
1990–99	1,511	8	1,977	11
General Population*				
1995	5,658	43	5,293	38
2002	5,726	31	5,815	30
Age 18				
LDS Youth				
1990–99	298	11	407	19
General Population**				
1995	1,608	59	1,690	65
2002	1,891	58	2,006	54

* Abma, J. C., Martinez, G. M., Mosher, W. D., Dawson, B. S. (2004). *Teenagers in the United States: Sexual activity, contraceptive use, and child bearing, 2002*. National Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Health Statistics 23(24)*, 2004.

** Although the studies of LDS youth and the general population defined the age-groups differently (9- to 12-grade students and high school seniors, and 15- to 17-year-olds and 18-year-olds respectively), we felt the parameters were close enough to make a valid comparison. The Abma report gave the number of 18- and 19-year-olds combined. We divided that number by two to obtain the closest approximation to the age of high school seniors.

At the time we were studying these LDS youth, Internet pornography had yet to appear, and pornography was primarily confined to books, magazines, movies, and videos. Thus we did not include a question about exposure to this pervasive source of pornography. Since pornography was not included as part of the measure of sexual behavior, and since it is such a visible force in society, we included it in the model as an independent variable predicting sexual behavior.

The factor analysis also revealed a problem with teens' relationships with their mothers and fathers. The teens' reports of their connection with parents, the regulation of parents, and parents granting of psychological autonomy were almost identical. When both parents' data were included, the model would not specify or calculate. To eliminate this problem, we used only the mothers' connection, regulation, and granting of autonomy in the model predicting premarital sex.

FREQUENCY OF PREMARITAL SEX

The percent of LDS high school students who have ever had sexual intercourse is compared to the percent of high school students examined in a very large national study in Table 1. The influence of affiliation in the LDS Church, with its unique moral values, is readily apparent in the substantially lower rates of premarital sexual behavior for both young men and young women. The national rate for young men in 1995, which is most comparable to the LDS youth, is six times larger than the rate for LDS young men. The gap is not as large for young women, but the LDS rate is still four times lower than that among the young women in the national sample. It should be noted that the national sample includes some 19-year-olds, which probably inflates its rate a little. Nevertheless, the differences are amazing.

The LDS seniors and the 18-year-olds in the national sample are a very dramatic contrast. The percentages are greatly different—11% versus 58% for boys and 19% versus 59% for

young women. Interestingly, 2002 is the first year that a higher percentage of young women than young men are shown to be sexually experienced in a sizable national sample.

The greater sexual experience of women as compared to men appeared among the LDS students much earlier. At the time of our study, we speculated that some LDS young women were frequently dating older nonmember men who were sexually experienced. Thus, LDS young women were at greater risk of being allured into sexual behavior than LDS young men. While this is an interesting trend, the important point made in the table is the powerful influence of religious affiliation in reducing teenage sexual activity.

The frequencies of specific sexual activities—heavy petting, and intercourse—are presented in Table 2. About 20% of the LDS high school students have participated in heavy petting but have not had intercourse. Only 8% of the boys and 10% of the girls had participated in sexual intercourse. In all cases, those who had experienced intercourse had first engaged in petting.

BIVARIATE CORRELATIONS WITH PREMARITAL SEX

A bivariate correlation measures the relationship between one variable, such as peer pressure, and premarital sex, while holding all the other variables constant. The bivariate correlations between the various personal, peer, religious, and family factors with premarital sex are presented in Table 3. Not surprisingly, pressure from friends to engage in sex produced the strongest bivariate correlation with sex for both young men and young women.

Table 2. Sexual Activity among LDS High School Students

Sexual Activity	Young Men (<i>n</i> = 1,518)	Young Women (<i>n</i> = 1,946)
Heavy petting only	19%	19%
Intercourse	8%	10%

Having friends who are sexually active also strongly correlated with sexual activity. For the young women, being forced to have sex was strongly related to premarital sex. Not surprisingly, among young men, sexual coercion was a relatively unimportant factor.

The proportion of friends who were LDS was only weakly related to premarital sex. This relationship was expected to be stronger, because it is assumed that LDS friends do not pressure the youth as often to have sex as non-LDS friends do. This finding suggests that it is not the religious affiliation of friends that is important; rather it is the moral values of friends.

Both participation in light deviance and exposure to pornography were strongly related to premarital sex. Those youth who were smoking, drinking, and skipping school probably had adopted a “hedonistic” or thrill-seeking lifestyle that included sexual activity. In addition, they seemed to be in rebellion against parents, school officials, and Church leaders. As for pornography, it is suspected that it heightens sexual arousal and thus enhances motivation for sex.

All the dimensions of religiosity except acceptance in their congregation were inversely related to premarital sex. The correlations all have a minus sign, which means that the higher the religiosity, the lower the probability of engaging in sex. The correlation between the importance of religion and sexual activity is strong for both young men and young women. Public religiosity (attendance) is also strongly related to such behavior. Family religious activity has a modest relationship to the sexual activity of teenagers. However, family structure is significantly related to sexual behavior, as youth living in single-parent families were more sexually experienced. A similar modest relationship was observed between a mother’s employment and sexual activity.

Family structure and maternal employment produced weak but significant relationships with initiation of sex for both young men and young women. Among the parent/teenager

relationships, mothers' regulation had the strongest relationship to premarital sex. The correlations for both young women and young men were the same. Those parents who set rules, observed compliance, and disciplined when appropriate had children who engaged in sex less often as compared to children raised in families with limited regulation.

Parents' granting psychological autonomy was not related to premarital sexual behavior. This finding was somewhat anticipated, as early studies had reported that lack of autonomy is more often related to internal states of mind, such as depression and thoughts of suicide as contrasted to behavior (Barber et al., 1994).

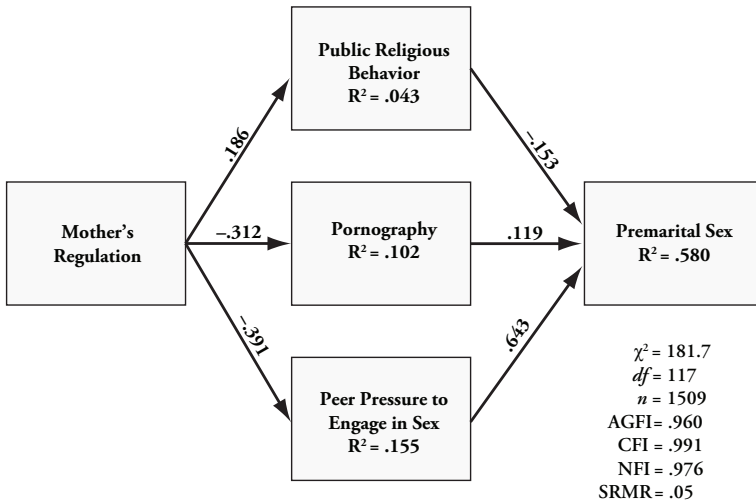
MODEL PREDICTING PREMARITAL SEXUAL BEHAVIORS

The structural model indicates the strength of the relationships between the predictor variables and premarital sexual behavior. The results for the young men are presented in Figure 2. One indicator from each of the four domains of peer influences, personal characteristics, religiosity, and family emerged as significant predictors in the trimmed model.

As anticipated, peer pressure for boys to engage in premarital sex was by far the strongest predictor of such behavior. Unfortunately, we do not know how much of the peer pressure to have sex came from other young men and how much came from young women. It is suspected that most of the pressure came from male friends, but it is likely that some pressure came from the girls with whom the boys associated and perhaps dated.

Public religious behavior has a significant inverse relationship to premarital sex. Thus, the more often young men attended church and participated in religious activities, the less likely they had initiated sex. In the earlier chapter on delinquency, the importance of religion in a boy's private life made a stronger contribution than did church attendance. Perhaps the social support against premarital sex obtained in church meetings, as well as the association with adult leaders and

Figure 2. Model Predicting Premarital Sex among LDS Young Men



other young people with similar values and behavior, was more important in explaining participation in premarital sex than were religious feelings. It is suspected that as youth started to participate in inappropriate sexual behaviors they withdrew from church fellowship.

As we all know, pornography has become more readily available to teens in high school. Access to the Internet places hardcore pornography into the hands of youth. In addition to the Internet, youth have ready access to soft pornography in videos and movies on cable or satellite. It appears that LDS young men struggling to understand and cope with hormonal changes of puberty are sexually aroused by pornography to participate in activities contrary to their values and behavioral intentions.

In our study, none of the family characteristics had a direct relationship to premarital sexual behavior. But mothers' regulation of their sons' behavior had a fairly strong indirect link to sex through the other three factors in the model. Regulation, as explained earlier, involves parents setting family rules, monitoring compliance to the rules, and disciplining noncompliance.

Also, mothers' regulation represents both mothers' and fathers' regulation of their teenage children.

The strongest indirect effect of mothers' regulation flows through peer pressure. The more that mothers regulated their teens' behavior, the lower the impact of peer pressure in the teens' lives. Mothers' regulation probably influenced the selection of friends as well as their teens' ability to resist peer pressure. Mothers' regulation also had a strong indirect effect on sexual activity through exposure to pornography. It is pretty obvious how a mother monitoring Internet use reduces access to porn. Finally, mothers' regulation had a modest indirect impact of their children's sexual activity through public religious behavior. In this case, teens whose mothers encouraged and monitored their church attendance were less likely to have initiated sexual behavior.

These four factors explained 58% of the variance in premarital sexual activity among LDS young men. This means that over half of the sexual activity of these boys is accounted for by these four variables. Friends were a powerful social influence in the lives of young men and pressured some of them to participate in premarital sex. On the other hand, faith, as represented by church attendance, was a social influence against early sexual activity. Participation in pornography had an obvious impact on such behavior. Finally, parents' regulation of their teenage sons did have a strong indirect effect through peer pressure, church attendance, and exposure of pornography.

The trimmed model predicting premarital sexual activity among LDS young women is presented in Figure 3. The model is very similar to that for young men, with the exception that pornography dropped out of the model. The results make it clear that young women initiate sexual behavior as a consequence of external pressures rather than personal desires.

Comments from three sexually active LDS young women illustrate the influence of pressure. When asked, "Why did you engage in sex for the first time?" they replied:

I had a boyfriend who pressured it on me a lot. And I thought, “Well, maybe I should.” I wasn’t thinking right. I don’t know. And one night I thought, “Well, maybe I want to do this.” But I didn’t really want to. But he wouldn’t stop. He just kept doing it. I was like, “No,” but he just kept doing it.

’Cause everyone else was doing it. I think that is why I did it. Everyone was like, “I have, I have!” It was just like at that moment, I said, “Okay.” It wasn’t like I even thought about it.

It was when I was fifteen. Really I just felt pressure. Mostly pressure. I just went to a friend’s house, and she was having a party. And I was left alone with this guy, and one thing kind of led to another.

The last comment illustrates the casualness of some of the young women’s first sexual activity. This young woman was pressured into having sex by “this guy” she was not even dating.

Figure 3. Model Predicting Premarital Sex among LDS Young Women

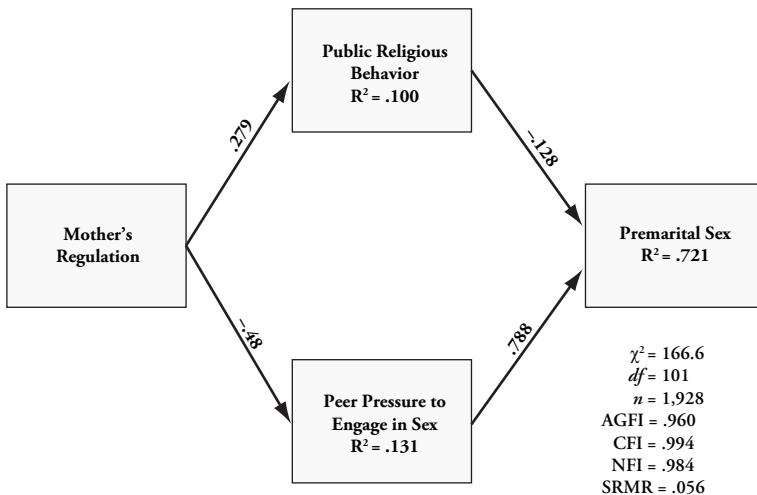


Table 3. Correlations between Friends, Religion, and Family Characteristics and Premarital Sex for LDS Young Men and Women

Independent Variables	Young Men	Young Women
Personal Behaviors		
Light deviance*	.455**	.496**
Exposure to pornography	.364**	.308**
Friends		
Examples of having sex	.351**	.472**
Pressure to have sex	.473**	.595**
Pressure for light deviance	.298**	.376**
Proportion of lds friends	-.187**	-.220**
Forced to have sex	.193**	.406**
Religiosity		
Beliefs	-.269**	-.243**
Public behavior (church attendance)	-.263**	-.350**
Importance of religion	-.367**	-.397**
Family religion activities	-.171**	-.202**
Acceptance in congregation	-.010**	-.034**
Family		
Single-parent family	.140**	.068**
Maternal employment	.104**	.090**
Mother's connection	-.132**	-.132**
Father's connection	-.093**	-.093**
Mother's regulation	-.275**	-.275**
Father's regulation	-.154**	-.154**
Mother granting psychological autonomy	-.065**	-.065**
Father granting psychological autonomy	-.019†	-.019†

* Defined in this study as cheating on tests, smoking, drinking, shoplifting, and skipping school without an excuse.

** Significance probability < .01

† Significance probability < .05

Involvement in church activities had a modest inhibiting effect. As with the young men, it was public religious behavior rather than private religious behavior that was most significant to delayed sexual initiation. This is not to say that personal beliefs, prayer, and scripture reading were not important. But in the multivariate model, church attendance emerged as a stronger predictor. Typical comments about church activities from the unwed mothers revealed that such behavior declined before the initiation of sex:

I was really active in the Church until my folks divorced. My dad was in the bishopric. I haven't been since they broke up. But I still pray every day and think and talk about the Church with people. I just don't go to church.

My mom always forced me to go to church. We're LDS. I was baptized and all that. But my mom got sick of fighting me, so that after maybe age twelve, I just stopped going very often.

I grew up Mormon, and I don't consider myself Mormon right now. I think I started trying to figure out what I believed around thirteen or fourteen. That also had a lot to do with my parents being pretty strong Mormons. I've always prayed. I have my personal beliefs. I don't really believe in an organized religion.

Mothers' regulation has a strong indirect effect on the daughters' sexual behavior through both peer pressure and church attendance. This is somewhat smaller than that for the young men. The lack of parental regulation and the inconsistency between mother and father are illustrated in the following comments:

The rules depended on the mood they were in. Sometimes they'd come up with this rule: "Now you have to be home at eight on a school night." That never worked. "You

have got to have the house clean before you leave.” That never worked. My mother could never stick to the rules.

They tried to have a lot of rules. But after a while they just gave up. ‘Cause I’d never follow them. They tried. Everything I’d do, they’d come up with a new rule. They finally just gave up. My dad would try to ground me, and I’d just fight it. I’d get my mom, and it was kind of like they were two separate parents. I could get them to disagree, which helped me.

Peer pressure, public religious behavior, and mothers’ regulation accounted for 72% of the variance in premarital sexual activity among LDS young women. This means that nearly three-fourths of the sexual initiation of this sample of LDS young women is accounted for by these three variables. LDS young women engaged in sex because their friends pressured them. This pressure came from young men they were dating, from those they were associating with, and even from their girlfriends.

As noted earlier, the interviews with the young unwed mothers shed some interesting insights about the power of external pressure to engage in sex. The reasons they gave in

*Table 4. Reasons for Sexual Activity Reported
by LDS Unwed Mothers*

Question: “Why did you decide to have sex the first time?”	
Reason	Percent (<i>n</i> = 45)
Don’t know, just happened	48
Coerced or raped	25
To be wanted	17
In love/special gift	5
Planning marriage	3
Wanted to do it	2

response to the question of why they had sex for the first time are presented in Table 4 and illustrate their susceptibility to forces they faced.

When asked why they had sex the first time, half of the unwed mothers replied, "I don't know." When pressed by the interviewer for a more insightful answer, they very emphatically replied, "I don't know!" Two young women expressed this lack of understanding.

I don't know! It just happened! I didn't really at the time . . . like, I always told myself that I wouldn't do it until I was married. And one night it just happened. It was almost like I did not care anymore, I guess. We just did it.

I became sexually active when I was sixteen. I don't know why. Just all of a sudden I decided. I don't even know why myself. A lot of guys had wanted to, and I always said no. And then all of a sudden I just did it.

It is remarkable that half of these young women initiated sexual activity, which has had such a drastic consequence in their lives, for reasons they do not understand.

It is obvious from these two comments that many of the girls who did not understand why they became involved in intimacy were pressured by boyfriends. An additional 25% clearly reported that they had been coerced to have sex, or in other words, they were raped. The young women made it clear that they were not just encouraged by their partners, but that they were strongly pressured into sex.

A substantial number of girls, 17%, engaged in sex for the first time because they wanted to feel accepted or to have a boyfriend. Pipher (1994), a clinical psychologist, argued that American culture poisons young women's feelings about themselves so that their only source of self-worth is attachment to a boyfriend. The powerful self-conformation that they hoped to gain from having a boyfriend was evident in their comments.

I don't have really low self-esteem, but probably the feeling of having a man, like the relationship or whatever, not wanting him to leave me. So I thought that by giving him some sort of pleasure maybe he would stay around longer. I don't know how to explain it, but probably for security reasons I guess. If that makes any sense.

I like being with someone. You know, someone just to be with, to hold hands. And it was just a cool thing, "I have a boyfriend." Especially if he is cute and popular. It's like "I'm dating so and so, and this is a cool thing." My first boyfriend was a cowboy; he rode bulls. That was real cool. I like the attention of a guy. I like getting attention from guys, because I never had any male give me attention in my home because I did not have a dad. It was just attention from guys that I like that made me have sex.

Feeling accepted. That is why I did it. That's always been important to me. I always wanted to feel accepted by boys.

Sadly, these LDS girls confused sex with affection, acceptance, and belonging. They felt that giving a boy sex would somehow create a lasting relationship with him. Unfortunately, the girls discovered that the enduring relationships they sought did not materialize from their sexual generosity.

The final 10% of the unwed mothers stated that they engaged in sex as a way to show their love to their partner. Several stated their "love" for their boyfriend motivated them to give him this special gift. Others reported that they were planning on marrying, and thus it was okay to have sex. Finally, only one young woman reported that she participated in sex for the first time because she was sexually aroused to the point that she wanted to engage in sexual relations.

Among these 45 LDS unwed mothers, all but one initiated sexual activity for reasons other than their own sexual feelings. These findings do not deny that young women have sexual

desires, but that in making the decision to have sex for the first time, such feelings are relatively unimportant. Most were pressured to participate, while others wanted acceptance and self-validation derived from having a boyfriend.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that initiation of sexual activity among LDS youth is influenced by a variety of social, religious, and personal characteristics. The social influence of friends, not surprisingly, appears to be the strongest predictor of LDS youths' participation in premarital sex. Although not as powerful as peer influences, religion does have a direct effect. The multivariate analysis suggests that significant religious effect is more a social effect than a strictly personal or spiritual effect.

However, the correlations do indeed show a strong inverse relationship between the different dimensions of religiosity and involvement in premarital sex. As a result, we can conclude that the more religious an LDS teenager is, the less likely that he or she will engage in immoral behaviors.

Finally, although parents' behavior does not have a direct relationship to the sexual behavior of their teenagers, parents do have a strong indirect effect on such behavior. Thus parents can affect the choice of their adolescent children's friends and positively influence their religious activity and spiritual development.

The major implications for parents from the analysis in this chapter appears to fall into three main areas. First, there is a need for parents, both mothers and fathers, to be actively involved in their teens' lives by what the literature refers to as "family regulation." This involves setting family rules, such as how late the teens can stay out at night; when, who, and where they can date; and how much they can be alone with members of the opposite sex. Equally important, parents need to monitor their teens' compliance to family rules. Sometimes a casual word with a teacher or parent of a friend about how things are

going with the son or daughter and his or her friends will produce revelations about obedience to family rules. When rules are violated, parents must step forward and discipline their teens. This practice is sometimes hard for parents to do, but as our study discovered, teens expect appropriate discipline and feel unloved when it is neglected.

The second major implication for parents is that they should do all they can to involve their teens with friends and peers who share similar values and standards. Granted, teens have their own criteria for picking friends, but parents can create conditions that maximize the selection of good ones. Parents can encourage their teens to participate in extracurricular activities, such as debate, chess club, band, and other clubs or organizations. Generally, such participation will surround a teen with potential friends who have shared values.

Lastly, the power of religiosity cannot be overlooked. Parents can strengthen their children and minimize the negative effects of peer pressure by creating a home environment where youth can not only learn gospel principles but also feel the Spirit in their lives. Family religiosity is strengthened through activities such as prayer, scripture study, and family home evening.

While it is indeed daunting to raise righteous and responsible teenagers in these challenging times, it is not impossible. Although there were some disturbing findings in our study, Latter-day Saint youth generally are far less involved in immoral activities than their non-LDS peers, and faith and family will continue to be powerful influences for good.

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