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Self Esteem and Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behavior

Roger B. Christensen

Utah State University

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Roger B. Christensen
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ABSTRACT

Self Esteem and Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behavior
by
Roger B. Christensen, Master of Science
Utah State University, 1985

Major Professor: Dr. Brent C. Miller
Department: Family and Human Development

This study was designed to determine: (1) if adolescent self esteem is related to premarital sexual attitudes and intercourse behavior; (2) if religious affiliation and church attendance affect the relationship between adolescent self esteem and premarital sexual attitudes and behavior. Approximately 2400 adolescents residing in California, New Mexico, and Utah comprised the sample.

Adolescents who attended church services more often reported less sexually permissive attitudes and behavior than those who attended church less often. Similarly, mormons' premarital sexual attitudes and behavior was more conservative than was the case for nonmormon adolescents. Findings indicated that the nature of the relationship between permissiveness and self esteem did depend on cultural norms or contexts. In the most conservative normative contexts (among Mormons and frequent church attenders) there was a negative relationship between self
esteem and sexual attitudes and sexual behavior; there was no significant relationship between self esteem and sexual attitudes and sexual behavior among the more moderate sample groups.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Adolescent pregnancy has become a serious problem in the United States (Jones, Forrest, Goldman, Henshaw, Lincoln, Rosoff, Westoff, & Wulf, 1985). Early pregnancy has adverse consequences for adolescents themselves, their babies, the grandparents, and for society in general (Moore & Burt, 1982; Nye & Lambert, 1981).

There are two major risk factors in adolescent pregnancy (Jorgensen & Alexander, 1981). These are the frequency of sexual intercourse, and the nonuse of contraception.

In recent years the proportion of nevermarried teenagers who have sexual intercourse has increased rapidly (Bell & Chaskes, 1970; Zelnik & Kantner, 1980), from 27 percent in 1971 to 39 percent in 1976 and to 46 percent in 1979. While sexual intercourse experience appears to have become quite widespread among adolescents, their use of contraceptives has not kept pace. Consequently, adolescents in 1979 were more at risk to become pregnant than adolescents at the beginning of the 1970’s.

One approach to prevention and intervention of the problems associated with adolescent pregnancy is based on an understanding of why adolescents become sexually active. There have been many studies about the antecedents of
adolescent sexual behavior, but these have focused primarily on social and demographic characteristics such as age, sex, race, family background, and so on.

Relatively few studies have explored psychological states as antecedents of premarital sexual behavior. There might be important relationships between how adolescents think and feel about themselves, and their involvement in early sexual behavior. This study is concerned with better understanding how an adolescent's self esteem is related to their sexual attitudes and behaviors, depending on the norms of their cultural context.

Early research (Reiss, 1967) suggested that there were different traditions or cultures of permissiveness such as males vs. females and whites vs. nonwhites. Carrying this thinking a step further, it might be that various religious groups have different norms about appropriate sexual behavior. Religious groups, and religious persons especially, might constitute a subculture that has a particular expectation about premarital sexual behavior.

Statement of the Problem

Several studies have been done examining the relationship between self esteem and adolescent sexual behavior but the results of these findings have been mixed. Some studies have reported no relationship between self esteem and sexual behavior while others show a significant
association. It has been suggested that the relationship between self concept and sexual behavior varies by the cultural context. However, studies supporting the cultural norms hypothesis were done with college samples over a decade ago (Stratton & Spitzer, 1967; Perlman, 1974). One more recent study (MacCorquodale & DeLamater, 1979), also done on college students, did not support any consistent relationship between self esteem and sexual behavior.

Definitions

The major independent variable in this study is self esteem which is conceptualized as a component of an individual's self concept. Self concept is defined as how one regards him or her self. More specifically, self esteem is a positive or favorable evaluation, "a feeling that one is a person of worth,..." (Rosenberg, 1965, p. 31).

The dependent variables in this study are sexual attitudes and behavior. More specifically, this study focuses on attitudes toward adolescents having sexual intercourse prior to marriage, and on their actual premarital intercourse behavior. For purposes of this study, permissive sexual attitudes are those that approve of or support premarital sexual intercourse.

A final important concept in the present research is the cultural norm of a group. Expectations about what is right and wrong behavior develop in various groups, and
these expectations for behavior are referred to as cultural norms.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between self esteem and sexual behavior and attitudes of adolescents. It looked closely at the importance of cultural norms and the significance of self esteem in relationship to sexual permissiveness. Secondary areas of religious affiliation and religious attendance in relationship to self esteem and premarital sexual behaviors were also examined.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The first part of this review deals with the definition and measurement of self esteem. Rosenberg's (1965) Self Esteem Scale is the basis for assessing self esteem in this study. The second section focuses on studies that have investigated the relationship between self esteem and sexually permissive attitudes and behaviors of adolescents. Samples in other studies have included both males and females from ages 13-25 in both moderate and liberal settings. Several measurements and results of those measurements will be reviewed. The final section is the synthesis of the literature which will summarize and set a foundation for the present study.

Self_Esteem

Self esteem is a part of one's self concept. Rosenberg (1965) has been a leading figure in self esteem research. His definition of self esteem states that:

When we speak of high self-esteem . . . we shall simply mean that the individual respects himself, considers himself worthy, he does not necessarily consider himself better than others, but he definitely does not consider himself worse, he does not feel that he is the ultimate in perfection but, on the contrary, recognizes his limitations and expects to grow and improve (p. 31).

Rosenberg developed the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale which measures how a subject is perceived to be valuing
his/her own worth. This scale consists of ten Likert-type items with one of four responses possible for each item.

The scale was developed and tested on a sample of over 5,000 high school students in New York State. Robinson and Shaver (1976) suggested that this scale appears to have been carefully constructed, and it's use by Rosenberg and others indicates that it can make theoretically meaningful discriminations between groups of adolescents. Reliability of the scale in previous research has ranged between .85 and .92. Robinson and Shaver's (1976, p. 98) summary statement about the scale is quite favorable: "Where a short and general index of self esteem is required, this scale is recommended."

Studies Linking Self Esteem and Sexual Behavior

There are several studies linking self esteem and sexual attitudes and behaviors. Stratton and Spitzer (1967) examined the relationship between attitudes favoring permissiveness and self evaluation. Their study was launched because little effort had been directed toward the exploration of these attitudes toward premarital sexual behavior. Many self concept instruments were available and because of the lack of consensus on the definition of self concept, Stratton and Spitzer chose four different instruments to test their subjects. These were Bill's Index of Adjustment and Value (IAV), the Gough Adjective Checklist
(ACL), Fiedler's Semantic Differential Technique (FSD), and a Twenty Statement Test.

The subjects were 325 unmarried students enrolled at the University of Iowa. Scores on the self-concept measures were dichotomized at the median into high and low categories. Their study was based on the idea that within any given society there are cultural norms prescribing appropriate sexual behavior. They suggested that people who conform to the norms tend to evaluate themselves positively, but people who deviate from the norms tend to evaluate themselves negatively. They concluded that self-evaluation is influenced by conformity to, or deviance from, societal norms. Further analyses revealed that the relationship between sexual permissiveness and self-evaluation was weaker for individuals reporting high social participation (frequent church attendance, and membership in organizations) than those reporting low social participation. Their explanation of this was that more socially active students would be expected to have greater contact with a more liberal orientation. Their conclusions were that in moderate subcultures there is little or no relationship between self-esteem and permissiveness, but in more liberal cultures self-esteem is positively related to sexual permissiveness. Stratton and Spitzer (1967) concluded that their findings fit a "social deviance model".

A later study (Perlman, 1974) specifically built on and
supported the Social Deviance Model proposed by Stratton and Spitzer. Perlman's (1974) study included two samples consisting of students from a moderate university in Canada and students from a liberal university of New York state. The moderate sample consisted of 58 unmarried females attending a large Canadian university which was considered to have moderate sexual norms. The liberal sample consisted of 242 unmarried students (129 females and 113 males) attending a small New York state college. This college has had "a longstanding reputation for being an extremely liberal school in terms of sexual beliefs" (Reiss, 1967). Questionnaires were administered to students at both universities. Two measures were used for both self esteem and sexual permissiveness. Self esteem was measured by the Fiedler's Semantic Differential Technique and Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale. Sexual permissiveness was measured by behavioral self reports of the number of coital partners and by the Reiss Premarital Sexual Permissiveness Scale. The overall results of both measurements were as predicted by Perlman: in the moderate sample the permissiveness/self esteem relationship was nonsignificant, but in the liberal culture high self esteem respondents reported more coital partners. These findings are supportive of Stratton and Spitzer's theoretical idea which predicted that the nature of the permissive/self esteem relationship is dependent on cultural context.
Another study that related self image to premarital sexuality was done by MacCorquodale and DeLamater (1979). They extended the previous studies by including not only self esteem but also the social actor and the moral component of self. They employed a multidimensional view of self image, suggesting that previous studies were severely limited by only discussing self esteem.

MacCorquodale and DeLamater collected their data from two samples of young people. The first consisted of college students. The second sample consisted of persons between 18 and 23 years who were not students. Both females and males were chosen randomly and personally interviewed. The student sample contained 432 single men and 429 single women. The nonstudent sample contained 220 single men and 293 single women. Sherwood's (1962) Semantic Differential measure was administered to measure self image. A modified version of Reiss' (1967) Sexual Permissiveness Scale was employed to assess the individual's premarital standards. Results indicated that most of the respondents held very liberal attitudes. Only 5 percent of the men and 12 percent of the women endorsed premarital abstinence from intercourse. This liberal sample appears to be quite similar to the one studied by Perlman (1974). However, MacCorquodale and DeLamater reported that, as they expected, self evaluation was primarily influenced by whether or not one met his/her own standards and not by conforming to a
societal norm. They summarized that: (1) there was not a
general, consistent relationship between self image and
premarital sexuality; (2) the relationship between self
image and premarital sexual attitudes was weaker than the
relationship between self image and sexual behavior; (3)
the evaluation of self as a social object was more strongly
and consistently related to sexual behavior than was self
esteem.

MacCorquodale and DeLamater claimed that the results of
their study supported the idea that an individual’s
attitudes were more important than cultural norms. They
indicated that the correlation between sexual standards and
behavior was large, ranging from .38 to .59. Their study,
however, might not be directly comparable to the earlier
studies of Stratton and Spitzer (1967) and Perlman (1974),
however, because they used different measures for self
concept and because their sample really did not include a
moderate or conservative subcultural group for comparison.

Herold and Goodwin (1979) collected self esteem and
sexual permissiveness data from 486 single females attending
birth control centers in Ontario. They ranged in age from
13 to 20. Responses to attitude questions indicated that
most of the subjects held liberal attitudes. Only 3 percent
endorsed abstinence from intercourse. Self esteem data were
obtained by a 10-item 5-point Likert-type scale constructed
by Mackinnon. Three single item questions were used to
measure sexual permissiveness.

Following from the Stratton and Spitzer hypothesis that those who deviate from cultural norms would have lower self esteem, Herold and Goodwin hypothesized that, in their liberal sample, non-acceptance of premarital intercourse with affection would be related to lower self esteem. They also suggested that there would be a negative relationship between self esteem and rejection of premarital intercourse as well as a negative relationship between self esteem and acceptance of premarital intercourse without affection.

A significant positive relationship was found between self esteem and approval of intercourse with affection. As discovered by Stratton and Spitzer (1967) and Perlman (1974), this study also found that women who accept the abstinence norm are deviating from the generally accepted norm of premarital intercourse with affection and were found to have lower self esteem.

Studies Linking Adolescent Self-Esteem and Pregnancy

In addition to the studies about self esteem and sexual attitudes and behavior (reviewed above), some studies have examined the relationship between self esteem and early pregnancy.

According to Chilman (1977), teenagers suffering from low self esteem, anxiety, loneliness, and distrust have a higher incidence of pregnancy. Patten (1981) suggested that
self concept and self esteem might be important factors in adolescent unwanted pregnancies. In her study she collected data from 37 subjects in residence at the Florence Crittenton Home in Nashville, Tennessee in 1979. Criteria included being single, pregnant, and between the ages of 13 and 24. The Tennessee Self Concept Scale and the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale were used to test subject's self perceptions. Results of the TSCS showed a significantly lower self concept among the pregnant adolescents in relation to scores of the general public (p < .003). There was also a statistically significant difference between the average self esteem of the sample's individuals and the self esteem of the general population (p < .01).

In summary, Patten (1981) suggested that the subjects had an unfavorable attitude toward themselves based on how they perceived others to be valuing their worth. Other studies (Abernathy, Robbins, Abernathy, Grechbaum, & Weiss, 1975; Lindeman, 1974; Shiller, 1974 and Babikian & Goldman, 1971) support Patten in summarizing that family experiences, irresponsibility (due to low self esteem), chaotic early life experiences and inadequate ego strengths contribute to adolescent unwanted pregnancies.

**Synthesis of Research**

It seems to be the consensus of previous research that self esteem and adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviors
are significantly related. However, the relationship is a complex one, being mediated by cultural norms. The samples, measures and findings of the studies reviewed are summarized in Table 1.

From reviewing Table 1 it is apparent that there is considerable agreement in the results. All of the studies conclude that in a liberal subculture, self esteem is positively related to sexual permissiveness. Herold and Goodwin's (1979) conclusions are consistent with Perlman's (1974) and Stratton and Spitzer's (1967) predicting from the Social Deviance Model that the nature of sexual permissiveness/self esteem relationship is dependent on cultural context. In samples with moderate social norms there was no association between self esteem and sexual permissiveness. In the liberal settings, however, high self esteem respondents reported more coital partners. MacCorquodale and DeLamater (1979) disagreed on one issue of the above hypothesis, in that they suggested that self evaluation was more influenced by one's standards than by societal norms.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Year</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Self Esteem Measure</th>
<th>Sexual Permissive Measure</th>
<th>Findings Relating Self Esteem and Sexual Permissiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stratton and Spitzer 1967</td>
<td>325 Students University of Iowa</td>
<td>Bills' Index of Adjustment and Values Gough Adjective Checklist Fiedler's Semantic Differential Tech. Twenty Statement Test</td>
<td>Reiss' Premarital Sexual Permissiveness Scale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perlman 1974</td>
<td>Mod. Sample 58 Female Lib. Sample 129 Females 113 Males</td>
<td>Fiedler's Semantic Differential Tech. Rosenbers' Self esteem Scale</td>
<td># of Coital Partners Reiss' Premarital Sexual Permissiveness Scale</td>
<td>In Moderate subcultures the permissive self esteem relationship is nonsignificant In Liberal subcultures high self esteem reported more coital partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacCorquodale and Dalamater 1979</td>
<td>Student Samp. 432 Female 429 Male Non-Student 220 Male 293 Females</td>
<td>Sherwood Semantic Differential Measure</td>
<td>Reiss' Premarital Sexual Permissiveness Scale</td>
<td>No relationship between self image and premarital sexuality. Sexual attitudes between self image and premarital sexuality was weaker than sexual behavior. Evaluation of self more strongly related to sexual behavior than self esteem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harold and Goodwin 1979</td>
<td>486 Females Age: 13-20</td>
<td>Mackinnon Self Esteem Scale</td>
<td>3 Single Item Questions</td>
<td>Significant relationship between self esteem and the endorsement of premarital sexual intercourse without affection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patten 1981</td>
<td>37 Pregnant Adolescents; Age: 13-24</td>
<td>Tennessee Self Concept Scale Rosenbers' Self esteem Scale</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Self concept of pregnant adolescents is lower than the general population. Self esteem of pregnant adolescents is lower than the general population</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In general, there is a positive correlation between self esteem and sexual permissive attitudes and behavior among adolescents from more liberal subcultures.

Hypotheses

The general hypothesis of this study is that the relationship between self esteem and sexual behavior depends on the normative context. According to this model, self esteem might be inversely related to sexual behavior in one group and positively related to sexual behavior in another group with different norms. This general idea will be analyzed in a series of specific tests, some of which are more directly comparable to previous research than others. Specifically, the following hypotheses will be tested:

1. Using frequency of church attendance as an indicator of belonging to groups with different norms, it is hypothesized that:

   (a) Among those who do not attend church frequently, self esteem will be positively related to sexual attitude permissiveness.

   (b) Among those who attend church frequently, self esteem will be inversely related to sexual attitude permissiveness.

   (c) Among those who do not attend church frequently, self esteem will be positively related to sexual intercourse experience.
(d) Among those who attend church frequently, self esteem will be negatively related to sexual intercourse experience.

2. Using religious affiliation as an indicator of groups with different norms it is hypothesized that:
   (a) Self esteem will be positively related to sexual attitude permissiveness among Nonmormons (moderate or more liberal groups).
   (b) Self esteem will not be significantly related (or will be inversely related) to sexual attitude permissiveness among Mormons.
   (c) Self esteem will be positively related to sexual intercourse experience among Nonmormons.
   (d) Self esteem will be negatively related to sexual intercourse experience among Mormons.

3. Using personal attitude permissiveness as an indicator of groups having different norms for behavior, it is hypothesized that:
   (a) Self esteem will be negatively related to sexual intercourse experience among those with conservative sexual attitudes.
   (b) Self esteem will be positively related to sexual intercourse experience among those with liberal sexual attitudes.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

Sample

The present study is based on two samples (total n=2423) of adolescents attending public high schools in three Western states. The data were collected as part of the evaluation of a prevention demonstration project sponsored by the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs (Miller, 1984). The samples included adolescent students from Utah and New Mexico, and California. Because the two samples were demographically similar and the same questions were asked, the 1983 and 1984 data were combined in this study. All participating adolescents were between 14 and 19 years old when the survey was conducted. The largest proportion (42 percent) of students were age 16, with approximately 30 percent being 15 or younger, and 30 percent being 17 or older. The sample was about 2/3 (63 percent) female and about 3/4 (76 percent) white, with the largest minority group (15 percent) being Hispanic.

Procedures

Approximately twenty high schools participated in the study. Prior to administering the surveys, teachers from health, parenting, and home economics classes were instructed to send a letter home with students which
explained the curriculum being tested. A consent form was also sent home, and it was to be signed by the parents and returned to the teacher prior to administering the surveys. The data to be reported in this study were collected as part of the pretest-posttest evaluation survey conducted in the classroom in 1983 and 1984.

Measurement

There are three kinds of variables to be analyzed in the present study, namely the independent variable (self esteem), dependent variables (sexual attitudes and behaviors), and control or mediating variables (sex, age, religion, religious activity). These will be considered in turn.

Attitudes about premarital sex were measured by answers to the question "What is your attitude toward teenagers having full sexual relations (sexual intercourse) before marriage? Do you think it is (1) always wrong, (2) usually wrong, (3) neither right nor wrong, (4) usually all right, (5) always all right." Sexual intercourse experience was measured by asking if they had experienced "full sexual relations (sexual intercourse)." The sexual experience variables were recoded for the present analyses to never having experienced sexual intercourse or having experienced sexual intercourse at least once.

The control and mediating variables were also measured
by single item survey responses. Questions about age and sex are so simple that they need no elaboration here. Present family structure was measured by asking "Who are you living with now?" Parents' educational attainment was assessed by asking the respondents "What grade of education did your (father/mother) complete?" Both religious affiliation ("What is your religious preference?") and activity ("About how often do you attend religious services now?") were asked in the survey and will be analyzed as mediating variables in this paper.

Self esteem was measured in the present study by Rosenberg's (1965) Self Esteem Scale. This scale consists of ten Likert-type items with one of four responses possible for each item. This scale measures how a subject perceives others to be valuing his/her worth.

Analysis Plan

This part of the methods section outlines the steps to be taken in analyzing the data to test the hypotheses. In a general sequence, these steps were:

1. Create a subfile from the larger data set that contains just those variables needed for the proposed analyses.
2. Run FREQUENCY on all variables.
3. Screen variables for MISSING VALUES.
4. Recode variables as necessary so that the data will be as clear and analytically useful as possible.
5. Run RELIABILITY for the self esteem composite scale.
6. Examine relationships between the independent variable (self esteem) and the dependent variables (sexual attitudes and behavior) in each of the different normative settings (religious affiliation and church attendance).
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

The questionnaires yielded information on gender, age, race, father's and mother's education, who adolescents lived with, religious preference, frequency of church attendance, and premarital sexual attitudes and intercourse experience. Table 2 gives the frequency and percentage distribution on each variable. The mean and standard deviation is also included on age, frequency of church attendance, and attitudes toward premarital sexual behavior.

As shown in Table 2, participants in the study included 2423 adolescents of which nearly two thirds (63.7 percent) were females. The range of age was between 14 and 19. The mean age was 16.1. The majority of subjects were white (76.6 percent). Hispanics were next prominent at about 15 percent. Blacks, Orientals, and Native Americans completed the sample's race distribution.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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</thead>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>841</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1478</td>
<td>63.7</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td>Black</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>Oriental</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Father’s Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to trade/voc.</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to college</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College graduate</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad/professional training</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mother’s Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>963</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to trade/voc.</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to college</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College graduate</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grad/Professional training</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Living With</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father, mother</td>
<td>1515</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother, stepfather</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Father, stepmother</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Foster parents</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Preference</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Preference</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church Attendance</th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-Never</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Less than once a month</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Once or twice a month</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Once a week</td>
<td>935</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-More than once a week</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex Attitudes</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-Always wrong</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Usually wrong</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Neither</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Usually right</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Always right</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Experience</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not had intercourse</td>
<td>1478</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have had intercourse</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In relationship to parents’ education, about 40 percent of the fathers had a high school education or less, and about 30 percent had graduated from college. Only 9 percent had received graduate or professional training. Approximately 55 percent of the mothers had a high school education or less. Of the mothers, 20 percent graduated from college, and 6 percent of these had received graduate or professional training. About 12 percent of the respondents did not know their father’s education, as compared to 7 percent who didn’t know their mother’s education. About two thirds of the sample lived with both parents and 14 percent lived with only their mother, whereas 3 percent lived with only their fathers. Those living with a stepfather or stepmother were about 13 percent.

The questionnaire asked religious preference. Approximately 56 percent of the sample were Mormons and 26 percent were Catholics. There were about 5 or 6 percent each of Protestants, no preference, and others. Frequency of church attendance included responses ranging from never attending (19 percent) to attending more than once a week, (11 percent). The average church attendance was once or twice a month. However, 40 percent of the adolescents attended church once a week.

The last section of the descriptive statistics included attitudes toward premarital sex and sexual experience (had or not had intercourse). The choice of responses to
attitudes about teens having sex before marriage ranged from "always wrong" to "always right" including a "neither right nor wrong" middle response. The mean response was closest to premarital sex was "neither right or wrong" (40 percent). However, 34 percent of the sample responded that premarital sex among teens was "always wrong" and 15 percent felt that it was "usually wrong". The remaining 11 percent answered "usually right" to "always right". Regarding sex behavior, 1478 (about two thirds), had never experienced premarital intercourse, but 68.8 (nearly 32 percent of the total sample) had experienced intercourse.

**Overall Correlation Between**
**Self Esteem and Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors**

The overall correlations between the measure of self esteem and premarital sexual attitudes and behavior are presented in Table 3.
Table 3

Pearson Correlations Between Self Esteem and Sexual Attitudes and Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>r (correlation)</th>
<th>n (number)</th>
<th>p (level of significance)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Attitudes</td>
<td>-.101</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premarital Sexual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercourse Experience</td>
<td>-.037</td>
<td>1914</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson correlation coefficients were used to test the relationship between the two variables. Self esteem was negatively correlated with sexual attitudes (r = -.10, p < .000) and premarital intercourse experience (r = -.037, p < .05) in the total sample. Although these correlations are weak, they suggest that as an individual’s self esteem increases, his/her sexual attitudes and behavior become more conservative and vice versa. It should be kept in mind, however, that the present sample included a large proportion who are quite conservative, and the relationship between self esteem and sexual attitudes and behavior would probably be nonsignificant in a more moderate sample, and perhaps, positive in a liberal sample.
Correlations by Cultural Context

The Pearson correlations between self esteem and premarital sexual attitudes and behavior in various normative contexts are shown in Table 4. For purposes of forming two different normative groups for this analysis, church attendance was recoded to attending one or more times a week and less than once a week. Religious affiliation was recoded to Mormons and nonmormons and sexual attitude was recoded to "wrong" or "right" (to have premarital sex). The conservative normative contexts, shown in the upper part of each panel of Table 4, were those who attended church one or more times a week, mormons, and those who felt premarital sex was wrong.

As shown in Table 4, statistically significant negative correlations were found between self esteem and sexual attitudes and behavior in the conservative normative contexts. No significant relationships were found in the liberal normative contexts. For those who attended church one or more times a week, self esteem was negatively correlated with permissive sexual attitudes \( r = -.14, p < .001 \), and also intercourse experience \( r = -.09, p < .001 \).
Those who attended church less than once a week showed a nonsignificant correlation with attitudes \( r = 0.00 \) and behavior \( r = 0.04 \). In reference to religious affiliation, Mormon adolescents’ self esteem was negatively correlated with permissive sexual attitudes \( r = -0.15, p < 0.001 \), as well as intercourse experience \( r = -0.09, p < 0.001 \). Among nonmormons there was no significant relationship between self esteem and attitudes \( r = -0.03 \) and intercourse experience \( r = 0.01 \).

These results indicate that as self esteem increases,
premarital sexual attitudes and behavior decreases in conservative subcultures. For those who frequently attended church (one or more times a week), or were Mormon, it was found that premarital sexual attitudes and behavior were inversely related to self esteem. Among those who attended less often and were nonmorman, there was no significant relationship between their sexual attitudes and behavior. It was not significant to their level of self esteem. Their self esteem did not affect their attitudes and behavior.

Among adolescents who believed it was wrong to have premarital sexual intercourse, the correlation between self esteem and intercourse experience was significantly negative ($r = -.05, p < .04$). The correlation was also statistically significant, but in the opposite (positive) direction ($r = .06, p < .02$) among those who thought it was allright to have sex before marriage.

These statistics indicate that, for those adolescents in a more conservative setting, as their self esteem increases their intercourse behavior decreases, or they are less sexually active. Among more liberal adolescents, the higher their self esteem, the more sexually active they are.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if adolescent self esteem is related to sexual attitudes and behavior. More specifically, the study was based on the idea that the strength and direction of the relationship between self esteem and premarital sexual attitudes and behavior would depend on the cultural context.

Procedure

Approximately 2400 adolescents, ages 14-19 responded to a survey administered at school. The adolescents completed demographic information about their parents and themselves. Self esteem was measured by Rosenberg's (1965) Self Esteem Scale. Questions were asked to determine the respondent's premarital sexual attitudes and intercourse behavior.

Findings

Hypothesis 1 stated that self esteem would be negatively or positively related to permissive sexual attitudes and behavior depending upon the frequency of church attendance. Among those who attended church often, self esteem was inversely related to sexual attitudes and behaviors. Among those who attended less often, self esteem
was not significantly related to either attitudes or behavior.

Hypothesis 2 stated that self esteem would be positively or negatively related to premarital sexual attitudes and behavior depending on religious preference (Mormon or nonmormon). Among the most conservative religious group (Mormon) there was a significant negative correlation between self esteem and premarital sexual attitudes and behavior. As expected, among the more liberal group (nonmormon) there was no relationship between self esteem and sexual attitudes and intercourse.

Using personal attitude permissiveness as an indicator to group individuals having different norms for behavior, hypothesis 3 stated that self esteem would be negatively related to premarital intercourse among conservative adolescents and positively related to sexual intercourse among liberal adolescents. This hypothesis was also supported; the correlation between self esteem and sexual intercourse experience depended on the normative context of the adolescents' attitudes, being a significant inverse relationship among those who believed premarital sex was wrong, and significant positive correlation among adolescents who thought premarital sex was all right.

Conclusion

The overall results of this study support earlier
research (Stratton & Spitzer, 1967; Perlman, 1974; Patten, 1981, and Herold & Goodwin, 1979) concluding that social contexts do affect the relationship between self esteem and premarital sexual attitudes and behavior.

This study extends previous work by using a younger and more conservative sample (earlier studies used moderate and/or liberal college students), and by comparing self esteem with religious affiliation and church attendance. In three comparisons of groups with different norms, the relationship between self esteem and premarital sexual attitudes and behavior were in the theoretically expected directions.

Limitations and Implications

For future study of adolescent self esteem in relationship to their premarital sexual behavior and attitudes, three variables come to mind that certainly could be investigated. A breakdown of race, gender, and age could result in more information to support the hypothesis.

The past studies have included only specific cultural contexts; (1) moderate and liberal; (2) moderate and conservative. A comparison of a liberal and conservative sample should certainly be an area of interest to concerned researchers.

An area of limitation in the present study may be that only one question for behavior and one question for
attitudes were asked on the survey. Whereas, like the Reiss Scale, several questions were used to formulate actual behavior and attitudes on sexual permissiveness.
REFERENCES


Dear Parent,

Our high school is pilot-testing a family life curriculum designed to examine the meaning of the family across generations. The curriculum is designed to promote parent-child discussion of such questions as:

1. What is responsible behavior?
2. What meaning does the family have for the individual?
3. What does quality family living consist of?
4. How can conflicts between people be resolved?
5. What does it mean to take offense?
6. What does it mean to behave in your own and others' best interests?
7. What is the meaning of commitment in relationships?

As your son or daughter’s teacher, I am requesting your help in being willing to assist them with the assignments they bring home from class. You will be able to help them by asking them questions or by sharing your beliefs. What you talk about with your teenager will not be reviewed in class—it is information for you and your teenager alone.

EVALUATION: The curriculum is being evaluated independently of me by researchers. They wish to measure the effectiveness of the curriculum by asking your son or daughter to fill out a research questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire will be kept strictly confidential. No names will be used in analyzing the results. Participation in the research study (filling out the questionnaire) is completely voluntary, or is not a requirement of the course. I am seeking your permission to administer the questionnaire to your son or daughter in the classroom this semester. Their attitudes about family life, about their own family experience, and about personal sexual responsibility will be measured.

The major purpose of the curriculum is to teach students to examine the meaning of responsible attitudes, decisions and choices. It is designed to show them how they can make personal choices based on principles of personal responsibility. It also shows how the family is a part of responsible living. It is hoped that through this curriculum, teenagers and parents will continue to discuss the family dimension of human experience, including a sharing of what it means to live wisely and responsibly.
I will be happy to answer any questions you may have, or I can have the researchers contact you directly if you wish.
CONSENT FORM

I give my consent for ______________________ to
son or daughter’s name

complete a confidential questionnaire in the school as part
of the evaluation of a Family curriculum.

__________________________________________
Please print name of parent or guardian

__________________________________________    __________
Signature of parent or guardian          Date

__________________________________________

Please detach this consent form from the cover letter and
return it to your son or daughter’s teacher. Thank you.
Appendix B. Questionnaire

Please Print Clearly:

Your name ____________________________________________

Parents' name(s) _______________________________________

Your address __________________________________________

(street)

(city) (state) (zip)

Your phone ___________________________________________

School _______________________________________________

Teacher's Name ________________________________________
TEEN SURVEY

TO THE STUDENT: The purpose of this survey is to help us better understand teen attitudes about their friends, families, and morality. Your answers to the questions will be kept strictly confidential. Please respond to every item by circling or writing in the most accurate response. When you are done, please put your questionnaire in the envelope and seal it. Thank you.

Section 1: General Information

1. Are you male or female? Circle one:
   1. male
   2. female

2. What is your race? Circle one:
   1. white
   2. black
   3. hispanic
   4. oriental
   5. native american
   6. other __________

3. How old are you? Circle one: 14 15 16 17 18 19

4. What grade of education did your father complete?
   1. didn’t graduate from high school
   2. graduated from high school
5. What grade of education did your mother complete?
   1. didn’t graduate from high school
   2. graduated from high school
   3. went to trade or vocational school
   4. went to college
   5. graduated from college
   6. had graduate or professional training
   7. don’t know

6. What is your religious preference?
   1. Catholic
   2. Protestant
   3. Jewish
   4. Mormon
   5. Other ____________________________
   6. No Preference ______________________
Section 2: Your family

7. Who are your living with now?
   1. both your father and your mother
   2. your mother only
   3. your father only
   4. your mother and step-father
   5. your father and step-mother
   6. your spouse
   7. your foster parents
   8. other (please write in) __________

8. Are you currently:
   1. single, never married
   2. married
   3. divorced
   4. separated
   5. other (please write in) __________
Section 3: Personal Feelings

TO THE STUDENT: Please circle the number that best describes how you feel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>A feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I feel that I have a number of good qualities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>All in all, I’m inclined to feel that I am a failure.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I am able to do things as well as most other people.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I feel I do not have much to be proud of.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I take a positive attitude toward myself.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I wish I could have more respect for myself.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I certainly feel useless at times.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>At times I think I am no good at all.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 4: Premarital Sexual Attitudes and Behavior

1. What is your attitude about teenagers having full sexual relations (sexual intercourse) before marriage? Do you think it is:
   1. Always wrong
   2. Usually wrong
   3. Neither right nor wrong
   4. Usually all right
   5. Always all right

2. Have you refrained from having full sexual relations (sexual intercourse)?
   1. Yes, I have always refrained
   2. No, I have had sexual relations
VITA

Roger B. Christensen

Candidate for the Degree of
Master of Science

Thesis: Self Esteem and Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behavior

Major Field: Family and Human Development

Biographical Information:

Personal Data: Born at Afton, Wyoming, March 13, 1949, son of LeRoy and Ruby Baldwin Christensen; married Connie B. Croft September 5, 1969; four children, Kristin (13), Paul (12), Britney (6), and Cole (4).

Education: Attended Afton Elementary school in Afton, Wyoming; graduated in 1967 from Star Valley High School; received Bachelor of Science degree in Speech Pathology from the University of Utah, 1972; completed the requirements for Master of Science degree in Family and Human Development at Utah State University in 1985.