

**PREVENTING OUT-OF-WEDLOCK, TEEN-AGE PREGNANCY:
CURRENT PRACTICE VERSUS THE EXPERIMENTAL
SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH BASE**

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ABSTRACT

This paper expands the range of scientific-creationist thought to include experimental social psychology. It examines experimental research relevant to the crisis of out-of-wedlock, teen-age pregnancy in the U.S.A. The author follows the model set forth by creationists in the physical and biological sciences who have defended the Genesis record of creation over and against the claims of Darwinist evolution. As creationists have exposed Darwinism for its philosophical bias and scientific weakness, this paper examines current approaches to the teen-pregnancy crisis showing how they reflect humanist/evolutionist philosophy rather than sound experimental science. This paper shows that many sex education activities and initiatives, ostensibly aimed at reducing risky teen sexual activity, will increase it. The experimental social psychology research base is consistent with biblical principles of public and individual morality. Regarding the teen-pregnancy epidemic, the scientific evidence is consistent with biblical standards based on parental supervision, discipline and clear moral guidelines. Those who hope to see their children and grandchildren raised under the guidance of biblical values need to become informed in order to counter present-day trends.

INTRODUCTION

In Western societies, powerful currents of thought and political effort seek to depose the remaining vestiges of biblically based, Judeo-Christian values [4, p.21-25] [5] [22]. These forces are close to achieving a radical, centrally controlled transformation of Western societies and their major institutions. Those involved in this mission of societal transformation draw justification from evolution-based declarations by prominent natural and social scientists. For example, the respected psychologist Raymond Cattell has written that "science must be the source of religious values" [6, p.13]. He calls for a "One World" order with a central world research organization. Cattell envisions "a world organized richly with nerves conveying information to a research center acting in an advisory capacity to a highly differentiated array of national experiments" [6, p.11]. Christian, creationist scholars opposing these trends have focused on the natural sciences and Darwinist theory. These scholars have shown that the scientific evidence contradicts the theory of evolution, and, therefore, evolutionism is unfit as a warrant for cultural transformation. As creationist scholars and scientists critically examine research in the natural sciences, there is a corresponding need for creationist scholars to examine research in the social sciences and claims that these disciplines provide scientific evidence mandating cultural change.

In this vein, the present paper considers the social problem of out-of-wedlock, teen-age pregnancy. The way in which our society, guided by prominent psychologists and health care professionals, is approaching this problem exemplifies our drift away from the biblical world-view. Current approaches to the teen-pregnancy epidemic run counter to practices indicated by experimental social psychology research. On the contrary, experimental research in social psychology supports traditional, Judeo-Christian approaches based on clear moral guidelines and disciplinary structure.

Current experts want to curtail parental control over sex-education, birth control and abortion [13] [14] [23, chap.7]. They want to remove messages about teen sexuality that conflict with their own, especially messages stressing abstinence and moral absolutes [11] [23, p.239-240]. Persons who hope to raise their children under the guidance

of biblically-based, moral values should be interested in an analysis that calls into question the scientific validity of current trends.

THE TEEN-PREGNANCY EPIDEMIC AND CURRENT "SOLUTIONS"

The problem of out-of-wedlock teen pregnancy is epidemic. Each year more than one million teen-age pregnancies occur, which translates into a ratio of roughly one pregnancy per every 10 teen-age girls [23]. For the two million girls turning fourteen each year, approximately forty percent will become pregnant during their teen-age years. The variables associated with teen pregnancy include poverty, low educational attainment, weak parental involvement, poor parent-child communication, low family involvement in religious activities, low teen involvement in religious activities, low aspirations and expectations for achievement coupled with a high value for independence, and strong peer-group influence [23, p.213-214].

In combating the epidemic, prominent psychologists recommend intensive social intervention programs focusing on feelings, choices, and insight. They also recommend readily available contraception. There are no influential social scientists calling for biblical moral guidance, structured traditional academic programs, and abstinence from premarital sex. The assumption underlying current thinking has been succinctly stated by Schinke and colleagues, "Given easy, low-cost access to sex education and contraceptive services, young men and women will become responsible and self-regulating in their reproductive behavior, and the number of unanticipated adolescent pregnancies will drop" [19, p.82].

Contraception is an invariant feature of currently recommended approaches. The 1984 National Research Council study panel on adolescent pregnancy and childbearing stated that "contraception is currently the surest strategy for achieving pregnancy prevention" [quoted in 23, p.211]. Furstenberg and Brooks-Gunn have complained about the currently low level of contraceptive use among U.S. adolescents and the "mixed messages" about contraception they receive [10, p.313]. Many health experts are saying that it is crucial for explicit education and counseling in contraceptive use to begin in late childhood or early teen years. Zabin, Kantner, and Zelnick state that "teenagers are being reached too late."

Since *young* adolescents are the least likely to utilize contraception, and since the relative risk of pregnancy in the early months of intercourse is highest for nonusers, it is the young adolescent who runs the greatest risk of conceiving shortly after initiating intercourse . . . We now know that programs will fall short of their goals if they do not reach teenagers early. [25, p.222, emphasis in original].

The fundamental conflict between Christian and secular approaches to the teen-pregnancy epidemic comes into focus when we examine the relationship between teen sexual activity, contraceptive use, and teen pregnancy. According to the best available evidence, the incidence of sexual intercourse among teens has increased dramatically over the past 50 years. Specifically, data from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s show that about 7 percent of white females had sex by the age of 16. Data from the 1970s reveal a dramatic increase in teen sexual activity with 28 percent of unmarried 15-19 year-old females reporting that they had experienced intercourse. By 1980, data showed a rate of 46 percent, and by 1988 a rate of 50 percent for unmarried 15-19 year-old females [26, p.16-17]. Over the past 50 years there has also been a sharp increase in pregnancy rates for teen-agers. However, although the teen pregnancy rate has increased overall, it has not increased for sexually active teen-agers who use contraceptives. In other words, total teen pregnancy is increasing because more teens are having sex. Contraceptives are effective, however, in that fewer sexually active teens become pregnant. From this evidence, current experts argue that contraceptives will be effective in controlling the teen pregnancy epidemic if only we can increase their availability. For the secularist, the teen pregnancy problem is pragmatic, and since teen sexual activity is desirable or at least inevitable, public policy must involve widely available birth control for young adolescents. From the Christian standpoint, however, there is more to the issue than the pragmatic of pregnancy prevention. Teen pregnancy is one component of an extensive moral and public health crisis which more widely available birth control would only exacerbate.

Some experts hold that sexual abstinence for older children and teens is not healthy. Among the chief proponents of this position is Catherine Chillman, Professor Emerita of the School of Social Welfare, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Chillman sees sexual activity as a "central and positive part of the total well-being of young people from the ages of about 10 to 20 years." [7, p.123] For Chillman, the "sexually healthy adolescent" should take pride and pleasure in his or her developing body, and accept sexual desires as natural and to be acted on within the limits of reasonable "reality constraints." She does not recommend purely recreational sex because it "tends to trivialize the depth and meaning of the exceptional intimacy and potential involvement of the total self through intercourse." [7, p.124] Heterosexual and homosexual forms of intercourse are equally valid for Chillman.

As of 1993, social planning experts recommend an approach to sex education called Comprehensive Sexuality Education [16]. This approach provides detailed information about sex, birth control, homosexuality, and "multicultural" values. For example, children at ages 5-8 are taught what masturbation is, how to do it, and that it should be done in a private place. In the 9-12 age range, children are taught that sexual intercourse brings

pleasure, homosexual relationships are as fulfilling as heterosexual ones, and legal abortions are safe. Between the ages of 12 and 15, children are taught that people should use contraception during sexual intercourse unless they wish to have a baby, homosexual couples behave sexually in many of the same ways as heterosexual couples, and masturbation, either alone or with a partner, is one way to enjoy sex. Finally, at ages 15-18, teen-agers are taught the most satisfying way to have sex is with a partner and that sexual behaviors shared by partners include sharing erotic writings or pictures, bathing or showering together, and oral, vaginal, or anal intercourse.

FREUDIAN THEORETICAL BASIS OF CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES

In the main, one can trace the theoretical roots of contemporary sex education policy and programs such as Comprehensive Sexuality Education to the psychodynamic school of psychology founded by Sigmund Freud. Catherine Chillman, for example, draws heavily from the psychoanalytic tradition for her views. She cites the Freudian defense mechanisms of repression and denial as part of her basis for viewing abstention from sexual activity in the teen years as unhealthy and problematic [7, p.124]. Central to all of the psychologies that have grown out of the Freudian school are the concepts of catharsis and ventilation.

People's emotions are similar to steam locomotives. If you build a fire in the boiler of a locomotive, keep raising the steam pressure and let it sit on the track, sooner or later something will blow. However, if you take it and spin the wheels and toot the whistle, the steam pressure can be kept at a safe level. [17, p.83].

Sadly but predictably our society's policy of encouraging teen-age sexual "wheel spinning and whistle tooting" has transported a generation of teens far down the tracks of dangerous sexual immorality, STDs, and out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Historian Lawrence Stone has succinctly expressed the Freudian theoretical base underlying expert approaches to sex education,

If one follows Freudian theory, this [sexual denial among adolescents] could lead to neuroses of the kind that so regularly shattered the calm of Oxford and Cambridge colleges at this period [1500-1800]: it could help to explain the high level of group aggression, which lay behind the extraordinary expansionist violence of western nation states at this time. [20, p.120]

This is indeed a remarkable explanation of the cause of British colonialism! According to the Freudian school, biblically based restrictions on premarital sex for young men and women gave rise to high levels of neurotic aggressiveness which led England to go forth conquering the far reaches of the globe.

Despite the grip the Freudian hypothesis of an abstinence-aggressiveness link has had in forging "expert" approaches to sex education, the data from over 100 societies shows no evidence that sexual frustration, inferred from the prohibition of heterosexual intercourse, leads to aggression [20, p.120]. What the cross cultural data do show is that cultures that are tolerant of adolescent sexuality have higher frequencies of adultery. This finding is gender specific. Cultures that are tolerant of male adolescent sexual promiscuity have higher frequencies of male adultery. Cultures that are tolerant of female adolescent promiscuity have higher frequencies of female adultery [20, p.109]. Schlegel concludes that a period of adolescent promiscuity "establishes habits that are hard to break and lead to discontent and boredom with one partner" [20, p.109].

A few experts today are knowledgeable enough of the experimental social psychology literature to have rejected Freud and his ideas of ventilation and catharsis. Yet they are pessimistic about the possibility of returning to an approach involving morality and traditional academics.

It is unlikely that an earlier morality could be reinstated, even if that were deemed desirable. A sensible course of action in a world in which young adolescent mothers and their children are highly disadvantaged and sexually transmitted diseases are a serious threat to health and even life would be to educate our young people to be responsible about their sexual freedom and to induce them to take precautions against pregnancy and disease. [20, p.132]

In summary, the sex education experts and specialists of our day believe as follows: To insure healthy, productive, free citizens for the future, we must accelerate the psychological and social-emotional development of children and teen-agers. We must also accelerate the independence of children and teen-agers from their parents. Parental control over children and teens needs to diminish. Independent choices by teen-agers need to increase. Society needs to encourage teen-agers in their normal rebelliousness and struggle against the boundaries parents and middle-class traditions place on them. Applied to the teen pregnancy issue, this philosophy says that teens should be encouraged to decide for themselves when they will become sexually active. (Usually it is not healthy to remain sexually inactive past the mid-teens.) Parental boundaries, traditional values and taboos are not healthy. Early education in responsible choice and contraceptive use speeding teen-agers to independent maturity, wisdom, and responsibility is desirable. Whatever the program specifics, it is taken as axiomatic that to reduce pregnancy in children and teen-agers, one must talk *more* with them about sexual intercourse, contraception, and reproduction. As I shall now show, the opposite is true. To reduce teen pregnancy we should talk *less* about sex and *more* about academic subjects such as mathematics, literature and history.

EXPERIMENTAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND THE TEEN-PREGNANCY CRISIS

From a Christian standpoint, there are many moral and practical difficulties with the above stated consensus. It is certainly biblically problematic. It is also problematic in light of experimental social psychology documenting the range of factors that can influence conduct. We attempt to protect our children from the hazards of sexual misconduct by intellectual persuasion and education. Meanwhile, we ignore dangerous settings and temptations that guarantee sexual activity, pregnancy, and venereal disease. Many public efforts ostensibly aimed at reducing risky teen sexual behavior, based on our best and most current social science research, will increase it. Yet the experts of the contemporary consensus appear oblivious to these factors, and one finds that the professional literature addressing teen-age pregnancy contains no reference to relevant experimental social psychology research.

What causes teen-agers to engage in risky sexual activities? Intercourse in unmarried teens occurs in intimate social settings where male and female teen-age couples are alone and unsupervised. It is encouraged by activities that lessen social inhibitions, modesty, and moral restraints. The problem of pregnancy among unmarried teen-agers is only one aspect of a larger moral and social context. Today, young people face dangers not only from unwanted pregnancies but also from drugs, gangs, and guns. Also, they face dangers from sexually transmitted diseases such as herpes, syphilis, and AIDS. Since teen-pregnancy ramifications extend beyond the mechanics of conception, the best approach for addressing the crisis is one that reduces the amount of premarital sexual intercourse by teen-agers. Based on experimental social psychology research, the best approach to reducing the incidence of sexual intercourse among teens and preteens is one that provides clear and consistent moral guidelines for behavior but also: (a) removes elements conducive to sexually irresponsible behavior in the social environments of teen-agers; (b) promotes constructive and beneficial activities incompatible with irresponsible sexual involvement; and (c) provides attractive alternate goals and concerns that compete with romance and social life. Regarding hazardous social situations and factors that promote risky sexual behavior in teens, the social psychology research literature contains much that is relevant. I will give four examples.

Emotional Arousal and Social Context

Every parent knows that raising children gets more difficult after they wake up in the morning. Manageability dissipates quickly as they pass from drowsy to wide awake. Scientific research has refined this common knowledge by exploring the effects of arousal on behavior [24] [18] [27] [1]. Research shows that as persons become aroused through intense activity or emotion, simple and automatic actions requiring little thought are facilitated [1] [27]. The facilitated actions differ depending on the situation. High arousal prepares a person for actions that are relevant and dominant in the situation at hand. At a funeral, it increases the likelihood that a person will cry; at a sporting event, it increases the likelihood of cheering and euphoria; if one observes a cruel injustice, it increases the likelihood of outrage and angry attack. On the other hand, high arousal makes actions that are counter to the "flow" of a situation, and that require care and forethought, more difficult. At a funeral or sporting event, high arousal makes it difficult for a person to plan for the future. In summary, research on the effects of arousal on social behavior shows that *moderate* levels of arousal are optimum for planning, learning and performing complex mental activities and behaviors. High levels of arousal, on the other hand, facilitate simple, emotional behaviors consistent with the setting.

With this understanding of arousal effects, consider the typical high school dance. According to the research, if high arousal is activated in a social situation with clear sexual overtones, sexual behavior as an emotionally dominant action will be facilitated. Simultaneously, clear and reasoned thinking, inhibitions, shyness, and moral restraints will be undermined. There are four factors that interact to produce conditions favorable to sexual intercourse, (a) sexually suggestive external stimulation; (b) sex related emotions and attitudes; (c) sex related beliefs and expectancies; and (d) sexual fantasy and imagination. Under current practices, high school dances include all these elements coupled with high arousal produced by strenuous dancing to loud, rhythmic rock music. The meaning of the social situation is directed toward sexual expression by the coital messages in the lyrics and dance movements. Thus, saying, "Yes," becomes the dominant, facilitated response; saying, "No," through a consideration of the moral issues, dangers and long term consequences, becomes more unlikely. That high frequencies of risky sexual behavior follow such functions is not surprising to one familiar with the experimental social psychology literature.

Self-Awareness Versus Mob Mentality

Have you ever been at a party with flashing strobe lights and music so loud that you could feel the room vibrate? If so, did it seem that you were somehow merging with the pulsating crowd around you and your individual identity was slipping away? [3, p.502].

Reduced awareness of oneself as an individual leads to a sense of emersion in the social setting, a sense of anonymity and a loss of personal identity [9] [15] [28]. As with emotional arousal, a loss of personal individuality or identity can greatly increase the likelihood of risky teen-age sexual activity. In laboratory experiments, researchers reduce individual awareness, for example, by having subjects wear masks or hoods, or by putting them

in darkened rooms. By contrast, experimenters heighten subjects' sense of identity and individuality by giving them name tags, or by having them perform tasks in front of mirrors. Research has shown that reducing a person's awareness of his or her individuality and identity causes a loosening of normal constraints against deviant behavior. Heightened awareness of one's identity and individuality, on the other hand, reinforces normal inhibitions about wrong doing. A research team led by Edward Diener [8] displayed this phenomenon with 1352 children trick-or-treating. Twenty-seven homes scattered throughout the city of Seattle were prepared for the experiment. When children arrived, an adult greeted them warmly and invited them to "take one of the candies." The adult then left the room. Hidden observers noted that of those children who were alone and had been asked their names and where they lived, only 8 percent transgressed by taking extra candy. However, for children in groups who were allowed to remain anonymous, 80 percent transgressed by taking extra candy.

For social activities such as teen dances, research shows that reduced self-awareness leads to (a) weakened restraints against impulsive behavior, (b) increased sensitivity to immediate cues and current emotional states, (c) inability to monitor and regulate behavior, (d) less concern about what others think, and (e) less ability to plan and think about the future [9]. How is obliviousness to self-identity fostered in the school dance? According to the research, the social-situation factors that cause reduced self-awareness are (a) anonymity, (b) high levels of arousal, (c) focus on external events, and (d) close group unity. Intense stimulation from the rock music of the typical high school dance would reduce personal identity. Darkening the room or using strobe lights would further reduce it. Crowded social situations are conducive to a loss of individuality.

In the light of research, one can consider how to structure teen dances to promote actions that are safe and responsible. It would be better if they were modeled along the lines of a debutante ball. The debutante ball is a rite of passage into the adult world of responsibility and opportunity rather than an escape into bestial passion. It emphasizes manners, etiquette, and adult values. A scientifically sound school dance would create an environment that heightens individual sense rather than the obliterating it. Thus, teen dances should be occasions for parents with camcorders to record the event in the manner of weddings and birthday parties. This practice would add adult supervision to the occasion and remind teens of their family identities, relationships and responsibilities. The dance arena would be brightly lit to accommodate taping by parents mingling through the dance floor. Announcements of names for door-prizes between dance sets could serve as "individuating" reminders that each teen is a person with an identity apart from the group.

Situations That Mask Intimacy Motives

Sometimes we do things for which the motives behind our actions are obvious. At other times, it is unclear what our motives might be. Research on settings that provide a protective cloak for one's motives has important implications for reducing risky sexual activity in teens. [21] Consider a setting that affords one teen-ager an opportunity to initiate an immoral proposal to another teen under the cover of circumstances that suggest the immoral proposal might not be serious. Such an ambiguous setting protects the initiating teen from embarrassment if the improper overture is rejected. If a person makes an indecent proposal under circumstances that clearly show his or her desire for what is proposed, a negative outcome is embarrassing. To make an indecent proposal under clear and unambiguous circumstances is to make oneself vulnerable. However, if the circumstances are ambiguous, and it is not clear whether the proposal is serious, the initiator is protected from embarrassment. If the target responds positively, then the initiator can acknowledge serious intent and move matters forward. If, on the other hand, the target rejects the proposal, the initiator can retreat under the protective cover, "I was only joking."

The power of ambiguous circumstances to influence a male's willingness to approach an attractive female stranger was shown in a laboratory study by W. M. Bernstein and colleagues [2]. Male college students were asked to choose between two rooms where movies would be shown. Each room contained two adjacent chairs. One room was empty of people, and the other had a lone, attractive female sitting in one chair. When male college students could watch a movie seated next to the attractive female, only 25 percent chose to do so when attraction to her was transparent because the *same* movie was showing in both rooms. When the experimenters scheduled *different* movies for the rooms, the males' behavior was markedly different. *Different* movies in the two rooms provided a protective cloak to hide the males' attraction, and sitting beside her could be due to a preference for the movie being shown in that room. With this cloak of ambiguous circumstances, 75 percent of the men choose the room that allowed them to sit beside the woman.

One can readily see the implications of such research for conducting sex-education classes and teen-agers' social functions. Co-educational classes involving discussion and demonstration of birth control techniques can provide an ambiguous cloak for sexual overtures. It is easy to imagine a teen couple walking out of a sex education class where the technique of condom use had been demonstrated. The boy casually asks the girl if she would join him for some "homework." If she is offended, his line is, "I was only joking, don't you have a sense of humor?" If she is not offended, then some barriers to promiscuity -- shyness, modesty, and fear of rejection -- have been breached, and the likelihood of sexual intercourse is increased. Many practices in sex education classes could have a potent effect in undermining and circumventing healthy shyness and modesty. Consequently, human sexuality education for children and young teens should not be co-educational. Explicit discussions of sex, values, contraception, etc.

should be conducted one-on-one with a parent or school official of the same sex.

Social Influence

Researchers have studied how personal views are influenced as individuals and groups interact with one another. Much of what we know about such "social impact" has been described by the research and theoretical writing of Bibb Latané [12]. As we would expect, the impact of one person's views upon another becomes greater as the *status* and *prestige* of the former increases. The *number* of persons whose views are impacting and being impacted by social influence attempts is also critical. A group of people expressing a view will have more impact than a single individual. Surprisingly, the number of persons who are the targets of influence is also important. A person will have more impact on another's views if he or she addresses the person alone rather than as part of a group. Finally, the *similarity* and *proximity* of persons or groups expressing views are important. An influential person who is more similar to us, or closer to us in time and space, will have more impact than one who is dissimilar or distant. In an educational context, the social impact of a teacher is reduced as the size of the class increases.

It is unsettling to sketch the implications of social impact theory for the epidemic of teen sexual promiscuity. Consider status and prestige as affecting a teacher's influence in the classroom. In our society, admired and prestigious stars and public figures extol free and casual sex. By contrast, those who counsel biblical standards and values are ridiculed. Recall the public derision heaped on then vice-president Dan Quale when he made comments critical of the Murphey Brown television program. In this show, the lead character, an unmarried professional woman played by Candice Bergen, sought a man who would impregnate her so she could have a child to raise. Relative to popular stars such as Candice Bergen, a teacher who promotes traditional standards of moral conduct operates at a status and prestige deficit. The class rebel, on the other hand, has a prestige advantage since he or she espouses values in line with those of attractive stars and public figures. Also, with similarity and proximity, the teacher is at a disadvantage in the classroom. He or she is a "distant" figure in terms of age, interests and lifestyle, while the class rebel is a friend at close physical and psychological range. The issue of numbers is also significant. In a typical classroom the influence of the teacher is "diffused" over many students. On the basis of our knowledge about social influence, it is straightforward to derive guidelines about how to deal with sexuality and reproductive issues in the public schools. As stated above, a parent, teacher, or health official should handle such issues in one-on-one, same-gender settings. This would maximize the impact of the value message that young people need to hear. The one-on-one setting is maximal in terms of the number and physical proximity factors. It also maximizes the impact of the status differential between the adult and teen. For reasons of similarity and social influence, same-gender discussions are important. Also, same-gender settings allow discussion of sexuality issues without violating modesty and personal privacy.

CONCLUSION

Considering the experimental social psychology research base, the outlines of a sound approach to teen sexuality issues are not hard to imagine. Activities incompatible with sexual intimacy should be encouraged. Shyness and modesty should be protected. Educational and social activities should maximize parental/adult social values and minimize the influence of daring, attractive, but destructive rebelliousness. Among the teen activities that are most incompatible with irresponsible dating and sexual activity are commitment to education, a career, and homemaking, and involvement with parents, church groups, and civic organizations. The role of creation scientists in this and similar issues is also straightforward. It is obvious that the core element of the creation science movement has been the argument of compatibility between the Genesis record and genuine empirical science. The major focus of our work should remain the historical reliability of Genesis in the light of physical and biological science. It is also relevant, however, in the context of the social and health sciences, to show that social science evidence is compatible with and supportive of biblical principles of public and individual morality.

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