

ABSTRACT

THESIS: Religiosity Influences on Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors Among Young Christian Women

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DATE: July 2012

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Utilizing subcultural identity, scripting, and reference group theories, this study analyzes 21 young adult, evangelical Christian women's attitudes toward sexuality, and how they utilize messages regarding sexuality from their pastors and parents. Although the women in this study perceive that messages from their pastors and parents regarding sex are unclear and at times inconsistent, their attitudes still particularly fit into the well-known strict sexual "norms" for evangelical Christians. However, the women's understanding of sexuality did not always include messages from a pastor or parent. Though messages from the participants' pastors and parents are not irrelevant to the women in this study, the ambiguous nature of their messages offers the participants a unique opportunity to construct their own definitions of sex. Most participants consider procreation to be an important purpose of sex, but they also believe enjoyment and intimacy are important purposes. Additionally, while most of the women in this study consider oral sex and anal sex to count as a loss of virginity, participants also noted many gray areas when considering virginity loss and sexual purity.