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Sexual Abstinence among Female Undergraduate Students

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Honors Thesis
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ABSTRACT

This study, conducted at a liberal arts college in the Midwest, utilizes qualitative data gathered through focus group discussions to examine the factors associated with sexual abstinence among female undergraduate students. Most studies on protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among youth have focused on condom usage and monogamy, and have been conducted mostly among high school students, with very few among undergraduate students. Since sexual abstinence is the best protection against pregnancy and STIs, this study examines the factors that influence female undergraduate students to remain sexually abstinent or become secondary virgins. It also examines the challenges these sexually abstinent students encounter before and during college, as well as the type of assistance they require to uphold their decision.

INTRODUCTION

This study uses qualitative data gathered through focus-group discussions to examine the factors associated with sexual abstinence among female undergraduate students in the United States. The paper is organized in three broad parts. The first section is a review of existing studies showing the high rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among young females aged under 25 years. It shows that to date, most of the research on protection against STIs has focused on condom usage rather than abstinence, and the majority of studies on abstinence have been conducted among high school students and not university students. The second section discusses the methodology through which this research was done. The third section discusses the findings and gives recommendations from focus-group participants useful to females and other socialization agents working to aid female students who opt to become, or remain, sexually abstinent.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the Reproductive Health Technologies Project (RHTP, 2004), fifteen million new cases of STIs are diagnosed each year. Two thirds of these STI cases occur among those under 25 years of age. Moreover, women are more likely to contract STIs than men due to differences in their reproductive organs (The Heritage Foundation, 2002). According to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID, 2002), more than 4 million cases of chlamydia are diagnosed each year. Among females aged 15-24 chlamydia is the most common STI. There are 500,000 new infections of genital herpes each year. One million cases of the human papillomavirus, also known as HPV or genital warts, are diagnosed each year with over half occurring among females aged 15-24. There are an estimated 650,000 new cases of

gonorrhea each year with the highest prevalence found in females aged 15-19 (NIAID, 2002). Furthermore, the Center for Disease Control found that although rates of female syphilis cases declined 19.5% from 2000 to 2001, rates still remain highest in females aged 20-24 (CDC, 2001). Despite this declination in syphilis cases, the number of STI cases among college students continues to remain higher than other age groups (Jameson, 2004).

Despite the high levels of STIs, 400,000 college students in a recent national survey admitted to having unprotected sex (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2002); and numerous studies show that condoms do not protect against certain STIs such as HIV (the virus that cases AIDS), HPV, and genital and oral herpes (NIAID, 2001; Cates, 1999). Condoms do not cover the entire genital area, leaving potentially infected flesh exposed. Consequently, researchers of sexual health point out that the safest means of protection from STIs is to avoid of all types of intimate sexual contact (HF, 2002; NIAID, 2002; RHTP, 2004).

Given the high risk of STIs among college-aged females, supported views that sexual abstinence as the safest STI protection method, and the importance of university education, this study seeks to examine the factors that motivate undergraduate female students who are primary virgins to remain sexually abstinent. It also examines the factors that motivate those who have been sexually active to become secondary¹ virgins. Therefore, the central research question of this study is: **What factors motivate female undergraduates to remain sexually abstinent?**

This broad question is examined through four related sub-questions:

- a) What does sexual abstinence signify to college women?
- b) What factors influenced them, and at what age did they choose to remain sexually abstinent?
- c) What challenges have they faced before college and during college due to their decision?
- d) What help do undergraduates need to remain virgins or become secondary virgins?

In regard to the first question pertaining to what sexual abstinence signifies to college women, studies show that adolescents and youth engage in sexual behaviors such as oral sex, petting, and mutual masturbation (Remez, 2000). In fact, according to Lisa Remez of the Alan Guttmacher Institute, an increased activity in oral sex has been found among young adolescents. Despite the rise in sex play activity; teens still consider themselves sexually abstinent (Remez, 2000). Although many youth do not consider these activities as sex because they define sex as vaginal or anal intercourse, it is noteworthy to point out that oral sex and heavy petting can lead to contraction of STIs. Indeed, “Noncoital behaviors avoid the risk of pregnancy, but still leave adolescents vulnerable to sexually transmitted [infections]” (2000:1). As Remez affirms, “Some of these activities may also be precursors to vaginal intercourse” (2000:1). One Planned Parenthood nurse in the study by Remez (2000:2) states:

I have more patients who are virgins who report to me that they are worried about [STIs] they may have gotten by having oral sex. There are a lot of questions and concerns about herpes, since they seem to know that there is some risk of 'top and bottom' herpes, as one of my patients put it.

As to the second question, which addresses the factors and the age at which females are encouraged to remain abstinent, socialization theories show that key socialization agents shape our behaviors. During adolescence, the three key socialization agents are parents, peer group and teachers. Family and peers can positively and negatively affect the decision of an adolescent to remain abstinent. For example, if a child was sexually abused they are more likely to engage in sexual activity at an early age. The low self esteem that results from this abuse often leaves teens more vulnerable to poor decisions regarding their sexual health (Dryfoos, 1990; Boyer, 1992). Additionally, families of lower social economic status are more likely to have adolescents that do not protect themselves when engaging in sexual activity (Kiernan, 1995).

ns include those remaining sexually abstinent for the past three years.

With respect to the decision to remain abstinent, support and intimacy between young people and their parents can positively influence dating and sexual practices. Teens living with both parents who spend large quantities of time with their children during childhood and adolescence are more likely to make positive sexual health choices (Sweeting, West, & Richards, 1998). Similarly, parents who closely monitor the activity of their adolescents and establish clear boundaries of acceptable behavior also positively influence dating and sexual attitudes of their children (Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2001).

On the contrary, in the early 1990s, less than twenty percent of teens found the majority of information about sexuality from their parents. Parents want their adolescents to adhere to more stringent rules. Teens struggle with these rules that may not correspond with their sexual activity (Luker 1996). Parents may also have received very little guidance about sex themselves and feel inadequate to openly speak with their children about sexual choices (SIECUS, 1997). Therefore, sex remains a closed-mouth matter within the home. Females especially do not approach their parents in order to remain the “good girl” and “the perfect daughter” in the family (Luker, 1996). These particular females would rather risk pregnancy and STIs than approach their parents or educators with questions. With sex education between parents and teens there is a lack of communication, which leads to a lack of information given to adolescents regarding sexuality.

Peers also influence the sexual beliefs and decisions of adolescents. Because peer pressure can be a driving force behind adolescents they do not necessarily adhere to the ideals of abstinence their parents want for them. In regard to sex education, the majority of what teens learn is from their peers. Young people feel comfortable talking about sex and contraception with each other; however, peers often provide each other with incorrect information. Myths are

quickly spread from group to group, such as the myth that a female is safe from pregnancy if she has sex standing up (Luker, 1996).

In the dating culture of teens, unfortunately girls “between the ages of 9 and 14... often... get the message that [sex] is what counts” (Nifong, 1996). Girls seek the attention of boys and long to go out on dates. This can negatively affect the young adolescent as girls who begin dating at an earlier age have been found to engage in sexual activity younger than those who wait (Giordano et al., 2001). When young females are encouraged to value dating at earlier ages by peers, sex appeal becomes of more importance than previous favorite activities.

However, as for the decision to remain abstinent, a study published by Bearman & Brückner (2002) found that peers could be a positive support system through forms of virginity pledges among high school students. Adolescents formally pledge to not engage in sexual activity until marriage and sign their name to this belief. It was concluded that as long as less than 30 percent of students in a given community pledged, the pledges were considered highly effective in delaying age of first intercourse (Bearman et al., 2000).

In regard to the third question that addresses the challenges young women face because of their decision to remain abstinent, studies show that peer groups can significantly challenge the decisions of young people. Peer groups have unique characteristics. To be part of a particular peer group one must adhere to these characteristics. Those who do not conform to certain ideals, beliefs, and practices may become social outcasts (Santor, Messervey, & Kusumakar, 2000). If a young woman has made the decision to remain abstinent yet is surrounded by sexually active peers they may be pressured to “fit in the group.” Peer pressure can influence teens to initiate sexual relationships. Thus, if the friends of a teen are sexually active, or profess sexual activity, the teen herself is more likely to be sexually active (Luker,

1996). Additionally, adolescent females may pressure other females their age to be in a relationship, healthy or otherwise, especially if the boy is considered popular. This pressure is strong, as “a girl’s friends may even reinforce the idea that it’s okay for her boyfriend to hit her” (Nifong, 1996:1). All this may come as a result of the desire to feel accepted as part of a peer group. Therefore, the decision to remain sexually abstinent can be challenged by the peer group of a young person.

Another obstacle faced by females who choose to remain sexually abstinent is the type of sex education they receive. Those organizations opposed to comprehensive programs believe that comprehensive programs teach a wide range of topics such as sexual intercourse, contraception, STIs, pregnancy, and abortion but do not discuss abstinence in great detail. These programs approach teen sexuality with the assumption that unprotected sex is a poor choice, but premarital sex is acceptable as long as one uses condoms. The subtle message conveyed to teenagers is that abstinence is not of great value (HF, 2002). Additionally, comprehensive programs fail to consistently cover the benefits of “commitment, intimacy, and love” in a marriage or “relationship leading to marriage” (HF, 2002:1). This type of sex education program does not discuss these benefits as being favorable conditions in a sexual relationship and thus fails to communicate abstinence as a superior option.

Now that a review of past and present research has concluded, the next section of the paper will begin with the methodology through which this research was completed. This research is unique in that it focuses on abstinence as the most effective protection against STIs rather than condom usage among females. It also focuses on college females in their junior and senior years of study that have adhered to the decision to remain abstinent.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To explain the factors that lead youth to opt for sexual abstinence, and the challenges faced due to this choice, two theories were helpful in explaining social behavior. The two theories are: Socialization Theory and Social Learning Theory.

Socialization Theory

Socialization is the learning development that includes the learning of values and accepted norms of behavior. Thus, the Socialization Theory proposes that agents of socialization such as family members, peers, religious leaders, and teachers shape the behavior of an individual and are significant in the development of a young person (Zelezny et al., 2000). Therefore, agents of socialization that promote sexual abstinence can influence the decision of a female to abstain. Two key models derived from socialization theories that are pertinent to this study are the Gender Socialization Theory and the Peer Influence Model.

Gender Socialization Theory

Gender Socialization Theory describes how males and females are socialized differently due to their sexes. There are appropriate sex-roles males and females learn in a given society and thus, different attitudes on sexual behavior and beliefs. Females, more so than males, are reared to be more cooperative and adhere to rules and beliefs of their parents (Zelezny et al. 2000). For example, females are to remain “the good girl” in American society (Luker, 1996). They are to act naïve in regard to sexual activity or simply act uninterested in having sex, and these standards are taught by the family and religious leaders. Therefore, female undergraduate students who are virgins are highly likely to have been socialized by parents or religious leaders who emphasized sexual abstinence as a part of their gender role (Zelezny et al., 2000).

Peer Influence Model

The Peer Influence Model suggests that peers are highly influential in shaping the beliefs and behavior of adolescents and young adults. In their reactions to each other, peers can positively or negatively enforce standards of accepted behavior within a social group. Peers are more likely to model their behavior after each other and actively seek relationships with other peers who are like themselves (Hektner, 2003). Therefore, female university students abstaining from sex are highly likely to have close peer relationships with primarily abstinent students.

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory states that people learn patterns of behavior through rewards and punishments, modeling their behavior after observations of others' behavior (Bandura, 1977). Thus, sexually abstinent female students who had positive role models such as parents, older siblings and relatives, teachers, and religious leaders who emphasized sexual abstinence are likely to remain sexually abstinent. Furthermore, students who were aware their parents would be angry or disappointed with them if they were not sexually abstinent or became pregnant are more likely to remain sexually abstinent as well.

Hypotheses

Based on the above theoretical framework, this study stipulates the following seven broad hypotheses. Sexually abstinent female undergraduate students are highly likely to:

1. Have close peer relationships with other sexually abstinent students.
2. Adhere to a religion that encourages them to remain sexually abstinent.
3. Have started dating at an older (high school or college) age.
4. Be goal-oriented with a strong focus on individual academic accomplishments, reflected by high grade point averages.

5. Be frustrated by the assumption that everyone in college is sexually active.
6. Need support from the university and its staff to remain abstinent.
7. Have strong familial relationships with parents and siblings.
 - 7b. Have family members who influenced and support their decision to remain abstinent.

METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this study was to determine some of the key factors that motivate undergraduate female students to remain sexually abstinent. It also focused on the challenges that confront these sexually abstinent students, and the means through which they were assisted to maintain their sexual abstinence. To gather this qualitative information from the undergraduate female students, this research utilized small focus group discussions and observations.

Description of Study Area

The study took place at a small, private Midwest undergraduate university. At the time of this study (2004), the university had 2,099 students enrolled full-time, including 1,193 females and 906 males, of whom ninety percent were Caucasians and ten percent were either international or minority students. Of the domestic students, a large majority of students permanently reside in the Midwest.

Students are required to live in the residence halls during their first year on campus. First year residence halls are co-ed by floor and upper-class housing is co-ed by room. After their first year in a residence hall students are allowed to move to off-campus housing of their choosing.

Additionally, the university is not affiliated with a religion. It is a secular school and there are no required religious elements for students nor staff.

Target Population

The target population for the study was junior (third year) and senior (fourth year) females who have remained sexually abstinent for the past three years. This population was chosen because these students were exposed to the university environment for more than two years, and therefore were in a good position to tell how they have been challenged and/or encouraged in their decision to remain sexually abstinent. They also have been in the university long enough to observe sexual practices among their peers in and away from the university.

Sampling Design

To gather in-depth qualitative information from the juniors and seniors, this study utilized focus group discussions comprised of eleven students, seven of whom were seniors and four of whom were juniors.

Focus Group Discussions

Small focus-group discussions are ideal for this type of research because each group is comprised of 8-12 participants of the similar characteristics, such as same gender or age, so that they can interact freely with each other. This provides the discussants with an atmosphere to discuss qualitative information in a group setting similar to regular interview methods. Additionally, a focus group facilitator guides discussions and poses questions to the focus group participants (Neuman, 2000).

DATA COLLECTION

The focus group discussants in this study were recruited into the study using two methods: one, snowball method, and two, advertisement on the campus internet system. In

regard to the snowball method, I sent an email to four students who had identified themselves as sexually abstinent during a previous course titled “Sex and Sexually Transmitted Infections” that they were enrolled in with Professor Mbugua in 2003. The email asked these students whether they would be interested in participating in this study and asked them to forward the message to any of their peers who they thought were sexually abstinent.

In addition to this email, during the first week of the semester in January 2004, I posted the following announcement on Campus Pipeline:

Senior Thesis on Sexual Abstinence: I am conducting research on those who have remained abstinent for the past three years. If you are one of them please contact me at (my email address).

The Campus Pipeline is a university email service that provides information links for campus activities and classes as well as the email portal of the university. It provides announcements on the homepage posted by university staff and students. Thus, all students of the university had the opportunity to view the announcement I posted.

Out of snowball method and Campus Pipeline Advertisement I received a total of 65 student responses, 55 (84.6%) females and 10 (15.4 %) males. Of the 55 females, 30 were either juniors or seniors². I sent a follow-up email to all the 30 juniors and seniors inviting them to become members of a focus group. In this follow-up email, I clearly outlined the format and goal of the proposed focus group discussions in which they would be participating. Specifically, I informed them that I wanted to hold discussions with a group of girls in their junior or senior years of study on the topic of sexual abstinence. The focus groups were to be comprised groups of eight to twelve (8-12) females who would meet four times. Each meeting would run for approximately one hour in a room that I reserved through the university. The room was a

² The large number of junior and senior responses could be because typically they are more aware of senior research projects and the need for respondents

centrally located building on campus and offered a convenient meeting venue for all the participants.

I then requested that the 30 junior and senior females email their schedules to me so as to determine the ideal day of the week in which to meet. Of the 30 females, eleven of them sent their schedules and we agreed to meet on Tuesday nights from 8.00-9.00 p.m. These eleven were comprised of seven (63.6%) seniors and four (36.3%) juniors. The other 19 females still had the option to participate in the study, but chose not to take part. Before the first session I contacted the Counseling and Consultation Services on campus to inform them of my research. Because sexuality is a sensitive issue, it was important to ensure that Counseling and Consultation Services was aware that I would suggest their services at the close of each session should something discussed create discomfort for any participant.

Before each of the four focus-group sessions, I emailed the discussants in order to remind them of our scheduled meeting. Of the eleven females who committed themselves to participating in the study, one attended the first two focus group meetings, while ten attended all four meetings.

I facilitated each of the four sessions, introducing the topic for discussion in each session and then listening to the discussants voice their opinions about it³. Although I was the facilitator, the focus group discussants were able to question and challenge each other, often providing details and information I had not anticipated. As the facilitator, I was conscious not to dominate the discussion and only spoke when necessary.

³ The topics and questions in each session which I used had been pre-tested using a similar type focus group conducted by Professor Mbugua during the May term class mentioned before.

Focus Group Format

During the first focus group session, a slip of paper with a signature and date line at the bottom was passed to each discussant stating, “By participating in this focus group I understand I am expected to keep the members of the group and what is discussed confidential.” This was done to reassure members of the group that the focus group was a safe environment where trust was essential. Additionally, before each session began I reminded the group of the importance of confidentiality so as to make the discussants feel comfortable to share their opinions freely.

During this first meeting, I reminded the participants of the purpose of the study, and then asked them whether any of them was uncomfortable with me taking notes of the discussions and including their first names in my notes and subsequent final thesis. I told them that if they were they could voice it at the meeting, through e-mail or speak with me after the session. No one expressed concern, but stated that they were comfortable to have me and each other know them by name. I proceeded to take abbreviated notes and to use their first names which they all preferred I do rather than assign them numbers.

At the close of each session I reminded them of Counseling and Consultation Services’ availability and encouraged them to e-mail me if they forgot to mention something that may have been of importance. After each session, I wrote down the notes longhand.

In the sessions to follow, I first provided a brief overview of what was discussed the week prior and invited the discussants to make additional comments before we proceeded with the new set of questions. Below is a summary of the topics discussed under each of four focus-group sessions. The questions asked under each session are attached in the appendix.

- Focus group Session One: Discussion of Personalities, Familial Relationships, and Dating

- Focus Group Session Two: Discussion of Sex Education, the Decision to Remain Abstinent, and Close Peer Relationships
- Focus Group Session Three: Discussion of the University Environment Regarding Sexually Abstinent Students
- Focus Group Session Four: Discussion Reviewing Previous Sessions and Concluding Comments.

DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

Focus Group Session One: Discussion of Personalities, Familial Relationships, and Dating

When asked to describe themselves, of the eleven discussants who participated in this session, two were international students, five were from urban areas, and four were from rural towns. Four participants were juniors and seven were seniors. When asked to describe their families, the participants related stories of “strong family traditions” and how parents were “good examples of how to help each other” through life. I observed that a majority of the participants who stated that their parents were good examples also stated that their families were religious. Of the eleven participants, two were not religious, four were somewhat religious, and five were very religious. The demographic description of the group reflected a diversity of students on campus. They were of different groups of students – athletes, sorority women, academic honor societies, and Student Senate – as well as different personalities. Six were outgoing whereas five were more reserved, though not necessarily shy.

The participants naturally began with descriptions of their families before the question of family was asked, and most described their families as “very close.” Ten of the eleven

discussants (90.9%) reported their parents had been married twenty-odd years, and all eleven participants spoke of close sibling and parental relationships. The discussant who had experienced a divorce between her parents stated that she received “lots of love” from her mom and older brother with whom she was close. I observed that the majority of the participants glowed when talking about their families who one participant described as “loveey dovey.”

Six of the participants stated that their parents spent a lot of time with them and kept a close watch over them. Specifically, one student stated that her parents “liked to keep tabs” on her and her siblings; and another stated that:

My family was so noseey and involved but looking back I am grateful for such parents who were active in my life yet trusted me to begin making my own decisions.

Although their parents established rules of accepted behavior within the family regulated this behavior through punishments and rewards, the participants stated they still had freedom to make independent choices within acceptable boundaries.

This finding corresponds with research results that state that parents who spend lengthy amounts of time as well as establish behavioral boundaries with their children, have teens who are more likely to make positive sexual health choices (Sweeting et al., 1998; Giordano et al., 2001). This also supports the research of Keith et al. who found that sexually abstinent high school females are more likely “to be more influenced by family values” than those that are sexually active (1991: 769-785). Moreover, according to the National Center for Health Statistics (2002) forty percent of marriages in the United States end in divorce. Therefore, it was interesting to note that ten of the eleven participants had parents in their first marriage. Because this study only examined sexually abstinent females, I could not ascertain whether or not this relationship is statistically significant. However, other researchers have found similar correlations. The Heritage Foundation found that “teens living with two parents at age 14 were

significantly more likely to postpone losing their virginity than teens who did not live with two parents” (Cooksey, Rindfuss, & Guilkey, 1996: 59—74). Additionally, “being from a two-parent family increased the likelihood of not engaging in premarital intercourse. Indeed, virgins were more than twice as likely as nonvirgins to be from a two-parent family” (Lock & Vincent, 1995: 47—58). These findings support hypothesis seven that states that female undergraduate students who are sexually abstinent have strong familial relationships with parents and siblings who influence and support them in their decision to remain abstinent.

When asked the age they began dating, the age of the eleven participants’ first date or first boyfriend ranged from eleven to nineteen with two beginning to date before the age of fourteen. One participant said she had never dated at all simply because she had not found someone who could “keep up with” her. This participant stated she had high standards for herself and had not met someone who met the high standards she sets for someone with whom she could be in a romantic relationship. This finding supports the research of Luker (1996) and Miller et al. (1989) who found that teens who begin dating before high school are more likely to be in high school when first engaging in sexual intercourse. Based on the finding that eight of the eleven participants (72.7%) began dating during high school or college, hypothesis three which states that sexually abstinent female undergraduate students are highly likely to have started dating at an older high school or college age is supported.

Four participants have had relationships lasting longer than one year, and four participants shared they only “enjoy the chase, but get bored easily.” One participant stated:

I don’t want to be tied down by a boyfriend. I am too driven to be with someone and I first want to find someone with the same goals as myself. I have worked so hard to get what I want that I don’t want to give that up for some guy I’d date.

Three other participants agreed with this statement. Another participant agreed with them, yet distinguished herself as “a hopeless romantic who tries [dating] over and over again and will try until [she] finds ‘the one.’ Even though she does date, she makes a point to say it is her goal to wait until she has a job to find a relationship that could lead to marriage.

During this discussion four participants stated that they were too focused on their individual accomplishments to have a serious boyfriend. These participants stated that they wanted to complete their own goals before having to compromise with the goals of another person. I observed that the majority of the participants were highly academically motivated in order to achieve the goals they have for themselves. Their academic achievement is reflected in a highly respectable average GPA score of 3.39 of 4.0 and ten of the eleven participants had above a 3.0 GPA. This finding supports the research by Keith (1991) who found that career oriented high school females were more likely to remain abstinent than those who were not career oriented. Additionally, Halpern (2000) found that among teenagers a high level of intelligence “act[s] as ‘a protective factor against early sexual activity.’” Moreover, it was also found that highly intelligent teenagers “were also more likely to delay holding hands as well as kissing” not because they were uninterested in sexual activity, but because they exhibited “more discipline [in the] postponement of acting on that interest” (Halpern, 2000). These findings support hypothesis four that states that sexually abstinent female undergraduate students are highly likely to be goal-oriented with a strong focus on individual academic accomplishments reflected by high grade point averages.

Focus Group Session Two: Discussion of Sex Education, the Decision to Remain Abstinent, and Close Peer Relationships

When asked the age at which they first learned something about sex, the respondents stated that it was through their school, mass media, peers, and family. Precisely, nine of the eleven participants (81.8%) agreed they first learned about sexual intercourse when they were ten, eleven, or twelve in a sex education program at school. The participants stated that peers played a strong role in supplementing the material covered in sex education classes specifically through conversations on the playground. One participant recalled an experience with neighborhood girlfriends when they encountered Playboy Magazines belonging to the father of one of the girls. Another, around the fifth grade age of ten, learned from older siblings. Another recalled laughing at a joke on a television show then promptly being confronted about her knowledge of the joke by her parents.

When asked which kinds of educators made them feel comfortable or uncomfortable, family, schoolteachers, and religious leaders were discussed. Ten of the eleven participants (90.9%) stated their parents made them feel uncomfortable and some participants stated that learning in school made them uncomfortable. One participant's parents "always threatened to have the talk but never did," as if talking about sex were a punishment. Therefore, talking about sex was always an uncomfortable conversation in her family. Similarly, other participants felt awkward speaking with their parents about sex. One participant stated she "hated talking to Mom about it so it really was not discussed at home. It is still very taboo." Three other discussants agreed they were not comfortable at all speaking with their parents.

One participant stated that she was very comfortable speaking with her mom, a nurse,

about sexuality. This person noted:

I know what I need to know so I don't have to go looking for [knowledge of sex] elsewhere. My mom told me where other books were that I could read; just in case I wasn't comfortable asking her. Sometimes I felt safer doing it on my own, but I did feel comfortable speaking about it, especially with my mom

This participant was able to learn about sex directly from her parents whereas the other ten did not.

Those who felt uncomfortable speaking openly with their parents about sex said they learned through subtle parental messages regarding the consequences of having sex. One discussant stated:

A girl would get pregnant at my school and, being from a small town, once my parents found out, it was quite clear it was a mistake and not something my parents would be happy about if it happened to me. . . I mainly learned that having sex was not an option for me from situations like this.

Another said she, at the age of sixteen, was the one to finally "bring up the talk" with her mother when many of her peers were beginning to engage in sexual activity. She approached her mother and asked her to talk with her about sex. Instead of having a conversation, her mother reacted by placing condoms in her daughter's suitcase without her knowledge before she left for boarding school. One female described a similar experience.

My dad sat down on the couch next to me during a television show and looked at me. He asked, "You and Jared are just friends, right?" That was it. That was the entire conversation about sex with my parents.

These two discussants illustrate how uncomfortable it was for their parents to speak to them about sex. This is similar to what SIECUS found regarding the hesitance parents feel that inhibits discussions of sexuality among adolescents and their parents (SIECUS, 1997). One participant said it became slightly easier to talk with her family about sex as time went by,

especially since she had an older sister with whom she could openly ask questions. Still, she did not openly speak about sex with her parents.

The participants said learning about sex was more objective at school which made it easier, although slightly awkward and embarrassing due to immaturity and jokes about the opposite sex. One participant recalled the videos her fifth grade class had to watch, one for boys and the other for girls. She stated:

Right after the videos ended we all got back together in the classroom. I remember two boys] who ran right up to [me and my girlfriends] and said, “Ew! You bleed every month! That’s gross!” Of course that’s going to make us feel uncomfortable!

One participant, whose father was a pastor, felt uncomfortable watching sex education videos at church. She said sex and sexual development did not seem to fit into the Sunday school lessons. She stated:

It felt awkward learning about [menstruation] in church. Plus my dad was the pastor so that didn’t make it any less awkward.

Another participant felt uncomfortable when learning about sex from religious leaders. She attended a Catholic school where nuns, her teachers, made sure that “abstinence was drilled into the brain.”

In regard to mass media, participants stated that it was less uncomfortable to learn about sex through magazines, television shows, and movies. One participant stated:

It was easier to learn about sex through the media because your parents and teachers didn’t have to know. ‘The sex talk’ was always uncomfortable with my family and in school so if I could learn about sex without them knowing I was learning about sex it was less embarrassing.

One participant added that although the media often portrayed sex contrary to what she believes it was easier to watch it in the movies or through videos in class. She stated:

Then no one was actually talking about sex. It always seemed that teachers and parents were uncomfortable with talking about sex so that made us feel uncomfortable, too.

When asked how they learned the majority of information about sex, peers played a key role. This finding is similar to other studies showing that peers supplement formal education received by parents and schoolteachers (Luker, 1996). Participants agreed that peers went into the details not covered by parents, teachers, or religious leaders. Peers discussed what they believed to be true about sex even in college on the bus to an athletic event, within sorority houses, and within the residence halls, especially as seven participants learned most of their knowledge of sex their first year at the university. They mentioned that during high school, watching the behavior of their peers who had become pregnant also contributed to learning about the consequences of having sex. When a friend goes through an unintended pregnancy, one participant recalled, “You really learn.”

The discussants were then asked how they would have liked to receive the majority of their information about sex. They stated that they wanted age-appropriate sex education so it was not an overwhelming amount of information all at once. One said:

You shouldn't be learning about penises and vaginas for the first time at the age of eleven. You should know about your body at a much younger age. And I also think I could have been more aware of sex in general at a younger age so I wouldn't have flipped out when I go to college. I didn't even know what oral sex was and that you could get STIs from having oral sex. Suddenly, in college, [oral sex] was everywhere.

They said that parents should be open to discussing all topics of sexuality with their children, and children should feel empowered to seek accurate information on their own private time. The participants also agreed that sex education should be a joint effort between parents and schools, and religious leaders if religion was important in their lives.

When asked what has influenced their decision to remain sexually abstinent participants stated that their reasons had changed from high school to college. Five discussants shared that they were waiting for marriage, waiting for “the one,” and remaining pure for their future

husband. The main reason of these five participants for remaining abstinent since coming to college has been because of their religious beliefs. Three other participants noted religion played a smaller role. This supports the research of Coles & Stokes (1985) and Miller et al. (1989) who found that “many young people abstain from premarital coitus for religious or moral reasons.” Moreover, these results are similar to other studies. Paul, found that ““persistent religious involvement”” had the strongest effect on delaying the age of first intercourse (2000: 1-10). These findings support hypothesis two that states that sexually abstinent college females are highly likely to adhere to a religion that encourages them to remain sexually abstinent.

Participants stated that their family also motivated them to remain abstinent. One participant said she received a promise ring from her parents. This ring, purchased by her parents, symbolized a promise made to herself, her parents, and her future husband to remain a virgin until marriage. The participant stated that the ring served as a daily reminder that she had committed herself to this virginity pledge. She stated:

My parents really took the time to choose a ring and spend a lot of money on it. To me that showed it was important to them and it should be important to me. It was a formal pledge to my parents, me, and my future husband to remain pure.

Another student had also received such a token from her father, a key charm she wears around her neck. She received this at the age of eighteen with a typed, laminated card saying she held the key to her daddy’s heart, the key to God’s heart, and the key to her future husband’s heart. She stated she wears it every day and reminds her of how important sex is and the importance of saving it for one special marital relationship.

One participant stated that her boyfriend was a motivating factor in remaining abstinent and committing to a virginity pledge. She stated that her fiancé was pressured so much in high school to have sex, as was she, the two spent time together to write their own virginity pledge

and sign it. She stated that this pledge to each other relieved some of the pressure they were feeling from their peers to have sex. They still have it, years later, as a reminder that they want sex to be something they experience in the special relationship of marriage.

One student recalled an incident at a retreat where it was expected to sign a virginity pledge at the beginning of the weekend. It was an ordeal to walk in front of everyone and sign a card so if one did not sign, it did not go unnoticed. She herself was not waiting for marriage, but gave in to the pressure to sign one, and stated this did not have an impact on her decision to remain abstinent. This is in accordance with the study published by Bearman et al. (2002) who studied virginity pledges among high school students. If less than 30% of a teen population signed virginity pledges they were considered highly effective in delaying the age of first intercourse. Like this participant who signed one because it was expected at the retreat, if more than 30% signed a pledge it was not a key factor in their decision to remain abstinent (Bearman et al., 2002).

Four of the five females who gave religion as their primary reason to remain abstinent said they had been raised in churches that taught the expected norms of behavior through weekly meetings and subtle messages. One participant said her faith had grown in the past three years and because of this, she became a secondary virgin when she matriculated as a student at the university. She said she had been hurt by the mistakes she made, sharing her body, and wanted to “start new” so as not to repeat the same mistakes. She looked at the other girls seriously and said:

Stay a virgin as long as you can. You can never get that back. Even though I want to and am “born again” or whatever you want to call it I can never get that back.

This feeling of regret has been another motivating factor of remaining sexually abstinent. Participants have either experienced regret or emotional pain themselves or through friends who

have been hurt. This regret came from compromising their bodies and their beliefs. The participants stated they had seen how one-night-stands have hurt their friends and they themselves do not want to go through similar situations.

Another motivating factor of remaining sexually abstinent was that the participants stated they were not comfortable sharing their bodies with another person. One discussant stated:

I'm not necessarily ready for sex, but I'm not necessarily waiting for marriage either. I'm just not comfortable with myself so how can I be comfortable with my body in front of another person?

Other motivating factors included fear of diseases and pregnancy, but more so when they were in high school. One student said:

I'm graduating in three months. I have a job that pays well lined up for next year. If I got pregnant right now it would not be the end of the world, so there are other reasons why I'm staying a virgin. In high school it was just that I didn't want to end up like "that girl" and [STIs] scared me.

The students shared that since coming to college they have felt better prepared to protect themselves against unwanted pregnancies and STIs with a greater knowledge of birth control pills and condoms. However, even with this knowledge they chose to remain abstinent.

When asked if their close friends were sexually abstinent, nine of the eleven students (81.8%) noted they had close relationships with sexually active friends. One said she experienced a lot of pressure to have sex from her housemates as she was the only virgin as well as the only one dating someone. She stated that they want to "live vicariously through" her and tell her she should be having sex. She only allows the pressure to slightly bother her because she feels more self-inflicted pressure "just to get [her] life together," which outweighs the pressure to have sex from her friends.

Three of the eleven discussants had sexually active friends in high school whereas now they do not. Six of the eleven had sexually active friends in high school and since coming to

college have had very few relationships with friends who were not sexually active. Four other participants stated they only have close relationships with friends who are sexually active. In regard to college friendships, nine of the eleven students noted they had close relationships with sexually active students and seven of these nine said these close relationships included those they would refer to as their best friends.

This contradicts research stating that teens in close relations with sexually active peers are more likely to become sexually active (Luker, 1996). I believe the participants in my study have had motivating factors to remain sexually abstinent that are stronger influences than the influence of sexually active peers. I observed that the participants in my study have family members with whom they can find support. Students also relied on their religion and their academic accomplishments that distracted them from wanting to become sexually active. I also observed that the discussants were confident in defending themselves and expressing their decision to remain abstinent, which combated peer pressure. This finding supports research by Rathus et al. who found that programs that encourage females to be assertive “without jeopardizing their relationships with their peers” are effective in delaying the age of first intercourse (2000: 402). Because of these findings, hypothesis one that states that sexually abstinent college females are highly likely to have close peer relationships with other sexually abstinent students is rejected.

When asked if their close friends support them in their decision to remain abstinent, the participants generally felt supported by those they called upon as confidants and loved ones. Although friends made jokes about their sexual abstinence, the fact that these participants remain virgins is respected and perhaps even envied. One discussant stated:

There is an underlying pressure in my close circle of girlfriends. My friends won't talk about sex in front of me because they think I won't understand and I think that's what

hurts the most. I'm the last person they'd tell, even though I'd understand most of what they would tell me so it makes me feel left out. If they do talk about [sex] it is mostly jokes with me not having any [sex], but I know they respect me. Once in a while somebody will come up and quietly say on the side, "That's awesome. Keep it that way." And I know I'm making the right decision and it just makes me feel good.

One participant said although she has friends that support her decision, the small campus created some anxiety for her. Many knew she was a secondary virgin, and she feared that sexually active students who did not value abstinence would hurt her intentionally. She feared they would attempt to "prove her wrong;" prove that she is not as strong in her beliefs as she professes, and that her decision to become a secondary virgin is not legitimate. However, one student from a rural area noted that in the college atmosphere students are able to have some privacy, which makes it easier for her to deal with those who would make light of her virginity. Although, the five from urban high schools said that because the university is smaller than their high schools their actions, peers are more aware of their actions and therefore the peer pressure to have sex is greater.

However, the discussants stated that they knew where to find support when they felt insecure about their decision to remain abstinent. Close friends, whether on campus or in their hometown, reminded them to remain strong in their decision to remain sexually abstinent. One participant stated:

I find support mainly from my friends and family...And from watching those who screwed up. I want to do it in the perfect order. Date, marry, have sex, have kids. My sister is living the fairytale life right now because that is how she did it. I want to do it that way, too.

Still, one student found support in reminding herself, "I am so glad I did not have sex with him" after a breakup. Five of the discussants (45.4%) again spoke of the desire to achieve their own aspirations as motivating and comforting them when others may make negative comments

regarding their virginity. Five participants again (45.5%) stated they find reassurance in their religion that praises them for remaining abstinent.

Focus Group Session Three: Discussion of the University Environment Regarding Sexually Abstinent Students

When asked to describe the university environment one participant described like “like high school – gossip is still the same as it was because everyone knows everyone” so who had sex and who was a virgin, she said, was generally assumed by students. The “infamous Wesleyan Bubble,” eight of the participants believed, sheltered university students from proper education on sex.

The discussants noted that if a student wanted information on sexuality she had to look for it because it was not easily accessible. They said there is rarely information, such as posters and handouts within the residence halls and campus buildings. If a student wanted to obtain such information they could outside the Health Services offices, but the student had to actively obtain it herself. The risks of sexual activity including STI information, they stated, were not widely publicized on campus. They also said Health Services may have sponsored AIDS testing in the Fall of 2003, but were only able to provide 15 tests while reportedly close to 100 students arrived for the free service. The students stressed that the university did not realize the need students have for such services.

Although there are STI testing centers around the campus of the university, they are not close enough and not as easily accessible as campus Health Services. Students and faculty alike were unaware of the risks college students take. One participant stated:

The faculty assumes we're all responsible students, but I think that's pretty funny. Even [Illinois State University] that has a high rate of [STIs] has signs around campus promoting safer sex and abstinence. [University staff] can't just assume we're making the right decisions because I know students and they aren't.

For example, the students agreed that students were not fully aware that their peers could have STIs. The specific risk participants witnessed was hearing a friend say, “I have a class with him so he’s okay [to have sex with].” They assume since that they see an average-looking college student on campus he does not have an STI. However, three noted that the smaller campus makes it more difficult for those who are looking for casual sexual relationships since “everyone knows everyone.” Unfortunately these students consequently attend parties at nearby universities in order to engage in casual sexual relationships.

When asked about their experiences as virgins at the university and whether they had been teased for being a virgin, I noted that the discussants largely agreed that they were teased throughout their college years, and were most bothered by the teasing during their freshman and sophomore years. In particular, athletic teams were noted as being the most “graphic” in their sexual stories and singling out sexually abstinent students. Teasing occurred anywhere from athletic to choir bus rides and sorority chapter meetings. Still, the participants noted that the teasing made it more frustrating than difficult to remain strong in their decision. Another discussant said that although she had not experienced much teasing due to her virginity, she had experienced more hardships because of her religion, the main proponent of her abstinence. I observed that all the participants agreed sexual activity was not something to be taken lightly and therefore peer pressure could be dealt with. One discussant stated:

People make it a casual issue and it’s not. It’s a really serious thing and I for sure do not take it lightly. I know I make it a bigger deal than guys or some friends do. But I get all excited when I find out a guy is a virgin! When people lose the v-card⁴ early on they forget how big of a deal [sex] really is. They’re surprised when I say I want to be in love.

Although some scoffed at their virginity, those same peers made comments that they are proud that their friend had decided to remain abstinent. However, one participant stated she was

⁴ “Holding a v-card” is slang for being a virgin.

emotionally hurt when she realized some men on campus knew she was a virgin and did not similarly value abstinence. She stated that she feels some male students “want to break her. They want to be the one [I finally have sex with].” One participant even admitted a boyfriend broke up with her because she would not have sex with him. Men, they stated, had a general assumption that “the nicer you are the dirtier you are.” This made the discussants uncomfortable, knowing someone could think of them in such a way. Therefore, two of the participants stated they did not actively seek out relationships with men on campus fearing they would think similarly.

One discussant stated that sexual abstinence is not portrayed on campus as a positive option and therefore the university should work to change these beliefs. Additionally, nine of the ten participants (81.8%) felt there was nothing that endorsed abstinence on campus, yet lots of activities for those who were sexually active. Six discussants stated that the university did not address abstinence because the staff assumed all students were sexually active. Moreover, one student said she was frustrated and offended that the university lacked sexual abstinence information in order not to offend those who were sexually active. A resident assistant in a freshman residence hall, she was specifically told she could not present programs or hang posters regarding abstinence so as not to offend those who were sexually active. Also, I observed that all the discussants agreed that the university and its staff should give abstinence more positive attention. These findings support hypothesis six that states that sexually abstinent college females are highly likely to have a need for the support from the university and its staff to remain abstinent.

When asked about the barriers that they had to overcome due to their decision to remain abstinent, participants stated personal acceptance of their decision to remain abstinent and of the

sexual beliefs held by professors and friends. Through the teasing, one had to accept that even though her friends thought it was “okay for them to have sex it was not okay for” her. She had to accept that she could be different from her friends in this way. Five other participants stated it was difficult to have close relationships with friends who were casual with their sexuality and would not necessarily experience sexuality in the same way as they would.

Additionally, four participants stated that professors spoke of casual sex in the classroom as being accepted behavior. They felt uncomfortable in the classroom and this made it difficult to continue participating in discussions knowing that some of their professors held these beliefs. Two participants admitted that taking the class Human Sexuality was a personal obstacle they had to overcome. One participant said she was always second-guessing her comments in class, “like they could tell I [had never had sex] and would make fun of me.” She said she never felt at ease because she feared that those who did not value sexual abstinence and engaged in casual sex would judge her for her opinions in class.

When asked whether programming at the university either endorsed sexual activity or abstinence, I observed that the majority of the participants felt that the university endorsed the assumption that all college students are sexually active or want to be so. The senior participants noted a comedian that performed during the week of freshman orientation. Although it was an optional event, the entire segment was about sex. One discussant recalled thinking, “Is this what my college experience is going to be like? Am I the only person not having sex in this room?” They stated that speakers like this comedian address students as though everyone is sexually active or wants to be so. Another expressed her frustration that the university specifically told resident assistants not to address abstinence so as not to offend sexually active students. These

observations support hypothesis five that states that sexually abstinent college females are highly likely to be frustrated by the assumption that every college student is sexually active.

When asked how the university should address sexual abstinence, participants stated the university and its staff should work to end the assumption that all college students are sexually active or want to be so by increasing the number of abstinence programs held on campus. Five students said the university must end the fear of offending some sexually active students in order to develop programs to aid in the decision of those remaining abstinent and those considering secondary virginity. I noted that one-half of the participants stated they would like to hear a speaker present a talk regarding healthy relationships and decisions of sexuality. In support of this idea, one stated:

People know the reasons to and why to abstain. They know about STIs and pregnancy; at least they know enough to know it's out there. What they don't know is the emotional, marital, and relationship benefits to those remaining abstinent.

To present sexual abstinence to the campus, four discussants suggested that even statistics around Freshman residence halls stating the percentage of sexually abstinent students would assure those new to the college environment that not everyone is sexually active. One added that this could alleviate some of the peer pressure to have sex many freshmen experience. Another suggested the university staffs should emphasize to incoming students about the benefits of remaining abstinent, including abstinence as the best protection against STIs. Three participants suggested that the university should make professors more aware that side comments regarding casual sex could offend those remaining abstinent. Professors might make it openly acceptable for students to make their own decision as to whether they should be sexually active or abstinent. In regard to programming, one stated:

We all decided a long time ago to remain abstinent. Programs in college might reinforce my decision and help me along the way, but college didn't change my decision.

A majority of the participants agreed with this statement. Five other participants strongly agreed that assistance from the university would make the sexual pressure of college less intimidating, especially during the first year of undergraduate studies.

The participants joked about how they had formed a “Virgin Support Group” during the focus group meetings, yet they did not believe students would attend such a future organization on campus specifically for virgins. Virginity, one stated, is too personal, and two participants expressed concern that others would visit meetings just to learn who were the virgins in attendance.

Focus Group Session Four: Discussion Reviewing Previous Sessions and Concluding Comments

When asked what they are doing to ensure they are meeting the right person to be with in a romantic relationship, seven participants noted that they actively attempt to engage in romantic relationships with sexually abstinent people. One participant said:

I want someone to value [sexual abstinence] like I have. If I didn’t consider the fact a prospective boyfriend was not a virgin I think I would be devaluing my own beliefs. I don’t have to date a virgin, but it is definitely something I would have to think about knowing he perhaps has not valued sex like I have.

Four participants stated it was not imperative the person be a virgin, but it positively influenced their decision to become romantically involved if the other person was.

When asked if they dress in a way that says they are different from others by being a virgin, the participants answered they did not. One noted:

I don’t get ready to go to the bars on Friday night thinking, “Hmm, will people be able to tell I’m a virgin if I wear this?” I just wear what I’m comfortable in.

However, one discussant responded:

Do you think, though, that because we are virgins we are less comfortable displaying our bodies? I know I don’t consciously make the decision to dress more conservatively, but I am not comfortable in clothing that shows off everything I’ve got.

They said that it was more apparent at campus parties and local bars, where expected attire was more revealing that they dressed differently rather than during classes and on campus, where the attire was more casual. I observed that the majority of the participants agreed that although they did not consciously dress differently they did more so than sexually active students because they believed themselves to be more conservative with their bodies.

When asked what they could do for their children so their children would also end up in a group for sexually abstinent college students, the participants agreed that they wanted to give their children the freedom to make their own decisions and mistakes. The majority stated it was important when allowing such freedom to make sure they knew when to intervene as a parent and enforce rules or take disciplinary action. I observed that the majority of participants agreed that friends of theirs who had parents with strict households were those who most rebelled during their adolescent years. Participants stated that their own parents were fair in compromising with them and trusting them until they did something that ruined that trust. I observed that the participants agreed that it was important to be involved in the lives of their children. They stated that they may not have enjoyed their parents' questions at the time regarding their actions outside the home, but they were thankful their parents showed they cared. They stated that this has made them want to do the same with their own children.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above findings for my sample, hypothesis one that states that sexually abstinent college females have close relationships with sexually abstinent peers was rejected. I observed that a key factor that could possibly explain why peers have not significantly changed their sexual beliefs and behaviors due to close peer relationships with sexually active students is

that all the participants stated they had close relationships with parents and siblings who strongly influenced and supported their decision to remain abstinent. Another factor that could possibly explain why the participants' remain sexually abstinent opposed to their sexually active friends is that the participants diverted their attention towards their religion that encourages abstinence, and their academic accomplishments. Thus, hypotheses two and four that respectively state that sexually abstinent college females are highly likely to adhere to a religion that encourages abstinence and be goal-oriented with a strong focus on individual academic accomplishments were both supported. This study also found that the participants were confident in defending and expressing their decision to remain abstinent. Additionally, the findings support hypothesis three that states that sexually abstinent college females are highly likely to have started dating at an older high school or college age.

As sexually abstinent university students, they found it disconcerting that the university staff assumes all college students are sexually active, and therefore the participants felt that the university did not properly address sexuality and abstinence on campus. These findings support hypotheses five and six that respectively state sexually abstinent college females are highly likely to be frustrated by the assumption that every college student is sexually active and therefore have a need for support from the university and its staff to remain abstinent. In conclusion, this study found that the key factors that determine sexual abstinence among female undergraduate students include: a) strong familial relationships with parents and siblings who encourage and support the decision to remain abstinent b) dating at older high school or college ages c) religion and d) focus on academic accomplishments.

Based on the suggestions provided by the focus group participants, the university should not only produce programs geared towards contraceptive use and the risks of sexually

transmitted infections, but also the benefits of remaining abstinent, one being that it is the best way to avoid contracting STIs (HF 2002; NIAID 2003; RHTP 2004). These results suggest that future research is needed regarding sexual abstinence. Research utilizing focus groups of sexually abstinent college males could also provide enhancing and supporting factors in their decision to remain abstinent as well as how sexually abstinent males view sexual attitudes on campus and presented by the university. Also beneficial, research utilizing focus groups of sexually abstinent males and females could be conducted at a public university where the lower tuition allows students from a wider range of social economic status to participate. Similar case studies including sexually abstinent female undergraduate university students could also provide additional data to supplement this research.

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APPENDIX

Session One: Discussion of Personalities, Familial Relationships, and Dating

1. Describe yourself, starting with your year in school, and a little bit about your personality. For example, "If asked to describe myself, I would say I am..."
2. Describe:
 - a) Your family composition (how many siblings, their gender and age, what position you are in the family – oldest, 2nd, middle, youngest, etc...)
 - b) Your parents (age, career, education background, marital status, socioeconomic status, income level – upper, upper middle, middle, middle lower, lower, etc...)
 - c) Your relationship with your parents (very good, fight with them, fight more with Dad than Mom or the other way around, they play favorites, etc...)
3.
 - a) When did you begin dating? Describe that experience.
 - b) Are you currently dating? Describe this experience. If you have never dated, describe your feelings on never having dated.
4. If you were a parent, what would you do to teach your child about dating? Is this different or similar to how your parents handled the issue?

Conclusion: Are there any concluding remarks?

APPENDIX

Session Two: Discussion of Sex Education, the Decision to Remain Abstinent, and Close Peer Relationships

1. a) What is the earliest age you recall learning something about sex?
b) What was the content of the sex information you first learned?
2. At what age did you first receive factual sex education and by whom?
a) Thinking back to the sex education you received, which “teachers” made you comfortable and which made you uncomfortable? (parents, peers, school teachers, religious leaders, etc...)
b) How did you learn the majority of your knowledge about sex?
3. If you were to learn about sex all over again, how would you like to learn about it/
a) At what age?
b) Who would instruct you?
c) In what context?
d) What topics would you like included?
4. What, in your opinion, has influenced your decision to remain sexually abstinent through college? Has this changed since when you were in high school?
5. Are your close friends sexually abstinent as well? How are their reasons for remaining abstinent similar or different from yours?
6. If you have friends that are sexually active, do you feel you receive their support in your decision to remain abstinent?

Conclusion: Are there any concluding remarks?

APPENDIX

Session Three: Discussion of the IWU Environment Regarding Sexually Abstinent Students

1. Overall, how happy have you been with your time at IWU?
2. What type of environment do you feel IWU provides?
 - a) Does it promote sexual health?
 - b) Is there a particular attitude regarding sexual activity that is prevalent?
3. Describe your experience being a sexually abstinent student at IWU.
 - a) Has it been difficult or not an issue?
 - b) Have you felt supported in your decision?
 - c) Have you been teased about being a virgin?
 - d) Are there any barriers you feel you have needed to personally overcome because of being a virgin? When you have been teased, who has been your support through this time?
4. With regard to programming at IWU, do you feel any programs either endorse sexual activity or abstinence?
5. How do you feel IWU should address sexual abstinence?

Conclusion: Are there any concluding remarks?

APPENDIX

Session Four: Discussion Reviewing Previous Sessions and Concluding Comments

1. What are you doing to ensure you are meeting the right person to be with in a relationship?
2. Is it okay to just tolerate someone in a relationship? Or do you want someone to celebrate you and your relationship?
3. Do you assume there are “no good men” worth dating?
4. Do you in dress in a way that says you are different from others by being a virgin?
5. What would you do for your children so they would end up in a group such as this in college?

Conclusion: Are there any concluding remarks?