

SHALL THE YOUTH OF ZION FALTER?

MORMON YOUTH AND SEX

A TWO-CITY COMPARISON

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This brief note summarizes findings from two surveys taken among Mormons during 1967-1969, one in Salt Lake City and one in "Coastal City," northern California.¹ Among the questions asked was the following:

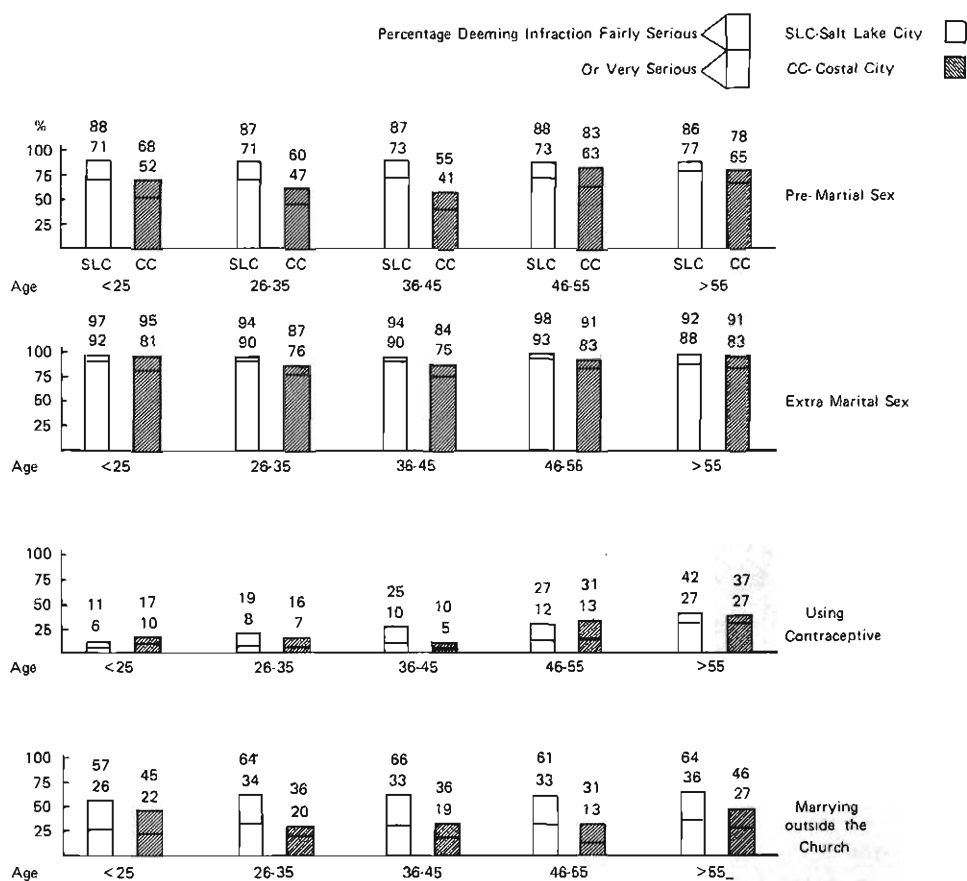
Most of us probably feel that failure to live up to the Lord's commandments will have an adverse effect on our standing in His eyes, but that weakness in some commandments might be more serious than weakness in others. By circling the appropriate numbers below, please indicate how serious you believe each of the following to be.

Then followed a list of twenty-two "infractions" of various kinds, including items related to sexual conduct, the Word of Wisdom, Sabbath observance, and many other practices. For each item, the respondent could circle one of five numbers, from "very serious," "fairly serious," to "not very serious," "scarcely matters at all," and "can't decide." Four of the items related to sex and marriage: pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, the use of contraceptives, and marrying outside of the Church.²

Figure 1 summarizes the responses from the two surveys:

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FIGURE 1

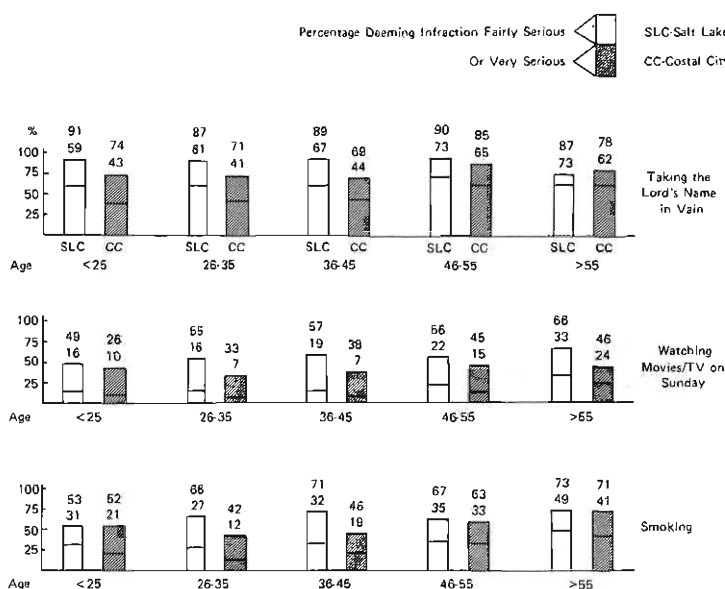


Among the four sex/marriage related items there is a noteworthy difference by age *only* for the belief about contraceptives. Those 25 years old or younger were less inclined to condemn contraceptives, particularly as compared to those over age 55. With the average total disapproval percentage for all ages on the contraception question being less than 30% in both the Salt Lake City and Coastal City surveys, it is difficult to conclude that even on this issue the younger people are running against a very clear consensus. For the other three items (pre-marital and extra-marital sex, and marrying outside the Church), the strong convergence of both youthful and older age groups seems to suggest indeed that "No!" The youth of Zion are not faltering.

It is striking to compare the responses in Salt Lake City where the Saints are considered the "establishment," and the Coastal City, where they are a minority.³ Levels of disapproval are similar *only* for extra-marital sex (94% vs 89%). For the rest of the "infractions," the Saints in the two cities are 20 percentage points or more apart. The "youth," 25 years old or younger, for the two cities are actually somewhat more similar than are the two total samples.

For comparative purposes, some non-marriage/sex related items are included in Figure 2:

FIGURE 2



We find again that the young people compare "favorably" with the older age groups—if not matching them quite so closely as on the sex/marriage items. One does wonder at the priorities which rank swearing in about the same way as pre-marital sex, and close even to extra-marital sex!

I remain far more impressed by the *conforming* tendencies in our youth (at least at the verbal level) than by their "faltering" tendencies. I think I shall hereafter be singing my "No!" a tiny bit louder when we sing "Shall the Youth of Zion . . .?"

NOTES

¹Approximately a thousand useable questionnaires comprise the Salt Lake City sample and nearly 300 the California sample. For more methodological detail see text and footnotes in my "Moderation in All Things: Political and Social Outlooks of Modern Urban Mormons," *Dialogue* (Spring, 1972); and "Saints, Cities, and Secularism: Religious Attitudes and Behavior of Modern Urban Mormons," *Dialogue* (Summer 1972).

²In the actual questionnaire, these were worded, respectively, as "having sex relations before marriage," "having sex relations after marriage with someone other than spouse," "using artificial birth control measures," and "marrying someone who is not LDS."

³Much more caution is required in relying on (and interpreting) the data from "Coastal City," because they are based on much smaller age sub-samples (none even as large as 80).