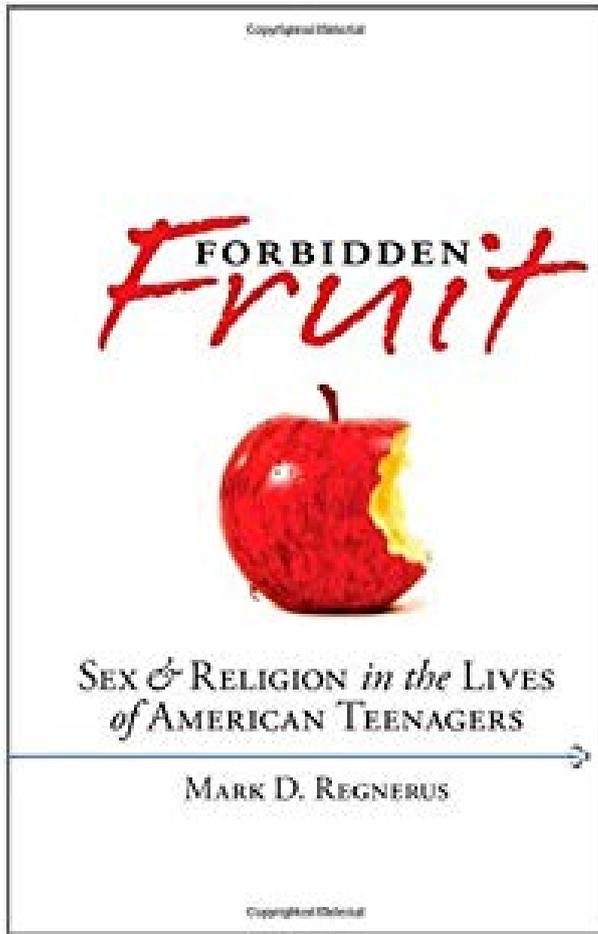


# Forbidden Fruit: Sex & Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers



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As is evident from contemporary debates about sex education, Americans remain deeply ambivalent about teenage sexuality. While many presume that such reticence is rooted in religion, how exactly religion contributes to the formation of teenagers sexual values and behaviors has been poorly understood before now. What difference, if any, does religion make in adolescents' sexual attitudes and behaviors? Are abstinence pledges effective? Is there evidence for a technical virginity phenomenon among religious teenagers? What does it mean to be emotionally ready for sex? Who expresses regrets about their sexual activity and why? Tackling these and other questions, *Forbidden Fruit* tells the definitive story of the sexual values and practices of American teenagers, paying particular attention to how participating in organized religion shapes sexual decision-making.

Merging analyses of three national surveys with stories from interviews with over 250 teenagers across America, *Forbidden Fruit* reviews how young people learn about sexual activity from their parents, schools, peers and other sources. It examines what experiences teens profess to have had, and how they make sense of these experiences in light of their own identities as religious, moral, and/or responsible persons. Religion can

and does matter, Mark D. Regnerus finds, but religious claims battle with other compelling sexual scripts.

Particularly interesting is the emergence of what Regnerus terms a middle class sexual norm of "everything but intercourse," which has taken hold not because of a desire for "technical virginity," but to avoid risks associated with pregnancy and STDs that can negatively affect one's future. Another striking finding is that evangelical teens aren't active sexually than their non-evangelical counterparts; they just tend to feel guiltier about it. Perhaps most significant, consonant with Christian Smith's disturbing findings about teenage ignoranc