

ATTITUDES ABOUT SEX OUTSIDE OF MARRIAGE

Participants of the “Sex & Unexpected Pregnancies: What Evangelical Millennials Think & Practices” were asked to agree or disagree with several statements about sex outside of marriage. Responses from evangelicals ages 18-29 tended to vary between those married and unmarried, and those who are having or have had sex outside of marriage and those who have not.

Only 12 percent of all evangelical Millennials agreed strongly with the statement, “Having sex outside of marriage is morally acceptable for an unmarried person,” with another 11 percent agreeing somewhat with the statements. Sixteen percent disagreed somewhat, while the majority (61 percent) disagreed strongly with the statement.

Among people who were unmarried and had been sexually active in the past three months, just 19 percent felt strongly that their behavior is morally acceptable. Fifty-five percent said it is not morally acceptable, including 29 percent who felt strongly about this. Of those who were previously sexually active but not within the last three months, 47 percent felt strongly that sex outside of marriage is not morally acceptable, and 73 percent of those who have never been sexually active felt strongly about this.

“Having sex outside of marriage is morally acceptable for an unmarried person.”				
	Agree strongly	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree strongly
All respondents	12%	11%	16%	61%
Married	11%	7%	15%	67%
Unmarried	13%	13%	17%	57%
>> Recently sexually active	19%	26%	26%	29%
>> Previously sexually active	12%	12%	29%	47%
>> Never sexually active	11%	7%	9%	73%

Qualifying the sexual relationship by asserting that the “two people are in a relationship and committed to each other” does not change the morality of sex outside of marriage for most people.

“Having sex outside of marriage is morally acceptable as long as the two people are in a relationship and committed to each other.”				
	Agree strongly	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree strongly
All respondents	9%	11%	16%	64%
Married	3%	7%	16%	74%
Unmarried	12%	14%	17%	58%
>> Recently sexually active	29%	28%	21%	22%
>> Previously sexually active	14%	19%	21%	46%
>> Never sexually active	3%	5%	13%	78%

Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Most respondents (87 percent) agreed strongly that the church they attend teaches that having sex outside of marriage is wrong, and most of the rest (10 percent) agreed somewhat with this statement. Even among those who were sexually active in the past three months, 95 percent agreed that this is what their church teaches.

“My church teaches that having sex outside of marriage is wrong for an unmarried person.”				
	Agree strongly	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree strongly
All respondents	87%	10%	2%	2%
Married	90%	6%	1%	3%
Unmarried	85%	11%	2%	1%
>> Recently sexually active	76%	19%	3%	2%
>> Previously sexually active	82%	12%	6%	--
>> Never sexually active	90%	8%	--	2%

Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Only 11 percent believed strongly that abstinence is not realistic in today’s world, although an additional 22 percent agreed somewhat with this perspective. Among people who had recently been sexually active, only 23 percent felt strongly that abstinence is unrealistic. Forty-six percent disagreed that abstinence is unrealistic, even though personally they were having sex. At the same time, 22 percent agreed that abstinence is not realistic, even though they had been abstinent so far.

“Abstinence is just not realistic for most unmarried adults in today’s world.”				
	Agree strongly	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree strongly
All respondents	11%	22%	22%	45%
Married	7%	21%	19%	53%
Unmarried	13%	22%	24%	40%
>> Recently sexually active	23%	32%	28%	18%
>> Previously sexually active	20%	29%	29%	22%
>> Never sexually active	6%	16%	21%	57%

Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Two questions were asked only of unmarried people. Eleven percent of all unmarried evangelical Millennials agreed strongly that, “I would like to remain abstinent, but I just can’t seem to do it.” Another 17 percent agreed somewhat with this, while 18 percent disagreed somewhat, and 54 percent disagreed strongly.

“I would like to remain abstinent, but I just can’t seem to do it.”				
	Agree strongly	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree strongly
Unmarried	11%	17%	18%	54%
>> Recently sexually active	30%	23%	24%	23%
>> Previously sexually active	12%	35%	25%	28%
>> Never sexually active	3%	7%	13%	77%

Six out of 10 unmarried evangelical Millennials agreed strongly that they are committed to not having sex until they are married. Among people who had never been sexually active, 87 percent were strongly committed to remaining abstinent. This was true for only 36 percent of those who had been sexually active in the past but not in the last three months.

“I am committed to not having sex until I am married.”				
	Agree strongly	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree strongly
Unmarried	59%	16%	14%	12%
>> Recently sexually active	15%	22%	30%	34%
>> Previously sexually active	36%	27%	24%	14%
>> Never sexually active	87%	9%	3%	1%

Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

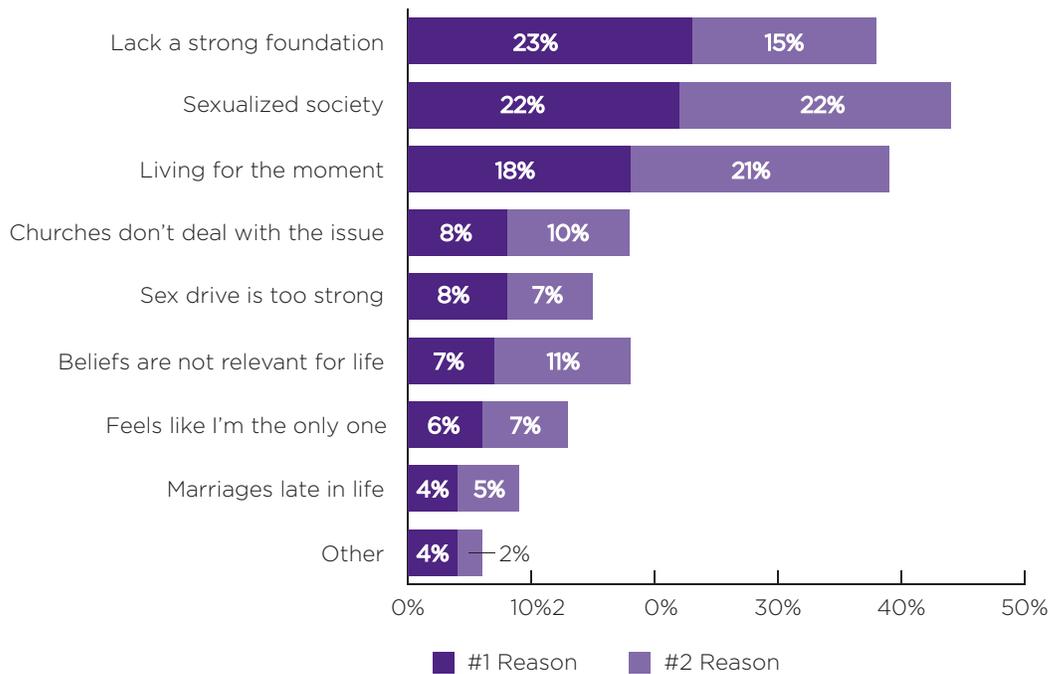
Unmarried evangelical Millennials who had been sexually active in the past were also asked how strongly they agreed with the statement, “I regret my sexual activity.” Forty-two percent expressed strong regret about that activity. Another 28 percent somewhat regretted their sexual activity, while 15 percent somewhat did not regret it, and 15 percent strongly did not regret it. Regret was more common among people who had been sexually active more than three months ago.

“I regret my sexual activity.”				
	Agree strongly	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree strongly
Unmarried	42%	28%	15%	15%
>> Recently sexually active	36%	27%	18%	19%
>> Previously sexually active	49%	30%	12%	10%

Some young, unmarried Christian adults say they believe sexual activity outside marriage is morally wrong, yet they are still sexually active. Respondents were given eight possible reasons for this and were asked which were the top two that explained why some Christians have sex even though they feel it is wrong. Respondents were divided. Out of the eight options, not one was considered a top two reason by even half of all evangelical Millennials.

Top reasons unmarried Christians have sex

Among evangelical Millennials



Grey Matter Research conducted this national demographically representative online survey of 1,007 evangelical adults ages 18-29 in May 2012. Evangelicals were identified by Protestant church attendance of at least once a month, believing that they will go to heaven when they die because they have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior, and strongly agreeing that the Bible is the written word of God and is accurate in all that it teaches, that their personal commitment to Jesus Christ is still important to their lives today, that eternal salvation is possible only through Jesus Christ, and that they personally have a responsibility to tell others about their religious beliefs. The poll has an overall margin of error of $\pm 2.9\%$. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.