

Sex on campus: St. Olaf College

by [Jennifer Koenig](#) and [Bruce Benson](#)

This article appears in the [January 25, 2012](#) issue.

There is indeed a dark side to emerging adulthood on campuses, and it does seem to be more problematic for women than men. One professor here polled her students and found that they agreed with sociologist Christian Smith's concerns. But they thought there is even more peer pressure on young men than young women to be sexually active. The pressure on women students is to be good at everything and look good doing it. Young adults live in a culture in which one can ask questions like, "Who am I? What does it mean to be a responsible sexual being? How ought I to live?" and get no meaningful response, no wisdom, no counsel from the world around—just the ubiquitous reply, "Whatever." Since that is what emerging adults typically hear, it is often also what they say.

But this dark side needs to be put in a bigger context or we risk feeding it. While we don't doubt Smith's findings, we don't find them to be as true on our campus as in his sample group of interviewees. The results from the National College Health Assessment back us up on this.

So what's the difference? We think it might be a question of volume. The decibel level of popular culture is always fairly high, but on our campus other voices compete for students' attention—and get it. We have an academic culture that respects both women and men and calls for their best work; most families provide loving support to daughters and sons; and the Christian witness on our campus proclaims a God who honors equally the life, leadership and dignity of women and men. Our students hear and respond to a multitude of redeeming voices. Maybe one of the strongest indications is that most of our students respond to the call for service, taking part in organizations like the Peace Corps, Lutheran Volunteer Corps and church camps and doing volunteer work in our local community. We find students listening for the still small voice.