Introduction

- Research Theme and Question: Religions often proscribe certain forms of sexual occasion and expression. Does participation in these religions increase the intensity of sexual guilt?
- Religious individuals experience more interpersonal guilt than those who are not religious (Albertson and Berry, 2006).

Previous research has shown that there is a relationship between religiosity, sex, and guilt:
- The more frequently individuals attend church, the higher their sex guilt levels (Gunderson and McCary, 1979).
- Religious affiliation predicts moral judgment on sexual situations (Graf, 2016).
- In this investigation, we conducted two studies to examine the relationship between religiosity and sources of religious guilt.

In Study 1, we examined religious affiliation and sexual guilt.
- In Study 2, we examined Roman Catholic’s experience with Catholic guilt and its relationship to religious orthodoxy and sex.

Study 1: Methods

- Participants: 108 undergraduate students (64 female, 39 male, 4 non-binary) were recruited through the Psychology Department’s subject pool website.
- Participants chose religious affiliations in a multi-select question.
- Participants were asked on a 100-point Likert scale to compare their current religiosity to their religiosity when raised.
- Participants were asked to rate the frequency of experiencing religious guilt and detail their source of their guilt.
- If students selected “I am not religious,” they did not respond to religiosity measures and instead were asked about general guilt.
- Measures of religiosity:
  - Search for meaning - Quest Scale (Batson and Schoenrade, 1991)
  - Religious orientation and motivation - Intrinsic / Extrinsic Scale (Gorsuch and McPherson, 1989)
- Measures of belief regarding sexuality
  - Attitudes on permissiveness, birth control, communion and instrumentality - Sexual Attitudes Scale (Hendrick et al., 2006)
  - Sex guilt - Mosher Guilt Inventory (sex subscale) (Mosher, 1966)
  - Negative health, emotions and social responses from hooking up - Negative Impact of Hookups Inventory (Napper et al., 2016)
- Measures of individual traits and dispositions
  - Guilt and shame proneness - TOSCA-3 (Tangey et al., 1989)
  - Overall feelings of self worth - Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)

Study 1: Results

- Because people were allowed multiple religious affiliations for religious guilt, we found they used them to report surprising combinations of religious identities.
- Religious guilt was correlated with sex guilt. (r = 0.33, p<0.0004, see Figure 1)
- Christian participants had the highest levels of sex guilt. (See Figure 2)
- The overall levels of religious guilt were similar regardless of the source of guilt reported.
- Religious affiliation and religious guilt were not correlated with the answers on the Sexual Attitudes Scale.

Study 2: Methods

- Study 2 intentionally oversampled active Roman Catholic students.
- Participants: 59 participants (41 females, 18 males) were recruited through connections with 15 Newman Centers across the country.
- Participants defined Catholic guilt and the sources of their guilt in open ended questions. They expressed frequency of experiencing the guilt on a Likert scale.
- Measures of religiosity:
  - Acceptance of Christian beliefs - Christian Orthodoxy Scale (COS, Fullerton and Hunsberger, 1982)
  - Reported the frequencies in an average month that they participate Roman Catholicism rituals (Mass, Confession, Adoration, Prayer, Bible Study)
  - Received a score of religiosity scale that combined COS score with a summed score of ritual participations.
- Measures of individual traits and dispositions
  - Honesty and humility - HEXACO Personality Inventory (Ashton and Lee, 2009)
  - Guilt and shame proneness - TOSCA-3 (Tangey et al., 1989)
  - Overall feelings of self worth - Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)

Study 2: Results

- Religiosity scores of this group were as expected clustered at the high end of the scale (possible range 20-34). 49/59 participants completed the COS. Of these, 29 participants (59%) scored 30 or above.
- 77% participants reported some degree of Catholic guilt. Of those, 16 included sex as a source of that guilt (42%).
- The religiosity of the 16 participants did not differ significantly from those who reported no sexual guilt or no Catholic guilt.

Discussion and Conclusions

- In a general student population, religiosity is a moderate predictor of sexual guilt.
- In a completely Roman Catholic population, sexual guilt did not correlate with degree of religiosity.
- In both populations, reports of sex as a source of guilt did not correlate with levels of religious guilt.
- Due to the Catholic sample being comprised of students who are very active in their respective Newman Centers, there was a lack of variance in religiosity. It would be beneficial to have a more diverse Catholic sample.
- Future research could investigate whether religious individuals’ relationship statuses predict levels of sex and religious guilt.

References