

# Sources of Religious Guilt

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## 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** (Tangney et al., 1989)
  - Overall feelings of self worth - **Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale** (Rosenberg, 1965)

## Study 1: Results

- Because people were allowed multiple alternatives for religious affiliation, we found they used them to report surprising combinations of religious identities.
- Religiosity was correlated with sex guilt. ( $r = 0.33$ ,  $p = .0004$ , 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 religiosity were not correlated with the answers on the Sexual Attitudes Scale.

## Religious Affiliation of Participants

Current Religious Affiliation	Atheist / Agnostic?		Religion Raised In
	yes	no	
Christian	3	28	53
Jewish	2	8	13
Atheism / Agnosticism	36	0	12
Muslims, Hindus, Buddhist, Miscell.	2	11	13
Not Religious	3	15	17

Figure 1: Scores on the Mosher Inventory (Sex Guilt) and Religiosity

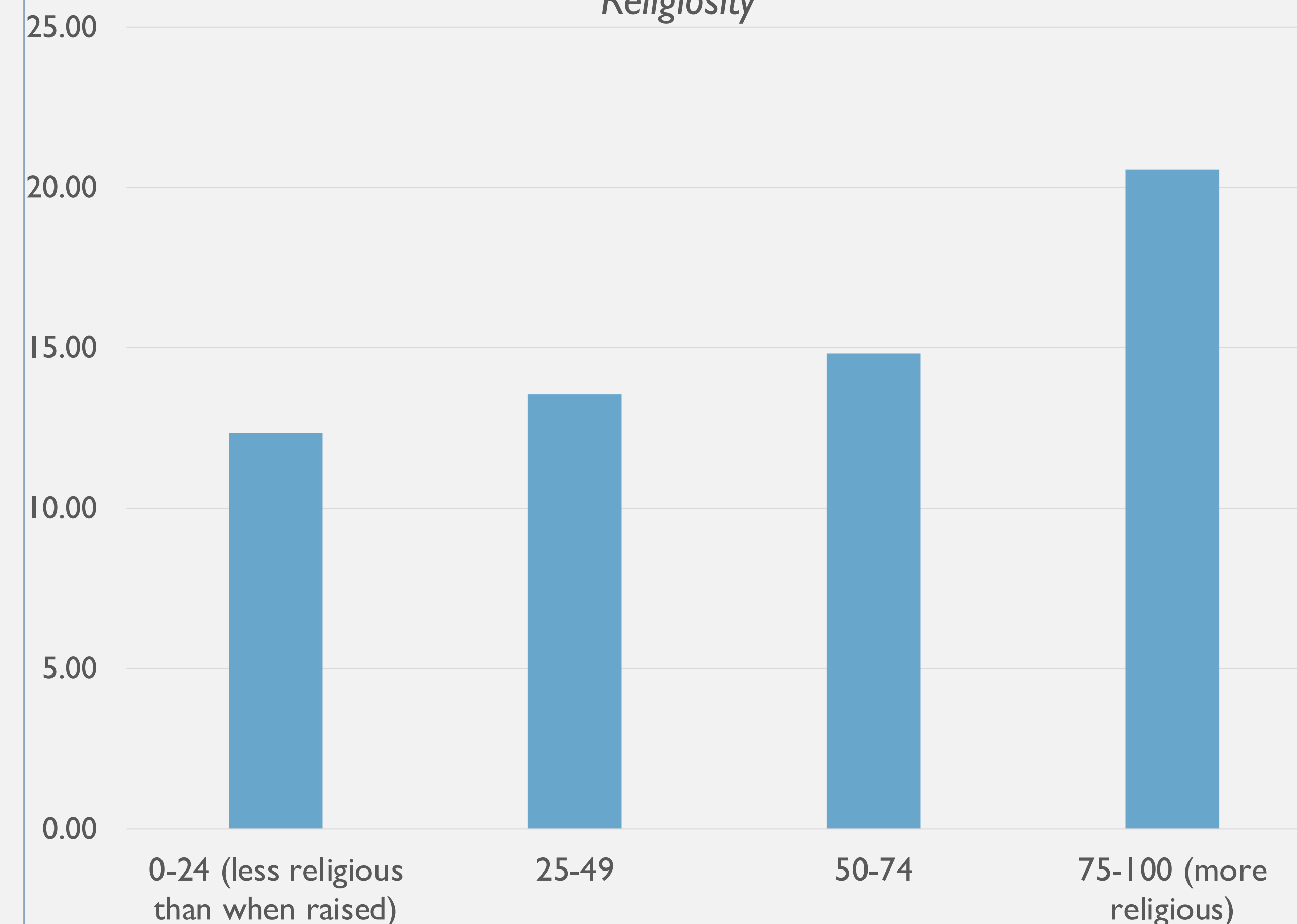
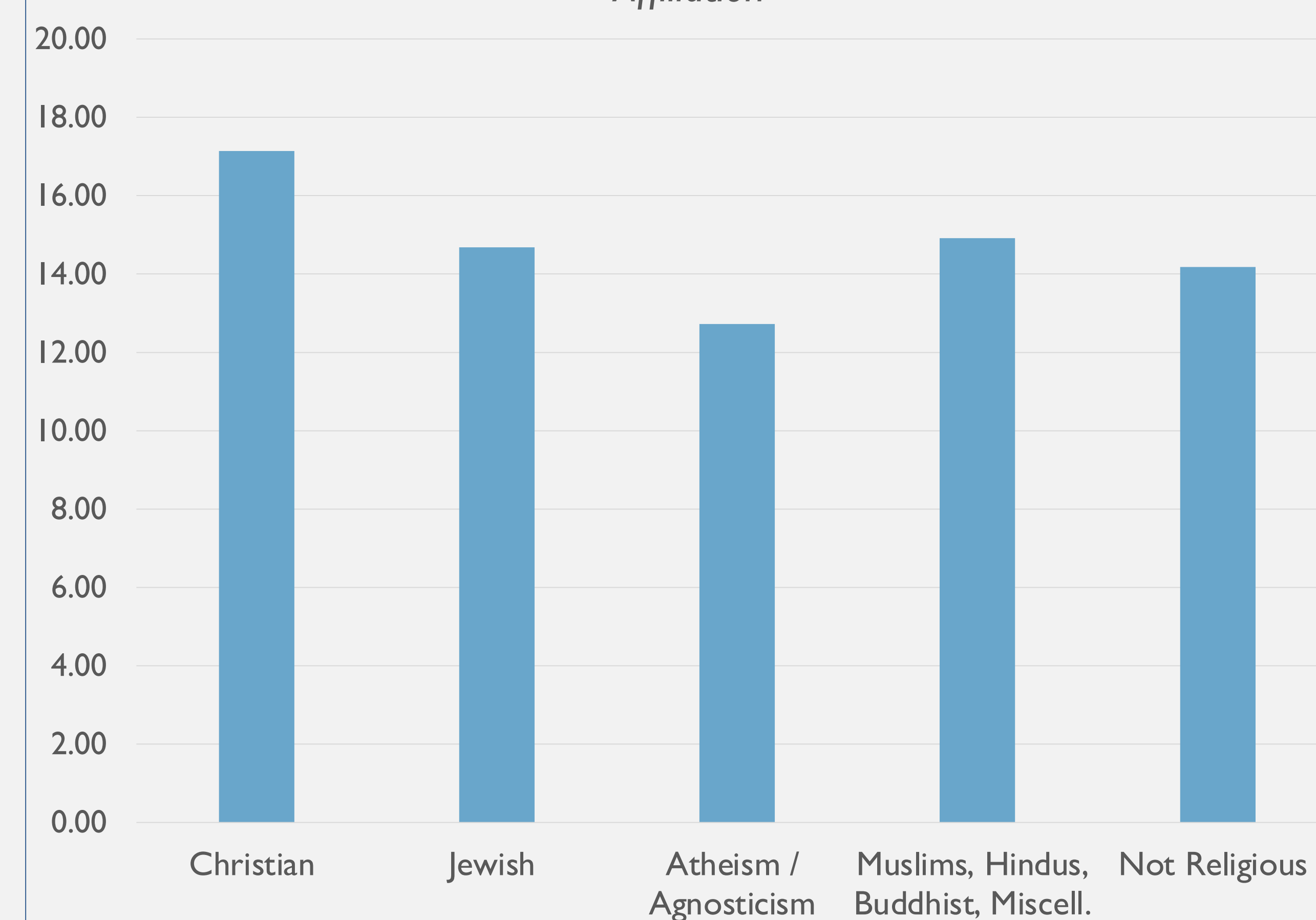


Figure 2: Mosher Inventory Scores (Sex Guilt) and Religious Affiliation



## 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** (Tangney 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 was 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

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