

Religiosity and the Sexual Double Standard

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Abstract: Clear associations exist between religion and the sexual double standard. In this study, the author examined a small liberal arts college with 316 respondents on their self reported answers to being religious, views on men and women's sexual desires, and men and women viewed differently upon their sexual desires. The findings clearly present that there is a positive correlation between religion and the sexual double standard.

I. INTRODUCTION

When a man and woman are sexually comfortable, they are viewed differently – one much more harshly than the other. In this paper, I am going to examine the relationship between religiosity and the sexual double standard. This is an important topic pertaining to today's society because sexual double standard still exists today. Even though we have artists such as Miley Cyrus and Rihanna expressing their sexuality and their level of comfort with sex, there is still a taboo when a woman expresses her sexual desires. For example, when we see Miley Cyrus on stage performing with her provocative outfits and her suggestive song lyrics, men and women label her as a "slut" and "whore". Even in today's society being a woman who is sexually comfortable and has the ability to express that in public is seen as a taboo because she is not *allowed* to be that comfortable. When the controversy began about Miley Cyrus and Robin Thicke's performance of Blurred Lines at the VMAs, many viewers stated that Miley's actions were inappropriate and a poor judgment call, but no one criticized Robin Thicke. The media and the public treated Robin as if he was an innocent victim and he had no say in the performance. When a woman is sexually comfortable and able to display herself on stage, the public asks, "what will our daughters learn?" When a man, such as Robin Thicke, can be as sexually comfortable if not more, no one asks, "what will our sons learn?" As humans we judge quickly and assume a woman's willingness to openly express her sexual desires means she is promiscuous, except when a man does the same thing he is not judged so harshly. This trend is present even among college age students. The research conducted and illustrated within this paper will assist to fill in a gap that is present in literature regarding the correlation between religion and the sexual double standard.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ehermann (1959) defines the sexual double standard as having "one code of conduct for one sex and a different one for the other", and it is used to characterize findings showing less permissive attitudes towards women's sexual behavior than toward the sexual behavior of men. The sexual double standard can be seen in parents when they are raising their children as well. Landor (2011)'s research suggests that there is a double standard for daughters but not for sons when it comes to sexual behavior. Parents find it more acceptable for their sons to have multiple sexual partners and engage in risky sexual behavior, while they do not find it acceptable for their daughters to do the same. Religiosity plays a role in the double standard in that the more religious the parents are, the children are less likely to engage in risky sexual behavior, and high chances of the double standard being applied on the daughter versus the son. As children grow up noticing that their parents accept their son having multiple girlfriends, but does not accept the daughter having multiple boyfriends this double standard this translates into how they view their peers also. A study conducted by Crawford and Popp (2003) in a middle school found that students believed girls should not be sexually explorative or have many boyfriends. This behavior is acceptable for boys, not girls. The same study conducted in an university found that college students saw women who initiated sex were labeled as "bitches", "sluts", and "whores" and even wearing attractive clothing or makeup

would label women as “whores”. As we noticed that if children grow up with the double standard, they will apply it in their daily life as well. After seeing this trend, I questioned what causing the sexual double standard?

One of the causation of the sexual double standard is the gender factor. In a study conducted by Muhlhausen(1999) it states that women are more likely to enforce the double standard than men, and those women who had multiple partners are more accepting of both men and women who had multiple partners. Recently, there is a trend of a hashtag #LiesToldByFemales in which women, as well as men, are the driving factor behind calling women “lose” or “easy”. There is a tweet posted in March that is a picture of a cave, and the tweet is “#LiesToldByFemales I’ve only been with like one guy....” This tweet was posted by a female, and is implying that a woman who has had sex with multiple partners, her vagina would be “looser”. But when I look at this tweet objectively, I asked myself “why would the number of partners matter? The number of partners has no bearing on whether or not the structure or the elasticity of her vagina changes.” This lead me to understand that women are attacking other women for being sexually active. This particular hashtag makes it seem that women, only, lie about their sexual desires and sex lives. This particular hashtag is not only trending on Twitter, but slowly spreading and it is judging women who are comfortable being sexually active to feel poorly about their decisions by making jokes such as the graphic posted by a tweet or other tweets such as: “I’ve only slept with 2 guys” or “I’ve never done this with anyone else”.

Another causation of the sexual double standard is national origin and race. In a study conducted by Brickle (2003), found that self identified Caucasians from USA, Canada, Western Europe and south Africa identify themselves as sexually liberal. Students who identified themselves as Middle Eastern or Asian considered themselves to be the most sexually conservative. The authors of the study that those who were acculturated within the American culture, the women are more likely to have multiple partners and carry condoms less than acculturated women (Brickle 2003). The authors of the study state that race alone does not provide a clear correlation between sexual double standard and race.

Research states that there is a positive correlation between religion and the sexual double standard. Research has shown that attitudes toward the role and status of women are affected by religiosity and that religiosity is strongly associated with traditional sex role attitudes (Baker & Terpstra, 1986). In a different study conducted by Allison and Risman (2013), they found that women who are Buddhist, Jewish, or unaffiliated or other affiliated have decreased odds of losing respect for women. Protestant women have decreased odds of holding a traditional double standard. Fundamental or evangelical Protestants have odds of losing respect for everyone who hook up a lot, versus no one; that is 68% higher than Catholics. The study conducted by Brelsford (2011), found that there is a clear association between religiousness and conservative sexual attitudes. In the study, the authors examined the link between college students’ reports on sexual attitudes coupled with measures of spirituality and religiousness. The results indicated significant links between private religious practices, daily spiritual experiences, and conservative sexual attitudes for all respondents.

Within my research I expect to find that religiosity and the sexual double standard do have a positive correlation. My hypothesis is that religion has an impact on the differences in views of sexual activity and that society views a woman who initiate sex as promiscuous. As research suggests that being religious has an impact on how we view our society and the morals of the society. If the religion is more lenient towards men who are promiscuous or sexually comfortable versus women, then religious humans will react to women as the negative source by calling her derogatory names and demeaning her character while praising the man for his accomplishments.

III. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The participants in this survey were graduate and undergraduate students at a small liberal arts college. Probability sampling was used in surveying all of the students. There are approximately 2,000 students at the college, of which 316 responded. Our response rate was 16%. The survey was open for approximately two weeks and it provided an opportunity for any and all undergraduate and graduate students to participate. All of the questions within the survey was optional and did not require a response in order to successfully complete the survey. The survey included questions ranging from demographic and general information question to personal sexual health and behavior questions. The limitation to the sampling strategy is deception in which people can lie or attempt to cheat the survey, which would skew the data. The advantages of probability sampling are that it can make statistical inferences, provide a representative sample, and has minimal sampling bias. We protected the participants by providing information at the beginning of the survey that provides information about what type of survey it is along and provide reassurance that their answers are completely anonymous. The one ethical issue that I have with the survey is that we are asking questions regarding sexual abuse and assault which is a traumatizing topic as it is to speak about, but even tougher topic to ask someone to reveal their

experiences with. As a part of our survey, though it is a sensitive issue, we have offered crisis line information for those who feel that these questions have caused emotional harm.

The independent variable is religiosity. Each student answered a matrix question, which is “I consider myself to be a religious person” and the answer choices were select: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree or strongly agree. This independent variable provides a confirmation whether or not the student body considers themselves religious and if that religiosity affects their views on the men and women’s sexual activity and behavior.

The dependent variable is the double standard about sexual decisions. The dependent variable seeks to explain whether religion plays a role in whether men and women’s decisions about sex are seen as being prude or promiscuous. There are five matrix questions that are being asked regarding sexual decisions, which are considered to be double standard. An example of the question is, “Men who act upon their sexual desires are considered sexually promiscuous.” Answer choices are strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree. This dependent variable relies on the one independent variable of religiosity. The dependent variables that I will use in my analysis will include the following three questions: “Men and women are viewed differently based on their sexual activity”, “Men who act upon their sexual desires are considered sexually promiscuous” and “Women who act upon their sexual desires are considered sexually promiscuous.” These dependent variables will also allow me to investigate whether or not there is a link between religion and whether or not the student body views men and women’s sexual activity separately or the same.

IV. FINDINGS

There are four variables that are investigated in this study: religiosity (independent variable) and three dependent variables, which are: men and women are viewed different based on their sexual activity, women who act upon their sexual desires are considered sexually promiscuous, and men who act upon their sexual desires are considered sexually promiscuous.

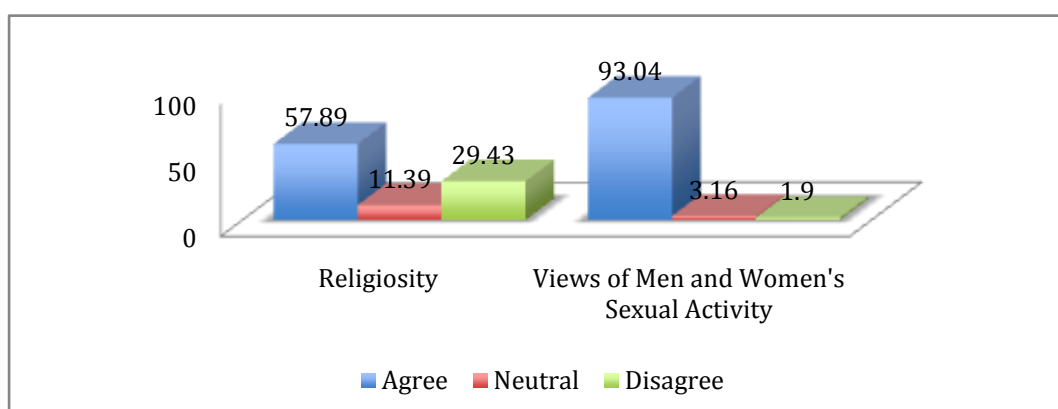
The first independent and dependent variables being analyzed are: religiosity and whether or not men and women are viewed differently based on their sexual activity.

Table 1 - Religiosity and Differences on View of Sexual Activity

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Religiosity	28.78%	29.11%	11.39%	13.29%	16.14%
Men & Women viewed differently based on their sexual activity	65.51%	27.53%	3.16%	1.27%	0.63%

For simple illustration, I have combined agree and strongly agree into one category of agree, and combined disagree and strongly disagree into one category of disagree. Neither agree nor disagree is labeled as Neutral in the graph below.

Figure 1 - Religiosity and Differences on View of Sexual Activity



The second independent and two dependent variables to analyze are religiosity and whether or not religion affects how society views men and women's sexual desires.

Table 2 - Religiosity and Views on Men and Women's Sexual Desires

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Religiosity	28.80%	29.11%	11.39%	13.29%	16.14%
Men who act upon their sexual desires are sexually promiscuous	5.38%	22.47%	18.67%	37.66%	14.24%
Woman who act upon their sexual desires are sexually promiscuous	43.99%	37.97%	8.54%	5.70%	2.21%

For simple illustration, I have combined agree and strongly agree into one category of agree, and combined disagree and strongly disagree into one category of disagree. Neither agree nor disagree is labeled as Neutral in the graph below.

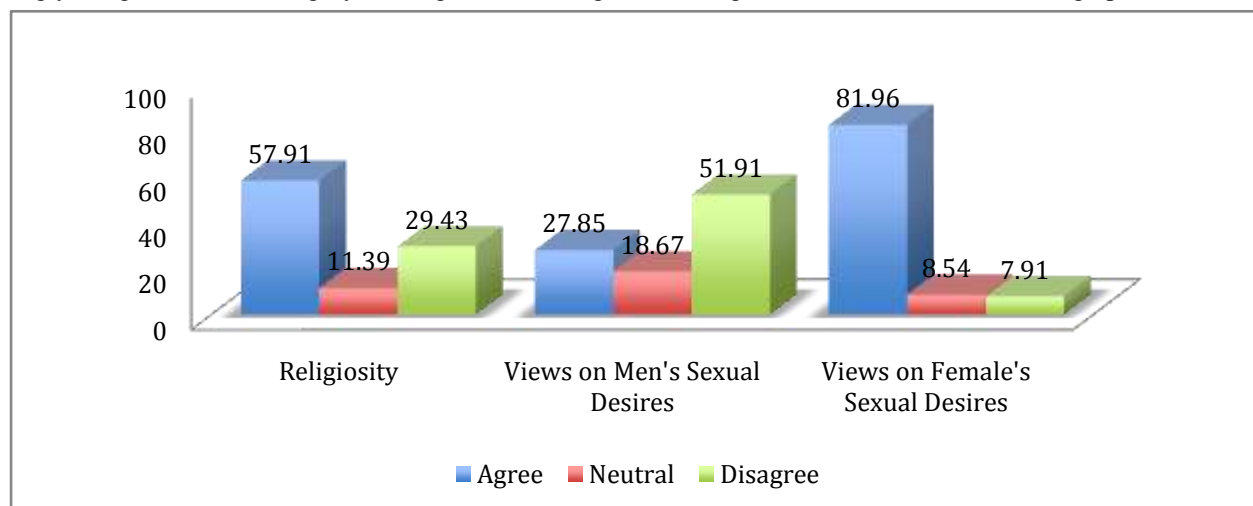


Figure 2 - Religiosity and Views on Men and Women's Sexual Desires

In Figure 1, approximately 58% of the participants self-reported as being religious, and an overwhelmingly 93% of the respondents also stated that there are different views of men's and women's sexual activity. It is important to note that the study is being conducted at a small, liberal arts college, which is predominately religious. Figure 1 illustrates and confirms my hypothesis that religion has an impact on the differences in views of sexual activity. In Figure 2, approximately 92% agree that women who act upon their sexual desires are considered sexually promiscuous, while only 28% agree that men who act upon their sexual desires are considered sexually promiscuous. This also confirms my hypothesis that women who act upon their sexual desires or initiate sex are considered sexually promiscuous, while men are not held up to the same standard. It is more acceptable for men to act upon their sexual desires and to engage in multi-partner sex while not being considered promiscuous, but women are.

V. DISCUSSION

Men and women have been judged differently since the dawn of time. We have punished women who are sexually comfortable with who they are or they are promiscuous by calling them derogatory terms such as, "slut" or "whore". Even in Biblical times there were harsher punishments for women who would lie with another man other than her husband, but polygamy and cheating from the man's end was condoned and even praised. In religion there is an emphasis that is placed in female sexuality and the freedom of female sexuality while it is not placed on male sexuality. This is the prominent reason why we have sexual double standard rooting from religion. We see that there is a sexual double standard in each and every corner of our lives. Whether we watch the media and criticize the way an entertainer is able to express herself. We teach our sons that it is acceptable for him to multiple girlfriends and multiple sexual partners, while for our daughters to express that same sexual freedom is a taboo and unacceptable within society. Religion greatly effects the outlook on the

sexual double standard, because those who consider themselves religious also apply the sexual double standard that men who are sexually active or engage in risky behavior are not promiscuous while women are. My hypothesis was verified in that those who self reported themselves as religious applied the sexual double standard in favor of men.

The data makes sense because those students who self reported themselves as religious typically grew up in a household where parental religiosity was present. A study conducted by Rostosky (2004) found that adolescent religiosity and sexual attitudes and behavior are linked. Thornton and Camburn (1989) found that adolescents hold strong religious beliefs and pray have less permissive attitudes about sex and report less sexual activity. Within several religions, followers are taught not to have sex prior to marriage in order to conserve the body for one human being thus being sexually free by expressing their desires and engaging in premarital sex would be seen as immoral. Religion is as important as culture; it is instilled in a human being since they are able to understand the difference between right and wrong. As humans get older there are certain stereotypes that are implanted in our brain through culture, religion, media, and peers. Religion has an impact on how we view and judge others because religion gives us the basis for our moral belief system. There are several sexual stereotypes that originate from religion and cultural values and these stereotypes manifest itself in certain situations such as a friend who experience teenage pregnancy label her as a “slut” or a woman who is having multiple sexual partners and labeling her as a “whore”. The dependent variables, which are: whether or not men and women are viewed differently based on their sexual behaviors, sexually active women are promiscuous, and sexually active men are promiscuous were dependent upon religion (independent variable) are positively correlated.

Limitation:

There are some limitations to this study. I would have like to have explored whether or not those who self reported as religious participated in on-campus affiliated groups. Another limitation to the study not looking at the religiosity level and the sexually active students and use those two variables as an independent and use sexual double standard as the dependent variable. There are limitations in the sampling strategy that is used in the paper because deception could occur on the ends of the participants by lying on the survey and possibly skewing the data. In an expansion research, it would be beneficial to investigate the correlation between religiosity, self-reported virgins, and the sexual double standard. These variables would show a clear distinction what college students allow themselves to be effected by: whether the decision to have sex or not is influenced by their religion, or whether the religion dictates how their views on men and women are.

VI. CONCLUSION

Within my research I expected to find that religiosity and the sexual double standard do have a positive correlation. My hypothesis is that religion has an impact on the differences in views of sexual activity and that society views a woman who initiate sex as promiscuous was confirmed with my findings. The research conducted and illustrated within this paper will assist to fill in a gap that is present in literature regarding the correlation between religion and the sexual double standard. Sexual double standard has been around for centuries because men and women are simply viewed differently. This presents an equality question: If men and women are suppose to be equal then why view a woman’s sexual choice differently than of a man? Is it because she can get pregnant and he cannot? As a society we have given women the right to vote, the right to earn their seat at the table, and slowly equal pay for the same job – so why is there such a stigma surrounding sex?

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