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# SPIRITUALITY, RELIGIOSITY, SHAME AND GUILT AS PREDICTORS OF SEXUAL ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES

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This study examines the relationship among levels of spirituality, religiosity, shame, and guilt on sexual attitudes and experiences. A convenience sample that included graduate and undergraduate students ( $N = 176$ ; mean age = 37) completed a five-factor measure of personality as well as measures of spirituality, religiosity, shame, guilt, and sexual attitudes and experiences. Spirituality was negatively correlated with sexual permissiveness, and engaging in high risk sex. The moral emotion of shame increased when people had multiple sex partners within the past three months while those more spiritual or connected to God were less likely to have had sex after use of alcohol and/or drugs. Also, the more often someone attended religious services the less likely they were to have had multiple partners within the past three months. A sense of alienation from God predicted shame and guilt, but shame and guilt themselves did not predict sexual practices. These findings suggest that sexual attitudes and experiences are related to both spirituality and religious practices independently of personality, whereas they have no relationship to shame and guilt.

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Religion is frequently viewed as a potent gatekeeper of sexual attitudes and behaviors. Historians and anthropologists have noted evidence from as far back as pre-fifth century BC that religion tends to separate human sexuality by emphasizing a dualistic split between body and spirit (Ogden, 2002; Pagels, 1988). While contemporary religion has attempted to emphasize the connection between spirituality and sexual expression, historically there was a tendency to control sexual expression, particularly outside of marriage

(Greeley, 1991). Religion, particularly Western religion, continues to reinforce the repression of sexual urges and proscribe the utilization of sex solely for pleasure (Leeming, 2003). In this vein, Davidson, Darling, and Norton (1995) felt that people avoid engaging in sexual practices for the sake of sexual pleasure because of the broadly-held religious attitude that sexual desires ought to be repressed. Similarly, McClintock (2001) asserted: "fear of the flesh and denial of sexual impulses have left us with a disembodied theology and a great deal of shame. History reveals the deep chasms that have characterized spirituality and sexuality in Christianity" (p.28).

In addition to this position, religion's function regarding sexuality can also be viewed as a mechanism for helping society and culture regulate a powerful human force that often influences people's ability to live in harmony (Baumeister, 2005). Religion, in this view, becomes just one stratagem that culture uses for the necessary task of inculcating self-control in people who must live together. Rules for sexual self-regulation, therefore, and the attendant emotions arising from breaking those rules (e.g., shame and guilt), are potentially adaptive.

It is clear that understanding religion's role in regulating sexual behavior is complex, and has far-reaching implications. Some roles that religions play in regulating sexual behavior have clear social and cultural benefits (e.g., moral disapproval of rape or child sexual abuse). Other roles, as suggested by the theologians cited above, might lead to psychological fragmentation and emotional distress in the form of excessive shame and guilt.

### *Religion, Spirituality, and Sexuality*

Helminiak (1989) links spirituality to sexuality by defining spirituality as a construct that involves the

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integration of the whole person, a process that naturally includes the individual's sexuality. Helminiak (1998) suggests further that the integration of sexuality and spirituality is nothing other than the integration of the human being. MacKnee (1997) concurs that the relation between sexuality and spirituality offers a vehicle for post-conventional understanding of individual potential and growth, which ultimately leads to more human completeness.

Numerous attempts to empirically support the links among sexuality, spirituality, and religion have demonstrated a connection across cultures. In general, cross-sectional and longitudinal studies have shown that increased levels of self-reported religiosity and spirituality are related to higher rates of premarital abstinence, fewer life time partners, and less frequent intercourse (e.g., Alzate, 1978; Mahoney, 1980; Murray-Swank, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2005; Nicholas & Durrheim, 1995; Paul, Fitzjohn, Eberhart-Phillips, Herbison, & Dickson, 2000; Schultz, Bohrnstedt, Borgatta, & Evans, 1977; Thornton & Camburn, 1989). In addition, researchers have demonstrated a link between greater religious attendance and less frequent premarital sexual activity across diverse cultures (e.g., Cochran & Beeghley, 1991; Davidson et al., 1995; Fox & Young, 1989; Woodroof, 1985; see Koenig, McCullough & Larson, 2001 for a review). In one study of 2,175 females, Davidson and colleagues (1995) found that those respondents who attended church less frequently were more likely to have had sexual intercourse. Women who attended church more frequently were likely to have fewer partners in their lifetime, more likely to view masturbation as a sin, and to utilize sterilization or partner-related methods for contraception. In a national probability sample, Laumann, Gagnon, Michael and Michaels (1994) confirmed that people who reported their religious affiliation as *none* had more sex partners than those who reported a religious affiliation. In a review of the empirical connections among religion, spirituality, and sexuality, Murray-Swank et al. (2005), found 40 studies that supported a link between greater religiousness and less premarital sexuality.

A growing body of literature casts spirituality as a construct distinct from religiosity. Zinnbauer et al. (1997) found religiousness to be associated with higher levels of authoritarianism, religious orthodoxy, intrinsic religiousness, parental religious attendance, self-righteousness, and church attendance. Work based on Allport's (1950) seminal insights

about intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity has focused on spirituality, or the degree to which an individual describes his or her world view in terms of openness to transcendence. Such a self-definition may or may not include public religious expression. Evidence suggests that the religious/spiritual dimensions, while sometimes overlapping, often correlate differentially to psychosocial outcomes thereby yielding more robust information (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Piedmont, Ciarrocchi, Dy-Liacco, Mapa, and Williams, 2003). Others (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, and Saunders, 1988) described spirituality as the experience of and yearning for meaning and purpose as well as *something more* or transcendent. Miller and Thoresen (1999) delineated the difference between religiosity and spirituality by defining spirituality as an attribute of an individual (much like a personality trait) while religiosity is understood as encompassing more of the beliefs, rituals, and practices associated with an institution. Moberg (1990) has defined spirituality as an urge toward wholeness that is a response to human incompleteness. Piedmont (2001; Piedmont, et al. 2003) has empirically defined religiosity as "being concerned with how one's experience of a transcendent being is shaped by, and expressed through, a community or social organization. Spirituality, on the other hand, is most concerned with one's personal relationships to larger, transcendent realities, such as God or the Universe" (p. 2). Piedmont (1999) has also suggested the possibility that spiritual transcendence may actually constitute a sixth factor of personality, in addition to those factors identified in the five-factor model: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness.

Religion and spirituality have been linked, positively and negatively, to a host of outcomes across multiple domains of physical and mental health (e.g., Phillips, Pargament, Lynn & Crossley, 2004). Harrison, Koenig, Hays, Eme-Akwari, and Pargament's (2001) review of empirical research in the area of religious (spiritual) coping found that "religious coping is predicated on two assumptions. First, it assumes that all humans encounter trials and transitions that push them beyond their own capabilities, triggering a dynamic process of coping, which is distinguishable both from the triggering event and from the outcomes of coping. Second, it assumes that in coping the individual is a proactive agent, engaging multiple possibilities and choices, and an *a priori* orienting system" (p.86). How then, do spirituality

and religiosity interact with people's choices about sexual attitudes and practices?

One weakness in previous research linking sexuality and spirituality is its reliance on a narrow range of items for measuring religiosity. These studies typically examined only church attendance, religious affiliation, and level of importance of religion. These indices do not tap the broader dimensions of what traditionally constitutes spirituality and transcendence, especially in relation to sexual attitudes, sexual beliefs and sexual practices. However, there are some notable exceptions. For example, Murray-Swank and colleagues (2005) directly measured people's beliefs about the connection between transcendence and sexuality. In this study, the sanctification of sexual intercourse, or the belief that sexuality is sacred and associated with the divine, predicted increased sexual activity and sexual satisfaction. Horn, Piedmont, Fialkowski, Wicks, and Hunt (2005) provided further evidence that there is a relationship among embodied sexuality, or the integration between one's experience of sexuality and spirituality, added explanatory variance over personality in predicting outcomes related to sexual attitudes, and behaviors. Other researchers have found that personality characteristics correlate with sexual functioning (Costa, Fagan, Piedmont, Ponticas, Wise, 1992). In two different studies, Eysenck (1971, 1972) indicated that one's personality was predictive of one's level of sexual experiences (i.e., age of first sexual encounter was correlated with extraversion). However, these studies did not examine spirituality or religiosity as predictive variables of personality and sexuality.

In summary, prior research has shown that higher self-reported religiosity and greater church attendance are related to a variety of sexual experiences and attitudes including premarital abstinence, having fewer partners, and less frequent intercourse. However, previous definitions of religiosity have been narrow and have not taken into account levels of spirituality. Recent studies have shown the constructs of religiosity and spirituality to be distinct and separate, yet there are few studies that empirically link levels of spirituality with sexual attitudes and experiences.

### *Shame, Guilt, and Sexuality*

Numerous research studies have demonstrated a link among sex guilt, sexual behavior, sexual attitudes, and religiosity (McClintock, 2001; Murray,

2000; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). For example, researchers have found that sex guilt appears to inhibit sex-related behaviors and attitudes in a variety of situations. Sex guilt has been negatively correlated with sexual experiences such as having sexual intercourse, engaging in masturbation (Langston, 1973; Mosher, 1973; Mosher & Cross, 1971; Sack, Keller, Hinkle, 1984), and limiting sexual participation to less intimate forms of sexual expression (Mosher & Cross, 1971). In addition, women high on sex guilt reported less knowledge of birth control (Schwartz, 1973), were less likely to use effective birth control measures (Mosher, 1973), and were less likely to find erotic stimuli arousing (Ray & Walker, 1973). Mosher and Cross (1971) defined sex guilt as a "generalized expectancy for self-mediated punishment for violating or anticipating violating standards for proper sexual conduct" (p.71).

Other researchers have also demonstrated a relationship between sex guilt and religiosity. For example, Ogren (1974) found that sex guilt resulting from early religious training and experiences significantly influenced sexual attitudes and behaviors. Similarly, Gunderson and McCary (1979) reported that men and women with a strong religious interest, who attended church frequently, were significantly less liberal in their sexual attitudes and less sexually active. They also had more sexual guilt than those with weak religious interest and infrequent church attendance. Again, women who had a high level of religiosity also exhibited higher levels of sex guilt (Fox & Young, 1989). In fact, some studies have indicated that sex guilt mediates the relationship between religion and sexual expression. For example, Gunderson and McCary (1979) demonstrated that sex guilt was the primary predictor of sexual behavior and mediated the relationship between religion and sexual behavior. Similarly, sex guilt emerged as a significant mediator between global level of religiousness and spirituality, and engagement in sexual intercourse and other sexual activities in a college student sample (Murray, 2000). Thus, religion may inhibit sexual expression through guilt.

Despite the abundance of research on sexual guilt and sexual behavior, there has been surprisingly little attention devoted to sexual shame. Guilt has often been used synonymously with shame, despite the ample evidence that suggests they are separate constructs. Across multiple domains, guilt and shame manifest distinct patterns of correlations (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Shame is extremely painful; it

involves global negative evaluations of the self (i.e., Who I am.). Guilt, on the other hand, is related more to feeling badly about doing something specifically wrong or condemning a specific behavior (What I did.). McClintock (2001) defines guilt as our conscience telling us we have done something wrong. If we go through the process of rectifying the wrong, then we feel better and our guilt is relieved. With shame, on the other hand, our whole being is at fault. Shame makes us feel condemned to our very core. McClintock goes on to say that this is especially true in sexual shame:

The person who has a one-night stand and begins to feel bad afterward doesn't usually use those feelings to go through a process of confession or forgiveness. What is more often felt is shame, that the behavior destroyed the person's worth or integrity. (p. 38)

Sexual shame is the emotional experience of unworthiness that clusters around events of the past. There is a dearth of empirical studies that examine differences between these constructs in relation to sexuality.

Most early work in the psychology of religion emphasized various status or categorical variables. These included items such as attendance at religious services or membership status in a particular religious denomination. Results using these measures were mixed. In some cases, they predicted attitudes and behavior, but in other instances they did not. For example, no relationship was found between religious denomination identification and the variables of shame or guilt (Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

It is important to distinguish the linkages among the variables of shame, guilt, religiosity, spirituality, sexual behavior, and sexual attitudes. Just as shame and guilt can be for good or woe, it may be that the link between breaking sexual religious norms and the attendant emotions of shame and guilt may also be for good or woe. If guilt has a positive moral dimension (Tangney & Dearing, 2002), then it is plausible that guilt feelings related to sexual misbehavior play a positive role in helping society regulate the potentially damaging aspects of total license of human sexual expression. At the same time, it is equally plausible that certain religious beliefs and feelings could result in stifling people's sexual expression to the point that they incur significant emotional distress. Tangney & Dearing (2002) looked at moral emotions and moral behaviors and found that, overall, self-reported moral behaviors were substantially positively correlated with prone-

ness to guilt but unrelated to proneness to shame. Guilt, but not shame, helps people to choose the "moral paths" in life. In their work they also noted that, "people's religious background was relatively unimportant in determining a person's propensity to experience shame and guilt" (p.9). Their definition, however, of religious background is unclear. They also did not specifically examine sexuality.

Overall, there are strong empirical connections among sex guilt, sexual attitudes and experiences, and religiosity. Higher levels of sex guilt are associated with less liberal sexual attitudes and experiences and increased levels of religiosity are associated with higher levels of sex guilt. Despite research in this area, there has been relatively little research investigating sexual shame in relation to levels of spirituality and sexuality, as well as to sexual attitudes and experiences.

### *Purpose of this Study*

The present study examines the links among multiple dimensions of religion/spirituality, sexual attitudes and behavior, and shame and guilt. Specifically, it investigates the degree to which spiritual and religious dimensions predict shame and guilt and how these variables relate to sexual attitudes and behavior. Finally, it looks at the question of which forms of religion and spirituality are relevant to the links among sexuality, shame, and guilt.

We hypothesized that, consistent with previous research, religious identification would predict sexual attitudes and behavior. We explored whether spirituality would predict these attitudes and behaviors. We also hypothesized that increased religiousness/spirituality would predict sexual shame and guilt. Finally, our design created a stringent test for the predictor variables by controlling for the often-overlooked, but potentially influential, variable of personality.

## **METHOD**

### *Participants*

Participants were recruited from a small Catholic liberal arts college on the east coast (U.S.A.). A total of 176 undergraduates and graduate students completed the surveys. There were 126 women (71.6%) and 50 men (28.4%) with a mean age of 36.7 years (range: 18-80). Ethnic make-up was 68% Caucasian, 18% African American, 6% Asian, 2% Hispanic, 2% Middle Eastern, and 4% Other. Religious affiliations were 46% Protestant, 33% Catholic, 2% Jewish, 11% other religion unspecified, and 8% atheist or agnostic.

### Materials

**State Shame and Guilt Scale (SSGS).** The SSGS was originally developed by Marschall, Sanftner, and Tangney (1994). The SSGS is a self-rating scale of in-the-moment (state) feelings of shame, guilt, and pride experiences. There are 15 items (5 for each of the 3 subscales) and they are rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Alpha reliability in this study was .84 for shame and .83 for guilt.

**Hendrick Sexual Attitude Scale (HSAS).** The HSAS is a 43-item instrument that measures four dimensions of sexuality: The first dimension is permissiveness, which is described as accepting the attitude that engaging in casual, guilt free sex is permissible. The second dimension is sexual practices, which is described as the agreement that one should have responsible, yet nonjudgmental, sex. The third dimension is communion, which reflects attitudes toward sex that focus on sharing and involvement and includes a spirit of idealism within the sexual relationship. The fourth dimension is instrumentality, which presents an attitude/orientation toward sex that is utilitarian and genitally focused. The four subscales have excellent internal consistency. In a study of 807 subjects, the standardized alpha was .94, .71, .80, and .80, respectively (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1987). Alpha reliability in this study was .85 for permissiveness, .80 for sexual practices, .70 for communion, and .83 for instrumentality.

**High Risk Sex Questionnaire (HRSQ).** Participants completed a seven-item questionnaire designed to assess high risk sex practices (e.g., Have you had sex with someone you knew less than 24 hours?, Have you had sex after use of alcohol and drugs?, and Have you had multiple sex partners within the past 3 months?). High risk sexual practices are operationally defined as those sexual practices that are related to an increased probability of untoward or negative health outcomes or consequences. This instrument was constructed for this study as previous searches did not yield an existing instrument that assessed these types of sex practices independent of sexual orientation or medical issues. Alpha reliability for this study was .38.

**Multidimensional Religious/Spiritual Scale.** Consistent with the understanding that religious experience encompasses various dimensions, participants completed relevant subscales of the 40-item Brief Multidimensional Scale of Religion and Spirituality (BMSRS). Developed by a combined working group

from the National Institute on Aging and the Fetzer Institute (Idler et al., 2003) the BMSRS covers eleven domains of religious experience, such as religious affiliation, public and private religious experiences, forgiveness, religious coping, and daily spiritual experiences. In the current study, we used three content areas – spirituality, religiosity, and alienation from God. Spirituality was measured by the Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale, which measures the frequency with which a person reports feeling a sense of closeness to God or spiritual reality. Examples of the items are, *I feel God's presence, I feel a deep inner peace or harmony, and I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation.* Respondents answered these items on a six-point Likert Scale that ranged from *Many times a day*, to *Never or almost never*. Religiosity was measured by two questions: "How often do you go to religious services?," and "Besides religious services, how often do you take part in activities at a place of worship?" Both of these questions were six-point Likert scales from *More than once a week*, to *Never*. Alienation from God was measured by two items: *I feel God is punishing me for my sins or lack of spirituality.* and *I wonder whether God has abandoned me.* Respondents responded to these items on a four-point Likert scale ranging from *A great deal* to *Not at all*. Alpha reliability for this study was .88 for daily spiritual experiences, and .70 for religiosity (no alpha reliability for God Alienation as it is only a two question sub-scale).

**Adjective Checklist.** We measured personality according to the five-factor model, a standardized theory that captures a wide range of individual differences (McCrae & Costa, 1999). The five factors include neuroticism (tendency to experience negative emotion), extraversion (tendency toward sociability and positive experience of emotions), openness to experience (degree to which one is open to different types of experience), agreeableness (tendency to be cooperative and oriented toward others), and conscientiousness (degree to which one sets goals and adheres to responsible behavioral patterns). The 50-item Adjective Checklist (Goldberg, 1999) measured these five factors of personality in the study. This 50-item scale measures responses on a 5-point likert-type scale, from *very inaccurate*, to *very accurate*. Some sample items are: *I am the life of the party*., *I change my mood a lot*., and *I have excellent ideas*. Alpha reliability for this study was .87 for extraversion, .82 for agreeableness, .80 for conscientiousness, .87 for neuroticism, and .74 for openness.

## RESULTS

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for the study variables. Interestingly, shame was positively correlated with guilt. The more one felt disconnected, or alienated from God, the more shame and guilt they also experienced. Also, the personality trait of neuroticism was positively associated with both shame and guilt. Spirituality was negatively correlated with sexual permissiveness, sexual practices (responsible yet nonjudgmental sex), and high risk sex practices. Attendance at religious services was negatively correlated with sexual practices, sexual permissiveness, instrumentality, and high risk sex practices. Not surprisingly, there was a positive correlation between sexual permissiveness and engaging in high risk sexual behavior.

### *Spirituality Predicting Shame and Guilt*

To determine whether spirituality contributed unique variance to the variables of shame and guilt over and above personality, a series of hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted. Each facet of shame and guilt constituted the criterion in separate regression models. The advantage of multiple regression is that it simultaneously controls for the variance of the other correlated variables to determine whether the main variable remains significant and measures any additional (incremental) variance over and above any mediation effect. Thus, multiple regression analysis concurrently controls for overlap and determines the unique contribution of any variable of interest. For both shame and guilt, personality was entered on step one, followed by a separate analysis on step two for spirituality, religious attendance, and spiritual alienation.

Table 2 indicates that, as expected, personality explained a significant portion of the variance for shame (17%) and for guilt (14%). However, God Alienation accounted for 8% additional variance above personality, and God Alienation accounted for a modest 4% additional variance above personality.

### *Spirituality, Shame, and Guilt Predicting Sexual Attitudes and Experiences*

To determine whether spirituality, and shame and guilt contributed unique variance and added value to the sexuality variables over personality, a second series of multiple regressions was performed. The variables

of personality were entered on step one, and on step two, spirituality, religiosity, alienation from God, shame, and guilt were entered in separate analysis as predictors of sexual attitudes and experiences.

Table 3 indicates that one's spiritual experience explained a significant portion of variance for engaging in high risk sex, when controlling for personality. The more spiritual people reported themselves to be, the less likely they were to accept the sexual attitude of permissiveness. Likewise, the more religious they reported themselves to be, the less likely they were to have the attitude of sexual permissiveness. When examining the variable of sexual practice which is described as accepting responsible but non-judgmental sex, one's spirituality and religiosity again was extremely predictive. Those scoring higher on spirituality were less likely to have responsible, yet non-judgmental sex. Likewise, the greater one's religious participation, the less likely one was to have responsible, non-judgmental sex. The variable of instrumentality is described as manipulative, biological sex. Spirituality was not predictive of instrumentality; however, both religiosity and God-alienation were predictive. Greater religiousness predicted decreased likelihood of espousing acceptance of the attitude of instrumentality. Being more alienated from or less connected to God also predicted decreased acceptance of manipulative, biological sex. None of the spirituality or religiosity variables predicted communion, which is described as idealized sex. Personality, however, did predict the attitude of communion. In conclusion, both spirituality and religious practices similarly predicted the sexual behaviors of permissiveness, responsible, yet non-judgmental sex, and idealized sex. However, the patterns of spirituality and religious practices predicted differently for manipulative and biological sex and high risk sex.

As Table 4 indicates, an inspection of the beta weights illustrates significant relationships between the predictors and high-risk sexual behavior. The moral emotion of shame increases for people who acknowledged having multiple sex partners within the past three months. However, there was no significance with the moral emotion of guilt. The more spiritual or connected to God people reported themselves to be, the less likely they were to have had sex after use of alcohol and/or drugs. Also, the more often someone attended religious services, the less likely they were to have had multiple partners within the past three months.

**TABLE 1**  
*Intercorrelations Between Study Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1 Neuroticism														
2 Extraversion	.25***													
3 Openness	.04	.22**												
4 Agreeableness	-.14	.13	.26***											
5 Conscientiousness	-.19	.07	.00	.27***										
6 Shame	.39***	-.11	-.08	-.11	-.12									
7 Guilt	.37***	-.04	.06	-.05	-.13	.65***								
8 Spiritual Connectedness	-.17*	-.03	-.11	.24***	.05	-.02	.07							
9 Religious Services	-.12	-.12	-.14	.08	.12	-.08	-.05	.57						
10 God Alienation	.35***	-.13	-.09	-.11	-.32***	.30***	.24***			-.05*				
11 High-Risk Sex	0.01	.19*	.15*	-.05	-.07	0.08	0.08	-.21**	-.16*	0.01				
12 Instrumentality	0.07	-.03	-.30***	-.38***	-.06	0.14	0.01	-.011	-.023**	.21**	0.06			
13 Permissiveness	-.04	0.13	0.09	-.20**	-.09	-.03	-.02	-.43***	-.49***	-.04	.33***	-.27***		
14 Practices	0.02	.18*	.20**	0.11	0.1	-.08	-.07	-.26***	-.30***	-.08	.25**	0.03	-.42***	
15 Communion	-.08	.16*	.17*	.17*	-.04	0.04	0.04	0.14	0.04	0.02	.18*	-.09	-.02	-.19*
Mean	27.12	33.92	37.99	41.64	35.95	6.44	8.28	25.10	19.99	7.09	2.54			
SD	7.53	7.26	5.16	5.71	6.42	2.50	3.59	6.58	7.43	2.74	.80			
Alpha	.87	.87	.74	.82	.80	.84	.84	.88			.38			

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Note.  $N = 176$

Religious Services is a 2-item scale

**TABLE 2**  
*Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Shame and Guilt Controlling for Personality (N = 176).*

		R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	F Change	Beta
Criterion: Shame					
Step	Predictors				
1	Personality	.17	.17	6.79***	
2	God Alienation	.25	.08	18.99***	.31
Criterion: Guilt					
Step	Predictors				
1	Personality	.14	.14	5.73***	
2	God Alienation	.18	.04	7.83***	.21

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

**TABLE 3**  
*Hierarchical Regression Predicting Sex Attitudes Controlling for Personality (N = 176).*

		R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	F Change	Beta
Criterion: Total High-Risk Sex					
Step	Predictors				
1	Personality	.06	.06	2.24*	
2	Spiritual Connectedness	.09	.03	5.47*	-.18*
2	Religious Services	.07	.01	1.92	-.11
2	God Alienation	.06	.00	.00	.01
Criterion: Permissiveness					
Step	Predictors				
1	Personality	.08	.08	3.07**	
2	Spiritual Connectedness	.23	.14	31.44***	-.40***
2	Religious Services	.29	.21	48.75***	-.47***
2	God Alienation	.08	.00	.06	-.02
Criterion: Sexual Practices					
Step	Predictors				
1	Personality	.07	.07	2.61*	
2	Spiritual Connectedness	.13	.06	11.94***	-.26***
2	Religious Services	.15	.07	14.61***	-.28***
2	God Alienation	.08	.01	.92	-.08
Criterion: Instrumentality					
Step	Predictors				
1	Personality	.19	.19	8.08***	
2	Spiritual Connectedness	.19	.00	.39	-.05
2	Religious Services	.24	.05	11.70***	-.24***
2	God Alienation	.22	.02	5.06*	-.17*
Criterion: Communion					
Step	Predictors				
1	Personality	.07	.07	2.49*	
2	Spiritual Connectedness	.08	.01	2.63	.13
2	Religious Services	.07	.00	.57	.06
2	God Alienation	.08	.01	1.18	.09

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$



**TABLE 4**  
*Beta Weights Predicting High-Risk Sexual Behavior Controlling for Personality*

	Sex with Someone Known 24 Hours or Less	Unprotected Sex in the Last 3 Months	Sex After Using Alcohol/Drugs	Unprotected Sex with IV Drug User	Sex with STD	Multiple Partners	Anonymous Sex
Personality	.10	-.09	.06	-.01	.03	-.02	.03
Extroversion	.09	.00	.26***	-.07	-.02	.10	-.08
Openness	.15	.03	.02	.12	.19*	-.02	.24**
Agreeableness	-.09	-.06	.07	-.16	.20*	.01	-.24**
Conscientiousness	-.23**	.14	-.05	-.04	-.03	.00	.04
Neuroticism	.10	.09	-.06	-.01	.03	-.02	.02
<b>MORAL EMOTIONS</b>							
Shame	.11	-.05	.12	-.05	-.10	-.18*	-.08
Guilt	.06	-.03	.08	.01	.02	.09	.01
<b>RELIGIOSITY</b>							
Spiritual Connectedness	.01	-.09	-.19*	-.04	-.01	-.15	-.15
Religious Services	.12	-.04	-.12	-.15	.01	-.17*	-.11
God Alienation	-.01	-.02	.10	-.12	-.03	-.05	-.08

$p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$   
 N = 176

The five personality factors also predicted sexual behaviors and experiences. The more extroverted a person was the more likely he or she was to have had sex after use of alcohol and drugs. The higher the level of a person's openness, the more likely a person was to have had sex with someone they knew had had HIV, and to have engaged in anonymous sex. The personality characteristic of agreeableness was consistent with that of openness when it came to having sex with someone who used IV drugs, yet surprisingly, the more agreeable a person, the less likely he or she was to have engaged in anonymous sex. Not surprisingly, greater conscientiousness predicted decreased probability of having had sex with someone they knew less than 24 hours.

## DISCUSSION

Although there have been notable empirical attempts to support a link between religion and sexuality and more recent attempts to discern spirituality as a separate construct from religiosity in relation to sexuality, our results showed some overlap between these constructs in relation to sexuality. When it came to sexual behavior or experiences, the more spiritual one was, the less likely one was to have had the experience of engaging in sex after the

use of alcohol and drugs. Similarly, the more religious one was the less likely one was to have had multiple partners. Therefore, our results indicate that spirituality and religiosity may act as an important moral compass for spiritually or religiously committed individuals, or an internal locus of control, in relation to sexual experiences. This should not be surprising given the correlation between spirituality and religiosity is .57, suggesting that they are highly correlated, but not redundant.

It is interesting, however, that when one examines the semantics of experiencing high risk sex and attitudes about sex there did seem to be some significant inter-correlations between the two. Our high risk sex instrument measured high-risk sex practices and was experiential, while the Hendrick Sexual Attitude Scale measured one's attitudes toward different sex practices. Those who endorsed engaging in high risk sexual behaviors also endorsed permissive sex as acceptable, believed one should have responsible, yet non-judgmental sex, and believed in idealized sex. In examining attitudes toward sex, there appeared to be great consistency between spirituality and religiosity in predicting sexuality.

The more spiritual and religious, the less likely a person was to accept the attitude that having casual

or carefree sex was acceptable. Past research has shown religiosity to predict how free people feel they are to engage in casual sex. However, our research shows that one's spirituality is also a significant factor or gate-keeper of sexual attitudes and experiences. This is also true for the sexual practices in which one engages. The more spiritual and religious people are, the less likely they were to endorse strong agreement with the use of birth control, with sex education, and with the acceptability of such sexual behaviors as masturbation. Religiosity, and a disconnection or alienation from God, however, was strongly negatively related to viewing sex as utilitarian, genitally focused, and manipulative. One's level of spirituality, however, was not related to this orientation. Alienation from God can also be thought of as a spiritual struggle (Murray-Swank, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2005). If one fears and feels disconnected from God, then one may believe that endorsement of sex as utilitarian is wrong, and that he/she may be punished for it. It is not surprising, then, that God Alienation accounted for a 47% increase, above and beyond personality, in predicting one's level of shame and a 28% increase in predicting one's guilt. If some consider themselves to be spiritual and believe God to be a loving and non-punishing presence in their life, then they may be more comfortable with a *sex for sex's sake* belief. It is interesting to note that neither spirituality nor religiosity predicted the attitude toward sex that focuses on sharing and involvement. This attitude does tend toward idealized sex, however, and it could be that one's spirituality and religiosity are more pragmatic and grounding. Idealized sex could theoretically cause less subjective well-being if the event were to not live up to the expectation. Spirituality and religiosity may, therefore, be protective measures against that kind of idealistic thinking. This study does not confirm past research (Zinnbauer et. al, 1997) on the high overlap between the constructs of spirituality and religious practices. We found only a mild ( $r = .24$ ) relationship between the two. Nevertheless, spirituality and religiosity predicted differentially to some of the above sexuality variables.

This study is the first to employ multiple dimensions of religiousness and spirituality as predictors of sexual attitudes and behavior. A second unique feature of this study is the finding that, on most sexuality variables, spirituality and religiosity have significant added value above personality, thereby accentuating the strength of these relationships. This

is an important finding for spirituality, as it shows that the relative strength of one's faith (not just their religious attendance) is related to how people think and behave in the sexual domain.

Tangney and Dearing (2002) reported that across multiple domains, the correlates of shame are in a direction opposite that of guilt. In contrast, our results show a significant positive correlation between the variables of shame and guilt. It could be that in more religiously committed people there is an overlap in shame and guilt not seen in those with less religious commitment. This would speak to the theological tradition that shame and guilt are not necessarily opposites and that they may co-exist in a spiritually integrated person. This finding may also have been different from Tangney and Dearing's research because we used one of their shame and guilt scales that so far has not often been used empirically. Tangney and Dearing (2002) reported their research findings of the correlates of shame being in an opposite direction of guilt, and therefore cancelling each other out when using the Test Of Self-Conscious Affect (TOSCA).

Interestingly, we discovered that one's alienation, or disconnection, from God strongly predicted both shame and guilt. If, as noted above, alienation from God is a *fear-of-the-Lord* measure, people who did not feel they were living up to the expectations of God might have been more likely to engage in behaviors that they believed were shame-based. Another possible explanation is that those people who are more shame-based and believe they are inherently bad would have higher levels of shame and guilt. Spirituality denotes a sense of forgiveness of the self when mistakes are made and a sense that one can be forgiven, forgive oneself, and move forward. Those who feel alienated, disconnected, and fearful of God may feel more unworthy and more shame over behaviors considered unacceptable.

Prior research (Gunderson & McCary, 1979) found that sexual guilt accounted for much more total variance of sex information, sex attitudes and sexual behavior than did either frequency of church attendance or present religious interest. Our study showed quite different results. There was, in fact, very little relationship in our study between shame and guilt and one's sexual attitudes and experiences. This was surprising, as past research has shown a significant relationship between guilt and sexuality. We hypothesize that this lack of relationship may be due to the lack of sensitivity of the

shame and guilt instrument in identifying specifically sexual shame and sexual guilt. Had we used Mosher's Sexual Guilt Scale (1966) we may have picked up sexual guilt, but we would not have been able to examine sexual shame. Further research on shame, guilt, sexual attitudes and experiences is needed, as is the development of measures that would identify sexual guilt and sexual shame.

There are methodological limitations of the study relating to its correlational, cross-sectional design, as this design does not permit causal inferences. This study also used a sample of convenience and thus the data may reflect this dimension as well. The subjects for this study were recruited from a small liberal arts Catholic college thereby limiting generalizability. Further limitations of this study were not collecting data on sexual orientation and marital status, which could potentially have given us additional rich information on spirituality, religiosity, shame, guilt and sexuality.

This study suggests that there may be great benefit to exploring the implications of spiritual beliefs and practices in terms of their ability to help us understand sexual behavior and attitudes in a culture. Of late, spirituality, faith, and sexuality are topics of increasing interest in research and clinical practice. The current study suggests that statements about shame, guilt, and sexuality need to be analyzed in light of their powerful relationship to personality. To tease out this notion it would be important to look at various dimensions of spiritual experience, particularly including perceived closeness to God and perceived alienation. It is expected, based upon the negative religious coping literature (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998; Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000), that a sense of alienation from God predicts emotional distress (Ciarrocchi & Deneke, 2005). Investigating a broader range of ethnicities and religious affiliations, as well as a broader range of ages would also give more insight into the complexities of these topics.

Spirituality and religious practices seem to be related to sexual attitudes and behaviors. These variables appear to have an inhibitory relationship with certain sexual practices and behaviors. Some of these practices will have different interpretations in a pluralistic society (such as birth-control) but others appear to be related to negative social outcomes (such as high risk sex). Another inhibitory factor of spirituality and religious practices is that it inhibits people from using others sexually as a means to their

own gratification. From these results, there does not appear to be a facilitative relationship between spirituality and sexuality, i.e., it is not related to the attitude of communion in sex which is described as sex that focuses on sharing, involvement and a has an element of idealism. However, these findings may be a function of the instruments used in this study. Instruments that sample attitudes about the sacredness of the body and spirit (Murray-Swank et. al, 2005) might be more comprehensive and identify facilitative aspects of spirituality and sexuality.

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