

Sexual Mores within Religiosity: A Brief Report

Todd Wiebers and Chelsea Garcia
Henderson State University, Arkadelphia, USA

A serendipitous discovery from our previous study spawned this report. Runkel (1998) suggests that Christian enmity of sexuality and asceticism reminiscent of Victorian England contributes to Freudian anxiety via sexual repression, resulting in Manichean dilemmas or “ecclesiogenic neuroses” which may manifest a likelihood of problematic sexual behaviors. Via Gorsuch and McPherson’s (1989) Intrinsic/Extrinsic-Revised scale of religiosity, we identified 60 consenting participants as either Pro Religious, Spiritually Religious, Organized Religious, or Non Religious prior to completing Hudson, Murphy, and Nurius’ (1983) Sexual Attitude Scale (SAS). Non Religious individuals scored significantly more liberal than their counterparts, $F(3, 56) = 7.39, p < .0003$. Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients were respectable. We leave speculation about our results to the erudite reader, but it does appear that professed religious people may be more prone to abnormal sexual problems and the correlations we see in everyday life. Our only purpose is to make a modest contribution to the literature concerning the relationship between religion and sexuality.

Keywords: Freud, religion, sexuality, Victorian England

In his definitive historical review of the relationship between religion and sexuality, Runkel (1998) suggests that Judeo-Christian enmity of sexuality and related asceticism contribute to Freudian anxiety via sexual repression, resulting in Manichean dilemmas or “ecclesiogenic neuroses” which manifest a likelihood of problematic sexual behaviors.

As neophyte religious/sexual psychologists, we discovered Runkel’s (1998) paper while further exploring some intriguing results from our previous experiment on increasing awareness and knowledge relative to possible untoward consequences of premarital sex (Garcia & Wiebers, 2012). We were fortunate to learn about new words, replete with definitions and interpretations. Our purpose is to briefly revisit religious and sexual mores of the Victorian Era, Freud’s sexual revolution, operationally define some most interesting words in a novel clarity, and share our enlightening data as a modest contribution to the literature.

Most scholars agree that the sexual repression associated with Victorian England (1837 to the early 20th century) was replaced with Freud’s (1856-1939) psychoanalytic sexual revolution that came to fruition during the sexual freedom movement of the latter decades of the 20th century (Kern, 2006). Albert (2007) and Long (2009) support such observations of Victorian England, with regard to the correlation between religion and sexuality. Moreover, many suggest Freud’s (1901, 1905, 1907, 1908, 1913, 1927, 1928, 1939, 1940) psychoanalytic approach envisioned and realized a sexual revolution that changed societal thought (e.g., Hothersall, 2004; Stephan, 1996).

Table 1 presents important ideological terms with our operational definitions. Save our unique interpretation of “sexual mores,” the other paraphrases derive from sources inclusive of the Bible (King James Version), Collins English Dictionary (2010), Fisher, Byrne, White, and Kelley (1988), Oxford English Dictionary (2012), Kroger (1969), and Tolley (2010). Such terminology and definitions become self-evident in this report.

Table 1.
Operational Definitions

Word/Term	Definition
Asceticism	Categorical Imperative. Sexual abstinence (religious beliefs).
Ecclesiogenic Neurosis	Problematic sexual behaviors influenced by religious thoughts.
Enmity	Hatred/Hostility to others.
Erotophilia	Sexually Liberal
Erotophobia	Sexually Conservative
Manichaeism	Light or Dark? Heaven or Hell? Sexual behavior and an afterlife.
Sexual Mores	Includes all aspects of sexual attitudes and behaviors.

We administered a battery of published questionnaires in our first study, most importantly the Intrinsic-Revised religiosity subscale of Gorsuch and McPherson’s (1989) revision of Allport and Ross’ (1967) original instrument. Via a median split we identified 54 consenting participants as either low or high in religious beliefs, yielding some interesting results. Intrinsically religious individuals were significantly more likely to exhibit a propensity for sexual problems on Hudson, Murphy, and Nurius’ (1983) Sexual Attitude Scale (SAS) than their counterparts, $F(1, 50) = 10.36, p < .003$. Moreover, a la Fisher, Byrne, White, and Kelley’s (1988) Sexual Opinion Survey (SOS), we discovered a significant negative correlation, with erotophobic (sexually conservative) people scoring higher on the SAS than erotophilic

We presented portions of this study at the 58th annual meeting of the *Southwestern Psychological Association* in Oklahoma City, OK and graciously received funding from the HSU Undergraduate Research Program.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Todd Wiebers at 1100 Henderson Street, Arkadelphia, AR 71999, USA. Email: wiebert@hsu.edu

(sexually liberal) individuals, $r(54) = -.63$, $p < .001$. Cronbach's reliability coefficients were .74, .88, and .93, respectively.

After reviewing our data and significant literature in the psychology of religion (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009; Wulff, 1991), we elected to conduct an additional study. Thus, we administered the entire Gorsuch and McPherson (1989) scale, identifying new participants as High Extrinsic/High Intrinsic (HEHI, Pro Religious), Low Extrinsic/High Intrinsic (LEHI, Spiritually Religious), High Extrinsic/Low Intrinsic (HELI, Organized Religious), or Low Extrinsic/Low Intrinsic (LELI, Non Religious) prior to completing the SAS.

Our operational definitions identify individuals as follows: HEHI persons embrace religious/societal mores and values for promoting personal spiritual and worldly benefits, LEHI folks are primarily interested in spiritual salvation, HELI inclined people use religion for materialistic benefits, and LELI orientations suggest agnostic, apathetic, or atheistic perspectives. Herein, our purpose is to present scientific data sans judgmental stereotypes. We trust our audience will appreciate this approach amicably.

Method

Participants

After receiving certification from the National Institutes of Health and approval from our Institutional Review Board as required by the American Psychological Association's (2002; 2010) code of ethical conduct for eliciting human subjects, sixty consenting undergraduate college students from a predominately Judeo-Christian (Bible-based) community willingly participated. Via median splits using Gorsuch and McPherson's (1989) Intrinsic/Extrinsic-Revised (I/E-R) scale of religiosity, we identified them as follows: High Extrinsic/High Intrinsic (HEHI, Pro Religious, $n = 13$), Low Extrinsic/High Intrinsic (LEHI, Spiritually Religious, $n = 18$), High Extrinsic/Low Intrinsic (HELI, Organized Religious, $n = 16$), or Low Extrinsic/Low Intrinsic (LELI, Non Religious, $n = 13$).

Instruments

Intrinsic/Extrinsic-Revised (I/E-R). Gorsuch and McPherson's (1989) Intrinsic/Extrinsic-Revised (I/E-R) scale of religiosity entails two subscales: eight intrinsic and six extrinsic items, with higher scores indicating higher self-reports of religiosity (composite scores range from 8 to 40, and 6 to 30, respectively). Some experts (e.g., Hood, 1978; Williamson & Assadi, 2005) refer to this instrument as a reliable and valid revision of Allport and Ross' (1967) Religious Orientation Scale (ROS). While Kirkpatrick and Hood (1990) caution the use of median splits on these two dimensions, others have done so to obtain four categories of religious orientation (labels differ, but statistics are the same) relevant to their respective research (Hood, 1978; Williamson & Assadi, 2005). As mentioned, we used this methodology to operationally define/identify participants as HEHI, LEHI, HELI, and LELI via collegial discussions with experts about the current psychology of religion literature.

Sexual Attitude Scale (SAS). Hudson, Murphy, and Nurius (1983) developed this widely employed instrument to essentially measure "human sexual expression," providing a continuum of liberal-conservative sexual orientation, or in our interpretation, degree of sexuocuity and the relationship with problematic sexual

attitudes and/or behaviors. As mentioned in the introduction, our previous experiment revealed a rather significant negative correlation with the SAS as a bivariate predictor of Fisher, Byrne, White, and Kelley's (1988) Sexual Opinion Survey, with erotophobic (sexually conservative) people scoring higher on the SAS than erotophilic (sexually liberal) individuals, $r(54) = -.63$, $p < .001$, suggestive of statistical validity.

In our initial study, we created a slightly revised version of the SAS (Hudson, Murphy, & Nurius, 1983) with excellent reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .877$), and to remain consistent, we continued with this instrument in the current study. Our 22 item questionnaire removed three questions (items 5, 14, and 20) due to ageism and disability ethical concerns, still yielding composite scores of 0-100, with higher scores indicative of sexual conservatism and possible problems.

Procedure

After signing anonymous informed consent statements unpaired with their responses, students completed Gorsuch and McPherson's (1989) Intrinsic/Extrinsic-Revised (I/E-R) scale of religiosity and our established revision of Hudson, Murphy, and Nurius' (1983) SAS. All students willingly consented, behaved most professionally, and did not know that there was any possible incentive. However, we did provide them with candy during our debriefing process.

Results

Median Split Approach

A short review of the median split approach and resultant typologies is important in understanding our results. Typologies frequently appear in a myriad of behavioral and social science research, often utilizing median split methodologies (e.g., Baumeister, 1990; Bem, 1974; Bonaccich, Grusky, & Peyrot, 1985; Herek, 1987; Hood, 1978; Lubinski, Tellegen, & Butcher, 1983; Shahnaz, Wuensch, & Brandon, 2010; Spence & Robbins, 1992; Vuuren, Jong, & Seydel, 2008; Williamson & Assadi, 2005), as well as dichotomizations in zoological theory (e.g., Breland & Breland, 1966; Colinviaux, 1973; Dugatkin, 2009).

When his abbot found out Gregor Mendel (1822-1884) was working with animals, he was forced to turn to plants because they do not have "sex!" When one classifies a continuous variable into discrete categories, problems arise as to what we call intermediate or "fuzzy sets" at the designated boundaries. Of course, extreme measures analyses eliminating the middle third of a distribution may adversely skew findings by including outliers. Yet the famed geneticist and ANOVA statistician, Sir Ronald Fisher (1890-1962), estimated the probability of Mendel's findings as less than one in 30,000 (see Dunbar, 1984; Root-Bernstein, 1983). Of course, we now know Mendelian genetics are true in the real world. Other animal behavior examples include Tryon's classic maze bright/maze dull classic rat studies (Barnett, 1981; Wiebers, 1992).

Numerous authors have criticized the use of median splits because of curvilinear relationships, dichotomizing continuous variables, inter item variance, Type I and Type II errors, spurious findings, statistical power, and "moderated" multiple regression as superior to ANOVA (e.g., Aiken, West, & Reno, 1991; Bissonnette, Ickes, Bernstein, & Knowles, 1990; Irwin & McClelland, 2003; Kang & Waller, 2005; MacCallum, Zhang, Preacher, & Rucker,

2002; Maxwell & Delaney, 1993). With all due respect, these folks are essentially challenging the significance of many meaningful studies in the historical and recent literature.

Others such as Donahue (1985a; 1985b) and Kirkpatrick and Hood (1990) tend to be more open minded to the use of a “fourfold typology” in the study of religion, especially if these categorical variables are employed as bivariate predictors of criterion variables that are not necessarily religious in nature. In fact, they suggest that further research is necessary to establish the usefulness of this typology spawned by the original works of Allport and Ross (1967) and Gorsuch and McPherson’s (1989) revised scale. Curiously, well-established religious journals have no concerns publishing such research if the scientific methodology is of justifiable integrity.

We remain somewhat perplexed as to why some choose to focus on statistical procedures rather than the substance of our findings; thus we are compelled to address the median split approach. We propose that the fourfold religion typology is of scientific merit, our high reliability coefficients control for inter item variance and Type I error, our highly significant correlations address the continuous variable concerns (though the informed statistician will realize that many widely used scales are inherently ordinal anyway), and finally that the true scientist will agree that clear cut (not marginal) significant effects negate the median split controversy.

Such narrative may best be saved for discussion in most cases, but we believe this preliminary dialogue is a necessity for the justification and presentation of our results.

Our Data

Our statistical delineations of our four identified groups are consistent with national norms (e.g., Kosmin & Keysar, 2008), with approximately one quarter of participants suggesting a Non-Religious orientation (LELI). In our earlier study, we found such factors as Gender to be extremely *ns*, all $p > .60$, and our intention was to focus specifically on our version of the SAS and the I/E-R (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989). Thus, after accurate scoring, we conducted an ANOVA to explore how our four religious groups scored on the SAS, yielding a highly significant main effect for Religiosity, $F(3, 56) = 7.39, p < .0003$.

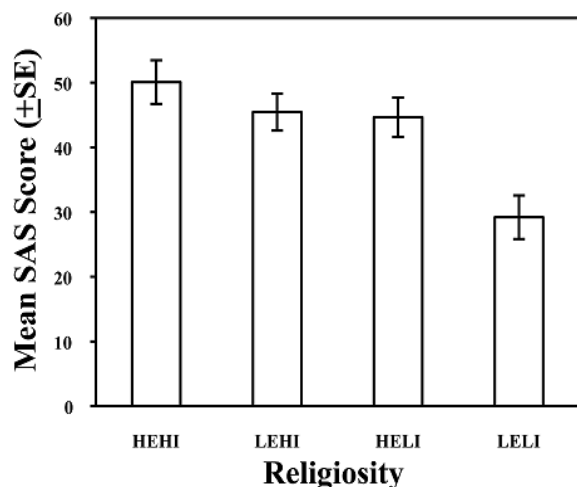


Figure 1. Mean SAS Score (SE) for religiosity. Participants in LELI group scored significantly lower than all other groups who did not differ from one another.

A Tukey post-hoc analysis (all $p < .007$) illustrates our findings in Figure 1. For the SAS, all three religious orientations did not differ from one another and scored significantly higher than LELI individuals. Curiously, yet hypothesized, these data appear self-explanatory and require little clarification.

It is important to report our Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients. Table 2 depicts our data for both studies for the respective instruments. The insightful reader will note the reliability of our revised SAS.

Table 2.

Cronbach's α Reliability Coefficients for both Studies

Study	Scale	<i>M (SD)</i>	Alpha
Original	I/E-R (Intrinsic)	28.94 (5.79)	.737
	SAS	65.22 (13.27)	.877
	SOS	90.02 (29.26)	.926
Current	I/E-R (Intrinsic)	29.23 (6.64)	.839
	I/E-R (Extrinsic)	15.23 (4.28)	.732
	SAS	59.95 (12.71)	.880

Finally, to reinforce the use of categorical variables as predictors of continuous variables, we deem it appropriate to report raw score analyses between Gorsuch and McPherson’s (1989) subscales and the SAS. Pearson correlation coefficients for the extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions of religiosity were $r(60) = +.38, p < .003$ and $r(60) = +.51, p < .00003$, respectively. As expected, there was absolutely no correlation between the two subscales, further supporting extrinsic and intrinsic typologies.

Discussion

As mentioned, we stumbled upon the impetus for this report serendipitously via our previous study. Results suggest that religiously oriented individuals (regardless of their cognitive intentions) tend to score significantly higher on the Hudson et al. (1983) SAS than their non-religious colleagues, indicative of possible untoward sexual behaviors and/or inclinations. We definitely have no intention herein to be judgmental, rather just sharing our scientific data.

Admittedly, sexual deviance or preference does not necessarily equate with abnormal behavior unless other innocent adults or children suffer adverse consequences. Religious correlates with sexual mores, perhaps beginning with Freud (1901, 1905, 1907, 1908, 1913, 1927, 1928, 1939, 1940), and further elaborated upon by Ellis (1980, 2000) and Sleek (1994), even suggest religious driven problematic sexual behaviors may be considered as a psychological disorder for inclusion in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Other interesting historical correlates may include Gosselin and Wilson (1980), and Kant’s (1788) introduction of the famous “categorical imperative.” Related sources are thoroughly documented in the definitive works of Hood, Hill, and Spilka (2009) and Wulff (1991).

We trust the erudite reader is aware of the recent plethora of media incidents involving sexual abuse via the clergy and other respected leaders of our beloved communities. Again, we speculate that Freud’s sexual revolution that reached fruition in the latter decades of the twentieth century has regressed to a Victorian mentality during our current millennium, reminiscent of religious

sexual repression resulting in Manichaeism, ecclesiogenic neuroses adversely affecting the future of our children and culture.

Blending the enthusiasm of an otter with the patience of an oyster, we respectfully wish to make both a positive difference in our society and a modest contribution to the religious/sexual literature in the twenty-first century. Perhaps, Freud was correct.

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