

The Effects of Religion on Engaging in Premarital Sex

by

Mikenna Denton

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Abstract

On a college campus of over 11,000 students, premarital sex is a constant topic on text feeds, lunch conversations, and on social media. Because my personal beliefs have been crucial in my sexual decisions, I became intrigued with the connection between religious beliefs and premarital sex. Extensive research has been done to test the connection between religion and premarital sex. I have chosen to explore how religious involvement affects an individual's sexual decisions. I will include a review of basic beliefs, a discussion on the religiosity scale which rates an individual's true religious involvement, and a comparison of the effects different religions have on the sexual activity of their membership. Analysis supports the premise that those more involved in their religion will be less likely to engage in premarital sex, with an occasional surprising exception. In my report, I compare the effects different religions have on the sexual activity of their members as well as the influence that religion plays on the accuracy and honesty of the individuals' reporting. Research on honesty involved a study on top world religions including: Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Atheism, and Buddhism.

Introduction

In 2010, approximately eighty four percent of the six billion nine hundred million people on the earth identified with a religious group. Religion and premarital sex are two practices that are raging in society around the world, and for many years' sociologists

have found interest in the connection and correlation between the two and have been knee deep into research ever since. Cultural norms shape the way society views sexual behavior and those cultural norms are strongly connected with religious traditions throughout history (Davidson, 2004). The past will always effect the future and future beliefs' of individuals, there is no way to escape the past. For centuries, religion is and has been one things that has strongly correlated to personal beliefs and shaping the way people live their lives'.

The United States along with other countries have seen the increase of sexual activity among unmarried adults and the increased acceptance of premarital sex. Some may question, has religiosity gone down or are religions more accepting of premarital sex and have decreased backlash for individuals that have engaged in premarital sex. Consequently, there has not been a decrease in membership in religions across the world. Researchers such as Mcmillen, (2011) have made the argument that religion is a major force of control over sexuality and can be used as a way for social control; it has also been said that religion can be a means to force individuals into living in a certain manner by striking fear into them by damning them to hell if they step out of line. In the United States, approximately eighty three percent of people identify themselves as Christian and thirteen percent have no religion, leaving four percent for the rest of the faiths such as Islam, and Hinduism (Langer, 2014). Therefore, my study will predominantly focus on Christian religions such as Catholic, Protestant and non-religious individuals when measuring religiosity. Traditionally, in the Judeo-Christian faith reproduction is the purpose of sex and a sin to practice outside of marriage (Mcmillen, 2011). This belief has had a major impact on the attitudes Americans have

regarding sexual activities, and it will be shown later how different religions effect individual's probability of engaging in premarital sex and how honest they are when recording their answers or if they answer in a more socially acceptable manner according to their religion.

Literature Review

Each scholarly journal article that I have read, studies nearly the exact same topic but using different methods, such as the Religious Orientation Scale along with others, as well as studying different groups of people (Mcmillen, Herbert, & McBride, 2011). Many of the researchers present the information they have gathered in a very informative fashion and each article may add one point to the argument another article did not address and/or increase the validity of past arguments with their findings. Generally speaking, researchers have all come to similar conclusions regarding religion and premarital sex. It should be noted most papers measured religiosity, how religious an individual is, by church attendance and/or affiliated religious groups. (e.g., Barkan, 2006; Mcmillen, Herbert, & McBride, 2011; Meier, 2003; Visser, Smith, Richters, & Rissel, 2007). According to Thornton and Camburn, (1989) adolescents that are frequent church attendees that value their religion are less experienced sexually and rate with the least permissive attitudes.

The near consensus via my research, is that more religious people are less likely to be sexually active (Lefkowitz, Gillen, Shearer, & Boone, 2004; Meier, 2003; Visser, Smith, Richters, & Rissel, 2007). However, there are two articles find outliers on their statistical data regarding religion and premarital sex. Meier (2003) finds regarding to first sex, "higher levels of religiosity, decrease the probability of having sex," but that the

effect is only for females and found no correlation between men, religiosity, and premarital sex. The second outlier are individuals of the Buddhist faith. When Visser, Smith, Richters, & Rissel (2007) tested a group of religious and nonreligious Australians and it was found that Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims that are highly religious were less likely to have had premarital sex. Buddhist however were not less likely to have had premarital sex regardless of church attendance (Visser, Smith, Richters, & Rissel, 2007).

Different classes or scales are used in different studies regarding religion and premarital sex. Rowatt & Schmitt (2003) categorize their study using intrinsic, extrinsic, and quest orientation. Intrinsic orientation refers to individuals that internalize religious teachings and values and tend to be more sexually restricted. Those of the intrinsic orientation use their religion to meet internal needs for guidance and strength instead of devotion to their beliefs (Mcmillen, Herbert, & McBride, 2011). Extrinsic religious orientation envelop individuals that base their religious outlook on their social environment versus actual devotion and are more likely to engage in sexual activities (Rowatt & Schmitt, 2003). The religious orientation that I find the most interesting is that of the quest orientation which a few articles did not think would correlate with sexual desires (Rowatt & Schmitt, 2003). Those of the quest orientation are described as individuals whom question occurrences in life and search for answers to their questions but also accept the fact that they might never find the answer to their question. Quest oriented individuals seemed to have an increased correlation regarding males and the willingness to consider having sex with an individual known for a shorter amount of time (Rowatt & Schmitt, 2003). In the study performed by Barkan (2006) a correlation between religious and less religious individuals engaging in premarital sex was not

found; however, a correlation between the numbers of premarital sexual partners was found. It was found that more religious individuals were more likely to have had fewer sexual partners outside of marriage. Less religious individuals; therefore, have a higher probability of having more sexual partners and have an increased likelihood of engaging in sexual activities after knowing someone for a shorter time than a more religious person (Lefkowitz, Gillen, Shearer, & Boone, 2004; Barkan, 2006).

One thing to keep in mind when looking at statistical data regarding religion and premarital sex is that the data can be shewed and challengeable. While studies show that religious people are less likely to engage in premarital sex, the data can be inaccurate because of excessive denial or admission of experience with sexual activities (Hood & Hill, 2009). Many religious people fear backlash from the church community for their sins committed thus they are less likely to tell the whole truth about their premarital engagements and have an increased likelihood of answering in socially accepting ways, especially in women who, in most religions, are supposed to be virtuous and would receive retaliation from their community if it was found out that they had engaged in premarital sex.

Hypothesis

The fundamental hypothesis for this research paper is, individuals with higher religiosity would have a lower likelihood of engaging in premarital sex than less religious individuals. This question comes from personal inquires about faith and sexual activities among unmarried adults. The question that religion effects sexual activities will also be addressed.

Results

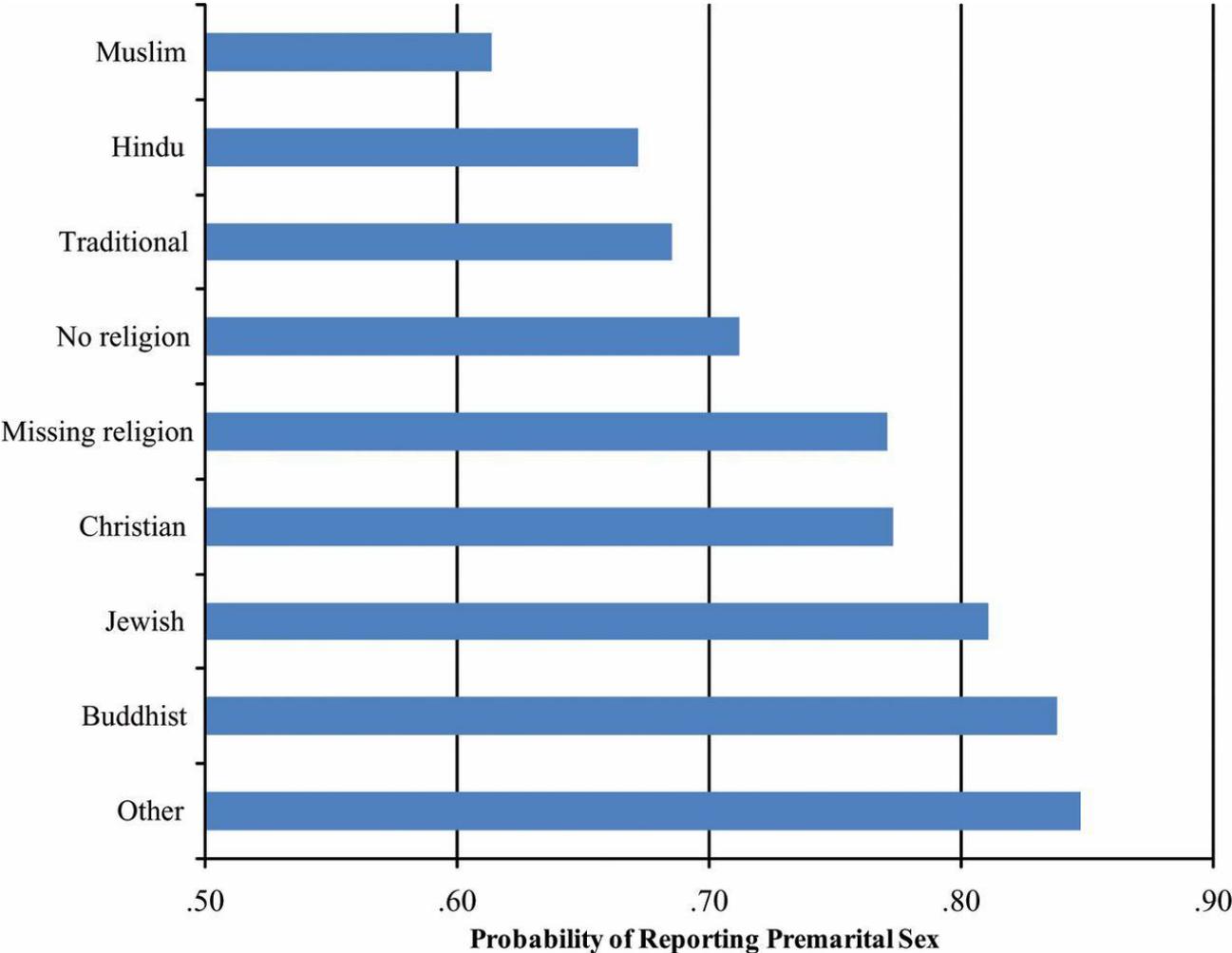
Due to campus issues, I was not able to complete my own studies regarding surveying and using my own population and results. However, I have been able to compare and contrast studies that have been done preceding my own study involving premarital sex and religion. In a report by Visser, Smith, Richters, & Rissel (2007) it was found that Catholics, Protestants and Muslims, but not Buddhist when compared to non-religious men were notably less likely to have engaged in premarital sex. As hypothesized, I found that the vast majority of researchers had already created and established according to their data that religiosity is inversely correlated to engagement in premarital sex (Lefkowitz, Gillen, Shearer, & Boone, 2004; Meier, 2003; Visser, Smith, Richters, & Rissel, 2007). However, there are those whom found in their studies that more religious individuals were not any more or less likely to engage in premarital sex than less religious individuals (Hood and Hill, 2009; Barkan, 2006). They did find nevertheless that there was a correlation between the number of sexual partners among never-married adults and religion. Barkan (2006) found that more religious individuals had a decrease of number of sexual partners and increase amount of time needing to know someone before engaging in sexual activities than those that are less religious individuals. The correlation size they found was 0.297 which was approximately 2.7 times than the median correlation.

During my research, I came across one faith that was an exception to the findings about increased religiosity and decreased likelihood of engaging in premarital

sex. Visser, Smith, Richters, & Rissel's (2007) report found that non-religious men were not significantly more likely to have engaged in premarital sex than Buddhist regardless of how religious an individual of the Buddhist faith which was measured by church attendance. This raised a red flag, because those of the Buddhist faith practice abstinence and do not condone sexual activities. Upon further research, I found that there was much less research concerning those of the Buddhist faith than Christian faiths and the studies that have addressed the Buddhist faith have been inconsistent and unreliable (Adamczyk and Pitt, 2009). Therefore, I am not able to present any data in connection to the Buddhist to address their exception to the religiosity scale, all I will be able to do is formulate a hypothesis that can be studied later on down the road in someone else's research dealing with this dilemma.

Next, I would like to address the issue and results I found regarding excessive denial or admission of experience. The person surveying an individual about premarital sex cannot control whether or not a person answers the question honestly, and this is something that all researchers have had to keep in mind when collecting data about different religious groups and the religiosity of individuals. Each religion has its own views about premarital sex and their own repercussions for disobeying. Among some of the strictest religions regarding premarital sex are the Muslim and Hindu religions whom are under greater pressure to follow their religious teaching about premarital sex. Due to this issue, Adamczyk and Hayes (2013) decided to complete a study regarding the probability of those with different religious backgrounds answering honestly about their sexual activities. In their study, they tested individuals and flagged individuals that responded to the questions in socially desirable ways to the questions

regarding sexual activities. Inconsistent answers about sexual activities were how they were flagged for answering in socially desirable ways. They hypothesized that those of the Muslim and Hindu faith would have an increased likelihood of responding in socially desirable ways versus other religions. The graph below shows predicted probabilities of reporting premarital sex by religious affiliation for ever married females who live in a rural area.



As you can see using information from the graph above, their hypothesis was correct. Those of the Muslim and Hindu religion have a decreased likelihood of reporting their engagements in premarital sex. Those of the Buddhist faith are found to be the

most likely religious group to be honest about engaging in premarital sex when compared to Muslim, Hindu, Traditional, non-religious, Christian, and Jewish. This information makes me believe that the reason Buddhist have an inconsistency in the data collected on them is because of the fact that Buddhist are more likely to be honest about their sexual activities. Compared to monotheistic religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, Buddhist are not as strict about certain behaviors. Nevertheless, their four ethical precepts do try to prevent sex outside of marriage causing the question to continue to remind about those of the Buddhist faith (Visser, Smith, Richters, & Rissel, 2007).

Discussion/Conclusion

As you can see from the graph and results above, religion does in fact have an effect on an individual's sexual activities. Barkan (2006); and Hood and Hill (2009) argue religion does not affect the probability of engaging in premarital sex. Others argue that my hypothesis is correct, which is that those individuals that are more religious have a decreased likelihood of engaging in premarital sex (Lefkowitz, Gillen, Shearer, & Boone, 2004; Meier, 2003; Visser, Smith, Richters, & Rissel, 2007). In the field of psychology, data can be very subjective and influenced by how questions are asked, who did the asking, was it a written survey, oral, was there family present, the influences are numberless. Strictness of a religion effects religion, because as we have seen in Muslim versus Buddhist that Muslims are less likely to engage in premarital sex. Consequently, they are also less likely to report honestly about their transgression if they had engaged in premarital sex.

In conclusion, the information is still challengeable regarding honesty in reporting engaging in premarital sex, and there is no concrete evidence of the exact effect of religion on premarital sex. There are many factors that affect the probability of an individual engaging in premarital sex, but after much research the statement that religion affects sexual activities such as premarital sex can be backed up by multiple research articles. High religious attitudes do not guarantee sexual abstinence before marriage; nevertheless, the probability of engaging in premarital sex is indeed lower. We can also see that religion can also affect someone's probability of reporting premarital sex if they feel socially pressured to be viewed as pure which must be considered when reporting data. "Religion is one of the major forces of control over sexuality," (McMillen, Herbert, & McBride, 2011).

Further research on this topic could include the effects of decreased importance of religion and the increased practice of premarital sex among adults in the United States as well as addressing those of the Buddhist faith and working on gaining more consistent data regarding Buddhist. Gender is another factor that can be addressed in addition to other factors. Females from the beginning have always been expected to excel in religion more than men with higher expectations for being chaste and virtuous is all things while keeping men at bay in their wants and desires. The last area I would be interested in furthering the research is studying the repercussions of sexual sins regarding world top religions and comparing their strictness and probability of dishonest depending on the community they live in such as in an area with high numbers of people in their religion compared to those that live in communities with small amounts of people in their religion.

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