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## Keep the Faith Not the Guilt: Demonization of Sex Workers

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## Keep the Faith Not the Guilt: Demonization of Sex Workers

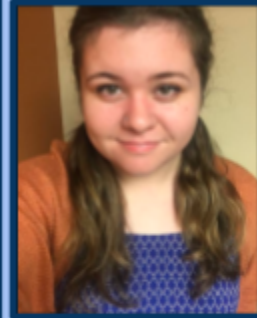
### Cover Page Footnote

There are several people I wish to thank for assisting with this project. Firstly, the support of a grant from the Office of Research and Creative Activity (ORCA) at Murray State University. With the grant we were able to collect a diversified sample through MTurk. Secondly, the continuous support, advice, and guidance from my project and faculty mentor, Dr. Jana Hackathorn. Thirdly, the research assistance aid throughout the project by Shahzor Hashim. Finally, I would like to thank Steffon Jones who conducted the first study on this topic, and without whom this replication project would not exist.

### Keep the Faith Not the Guilt: Demonization of Sex Workers

#### Abstract

Previous research shows that religiosity and attitudes about sexual topics are strongly correlated and typically negative. That is, as religiosity increases, views toward sexual topics tend to become more conservative or generally more negative in valence. However, current research also suggests that one's sexual guilt may be the mediating influence in the relationship between religiosity and negative sexual attitudes. The present study seeks to replicate and extend research that examined the extent to which an individual's religiosity and sexual guilt influence their perspective of pornography and sex workers (Study 1). To replicate this (Study 2), a survey containing relevant measures will be distributed to undergraduate participants as well as individuals from Amazon.com's MTurk.



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I originally chose MSU for my undergraduate career because of how friendly everyone was. I chose MSU again for the first few years of my graduate career because of the psychology department. The programs offered are rigorous, provide many opportunities for research, and thoroughly prepare one for a career or Ph.D. program. I have conducted many research projects with Dr. Hackathorn and have learned a great deal from her. I enjoy research and want to incorporate it into the career I choose in the future. I plan to obtain a Master's Degree as well as a PhD.

Jana Hackathorn is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at Murray State University. She received her PhD in Experimental Social Psychology from Saint Louis University in 2011. She has two main research interests: close relationship and the scholarship of teaching and learning. Her main social psychological research interests include the study of all things related to romantic relationship processes such as attraction, maintenance, infidelity, and dissolution. Her pedagogical research predominantly focuses on teaching effectiveness, especially in the "dreaded" (e.g., statistics) courses.



Jana Hackathorn  
Assistant Professor

## **Introduction**

Religiosity and attitudes about sexual topics are strongly correlated, especially throughout literature. The present study seeks to examine the extent to which an individual's relationship with religion relates to their perceptions of both pornography and the individuals who work in them (i.e., legal adult sex workers). Moreover, the role that sexual guilt plays in that underlying relationship is of considerable interest, which further demonstrates a reliable effect through past literature. This has important implications for law-making for recent laws that have placed a “ban” on pornography viewing (Cauterucci, 2016). In this specific case, the message that is typically dominated by Mormon groups is that porn is an addictive plague on society and has created a significant health crisis. As a result, new laws ascribe pressure on individuals who view porn and also those who work in the pornography area. But what is the reason for this particular religious group to specifically target pornography? Is this a result of religiosity, or is there something else? The literature surrounding the topics of religiosity and sexual guilt will be examined, as well as an outline of the project that will be conducted on this topic. Some general questions this project seeks to address are as follows: How is religiosity related to perceptions of sex workers? Is religiosity related to sexual guilt, and how will this impact their views on pornography and adult sex workers, either legal or illegal?

## **Literature Review**

### *Religiosity*

Religiosity is a factor that is frequently examined when considering perceptions of sexual topics (Ashdown, Hackathorn, & Daniels, 2018; Davidson, Moore, & Ullstrup, 2004; Edger, 2012; Efrati, 2019; Hackathorn, Ashdown, & Rife, 2015; Murray-Swank, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2005; Perry & Whitehead, 2018). However, it is altogether believed that religiosity may not be the sole driving factor in how an individual perceives sexual topics. This is due to discrepancies in the literature regarding the influence of religiosity on attitudes toward sex. For example, when evaluating religiosity's relationship with sexual satisfaction, Davidson and

colleagues (2004) found this relationship to be negative, whereas Murray-Swank and colleagues (2005) found this relationship to be positive. That is, it is clear that religiosity impacts individuals' perceptions, but other factors (e.g., potentially resulting in sexual guilt) are also influential. Thus, more research needs to be conducted to discover the parameters of this relationship.

### *Sexual Guilt*

A current proposal is that it may not necessarily be a direct relationship between these two variables (i.e., religiosity and sex), but instead, it may be some third variable. Of particular interest is that of sexual guilt due to how greater religiosity is related to more sexual guilt, which then relates negatively to positive perceptions of sexual topics. Interestingly, sexual guilt had not been evaluated frequently in literature until recently. Specifically, sexual guilt has been studied lately as having a mediating role in the relationship between religiosity and perceptions of various sexual topics (Ashdown et al. 2018; Hackathorn et al. 2017; Murray-Swank et al., 2005). For example, Hackathorn and colleagues (2015) examined variables that might predict the demonization of victims of the AshleyMadison.com hack. They examined what predicted victim-blaming of those potentially cheating individuals who were the victim of a cyber-crime. Among these variables was sexual guilt, which they found to be a significant predictor of the demonization of these individuals. To take this a step further, Ashdown and colleagues (2018) further examined the roles religiosity and sexual guilt had in the demonization of the AshleyMadison.com members and found that religiosity on its own was not related to the demonization of these individuals. However, when they included sexual guilt as a mediator, this relationship became significant, and religiosity predicted demonization only through sexual guilt.

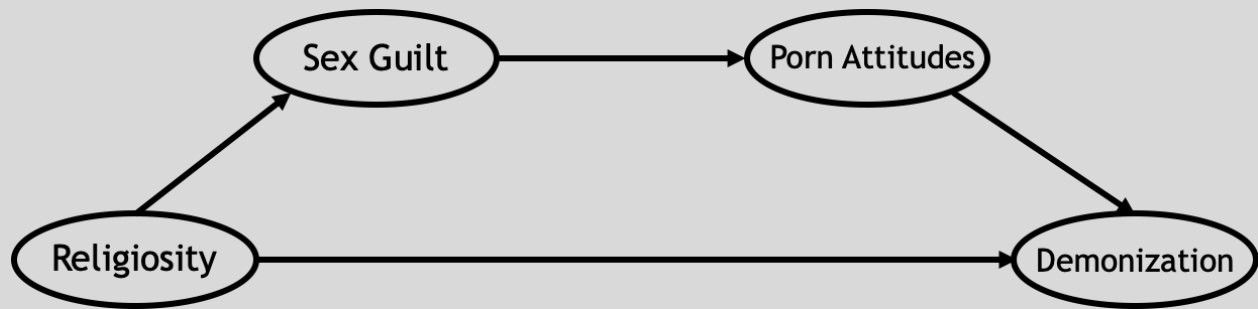
### *Current Study*

Research in this area has typically evaluated the participant's perceptions of or engagement in sex or their perceptions of broad sexual topics such as sexual suppression

(Efrati, 2019), sexual compulsion (Edger, 2012), sexual satisfaction (Hackathorn et al., 2015), and individuals associating with infidelity (Ashley-Madison users, Ashdown et al, 2018; Hackathorn et al, 2017). However, there is little known research existing in this area that evaluates one's perceptions or demonization of individuals involved in sex-related work. The present study, therefore, will attempt to target this.

This is a replication of a project conducted previously (Study 1), which sought to examine the relationship between religiosity, sexual guilt, the demonization of legal and illegal sex workers, and sex traffickers. Results of Study 1 found that sexual guilt mediated the relationship between religiosity and the demonization of sex workers. Importantly, the demonization of sex traffickers revealed a "ceiling-effect," where participants were consistently demonizing these individuals regardless of their religiosity. It will, therefore, not be included in the current study's replication attempt (Study 2). Additionally, Study 1 examined individuals' perceptions of pornography as an exploratory variable and found that it was also a second mediator in the relationship between religiosity and demonization. Furthermore, religiosity influences sexual guilt which then influences conservative attitudes toward pornography in general and ultimately influences the demonization of legal sex workers.

The variables that will be examined in Study 2 include religiosity, sexual guilt, the demonization of illegal and legal sex workers, and perceptions of pornography. It is hypothesized that religiosity will be correlated with negative attitudes toward pornography, in addition to replicating the positive relationships (e.g., sexual guilt and demonization of sex workers) found in Study 1 (H1). Secondly, it is expected that the mediation model from Study 1 will be replicated, in that sexual guilt will mediate the relationship between religiosity and demonization of sex workers (H2). Lastly, it is hypothesized that there will be a double mediation, in that the relationship between religiosity and demonization of sex workers will be mediated by both sexual guilt and general conservative/negative perceptions of pornography (H3). See Figure 1 for a visual of what this double-mediation is hypothesized to look like.



**Figure 1.** Hypothesized double-mediation model

## **Methods (participants and scales).**

### *Participants.*

Study 1 collected participants solely through the undergraduate research participant pool used and maintained by the Psychology department at Murray State University. This project will seek to diversify the sample by collecting participants from both the Murray undergraduate participant pool, and individuals outside the university through Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk data collection website ([www.mturk.com](http://www.mturk.com)). The goal of Study 2 is to discover whether the original findings have external validity and are replicable both inside and outside of the undergraduate student population.

In both populations, the current study will be listed among a list of possible studies available for participation. A short description of the study will describe the procedures, requirements, and credit for participation. For the undergraduate sample, participants will be offered credit toward their courses (e.g., PSY180). Potential participants from the MTurk sample complete surveys for a small monetary award (\$.01 to \$1.00, depending on the time and effort required to complete the survey; our participants will be paid \$0.50). We aim to collect at least 150 students from the undergraduate participant pool, and no more than 200 from the MTurk pool.

## *Measures.*

If potential participants choose this study, they will then be prompted to read an online informed consent. The online informed consent will explain further the purpose and details of the study and their participation requirements. Upon consent, participants will be directed to the online survey to complete several measures, presented in the following order:

***Demonization Scale (van Prooijen & van der Veer, 2010).*** Participants will receive two versions of this measure, once for each legal and illegal sex workers, counterbalanced and spaced apart from one another in the survey. This scale contains five items altered from its original format that referenced “the offender” to “legal/illegal sex workers” (e.g. A legal [illegal] sex worker’s life style is caused entirely by their evilness). The participants are asked to rate their agreement with each of the items on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Examples of legal sex workers will be given to participants in the instructions that include porn stars, sex-cam workers, and erotic dancers. Examples of illegal sex workers provided to participants in the instructions will include prostitutes and brothels/pimping. This scale is scored such that higher scores indicates greater demonization for the sex workers.

***Attitudes toward Pornography Scale (Evans-DeCicco & Cowan 2001).*** This scale contains thirteen items that assess participants’ attitudes toward pornography in general, rated on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). Items include questions such as “Pornography teaches new sexual techniques” and “Pornography leads to sexual addiction (reversed)”. This is scored such that higher scores indicate more positive attitudes about pornography.

***Brief Mosher Sex-Guilt Scale (Janda & Bazemore, 2011).*** This measure assesses participants’ guilt related to various sexual topics. Participants rate their level of agreement with 10 statements, on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). Sample questions include “When I have sexual dreams I try to forget them” and “Sex relations before marriage help people adjust (reverse)”. Higher scores indicate more sexual guilt.



***Religious Background and Behavior Scale (Connors, Tonigan, & Miller, 1996).*** This 13-item scale asks participants about their religiosity. The first question asks religious affiliation, with choices including atheist, agnostic, unsure, spiritual, and religious. A brief description of what each option means is also provided to participants. The next six questions ask participants how often they engage in various behaviors (e.g. meditated, had direct experiences of God) over the past year. Answers fall on an eight-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 8 (*More than once a day*). The final six questions ask participants if they have engaged in those behaviors ever in their lives on a three-point ordinal scale where 1 (*Never*), 2 (*Yes, in the past but not now*), and 3 (*Yes and I still do*). Items are summed, and higher scores relate to greater religiosity.

Participants will finally complete a brief set of demographic questions that include age, biological sex assigned at birth, year in college, race/ethnicity, and current relationship status. The current relationship status question is presented to participants such that they are only able to select one option. The choices include single, dating casually, dating regularly, dating exclusively, engaged, married, and an “other” option.

## **Results**

### *Plan of Analysis*

The initial project (Study 1) hypothesized a single mediation model, where the relationship between religiosity and demonization of sex workers would be mediated by sexual guilt. This project seeks to replicate those findings (H1 and H2) from Study 1. In order to do this, a series of bivariate correlational analyses will be used to examine the relationships between each of the variables.

Then we will test the second hypothesis, regarding whether sexual guilt mediates the relationship between religiosity and sex worker demonization, in both the undergraduate, as well as a new sample of older individuals (MTurk). Moreover, a mediated regression will be

conducted using the fourth model in SPSS Macro PROCESS (Hayes, 2018) to examine whether sexual guilt mediates the relationship between religiosity and the demonization of sex workers.

Finally, we will also use the sixth model in SPSS Macro PROCESS to test our double mediation hypothesis, that religiosity leads to sexual guilt, then to conservative/negative views of pornography and ultimately to the demonization of sex workers (H3).

## **Conclusion**

Religiosity tends to be related to more negative attitudes about sexual topics. Recent literature has suggested that this relationship may be attributed, at least partially, to sexual guilt. There is currently a dearth of research on sexual guilt in the role of a mediator, however. Additionally, there is little known research on how religiosity and sexual guilt are related to perceptions of individuals involved in sex work. There are serious implications for law-making associated with this, as evidenced by the law that was passed recently in Utah banning individuals from viewing pornography (Cauterucci, 2016). Additionally, this has arisen due to the “porn-addiction” epidemic that Mormon groups claim exists in the country today. Research should continue to examine the impact sexual guilt has on the perception of sexual topics, as this may be of direct relevance to laws that are being passed today. This study attempts to bridge a portion of that gap by addressing the role sex guilt and perceptions of pornography play in the relationship between religiosity and demonization of legal and illegal sex workers.

## **Acknowledgements**

There are several people I wish to thank for assisting with this project. Firstly, the support of a grant from the Office of Research and Creative Activity (ORCA) at Murray State University. With the grant we were able to collect a diversified sample through MTurk. Secondly, the continuous support, advice, and guidance from my project and faculty mentor, Dr. Jana Hackathorn. Thirdly, the research assistance aid throughout the project by Shahzor Hashim. Finally, I would like to thank Steffon Jones who conducted the first study on this topic, and without whom this replication project would not exist.

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