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VIRGINITY AND GUILT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

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Abstract

In this research, the authors measured the levels of sexual guilt between two groups of people on multiple levels, virgins and nonvirgins, by gender. The differences between men and women's virginity were also studied. Based on the sample size of college students, $n = 364$. College students completed a 34-item online survey of questions that measured guilt levels. Ten out of the twenty questions were demographic questions, such as: age, ethnicity, religion, year, etc. The other questions were a combination of Likert scaled questions and open ended responses. The researchers predicted that females would experience more guilt compared to males after the loss of their virginity. The researchers found that females experienced more sexual guilt compared to males, as well as, females with high scores of religiosity also experienced higher levels of sexual guilt.

Views of sex have changed over time, but what exactly makes an individual want to lose their virginity? Many factors seem to influence the quality and enjoyment of the first sexual experience. One was gender: Men seemed to have more positive attitudes than women about their first experience (Baumeister, 2001). Currently, the main factors that affect the decision to keep or lose one's virginity are primarily surrounded by gender differences in emotional reactions to first intercourse. To explain gender differences in emotional reactions to first intercourse, DeLamater (1987) conducted three studies to expand on reasons why males have more favorable reactions compared to females. The first reason is based on the assumption that males are more likely to experience an orgasm the first time they have intercourse. The second explanation DeLamater offered proposed that females need more closeness with their partners to enjoy fully the first intercourse (DeLamater, 1987). This finding seems to support the idea that women would experience more shame or guilt upon loss of virginity, especially if the ideal closeness is not achieved.

Along with the views of sexuality and sex changing, the definition seems to have changed several times over the years. People have very different ideas of what defines sex or sexual intercourse (Carpenter, 2001). According to Carroll, Volk, & Hyde (1985) the definition of sexual intercourse is sexual contact between individuals involving penetration, especially the insertion of a man's erect penis into a woman's vagina, typically culminating in orgasm and the ejaculation of semen. The definition that is generally used throughout this study is sexual contact between two individuals involving penetration of genitals to an orifice, or genitals being penetrated. Other sexual acts included in this working definition are: oral, anal, and manual. These definitions are used and explored because of the issues with studying sex and sexuality. Some of these issues are how people define their experience and their experiences of loss of virginity. Some may see the first time they had oral sex as a casual act rather than the loss of virginity. Most participants tended to believe that vaginal-penile intercourse as the only act which constitutes virginity loss, if it were the first partnered sexual activity in which a woman or man had engaged (Carpenter, 2001). Not only are there differences in the general definition of sex, there are gender differences in sex and its views and even how it is taught. This being said, this study will use a combination of definitions to test concepts of virginity.

One of the main ideas behind studying sexuality, in this case, is the idea of shame and guilt. Researchers found that males experienced more satisfaction and pleasure than did females in response to first intercourse (Baumeister, 2001). Furthermore, females were more likely to feel guilty (DeLamater, 1987).

A potential moderator for shame and guilt when it comes to virginity is religion and a person's score on religiosity. A person's religion often contributes largely to their value set (Liu & Koenig, 2013) and thus would moderate in part how people feel about virginity and sex. So to study how people feel about virginity and sex, it would be irresponsible to ignore a potential moderator that is at times so central to some's lives and belief system. Liu and Koenig (2013) studied how religiosity affects mental health, but their research and questions can be translated to hinting at a person's belief system.

Another potential moderator for virginity beliefs is the role of sharing. There have been a multitude of studies looking at the effects of sharing feelings with others. For negative emotions, sharing tends to exacerbate those emotions and for positive emotions, sharing adds to emotions, sharing tends to exacerbate those emotions and for positive emotions, sharing adds to

that positivity (Brans, Van Mechelen & Rime, 2014). In the previously mentioned study, it is discussed how one of the most common strategies for emotional regulations is social sharing.

This study will explore, in part, the effect that social sharing has on guilt or shame when it comes to the loss of virginity. According to the findings of Brans *et al.* (2014) and the correlation between sharing and negative versus positive emotions, it can be inferred that if a person feels negatively about the loss of their virginity, that sharing would exacerbate the negative feelings surround their experience and vice versa.

Given all of this information and background, we believe female students will produce more feelings of sexual guilt than males. In addition, to broaden the perspective, females will express more shame and guilt than males, as past studies have shown that females produce more sexual guilt compared to males after the loss of their virginity. We expect the proposed moderators of sharing and religiosity to make our results more significant. We expect a higher score on religiosity to produce a higher score on guilt. We subsequently expect the role of sharing to polarize or make the results more extreme.

Method

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were recruited from a social media pool (i.e. Facebook and Email) along with the faculty advisor website. The researchers obtained 376 participants between the ages of 18 to 65 years old. However, the age range was mostly between 18 to 23, specifically 78%. The experimenters obtained 280 females and 96 males. This study is focused on college age individuals in main. The researchers, for the most part, focused on individuals who have already lost their virginity, though some participants reported still being virgins.

MATERIALS

The study was conducted online, along with the consent form and the debriefing form. The study was a survey based in part on Eriksson and Humphrey's Virginity Beliefs Scale (VBS) (2014), the Hoge Religiosity Scale (Hoge, D. R. 1972), and some open ended questions aimed at finding out the role of sharing and other potential moderators of guilt. All of the questions

asked are included in the **Appendices**. Some of open ended moderator questions are items such as age of loss and the role of sharing in sexual experience, and items to measure the experience after loss of virginity and also included an extensive demographics section, with items including, but not limited to “Are you a virgin?”, “At what age did you have your first sexual experience?”, and “Do you see virginity as negative or positive?” All of the open ended items are free response.

The Hoge Religiosity Test is a brief questionnaire determining religiosity and was used to explore possible moderators of virginity beliefs. The Hoge is formatted as a likert scale questionnaire on a scale of 1 to 5. The VBS was used to determine participants base beliefs about virginity. It is formatted as a Likert scaled questionnaire on a scale from 1 to 7. The survey questions were formatted as multiple choice questions and free response and included the open ended section. In the **Appendices**, this section is labeled as “Secondary Demographics-Open Ended”. These were designed to measure the participants sexual experiences. Some examples of the open ended questions were “At what age did you have your first sexual experience”. The researchers provided a definition of a sexual experience to eliminate any potential confusion and ambiguity. The definition provided is as follows: “A sexual act is defined as sexual contact between two individuals involving penetration of genitals to an orifice, or genitals being penetrated. Other sexual acts include: oral, anal, and manual”. In order to obtain results from the religiosity scale and the role of sharing, the researchers coded the results into quantitative data. At the end of the survey there will be a section for open ended comments/answers.

The demographic questions were gender, age, race/ethnicity as well as “are you a virgin” and other such questions. There were also be a few questions regarding the status of the participants first partner. The most important of these was gender and age. The researchers expected to find that females experience more guilt surrounding the loss of virginity than males. The researchers then conducted a pretest to test reliability on the survey.

PROCEDURE

The participants were sent to a link through email or other social media. The participant then clicked on link to be redirected to the informed consent page where they clicked a box stating “I Agree”. Participants filled out a demographics survey then went to the next page and answered a religiosity scale survey. Then they were taken to the next page and took a survey based

on the Virginité Beliefs Scale. After this survey they were taken to a page of more demographic type questions that were open ended. The Virginité Beliefs Scale questionnaire is included in the **Appendix**. After participants took the Virginité Beliefs Scale they were taken to an open ended box in which the participants could write any sort of explanation or comments they chose. Lastly, participants were then debriefed and thanked.

Results

Results were collected online and analyzed in SPSS. The Virginité Beliefs Scale had a Cronbach's Alpha of .693 and the Hoge religiosity scale had a Cronbach's Alpha of .899. The scales were then averaged to create a scale score. Researchers performed a median split to convert religiosity into a high and low group. A 2×2 between subjects ANOVA was run with factors of religiosity and gender and guilt as the dependent measure. There was a significant main effect for gender, $F(1,313)=18.715, p < 0.01$. However, the main effect of religiosity, $F(1, 313) < 1, p = \text{n.s.}$, for the interaction, $F(1,313) = 2.401, p = 0.387$, was significant. These results are shown in **Figure 2** with gender on the x-axis, guilt score on the y-axis, and religiosity the different color bars. From these results, it is clear that women had a higher score of virginité guilt.

Discussion

The researchers found through their analysis that their hypothesis was somewhat supported. Women seem to produce slightly more feelings of guilt than men as illustrated in **Figure 3** and **Table 3**. This gender difference is not significantly enhanced by religion. Interestingly enough it can be seen in **Figure 2** for this sample that religious men show the least amount of guilt (**Figure 4**) while religious women show the highest (**Figure 5**), though it is not statistically significant. For example, from our qualitative data, one male participant stated, "After finally feeling comfortable to discuss losing my virginité I had moved on from that girlfriend at the time. When asked or telling others about my experience I often find myself feeling embarrassed because I know for a fact I did it for the wrong reasons." This example exhibits a non-religious male participant showing regret over the loss of his virginité. An example of a religious female answer is "After talking to someone about my first time I felt like an adult. I felt like I had it all figured out at the time. We both bragged on how amazing it was even though it was

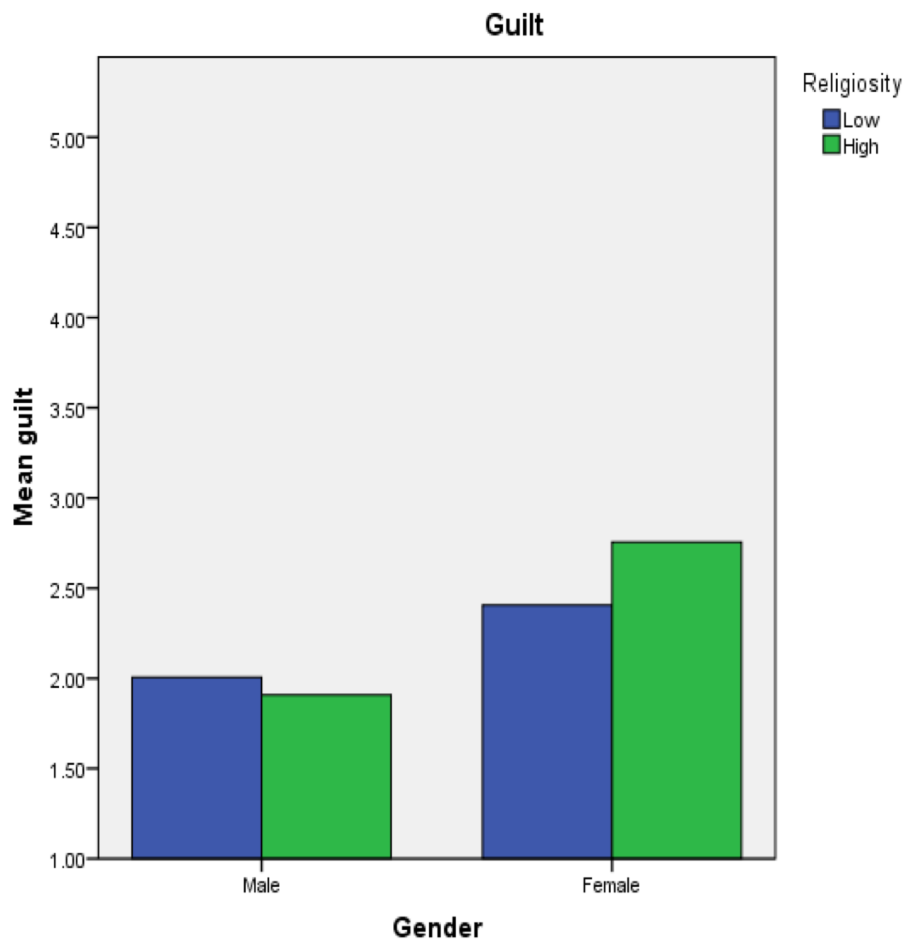


Figure 1. Guilt differences between men and women according to religiosity score.

Degrees of Freedom (1,313)	<i>F</i>	Significance Level
Gender	18.715	.000
Relative Risk	.751	.387
Interact	2.403	.122

Table 1. Numerical breakdown of guilt differences between men and women according to religiosity score

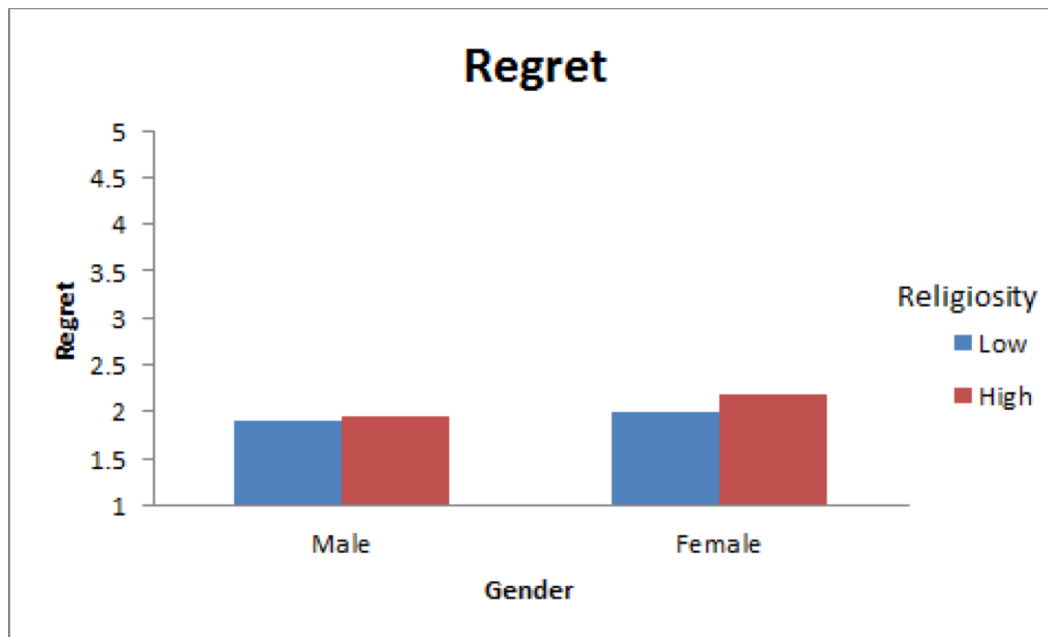


Figure 2. Regret differences between men and women according to religiosity score.

Degrees of Freedom (1,327)	<i>F</i>	Significance Level
Gender	2.128	.146
Relative Risk	1.033	.310
Interact	0.276	.600

Table 2. Numerical breakdown of regret differences between men and women according to religiosity score.

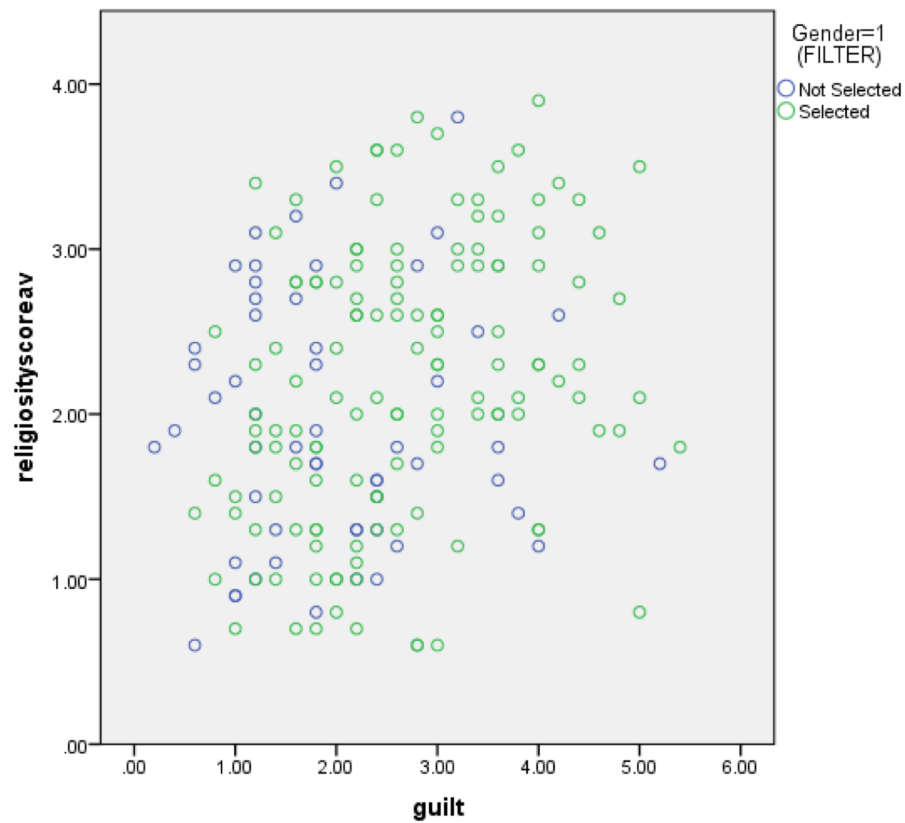


Figure 3. Gender differences between religiosity score and guilt.

Correlation	Guilt	Religiosity
Guilt	1.000	0.259
Religiosity	0.259	1.000

Table 3. Numerical breakdown of gender differences between religiosity score and guilt.

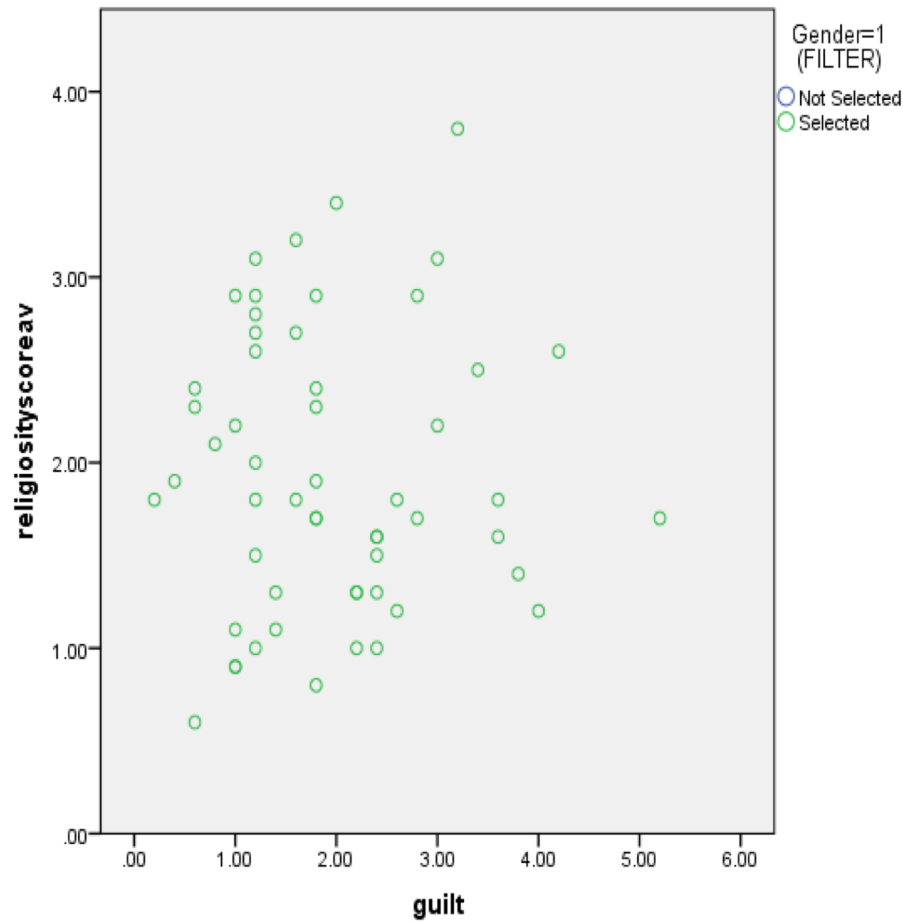


Figure 4. Interaction between religiosity and guilt for males.

painful and I felt really guilty.” These examples demonstrate the difference in the most guilty feelings surrounding the loss of their virginity between genders.

Along these lines our participants perfectly exhibited the virginity scripts from Eriksson and Humphreys. The Gift script was exhibited by both a male and a female as follows:

Passion is a great thing but when giving your virginity, it is something greater. It’s something beautiful and pure, something to be cherished, and I cherish that moment when I lost mine to a beautiful woman.

–Male

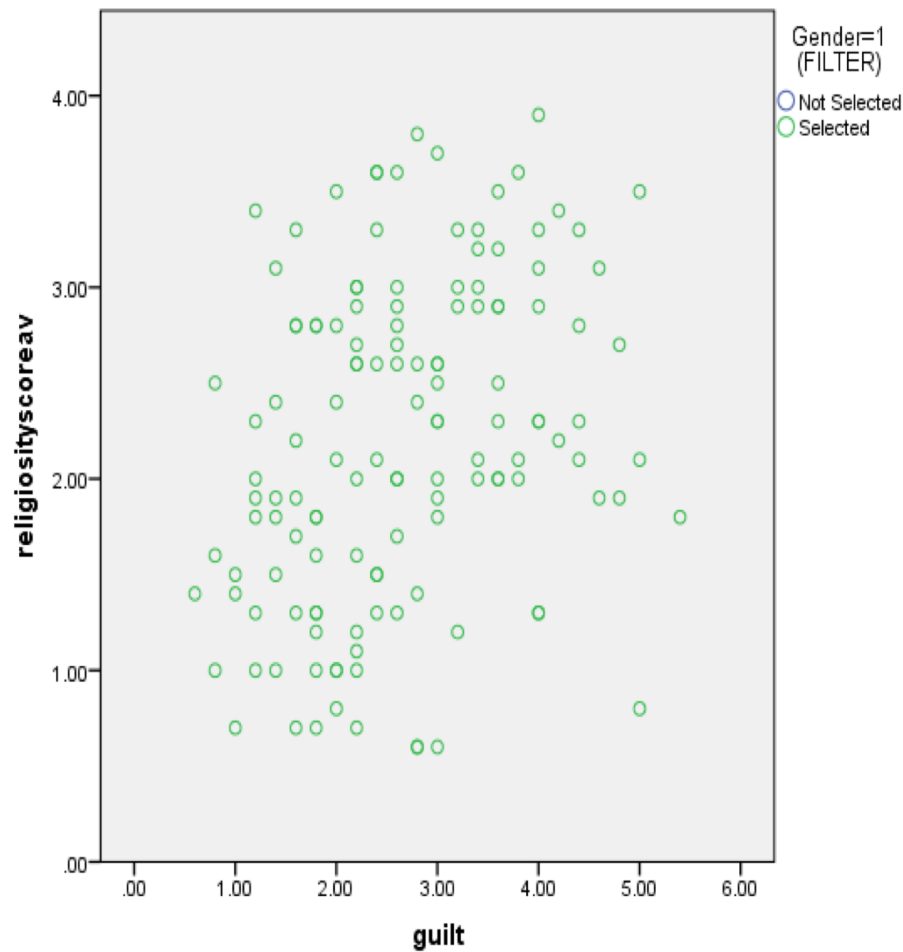


Figure 5. Interaction between religiosity and guilt for females.

To wait until I was married because sex is nothing special until you are with the man you are going to spend your life with. Way more men respect that.

–Female

The Process script was exhibited by the next few examples:

It is not something to fear nor is it something to place upon a pedestal. It is simply a part of life for most people—and your indifference towards it is too a part of life.

–Male

Sex doesn't mean love. It's a natural process that is put up too highly and regarded as something more than it needs to be.

—Female

The Stigma script was exhibited by the next few examples:

Have sex sooner! It feels good and as long as you are safe and protected it is amazing!

—Male

Make a greater effort to have sex sooner in life. Sample many different partners without committing to one.

—Female

These examples are very representative of the answers we received in the open ended section of our survey. This shows that females are still exhibiting higher levels of guilt over the loss of their virginity. This also implies that society is still instilling guilt in women. Although there is no comparative data here, the relatively low difference between men and women on the guilt scale seems to suggest at least a slight reduction in the effect size for guilt between males and females. Although the quantitative results are not statistically significant, the qualitative data seems to suggest some culturally relevant significance.

This study could have been made better with the presence of more participants, more diverse populations, and a more balanced proportion of males to females. If these limitations were fixed the results could have been more significant and representative than they are. For future studies, it might be interesting to look at sexual orientation differences, different religious sect differences, and ego identity differences between men and women and how they perceive themselves based on their virginity.

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Appendix A

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Demographics:

- What is your age?
- What year are you in college?
- What is your ethnicity?
- What is your religious background?
- Male or Female?
- Are you a virgin?
- What is your overall number of partners you have engaged in sexual activity with?

- What is your sexual orientation?
- What age did you have your first sexual experience?

Secondary Demographics – Open-Ended:

- Were you sober the first time you engaged in sexual activity?
- How often do you engage in sexual activity?
- Are your parents aware of your sexual activity?
- Where were you when you lost your virginity?
- Do you regret losing your virginity? If so, why?
- If you could go back in time and give yourself one piece of advice based on what you know now, what would it be?
- What was the age difference between you and the person you had your first sexual experience with?
- Was the person you had your first sexual experience with also a virgin? If not how many partners had they had?
- Did you talk to anyone after having your first sexual experience? Who was the first person you told?
- How did talking to someone about your experience make you feel?

Likert Scale:

- Rate your view of virginity. Scale 1 to 7, 1 being a burden and 7 being a treasure.
- How did you feel after your first sexual experience? Scale 1 to 7, 1 being shame and 7 being relief.
- How did you view your first sexual experience? Scale 1 to 7, 1 being negative and 7 being positive.
- How do you feel now about your first sexual experience? Scale 1 to 7, 1 being satisfied and 7 being shame or guilt.
- How would you rate the attractiveness to the person you had your first sexual experience with? Scale 1 to 7, 1 being not attractive and 7 being very attractive.

Hoge Intrinsic Religiosity Scale:

1 to 5; 1 being strongly disagree, 5 being strongly agree

1. My faith involves all of my life

2. In my life, I experience the presence of the Divine (i.e., God)
3. Although I am a religious person, I refuse to let religious considerations influence my everyday affairs
4. Nothing is as important to me as serving God as best as I know how
5. My faith sometimes restricts my actions
6. My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life
7. I try hard to carry my religion over into all my other dealings in life
8. One should seek God's guidance when making every important decision
9. Although I believe in religion, I feel there are many more important things in life
10. It does not matter so much what I believe as long as I lead a moral life

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT

This research is being conducted by Alexis Moore and Caitlin Lipman, students in the Psychology Advanced Research Seminar course at Hanover College. The experiment in which you are asked to participate in is designed to measure the guilt produced after the loss of one's virginity. You will be asked eight Demographic questions and twelve questions based off the Virginity Beliefs Scale (VBS). You are to answer these questions with the use of a Likert scale or an open-ended response, and after which you will be debriefed. The entire experiment will not take more than 30 minutes. There are no known risks involved in being in this study, beyond those of everyday life. The information you provide during the experiment is completely anonymous; at no time will your name be associated with the responses you give. If you have any questions about what you will be doing in the study or about the study itself, feel free to ask them now or at any other time during your participation. If you have any questions now or after the study, please contact:

- For questions about the research itself, you may contact the researchers: Caitlin Lipman (lipmanc15@hanover.edu) and Alexis Moore (moorea15@hanover.edu) .

- For questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact the faculty member supervising the research, Dr. John Krantz (krantzj@hanover.edu), or the chair of Hanover College's Institutional Review Board, Dr. Dean Jacks, at (jacks@hanover.edu). Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusing to participate or ceasing to participate at any time will involve no penalty. Incomplete participation will not result in credit for participating, but you may complete an alternative assignment of equal time commitment in order to receive credit. Please inform the researchers if you would like to keep a copy of this informed consent form.

Signature

Date

Appendix C

DEBRIEFING

The study in which you just participated was designed to measure the amount of guilt produced based off the loss of your virginity. Please do not discuss this study with other potential participants until the year is over. If people know what we're testing before the study begins, they may respond differently, jeopardizing our results. As soon as the results from this study are available, you can read about them by going to the following website and clicking on the semester when you participated in the study:

<http://vault.hanover.edu/>

If you have any questions, please contact:

- For questions about the research itself, you may contact the researchers: Caitlin Lipman (lipmanc15@hanover.edu) and Alexis Moore (moorea15@hanover.edu).
- For questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact the faculty member supervising the research, Dr. John Krantz (krantzj@hanover.edu), or the chair of Hanover College's Institutional Review Board, Dr. Dean Jacks, at (jacks@hanover.edu)