

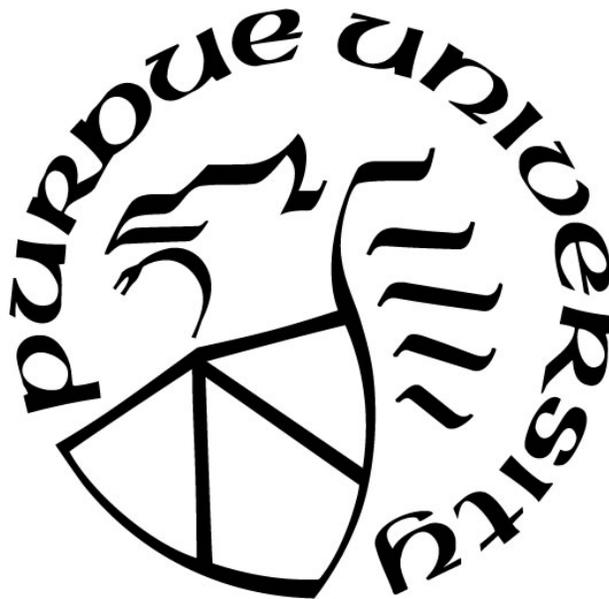
**IMPACT OF RELIGIOSITY AND SPIRITUALITY ON SEXUAL
ATTITUDES AND SEXUAL SELF-SCHEMAS IN AFRICAN AMERICANS
WHO GREW UP IN THE BLACK CHURCH**

by
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A Thesis

*Submitted to the Faculty of Purdue University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of*

Master of Science



Department of Human Development & Family Studies

Hammond, Indiana

August 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank God for carrying me through this process. He continues to guide me and show me mercy on this journey called life. Even in my doubt, He shows me that he is always here. None of this would be possible without Him.

Thank you, grandma, for always fostering my faith and believing that I could achieve anything I worked for. Thank you for always reminding me of Philippians 4:13. To my parents for planting the seed of determination despite frustration. Dad, thank you for the random calls to just check on me. Mom, thank you for never entertaining the idea of giving up. To my aunts Kylah and Gina and my uncle Louis, thank you for pushing me to always think and learn.

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Anne B. Edwards, Dr. Megan J. Murphy, and Dr. Marla F. Frederick for their time, patience, and commitment throughout this process. Words cannot express the gratitude I have.

Anne, your patience and understanding has put me at ease on numerous occasions. Megan, your advocacy for women's voices in the field has encouraged me to raise my own. Lorna, your validation gave me the push I needed when I didn't think I was good enough for this program. Joe, thank you for always sending me back to myself during my times of doubt. Seda, you taught me the value of self-compassion and I can never thank you enough for planting that seed in me.

To my cohort, hey friends! It's been a wild ride, but I couldn't imagine doing it all over again with a different group. You all have taught me so much about myself. Though life is taking us in different directions, I will never forget the bond we formed. You will always be my second family. Kaylyn, thank you for being the other half of our dynamic duo. You inspire me to be better a version of myself. I appreciate your friendship more than you know. As I have always sang to you at the end of each semester, "Never would have made it without you!"

Last, but certainly not least, my fiancé, William. Thank you, thank you, thank you for your unwavering support during one of the most challenging times in my life. You are always cheering me on no matter what I do. Thank you for never complaining about the late nights. I love you so much.

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ABSTRACT

Author: Griggs, Mialauni, T. MS

Institution: Purdue University

Degree Received: August 2019

Title: The Impact of Religiosity and Spirituality on Sexual Self-Schemas and Sexual Attitudes in African American Who Grew Up in the Black Church.

Committee Chair: Anne B. Edwards

This study examines the impact of religiosity and spirituality on sexual self-schemas and sexual attitudes in African Americans who grew up in the Black Church. Religiosity in this study measures external and ritualistic practices as well as the importance of and salience of religious meaning in personality. Spirituality in this study measures connections with oneself, nature, others, and the transcendent. It was hypothesized that religiosity and spirituality would impact sexual self-schemas and sexual attitudes of African American men and women who grew up in the Black Church. A total of 131 participants contributed to this study. Religiosity nor spirituality were significant predictors of sexual attitudes or sexual self-schemas for men or women.

CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Religion and the Black Church has been a saving grace and source of education and morale for the African American community for centuries. The context in which African American life began in this country is important to understand as it can explain aspects of how African Americans as a group function in American society. The moral foundation on which they have built their lives is rooted in oppressive ideology and survival. The Black Church was and still is a gathering place for African Americans to seek support and guidance to maintain survival in the very country that has historically worked to oppress them. This institution created a kinship amongst this group and worked to instill values that would promote healthy relationships and cohesiveness within their community.

Religion

African Americans perceive religion as being very important in their lives. They practice a variety of religions however; this community is known to primarily practice some denomination of Christianity. Research by the Pew Research Center (2018), found that approximately 79% of African Americans identify as Christian with 53% belonging to a Historically Black Protestant denomination. According to Taylor and Chatters (2010), African Americans have a significantly higher rate of religious involvement in comparison to their non-Hispanic White counterparts. They are more likely to say they believe in God with absolute certainty while only 61% of their White counterparts and 59% of Latinos would agree. While half of African Americans are associated with Black Protestant churches, others associate with evangelical Protestantism (14%), Catholicism (5%), and Islam (2%). Religious practices such as church attendance and prayer frequency are higher amongst African Americans in comparison to Whites and Latinos (Pew Research Center, 2018); Smallwood, Spencer, Ingram, Thrasher, Thompson-Robinson, 2017). African American millennials are more religious than other ethnic groups in their generation with about 61% reportedly praying at least daily while only about 25% of non-Black millennials report the same (Pew Research Center, 2018).

Despite their commitment to religion, there has been a decrease in religious affiliation in the African American Community in recent years. Though African American millennials are more spiritual than other ethnic groups in their generation, they are also less religious than older Black generations. In 2007, 12% of Africans Americans across all generations were reportedly religiously unaffiliated. Over the next four years, that percentage rose to 18%. Approximately 29% of African American adults aged 65 and older also reported being religiously unaffiliated (Pew Research Center, 2018).

Spirituality

Religion and spirituality go hand in hand in this community. “Spirituality is associated with a sense of connectedness to others including extended family, neighbors, and peers” (Mattis & Jagers, 2001, p. 529). According to Dantley (2003), possessing a spiritual self has served as the foundation of African American life. That is, the African American’s very existence and being has been tied to their souls in that their spirituality and religiosity has been rooted in their journey to liberation. Since the days of slavery, African Americans have drawn parallels between their living conditions and human experience and to individuals in the Bible. Spirituality has served as a coping mechanism for oppression and tragedy for Black Americans for centuries and continues to do so today (Dill, 2017).

The Black Church

Historically, the Black Church has been called the Negro church. However, Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) define the Black Church as “a body of Christian denominations that are independent, historic, and totally Black controlled” (p. 1). Lincoln and Mamiya go on to list the following as major historic Black denominations: the African Methodist Episcopal Church; the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church; the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Incorporated; the Progressive National Baptist Convention; and the Church of God in Christ.

What beliefs and practices line the foundation of the Black Church? How do they promote healthy, loving relationships within this community? Kinship is foundational due to the larger societal and systemic efforts to keep African American families apart. From chattel slavery to mass incarceration, the family bond is critical for Black survival in America. Douglas

(1999) notes the African American community's response to these societal attacks and pressures in that they espouse a White family model which proves to be more acceptable in Western society. Thus, the promotion of marriage within the Church is significant. The Church promotes the idea that marriage is reserved for a man and woman in order to procreate and create posterity. It is also important to note that sexual abstinence is maintained until marriage takes place. With these foundational beliefs, it could be expected that HIV prevalence would be low, teen pregnancy would be nearly nonexistent, and single motherhood would be obsolete.

Sexuality and Religion

Ramirez-Valles, Zimmerman, and Juarez (2002) notes that African American youth are more likely to report being sexually active and to initiate their sexual activity earlier than White and Hispanic youth. The researchers continue on to mention cultural differences as an influence of sexual behavior among ethnic groups. Another less examined influence on adolescent sexual behaviors is religion. "One of the most pervasive influences among African Americans is religion" (McCree, Wingood, DiClemente, Davies, Harrington, 2003, p. 2). There is research that suggests adolescents who are highly religious often initiate sex later and have fewer sexual partners (Hayes, 1987; Thornton & Camburn, 1989; Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000). McCree et al., (2003) surveyed African American adolescent females and found that greater religious involvement was associated with less sexual risk-taking and more positive attitudes towards condoms. Somers and Ali (2011) examined the role of parents in early adolescent sexual risk-taking behavior and measured the impact of family religiosity. They found that family religiosity was "mostly unrelated" to adolescents' sexual outcomes (p. 94).

Given that many African Americans turn to their pastors or religious congregation for guidance and spiritual support (Gooden & McMahon, 2016), the Black Church can serve as a key venue for helping individuals with sexual decision-making. However, the Church seems to be an underutilized resource for sexual health education, given that the topic of sex outside of marriage is viewed as taboo or immoral (Hawes & Berkley-Patton, 2014).

Self-schemas refer to an individual's beliefs about themselves (Markus, 1977). This study specifically looks at sexual self-schemas which Andersen and Cyranowski (1994) define as cognitive generalizations about sexual aspects of one's self. These schemas are developed from past experiences and continue to manifest in current behaviors. They also influence future sexual

experiences. An individual's sexual self-schema can impact their relationship with not only themselves, but their intimate relationships.

Patricia Hill Collins (2005) discusses the impact of gender ideology on the Black community such as masculinity and dominance as well as femininity and submissiveness in romantic relationships. These narratives play a role in how Black men and women perceive both themselves and others. They can also contribute to the construction and ongoing development of their sexual self-schemas and sexual attitudes.

The reality in the African American community is that this group is experiencing a high prevalence of HIV, teen pregnancy, and single motherhood. The rationale for this study is to gain a better understanding of how African Americans construct their sexual attitudes and sexual self-schemas as there seems to be a disconnect between teachings in the Church and practicality in the larger society. While there are larger societal constructs that impact Black sexuality, this study specifically examines the role of religion, spirituality, and the Black Church on the development of sexual self-schemas and sexual attitudes.

CHAPTER 2: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

Religion, Spirituality, and the Black Church

Historical Context

The influence of the Black Church on the African American community is rooted in North American slavery. During the Transatlantic Slave Trade, many Europeans did not believe African Americans should be indoctrinated into the Christian faith. In fact, it was thought that slaves could not go to heaven. However, sovereigns of various European countries traveling to the States to colonize a new world insisted on the indoctrination of the Black slave. (Woodson, 1921). When Europeans traveled to Africa and found value in “free” Black labor, the slave owners utilized the Bible and Christian ideologies to justify the institution of slavery. Conversion to Christianity had little to do with God or Jesus Christ and more to do with assimilating to Western civilization. African Americans were led to believe that it was God’s will for them to serve their earthly (White) masters (Williams, 1987).

Significance of Religion and Spirituality in the African American Community

Religion and sense of spirituality became a coping mechanism for the horrific conditions in which African American slaves were living. They sang songs of hope for freedom whether on earth or in heaven. Many believed that their souls were saved so long as they obeyed their masters. It must not be forgotten that African slaves were forced to give up their own religions from their homelands in Western Africa. However, there were some cultural and religious practices from their African countries and villages woven into the religion they practice in the United States (Douglas, 1999; Woodson, 1921).

Black slaves were prohibited from learning how to read and relied on their culture of oral tradition in listening and memorizing the stories of the Bible told to them by their masters. There was an understanding of the power found within the Bible that slaves then utilized for comfort. Certain stories in the Bible, specifically those regarding the Hebrews in bondage, were relatable to their experience and provided a sense of strength. The Christian Bible provided themes of freedom, justice, and dignity that were found and adopted by African Americans (Douglas,

1999). The magnitude of empowerment provided by the Bible solidified African Americans' beliefs in Christianity and its teachings.

Nero (1990) highlights the significance of the Black Church for this community in that they were some of the first institutions created and owned by African Americans. Through African American history, the Black Church has become a safe haven for African Americans. It has provided social and emotional support. It serves as a coping mechanism from racist ideologies and discrimination experienced within the United States against this population. Jeffries et al. (2008), stated that the church serves as protection against mortality, morbidity, and mental health issues rooted in institutionalized racism. Historically, the Black Church has been a supportive platform in social, educational, and health services to those in their congregation as well as in their communities (Taylor & Chatters, 2010).

From World War I until the late 1960s, the Black migration from the South to urban areas was a significant transition for most Black families. Consequentially, these Black migrants utilized their churches as major communal institutions (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). The Black Church and Black families have an interactive relationship in which the families serve as the building blocks for the church and the church serves as the foundation for a belief system, morality, and rituals. The Black Church promoted unity and kinship through their teachings (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

Little research has examined the relationship between spirituality and sexual attitudes or sexual self-schemas. However, literature shows spirituality is significant in the lives of African Americans. Murray, Ciarrocchi, and Murray-Swank (2007) found in their study that the more spiritual their respondents reported being, the less likely they were to possess permissive sexual attitudes. Similarly, in the same study, the respondents who were reportedly more religious were also less likely to possess permissive sexual attitudes.

Dill (2017) found that African American youth in East Oakland utilized spirituality as a coping mechanism for their life stressors such as death, racism, and illness. Interviews were conducted with 25 youths aged 12 to 20, with 80% identifying as African American and the remaining 20% identifying as Latino/a/x. Sixty-five percent of the African American participants were female while 35% were male. Frequent prayer in lieu of church attendance was one avenue of spiritual reliance found in the study. The youths discussed praying to God to protect themselves, their families, and to heal their communities of various afflictions. They noted that

they did not do anything differently from others in their community aside from praying. Another avenue of spiritual connection noted in the study was that of “activating faith talk” or shifting the language or perspective of a situation into a positive light where God handles said struggle (p. 700).

The Black Church and Sex

The portrait of the Black family has always been unclear in American history. Through the perpetuation of negative dominant discourses around Black sexuality from the Black Church as well as the larger Western society, Black families were not viewed as families during and post slavery. Instead, these families have been a means for capitalist profit as the worth of Black men and women was measured by their output of labor. The need to establish a symbol for the African American family has been significant and necessary. As the African American community works to restructure and redefine their family, the Black Church began to “mediate and institutionalize a counternarrative that distinguished between who and what was virtuous and not” (Lomax, 2018, p. 109). The ideal family narrative from the Black Church that is cisgender, heterosexual, and constructed within the confines of marriage could isolate African Americans who do not identify with those constructs.

Patricia Hill Collins (2005) states that, “Black Christian churches constitute the most important African American community organizations, and yet they continue to preach conservative gender ideology, and shun controversial topics, especially sexuality” (p. 45). Sexual purity is not a foreign concept to most religious systems. That is, abstaining from sexual impurities such as premarital sex or masturbation aligns with following the will of God.

Most Christian churches regardless of ethnicity preach and promote sex within a cisgender, heterosexual marriage. That said, Black religious domains are particularly less than ideal spaces for self-expression of any person who does not identify as strictly cisgender and heterosexual (Jeffries, Dodge, & Sandfort, 2008). Doctrinal sermons and religious spaces that strictly promote heteronormative gender and sexual expression is unquestionably harmful for members of the LBGTQ+ community. McGuire et al. (2017) note that some parishioners will preach a literal interpretation of particular biblical texts that justify the condemnation of individuals who do not practice monogamous, heterosexual partnership (McGuire, Cisneros, & McGuire, 2017).

Moultrie (2017) discusses the emphasis on abstaining from sex until marriage with minimal rationale for this standard specifically in the Black Church. She also breaks down the concept and teaching tactic of soul ties which is used to promote the notion that sex outside of marriage is also outside of God's will. These soul ties are described as the absorption of thoughts and will of the individual with whom they have had intercourse in their singlehood. These ties are believed to prevent an individual from living a life devoted to Christ. She also explains that, "the Bible clearly indicates the prevalence of polygamous marriages, marriage between family members, nonconsensual marriages, and marriages conducted as financial transactions, so an advocate of biblical marriage which in contemporary times is coded as a union of one man and one woman, requires being selective about biblical marriages" (p. 9).

Frederick (2003) states that teachings from home and church regarding the sanctity of sex within marriage "were meant to ward off premarital sex, although the 'warnings' were not easily adhered to by inquisitive teenagers eager to explore their sexuality in an environment that promised little opportunity or educational exposure beyond high school" (p. 189). Ward (2005) notes that literal interpretations of specific biblical passages promote the idea that heterosexual, monogamous marriages are the only kinds of acceptable intimate relationships. This leaves virtually no room for sexual expression of any sort for single and/or non-heterosexual individuals. The notion of essentially remaining asexual and repressing all sexual thoughts and behaviors until marriage creates an unrealistic expectation for religious followers looking to lead a God-pleasing life.

The relationship African American women have with their sexuality and spirituality is a complicated one. Frederick (2003) conducted interviews with several women about religious practice and their faith experiences throughout their lives. She notes the message given from most mainstream churches on the "proper" way to have sex if one is to maintain a truly spiritual life. Abstinence outside of marriage and fidelity within marriage is thought to affect an individual's access to and intimacy with God. She goes on to discuss the connection women make between their sexuality, spirituality, and personal experience as they set boundaries around their body. Physical consequences of sex such as HIV or unplanned pregnancy are not the only concerns the women she interviewed had. They were also concerned with how their sexual engagement affects their relationship with God.

Sexual Attitudes

Research has found the construction of sexual attitudes to be related to variety of factors. School environment, socioeconomic class, family structure, self-esteem, locus of control, family bonding, and family supervision are just a few variables measured as influences on adolescent sexual attitudes and behavior (Belgrave, Marin, & Chambers, 2000). However, literature examining religiosity and spirituality on sexual attitudes in African Americans is limited. Belgrave et al. (2000) surveyed 212 African American girls between the ages of 10-13 and found that, “ethnic identity, conceptualized as affiliation and belongingness, was a significant predictor, with higher levels of affiliation and belongingness being associated with less risky sexual attitudes” (p. 318). The study also conceptualized masculine gender orientation as independence and found that higher levels of independence was associated with more risky sexual attitudes.

Sexual Self-Schema

“Beliefs related to sexuality and the enactment of gender roles are deeply rooted in the culture and history of African Americans and their relationships with others” (Hall, Morales & Coyne-Beasley, 2012, p. 670). Understanding how these individuals perceive themselves sexually may explain how African Americans process, organize, and experience sex and sexuality. Historically, Western civilization has painted Black bodies as primitive and objective. Studies such as Aumer’s (2014) explore the influence of culture and gender on sexual self-schema. It was found that race did not predict sexual self-schemas for either men or women. However, women’s self-construal or their definition of their selves independent of or interdependent with others was a significant predictor for sexual self-schema. One of many usages for the Black woman during slavery was breeding. She was perceived as property to produce capital rather than a human. The lack of dress for the slave woman maintained a distinction between her and proper, fully-dressed White women (Douglas, 1999; Lomax, 2018). These historical messages have contributed to the image and perception of African American women. Research has also found that cultural centrality along with masculine ideology were positively related in African American men’s sexual self-schemas (Hall et al., 2012). Black men have experienced centuries of racism and emasculation by the dominant Western society. During the zeitgeist of chattel slavery and through the Civil Rights Movement, Black men faced the

consequence of death, often by lynching, for looking at a White woman. This punishment maintained the notion that he was subordinate, thus could not mutually share intimate relationships with White women (Bell, 1999). The Black male body, in addition to field labor, was also used for breeding purposes along with the Black female body further perpetuating the equation of Black sexuality with Western capitalist gain and moral separation from White bodies. Again, these historical messages have also contributed to the image and perception of African American men.

Post-slavery, Black women were deemed sexually impure by the Black Church as it was illegal for them to marry as slaves. Moultrie (2017) states that, “By emphasizing marital fidelity and strictly sanctioning all premarital and extramarital activities, religious leaders also reinforced a gendered bias that actively restrained Black female sexuality while merely recommending restraint for Black males” (p. 10) Religious identity and relationship with sexuality seems to influence sexual self-schema and sexual attitudes in African Americans. “Church commandments that sanctioned sex only in marriage often excused the male offender because it was thought that his “sin is individual” whereas the woman’s sins were deemed to be larger as she sins against the family and race” (Moultrie, 2017, p. 10). This notion places an imbalance on the sexual self-perception of this population. Douglas (1999) notes that Christ’s embodiment calls for an appreciation of the human body as a gift from God. She goes on to add that African Americans loving their bodies reflects God’s love.

Research examines a variety of ways in which sexual self-schemas may be impacted. However, there are limitations in the literature on sexual self-schemas such as little to no ethnic diversity. Literature examines religious guilt and sexuality, religiosity and sexual risk in the African American community, but lacks information on how this population perceives their sexual selves (Hall et al., 2012; Hawes & Berkley-Patton, 2014). There is no known research that examines (1) both African American men and women’s sexual self-schemas, as Andersen and Cyranowski’s (1994) study included only White, college-educated participants, and (2) the impact of religiosity and/or spirituality on sexual self-schemas in African Americans.

Black Sexual Politics

Background

Black bodies have been used for capitalist gain since the transatlantic slave trade. These individuals were viewed not as human beings, but as commodities. African American women were valued by their ability to produce laborers. More children meant more property and higher output of work. African American men were valued by their physical strength to work in the fields and produce as many goods as possible to be sold by their owners (Frederick, 2003). Power has been exerted and maintained by regulating Black bodies, how Black people perceive themselves, and their reproductive capacities (Douglas, 1999). This dynamic allowed no room for Black family life to flourish in a healthy manner. Men, women, and children were often separated and sold for profit, thus perpetuating the insignificance of Black family cohesiveness.

In larger societal contexts, African Americans are viewed as subhuman and animalistic in nature. They are assumed to be promiscuous and unable to control their sexual urges which is inappropriately associated with a high prevalence of HIV, single motherhood, and teenage pregnancy. “In a social context that routinely depicts men and women of African descent as the embodiment of deviant sexuality, African American politics has remained curiously silent on issues of gender and sexuality” (Collins, 2005, p. 35). Unwillingness to discuss human sexuality due to fear of sexual deviance by societal standards poses a serious risk to sexual health. This silence perpetuates misinformation and oppressive operations within this community.

The Black Family

Post-slavery, defining the Black family on humane terms rather than as a commodity was a challenge. The Black Church became instrumental in helping build a healthy image of family. However, it should be noted that the Church, in many ways, has perpetuated many of the same negative stereotypes as the larger Western society as a means of preserving sexual purity. African American men and women have been branded as animalistic and hypersexual to maintain the inaccurate belief that they are somehow less sexually moral than their White counterparts. The Church’s remedy called for labeling this promiscuous behavior, specifically for Black women, as the biblical term Jezebel. The term reinforces the imagery of Black women being seductresses and sexually impure (Lomax, 2018; Moultrie, 2017).

A promotion of fundamentalist family values during the Reagan era (i.e., all sexual practices should occur only within the confines of a heterosexual marriage, procreation is the essential purpose of intercourse, and children should be shielded from all sexual information, thus the promotion of abstinence education) has contributed to the control and repression of human sexuality in Western society. These values limit what is considered acceptable to practice, identify with, and research. This censorship has created stigmatization of all sexual practices and identities that fall outside the scope of heterosexuality (Collins, 2005).

Religious Media Impact

The Black Church, in combination with religious media over the years, has created these narratives for African American men and women to live by in hopes of creating more positive scripts for Black families. Religious media or religious broadcasting includes televangelism which is defined as “religious activity produced and viewed by people who share common symbols, values, and a ‘moral culture’ they celebrate” (Moultrie, 2017, p. 33).

While these narratives are heavily and unequally placed on women, there are sexual expectations, such as abstinence, that are linked to living a wholesome life desired by God for both men and women. In other words, for an individual to achieve a truly spiritual life and intimacy with God, pursuing abstinence or celibacy as well as fidelity within a marriage is critical (Frederick, 2003). Bishop T.D. Jakes appeals to women in that he encourages them to “love themselves” by submitting to God. He insists that by forgoing their own sexual needs and waiting for God to send them a man they can attain a closer relationship with God (Frederick, 2003; Moultrie, 2017).

Juanita Bynum has shared her testimony of marrying for sex, divorcing, and having sex outside of marriage post-divorce. Her transparency about her “sexual delinquency” garnered attention from many Black women in the Church. Her testimony seemed to give permission to women who had not maintained abstinence until marriage or had divorced. Her messages offered hope and redemption to be a good Christian woman worthy of a good Christian man if one chooses to follow the will of God (Moultrie, 2017).

Summary

Black sexual politics examines the combined oppressive systems of racism and heterosexism and its impact on the Black community and Black identity. Collins challenges these politics which leave Black women vulnerable to single motherhood and sexual assault while ignoring the equal culpability of Black men. The Black LGBTQ community challenges those same politics which rejects their right to be fully accepted by Black Churches and other Black organizations (Collins, 2005). Russell (1993) discusses how men and women of color have to make a choice in who they are as they begin to “recognize that who they are...is not given but constructed out of their own situations and responses” (p. 184). She explains how these choices are made based on an individual’s social location within a sexist and heterosexist society especially in terms of dominating messages of what God wants for them.

There is ample research examining the importance of religion and spirituality on the Black community. Studies have primarily approached research from the perspective of Black pastors as it relates to their practices and teachings. Other studies have examined religiosity and spirituality in the African American community in terms of physical health and wellbeing. However, there is a lack of research examining the messages Black families internalize or practice and how they navigate reality with societal challenges such as limited access to healthcare and adequate sex education. America’s perception of the Black family has influenced and continues to influence the way it handles this population. This study aims to further understand the impact of religiosity and spirituality on Black men and women’s sexual self-schemas.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Hypotheses

The goal of this research was to answer the question of what is the relationship among spirituality, religiosity, sexual attitudes and sexual self-schema among people who grew up in the Black Church? The first hypothesis was that religiosity was negatively related to sexual self-schema for both men and women. The second hypothesis was that religiosity was negatively related to sexual attitudes for both men and women. The third hypothesis was that a significant interaction between religiosity and spirituality when predicting both men and women's sexual self-schema. Lastly, the fourth hypothesis was that there was a significant interaction between religiosity and spirituality when predicting sexual attitudes for both men and women.

Participants and Procedure

This study specifically examined the African American community. This means that for the purpose of this study, only individuals who identified racially/ethnically as Black/African American were eligible to participate. Additionally, participants were required to currently live in the United States and be between the ages of 18-65. People of any gender identification were encouraged to participate. Participants were then asked a series of screening questions. Individuals who did not identify as Black or African American and never belonged to a traditionally Black religious denomination were excluded from the study. If participants listed a non-traditionally Black religious denomination such as Catholic, they were excluded from the study. These parameters were intended to focus on individuals who identified as Black or African American and belonged to a traditionally Black religious denomination so to share their feedback based on their religious background. Based upon power of analysis (Cohen, 1992) the study required 84 participants to be able detect a medium effect with $\alpha=.05$.

Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) is an outsourcing platform and online survey for researchers to quickly obtain samples for their studies. Qualtrics was used to develop the survey. This study recruited participants from this platform. They were monetarily compensated with a payment of \$2 for their completion of the survey. This platform utilizes a "catch trial" question

or a question that helps identify participants idly answering questions without fitting the criteria for participation (Shank, 2016).

Informed consent was required of participants prior to the start of the survey. Participants were informed of the nature and risks involved in this study. Their consent allowed them to gain access to the survey.

Instruments

Sexual Attitudes

The Brief Sexual Attitude Scale (BSAS) (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Reich, 2006) is a 43-item scale that measures sexual attitudes, not discriminant of gender. The scale has the following four subscales: Permissiveness is a 21-item subscale which measures permissiveness towards an open relationship ($\alpha = 0.94$); Birth Control is a 7-item subscale which measures who is responsible in regards to birth control ($\alpha = 0.77$); Communion is a 9-item subscale that measures attitudes toward idealistic sexuality with an intimate partner ($\alpha = 0.79$); and Instrumentality is a 6-item subscale that looks at attitudes towards enjoying physical sex ($\alpha = 0.79$).

The BSAS lists statements regarding attitudes regarding sex. A Likert scale allows participants to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with a given statement. The scale measures each statement as follows: Strongly agree with statement, moderately agree with the statement, neutral – neither agree nor disagree, moderately disagree with the statement, strongly disagree with the statement. Examples of statements include: *I do not need to be committed to a person to have sex with him/her*; *Casual sex is acceptable*; *Life would have fewer problems if people could have sex more freely*; *Birth control is part of responsible sexuality*; *A woman should share responsibility for birth control*; *Sex is the closest form of communication between two people*; *Sex is a very important part of life*; *Sex is primarily a bodily function like eating* (Hendrick, et al., 2006).

Religiosity

The Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS) is a measure of the centrality, importance, or salience of religious meanings in personality. The CRS derives from a five-dimensional measure. These dimensions are as follows: intellectual dimension, ideology, public practice, private

practice, and religious experience (Huber & Huber, 2012). For the purpose of this study, the full scale will be used. Some example items are as follows: *How important is religion for you?; How religious do you consider yourself?; To what extent do you believe that God or something divine exists?; How important is it to take part in religious services?; How important is personal prayer for you?* The Cronbach's alpha for this scale is 0.84 (Huber & Huber, 2012).

Spirituality

There is a tendency for religiosity and spirituality to be used interchangeably in general discussion. E. de Jager Meezenbroek et al. notes two approaches to measuring spirituality: theistic and nontheistic (2012). The Spiritual Attitude and Involvement List (SAIL) was developed on healthy adults as well as adults with cancer. It measures connections with oneself, nature, others, and the transcendent. This study defined spirituality as "one's striving for and experience of connection with the essence of life" which they say involves connectedness with self, community, environment, and God (p. 142).

The SAIL consists of eight subscales: Meaningfulness, trust, acceptance, awareness in the present, caring for others, connectedness with nature, transcendent experiences, and spiritual activities. The researchers utilized the total scale of the Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy Scale (FACIT-Sp), which measures experiences and attitudes, due to considerable overlap between the two subscales. It utilized a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 meaning *not at all* to 5 meaning *certainly*. The SAIL measures *Meaningfulness, Trust, Acceptance, Awareness in the Present, Caring for Others, Connectedness with Nature, Transcendent Experiences, and Spiritual Activities*. Some example items from the subscales include the following: *I experience the things I do as meaningful, and My life has meaning and purpose*. The mean Cronbach's alphas across the nine measurements for the eight subscales ranged from .73 to .86.

Women's Sexual Self-Schema

According to Markus (1977), schemas are cognitive representations of the self. They are derived from past experiences and manifest in current experiences. The sexual self-perception or sexual self-schema functions to interpret and organize sexually relevant actions and experiences, provides standards for sexual behaviors, and guides decisions and inferences about future sexual circumstances (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994).

There are three total parts to the Women's Sexual Self-Schema Scale (WSSS). The first part measures a cognitive self-perception of women's sexuality. Within this section, there are two positive aspects being observed: an inclination to experience passion-romantic emotions and a behavioral openness to sexual experience. There are also two negative aspects: embarrassment and conservatism which could serve to inhibit sexual or romantic affects and behaviors. Part two looks at the role of sexual schema in intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of sexuality. Finally, the last part was a bivariate model that was explored and yielded four self-views: positive, co-schematic, a schematic, and negative (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994).

There were three factors considered in administration of this scale: Factor 1 – Passionate-Romantic, Factor 2 – Open-Direct, and Factor 3 – Embarrassed-Conservative. The full Women's Sexual Self-Schema Scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .82. Factor 1 had an alpha of .81; Factor 2 had an alpha of .77; Factor 3 had an alpha of .66 (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994).

Men's Sexual Self-Schema

The Men's Sexual Self-Schema Scale (MSSS) measures self-schema in a similar fashion to the Women's Sexual Self-Schema Scale. There are three parts measured in the scale. Part one measures men's sexual self-schema. The construct consists of 3 magnitudes: passionate-loving, powerful-aggressive, and open-minded-liberal traits. In part two, data suggests that men's sexual self-schema is derivative of past sexual experience, is manifested in current sexual experience, and guides future sexual behavior. Lastly, the third part looks at the cognitive processing aspects of sexual schema. Consistent with the investigators' schema research with women sexual self-schema study, these data substantiate the importance of cognitive representations of sexuality (Andersen, Cyranowski, & Espindle, 1999).

There were three factors considered in administration of this scale: Factor 1 – Passionate-Romantic, Factor 2 – Powerful-Aggressive, and Factor 3 – Open-minded-Liberal. The full Men's Sexual Self-Schema Scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .86. Factor 1 had an alpha of .89; Factor 2 had an alpha of .78; Factor 3 had an alpha of .65 (Andersen et al., 1999).

Data Analysis

A series of linear regressions were utilized to determine (1) whether religiosity was negatively related to sexual self-schemas for both men and women, (2) whether religiosity was

negatively related to sexual attitudes for both men and women, (3) if there was a significant interaction between religiosity and spirituality when predicting both men and women's sexual self-schema, and (4) if there was a significant interaction between religiosity and spirituality when predicting both men and women's sexual attitudes. A regression was conducted to determine an interaction between religiosity and spirituality for men's sexual self-schema. Another regression was conducted to determine an interaction between religiosity and spirituality for women's sexual self-schema.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Data Screening

All data were examined and screened prior to any analysis through the IBM SPSS version 25.0 software for data entry accuracy and detection of missing values. An item was left out of the Dimensions of Religiosity scale in the survey. Thus, the entire scale was removed from the analysis. The Centrality of Religiosity scale measured religiosity in this study. Skewness and kurtosis were performed where neither was found in the women's data set. Kurtosis of 6.67 was discovered in the men's data set for the spirituality variable. The variable was not transformed due to the minimal size of kurtosis. There were no other problems found.

Demographics

The survey was administered twice during the data collection process. Collectively, 1006 accessed the survey link for this study. Due to technical error in Qualtrics, 619 were removed from the sample, resulting in 387 participants. Of the remaining 387, 131 identified as Black or African American, has belonged to a traditionally Black religious denomination, and listed a traditionally Black Church which they either currently belong to or formerly belonged to.

A section of the questionnaire inquired about other demographics of the participants. Table 1 reports the number of qualifying participants in which 109 identified as a male (83.20%) and 22 identified as female (16.79%). The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 54 years of age.

Table 1: Participants' Identified Sex (n = 131)

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	109	83.20%
Female	22	16.79%

Participants were asked a series of screening questions regarding their experience with the Black Church. They were asked if they had ever belonged to a traditionally Black denominations. Participants who answered either "Yes" or "I don't know" were allowed to continue to the next question. Participants were then asked which traditionally Black

denomination they belonged to. Participants who listed non-traditionally Black Churches were screened out of the survey. Table 2 reports the number of respondents who have belonged or currently belong to a traditionally Black Church.

Table 2: Participants' Traditionally Black Religious Denominations (n = 131)

	Frequency (Men, n =109)	Percentage	Frequency (Women, n = 22)	Percentage
African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME)	24	22.01%	2	9.09%
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ)	8	7.33%	1	4.54%
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME)	17	15.59%	8	36.36%
National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Incorporated (NBC, U.S.A.)	36	33.02%	7	31.81%
Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC)	10	9.17%	2	9.09%
Church of God in Christ (COGIC)	14	12.84%	2	9.09%

Participants were asked at what age they first attended a traditionally Black Church to measure their first exposure to traditional teachings of the Church. Table 3 reports the age groups in which respondents first attended a traditionally Black Church.

Table 3: Participants' Age of First Church Attendance (n = 131)

Age	Frequency (Men, n = 109)	Percentage	Frequency (Women, n = 22)	Percentage
0-4 years old	16	14.67%	3	13.63%
5-9 years old	27	24.77%	12	54.54%
10-14 years old	12	11.00%	3	13.63%
15-19 years old	15	13.76%	2	9.09%
20-24 years old	10	9.17%	1	4.54%
25-29 years old	2	1.52%	1	4.54%
30-34 years old	2	1.52%	0	0%
35-39 years old	1	0.76%	0	0%
40-44 years old	1	0.76%	0	0%
45-49 years old	0	0%	0	0%
50-54 years old	1	0.76%	0	0%

Participants were asked about the length of time they either have/had belonged to a traditionally Black Church to measure the length of their exposure to traditional teachings of the Church. Table 4 reports an approximate length of time in which respondents either had or currently have belonged to their traditionally Black Church.

Table 4: Length of Church Membership (n = 131)

	Frequency (Men, n = 109)	Percentage	Frequency (Women, n = 22)	Percentage
Less than 6 months	7	6.42%	2	9.09%
< 1 Year	10	9.17%	1	4.54%
< 2 Years	18	16.51%	2	9.09%
< 5 Years	23	21.10%	7	31.81%
<10 Years	10	9.17%	5	22.72%
10+ Years	41	37.61%	5	22.72%

Participants were also asked if they currently belonged to any church. Table 5 reports the number of respondents who currently belong or do not belong to any church. Over 70% of the respondents answered "Yes" while the remainder of the respondents answered "No". None of the participants who identified as female responded "Yes" to this question.

Table 5: Current Church Membership (n = 131)

	Frequency (Men, n = 109)	Percentage	Frequency (Women, n = 22)	Percentage
Yes	92	70.22%	0	0%
No	17	15.59%	22	100.00%

Separate instruments were utilized to measure men (MSSS) and women's sexual self-schemas (WSSS). For this study, male and female participants were analyzed separately as noted in the following tables. Tables 6 and 7 reports the ages of both female participants ($M = 30.59$, $n = 22$) and male participants ($M = 29.41$, $n = 109$). Respondents must have identified as Black or African American in order to be eligible for this survey. Some respondents identified as multiracial. Thus, tables 8 and 9 reports the second identified race by respondents in addition to their identification as Black or African American. Tables 10 and 11 reports achieved level of education for male and female participants respectively. Tables 12 and 13 reports the sexual orientation of both male and female respondents.

Table 6: Female Participants' Age in Years (n = 22)

	Frequency	Percentage
18-24 years old	3	13.63%
25-29 years old	10	45.45%
30-34 years old	5	22.72%
35-39 years old	1	4.54%
40-44 years old	2	9.09%
45-49 years old	0	0%
50-54 years old	1	4.54%

Table 7: Male Participants' Age in Years (n = 109)

	Frequency	Percentage
18-24 years old	14	12.84%
25-29 years old	50	45.87%
30-34 years old	32	29.35%
35-39 years old	9	8.25%
40-44 years old	2	1.83%
45-49 years old	0	0%
50-54 years old	2	1.83%

Table 8: Female Participants' Race (n = 22)

	Frequency	Percentage
Black/African American	22	100%
White	2	9.1%
Hispanic/Latina	0	0%
Native American	1	4.54%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	4.54%
Other	0	0%

Table 9: Male Participants' Race (n = 109)

	Frequency	Percentage
Black/African American	109	100%
White	9	8.25%
Hispanic/Latina	11	10.09%
Native American	7	6.42%
Asian/Pacific Islander	8	7.33%
Other	2	1.83%

Table 10: Female Participants' Level of Education (n = 22)

	Frequency	Percentage
High school/GED	8	36.40%
Associates	4	18.20%
Bachelors	8	36.40%
Masters	2	9.10%

Table 11: Male Participants' Level of Education (n = 109)

	Frequency	Percentage
High school/GED	14	12.8%
Associates	5	4.6%
Bachelors	71	65.1%
Masters	19	17.4%

Table 12: Female Participants' Sexual Orientation (n = 22)

	Frequency	Percentage
Heterosexual	19	86.4%
Lesbian	1	4.5%
Bisexual	2	9.1%

Table 13: Male Participants' Sexual Orientation (n = 109)

	Frequency	Percentage
Heterosexual	78	71%
Gay	6	5.5%
Bisexual	25	22.9%

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

The first hypothesis stated that religiosity is negatively related to sexual self-schema for both men and women. Two linear regressions were conducted, one with men and one with women in this analysis because the questions for sexual self-schema were slightly different for the two groups. Sexual self-schema was the dependent variable and religiosity was the independent variable for both analyses. Age of participant and level of education were used as control variables when analyzing the data for women. This model was not found to be statistically significant $F(3, 18) = 1.575, p > .05, R^2 = .208, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .076$. Centrality of religiosity was not a significant predictor of women's sexual self-schema ($\beta = -.378, p = .090$). Level of education was not significant ($\beta = .099, p = .654$).

Table 14: Religiosity on Women's Sexual Self-Schema

	B	Std. Error	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Constant	197.455	48.817		4.045	.001
Age of Participant	1.413	1.405	.218	1.006	.328
Level of Achieved Education	4.058	8.899	.099	.456	.654
Centrality of Religiosity (CRS)	-.536	.299	-.378	-1.790	.090

The data for men were also analyzed with age of participant and level of education being used as control variables. This model was found to be statistically significant $F(3, 105) = 3.034, p < .05, R^2 = .080, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .053$. Centrality of religiosity was not a significant predictor of

men's sexual self-schema ($\beta = .084, p = .385$). However, level of education was positively associated with men's sexual self-schema ($\beta = .245, p = .012$).

Table 15: Religiosity on Men's Sexual Self-Schema

	B	Std. Error	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Constant	178.811	27.162		6.583	.000
Age of Participant	.740	.848	.084	.872	.385
Level of Achieved Education	13.252	5.211	.245	2.543	.012
Centrality of Religiosity (CRS)	-.149	.140	-.100	-1.064	.290

Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis stated that religiosity is negatively related to sexual attitudes for both men and women while controlling for age and level of education. The model was found to be statistically significant, $F(3, 127) = 5.481, p < .01, R^2 = .115, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .094$. Centrality of religiosity was not a significant predictor of women's sexual self-schema ($\beta = -.079, p = .355$). Level of education was negatively associated with sexual attitudes and statistically significant ($\beta = -.265, p = .002$).

Table 16: Religiosity on Sexual Attitudes

	B	Std. Error	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Constant	100.381	10.250		9.794	.000
Age of Participant	-.292	.314	-.079	-.928	.355
Level of Education	-5.801	1.863	-.265	-3.114	.002
Centrality of Religiosity (CRS)	-.106	.054	-.164	-1.952	.053

Hypothesis Three

The third hypothesis stated that there will be a significant interaction between religiosity and spirituality when predicting men and women's sexual self-schema in two separate analyses. Both variables that made up the interaction term were standardized in order to prevent a broad range. The model testing this interaction for women was not significant, $F(5, 16) = 2.257, p > .05, R^2 = .414, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .230$. The interaction between religiosity and spirituality was not significantly related to sexual self-schema, ($\beta = .198, p = .787$). Age of participant and level of education were used as control variables. Age of participant was not significant, ($\beta = -.041, p = .857$). Level of education was also not significant, ($\beta = .124, p = .547$).

Table 17: Religiosity and Spirituality Interaction on Women's Sexual Self-Schema

	B	Std. Error	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Constant	131.493	138.157		.952	.355
Age of Participant	-.269	1.470	-.041	-.183	.857
Level of Education	5.073	8.235	.124	.616	.547
Centrality of Religiosity (CRS)	-.259	1.269	-.183	-.204	.841
Spiritual Attitudes and Involvement List (SAIL)	.767	1.308	.461	.587	.566
Interaction	.003	.013	.198	.275	.787

Data for men were also analyzed with age of participant and level of education used as control variables. This model was found to be statistically significant, $F(5, 103), p < .01, R^2 = .229, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .192$. The interaction between religiosity and spirituality was not a significant predictor of men's sexual self-schema ($\beta = .459, p = .252$). Age of participant was not found to be significant in this model, ($\beta = .047, p = .603$). Level of education was statistically significant positively related to men's sexual self-schema, ($\beta = .188, p = .044$).

Table 18: Religiosity and Spirituality Interaction on Men's Sexual Self-Schema

	B	Std. Error	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Constant	140.947	57.831		2.437	.017
Age of Participant	.410	.787	.047	.521	.603
Level of Education	10.154	4.987	.188	2.036	.044
Centrality of Religiosity (CRS)	-.663	.597	-.445	-1.110	.270
Spiritual Attitudes and Involvement List (SAIL)	.447	.452	.192	.988	.325
Interaction	.006	.005	.459	1.153	.252

Hypothesis Four

The fourth hypothesis stated that there will be a significant interaction between religiosity and spirituality when predicting sexual attitudes for both men and women. Both variables that made up the interaction term were standardized in order to prevent a broad range. This model was statistically significant, $F(5, 125) = 5.452, p > .05, R^2 = .179, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .146$. An interaction was not found between religiosity and spirituality, ($\beta = .001, p = .759$). Age of participant and level of education were used as control variables. Age of participant was not found to be significant, ($\beta = -.111, p = .196$). Level of education was also positively related to sexual attitudes, ($\beta = -.308, p = .001$). Spirituality was positively related to sexual attitudes.

Table 19: Religiosity and Spirituality Interaction on Sexual Attitudes

	B	Std. Error	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Constant	77.159	14.298		5.397	.000
Age of Participant	-.408	.314	-.111	-1.301	.196
Level of Education	-6.750	1.937	-.308	-3.485	.001
Centrality of Religiosity (CRS)	-.057	.079	-.089	-.723	.471
Spiritual Attitudes and Involvement List (SAIL)	.241	.102	.257	2.370	.019
Interaction	.000	.001	.038	.307	.759

Overall, the results of this study indicate that hypothesis one was not supported in that religiosity was not a significant predictor of sexual self-schemas in either men or women. However, level of education was positively associated with men's sexual self-schema. Hypothesis two was also not supported in that religiosity was not a significant predictor of sexual attitudes for either men or women. The women's analysis for hypothesis three was unsupported in that no interaction was found between religiosity and spirituality when predicting women's sexual self-schema. The men's analysis for hypothesis three was also unsupported in that no interaction was found between religiosity and spirituality when predicting men sexual self-schema. Hypothesis four was not supported in that there was no interaction between religiosity and spirituality when predicting sexual attitudes. However, there was a positive relationship between spirituality and sexual attitudes.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the sexual attitudes and sexual self-schemas of African Americans who grew up in traditionally Black Churches. The study also examined the effect of the respondents' age and level of education on their responses. The results of this study are discussed below as well as limitations, clinical implications, and future research directions.

Outward rejection of non-cisgender, heterosexual identities within the Black Church (Collins, 2005; Jeffries, Dodge, & Sandfort, 2008) may have impacted the responses and relationship of participants who identified as LGBTQ. None of the 22 women who participated in this study noted current membership in any church. Of those 22 women, 3 identified as non-heterosexual; 31 out of 109 men identified as non-heterosexual. Taylor, Chatters, & Brown (2015) found gender to be significantly associated with religious involvement in that males tend to have lower rates of service attendance and church membership. The study also found that age predicted levels of religious participation. Older respondents reported higher levels of religious participations than their younger counterparts. The majority of the participants in this study ranged between the ages of 20 and 29.

The majority of participants belongs to or belonged to the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc. (43). Twelve participants identified belongingness to the Progressive Baptist Convention; 26 belonged to the African Methodist Episcopal Church; 9 belonged to the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. This coincides with Boyd-Franklin's (1989) assertion that the Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal groups account for the largest proportion of Black people.

Religiosity and Sexual Self-Schema

There was no statistical support for hypothesis one which posed that religiosity is negatively related to both men and women's sexual self-schema. Age did not have an impact on either men or women's responses. There was a positive relationship between level of education and sexual self-schema for men. A higher sexual self-schema denotes an open-minded and liberal orientation towards their sexual self-schema. This may be explained by the relationship African Americans have between their sexuality and their relationship with God. The ways in

which they utilized their body may be dictated by their perception of how sexual engagement affects their relationship with God (Frederick, 2003). Research has shown that self-construal is a significant predictor of sexual self-schemas in women (Aumer, 2014). Moultrie (2017) references Dianna Anderson (2015) in that “through a misreading of Thessalonians 4:3-7 women are told they must be responsible for their body’s effect on men, ultimately making them responsible not just for their body but for everyone else” (p. 26). Religiosity and relationship with God seem to be strongly tied to the identities of many African Americans. If this population lives in accordance with their perception of the will of God, religiosity would actually have a positive relationship with how they view their sexual selves.

Religiosity and Sexual Attitudes

Hypothesis two indicated that religiosity is negatively related to sexual attitudes for both men and women. There was no statistically significant support for this prediction. Age did not have a significant impact on this analysis. Yet, Belgrave et al. (2000) stated that age accounted for 15-19% of the variance found in risky sexual attitudes in their study. However, level of education did have statistically significant effect on this analysis. The aforementioned concept of soul ties (Moultrie, 2017) may yield more conservative sexual attitudes in African Americans. Higher levels of education may provide more information, exploration, or sense of control over one’s sexuality, thus shaping their sexual attitudes. There is a lack of research examining the relationship between level of education and sexual attitudes. Existing literature examining sexual attitudes tend to focus on gender and cultural influences (Aumer, 2014; Belgrave & Chambers, 2000).

Interaction between Religiosity and Spirituality on Sexual Self-Schema

Hypothesis three posed that there is a significant interaction between religiosity and spirituality when predicting both men and women’s sexual self-schema. There was no statistically significant interaction between religiosity and spirituality for women. Neither age nor level of education had a significant impact on this finding. There was no statistically significant interaction between religiosity and spirituality for men when predicting sexual self-schema. Both age and level of education had a significant effect on men’s sexual self-schema. The average age of males in this study was 29. Existing literature on sexual self-schema does not

examine the influence of level of education. However, Sweeney, Horne & Ketz (2015) found age to be predictor of sexual self- schema in women with physical disabilities with middle-age women reporting higher levels than women in young adulthood. Moultrie (2017) notes the difference in expectation and responsibility in regards to premarital sex for men and women. Men engaging in premarital sex appears to impact him as an individual within the Church. However, a woman's decision to engage in premarital sex becomes larger than herself within the Church. This difference in perception for the same action may impact the way men and women navigate religion and spirituality in regards to their sexual self-schema.

Interaction between Religiosity and Spirituality on Sexual Attitudes

Hypothesis four suggested that there is a significant interaction between religiosity spirituality when predicting sexual attitudes for both men and women. There was no statistically significant interaction between religiosity and spirituality for either men or women when predicting for sexual attitudes. However, there was a relationship between level of education and sexual attitudes. Again, existing literature does not examine the impact of level of education on sexual attitudes. A relationship between spirituality and sexual attitudes was also found. An individual's perception of sex as a sacred and spiritual experience may have more conservative orientation towards sex (Brelsford, Luquis & Murray-Swank, 2011). Socialization and separate expectations for men and women regarding sex, again, may have an impact on how the participants process and navigate religion and spirituality in the development of their sexual attitudes.

Clinical Implications

Literature shows that African Americans experience better health and improved quality of life when elements of spirituality such as prayer are present in their lives (Debnam, Holt, Clark, Roth, Southward, 2012). The Church has also been a safe haven and provided a sense of community and belongingness for this population given the social exclusion from the larger Western society. It is important for marriage and family therapists to be cognizant of the contextual factors such as religiosity and larger sociopolitical systems that shape the Black sexual experiences in the United States. African American families have a unique dynamic in that their family functionality is rooted in collectivist ideology while residing in an

individualistic society. The therapist working with the client or family must assess the role religion or spirituality plays in the home. The Black Church can work as an extension of the family if the client has religious or spiritual connections. A therapist can suggest resources from local churches such as childcare or include a pastor in treatment if needed (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). This concept of kinship shapes life transitions such as single motherhood and teenage pregnancy. According to Jenkins, “teenagers with the fewest resources, both economic and educational, are most likely to bear children” (1988, p. 92). In this community, it is not uncommon for multiple generations to live under one roof due to limited financial support outside of the family of origin. This dynamic compounded with religious beliefs in the Church regarding sex outside of marriage can cause significant conflict within a family.

Understanding these larger systems such as the Black Church and the politics around Black bodies, the Black American family, its history, and its unique dynamics is a step towards having open conversations about what these societal constructs and larger systems mean for their lived experiences. Therapists working with Black families should understand there is no such thing as *the* Black family. Joining with Black families requires a clinician regardless of color to be aware that their client will be reading both body and verbal language. The client is checking for judgement and human connections. Thus, the therapist should take a “not knowing” stance and allow the client to share their lived experience without assumption. Understanding the Blackness is multidimensional and contains many layers allows for openness and exploration of beliefs and values with each individual or family.

Sexual topics within the Black community can be difficult to tackle at home and even more difficult in the therapy room. Normalizing and validating corresponding emotions to issues related to sexuality will require patience, psychoeducation, and the modeling of reflective listening to help the family through these adjustments. Aumer (2014) suggests that clinicians incorporate cognitive therapy especially for female clients to raise awareness of the relationship between their sexual and non-sexual self. Addressing LGBTQ issues in the Black community also requires an examination of religious background and personal spirituality. Literature shows and outward rejection of queer identities by not only the Church, but often the family as well due to the community connection between the Church and family (Collins, 2005). This can become a major stressor for not only the individual who has come out, but the entire family as well. Black youths are at increased risk for homelessness and exile once they have come out to their families.

Allowing space for African American clients to explore their sexual narrative in session can be healing. Identifying the origin of messages regarding sexuality can allow room for psychoeducation about sexual health. Mapping the influence of messages around sexual attitudes as well as their sexual self-schema can create an understanding of their sexuality and ultimately the freedom to explore their sexuality.

Limitations

Several possible factors have limited this study. First, language and terminology when referring to Black Churches may have impacted participants' interpretation of a Black Church. The term "traditionally" could have been interpreted as any church with predominately Black or African American members and included groups that identify as nondenominational or Catholic with a predominately Black congregation. The term "historically" may have provided more clarity on the groups the study sought. Second, this study was only administered through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The study was unable to reach individuals without internet access or access to MTurk. This limitation may have excluded participants in rural areas, older participants, or any participant who does not engage with technology or media.

Next, this study utilized scales for sexual self-schemas that were gender-specific. The use of these scales was unable to measure individuals who identified as nonbinary. This study also had an imbalanced ratio of qualifying male to female participants. The limited quantity of identified female participants (22) did not meet the necessary 84 participant quota for valid data alone. Finally, participants were compensated for their completion of the survey. This may have created a biased sample with individuals being more motivated to earn money.

There was limited research available examining the influence of age and level of education on sexual attitudes and sexual self-schema. One study was found that explored age as a predictor of sexual self-schema in women with physical disability. There was no study found that explored the impact of level of education on either sexual attitudes or sexual self-schema. This study examined the influence of both age and level of education which allows room for future research to explore.

There is limited research that specifically examines African American's sexual attitudes and sexual self-schema. This study is unique in that it studies both concepts within this population. More specifically, African Americans who have belonged to a traditionally Black

Church would seem to be less willing to answer personal questions regarding sexuality given the orientation and expectations regarding sex between individuals in the Church.

Future Directions

Research examining the impact of religiosity and spirituality on sexual attitudes and sexual self-schemas has not been previously conducted in the African American community. This study opened the door for exploration of various factors that may impact the way African Americans develop their sexual attitudes as well as their perception of their sexual selves. Future research could examine marital status of participants in relation to church involvement or religiosity. Age of first sexual experience as well as sex education experience could provide additional information on sexual attitude and sexual self-schema development. Additional research could also examine the impact of religious support and messages from church on how participants navigate their sexual experiences. Level of education was a predictor for sexual attitudes and sexual self-schemas for men in this study. However, there was no found literature that addressed the impact of this variable on either sexual attitudes or sexual self-schemas. Future research should aim to explore the influence of education on both sexual attitudes and sexual self-schemas.

Conclusion

Therapists should be aware that not all Black Churches are the same. There are a variety of denominations and religious groups within the African American community. According to Boyd-Franklin (1989), “the Baptists and the African Methodist Episcopal groups account for the largest proportion of Black people” (p. 81). Kelly Brown Douglas (1999) discusses how the Bible is used as a tool of authority to specifically censor those who identify as LGBTQ by arguing that the text takes a clear stance against homosexuality. She goes on to state the New Testament shows Jesus as being “virtually indifferent” about sexuality. With that said, remaining open and following the client through their exploration of their sexual self-schema, sexual attitudes, or sexual identity allows for the client to make meaning of their sexual experiences as they see fit.

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APPENDIX

Survey

Implications of Religiosity and Spirituality on Sexual Attitudes of African Americans Who Grew Up in the Black Church

Q1 RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM *Impact of Religiosity and Spirituality on Sexual Self-Schemas in African Americans Who Grew Up in the Black Church* Dr. Anne Edwards & Mialauni Griggs Behavioral Sciences Purdue University **What is the purpose of this study?** The purpose of this study is to gain understanding of the impact of religiosity and spirituality on the way Black or African Americans who grew up in the Black Church perceive their sexual selves. **What will I do if I choose to be in this study?** Your participation will involve answering questions about religiosity and spirituality and how you perceive yourself as a sexual being. **How long will I be in the study?** The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes. **What are the possible risks or discomforts?** This research study is of minimal risk to you. That means that the risks of participating are no more likely or serious than those you encounter in everyday activities. The foreseeable risks include discomforts when answering questions about sexuality and/or religious/spiritual experiences. **Are there any potential benefits?** You will not directly benefit from this study. Some indirect benefits are adding to the knowledge about religiosity, spirituality, and thoughts about sexuality in the African American community. **Will I receive payment or other incentive?** For your participation in this research study, you will receive \$2.00 upon completion of the survey. If you do not complete the survey, you will not receive \$2.00. **Are there costs to me for participation?** There are no costs for your participation. If you feel you have been injured due to participation in this study, please contact Dr. Anne B. Edwards at 219-989-8439 or abedwards@pnw.edu. Purdue University will not provide medical treatment or financial compensation if you are injured or become ill as a result of participating in this research project. This does not waive any of your legal rights nor release any claim you might have based on negligence. The following disclosure(s) is(are) made

to give you an opportunity to decide if this(these) relationship(s) will affect your willingness to participate in the research study. **Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?** The project's research records may be reviewed by research team members and by departments at Purdue University responsible for regulatory and research oversight. **What are my rights if I take part in this study?** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or, if you agree to participate, you can withdraw your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. **Who can I contact if I have questions about the study?** If you have questions, comments or concerns about this research project, you can talk to one of the researchers. Please contact Dr. Anne B. Edwards at 219-989-8439 or abedwards@pnw.edu or Mialauni T. Griggs at mtgriggs@pnw.edu. If you have questions about your rights while taking part in the study or have concerns about the treatment of research participants, please call the Human Research Protection Program at (765) 494-5942, email (irb@purdue.edu) or write to: Human Research Protection Program - Purdue University Ernest C. Young Hall, Room 1032 155 S. Grant St., West Lafayette, IN 47907-2114 **Documentation of Informed Consent**

I have had the opportunity to read this consent form and have the research study explained.

- Yes, I have read the informed consent document and agree to participate. (1)
- No, I do not wish to participate. (2)

Q2 What is your age?

▼ Younger than 18 (1) ... 65 (49)

Q3 Which best describes your sexual orientation?

- Heterosexual (1)
- Gay/Lesbian (2)
- Bisexual (3)
- Pansexual (4)
- Other (5) _____
- Prefer not to disclose (6)

Q4 Which best describes your highest level of achieved education?

- High school/GED (1)
- Associate's (2)
- Bachelor's (3)
- Master's (4)
- Post-doctoral (5)
- Trade/Vocational (6)
- Prefer not to disclose (7)

Q5 Which best describes your ethnicity? (Check all that apply)

- White/Caucasian (1)
- Black/African Descent (2)
- Hispanic/Latino (3)
- Native American (4)
- Asian/Pacific Islander (5)
- Other (6) _____
- Prefer not to disclose (7)

Q6 Have you ever belonged to a traditionally Black religious denomination?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- I don't know (3)
- Prefer not to answer (4)

Q7 Which traditionally Black religious denomination do you or did you belong to? (i.e. the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Incorporated, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, and the Church of God in Christ, etc.)

Q8 How long did you/have you attended a traditionally Black Church?

- Less than 6 months (1)
- < 1 year (2)
- < 2 years (3)
- < 5 years (4)
- < 10 years (5)
- 10+ years (6)

Q9 At what age did you first attend a traditionally Black Church?

Q10 Do you currently belong to a church?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q11 Please read the following statements and indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each one.

Several times a day (1) Once a day (2) More than once a week (3) Once a week (4) One or three times a month (5) A few times a month (6) A few times a year (7) Never (8)

How often do you think about religious issues?

To what extent do you believe that God or something divine exists?

How often do you take part in religious services?

How often do you pray?

How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine intervenes in your life? (5)

How interested are you in learning more about religious topics?

To what extent do you believe in an afterlife—e.g. immortality of the soul, resurrection of the dead or reincarnation?

How important is to take part in religious services?

How important is personal prayer for you?

How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine wants to communicate or to reveal something to you?

How often do you keep yourself informed about religious questions through radio, television, internet, newspapers, or books?

In your opinion, how probable is it that a higher power really exists?

How important is it for you to be connected to a religious community?

How often do you pray spontaneously when inspired by daily situations?

How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine is present?

Q12 Please read the following statements and indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each one.

Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) Neither disagree or agree (3) Agree (4) Strongly Agree (5)
Prefer not to answer (6)

I feel happy when I think of God.

I will always believe in God.

My thoughts often drift to God.

Being a Christian is a joyous way to live.

I am sure that Christ exists.

I think about God all the time.

I pray for guidance.

My thoughts turn to Jesus every day.

God does not help me to make decisions*.

I know that God hears my prayers.

Prayer lifts my spirits.

Everything that happens to me reminds me of God.

I try to follow the laws laid down in the Bible.

I know that Jesus will always be there for me.

I am certain that God is aware of everything I do.

When I'm feeling miserable, thinking about Jesus helps to cheer me up.

I like to talk about Jesus.

Jesus' life is an example to me.

God fills me with love.

Q13 Please select the answer that is most applicable to you. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. Your first reaction is often the best; do not think too long about your answer. We realize that some questions may be difficult to answer for you, for instance because you have never thought about it before. Yet it is of utmost importance for our study that you answer every question.

Not at all (1) Hardly at all (2) To a reasonable degree (3) To a degree (4)
To a very high degree (5) Prefer not to answer (6)

I approach the world with trust.

It is important to me that I can do things for others.

In difficult times, I maintain my inner peace.

I know what position is in life.

The beauty of nature moves me.

I accept that I am not in full control of the course of my life.

I am receptive to other people's suffering.

I accept that I am not able to influence everything.

Whatever happens, I am able to cope with life.

There is a God or higher power in my life that gives me guidance.

I am aware that each life has its own tragedy.

I experience the things I do as meaningful.

I try to take life as it comes.

When I am in nature, I feel a strong sense of connection.

I accept that life will inevitably sometimes bring me pain.

I try to make a meaningful contribution to society.

My life has meaning and purpose.

I want to mean something to others.

I have had experiences during which the nature of reality became apparent to me.

I have had experiences in which I seemed to merge with a power or force greater than myself.

I have had experiences in which all things seemed to be part of a greater whole.

I talk about spiritual themes with others (themes such as the meaning in life, death or religion).

I have had experiences where everything seemed perfect.

I meditate or pray, or take time in other ways to find inner peace.

I have had experiences where I seemed to rise above myself.

I attend session, workshops, etc. that are focused on spirituality or religion.

Q14 Listed below are several statements that reflect different attitudes about sex. For each statement, fill in the response that indicates how much you agree or disagree with that statement. Some of the items refer to a specific sexual relationship, while others refer to general attitudes and beliefs about sex. Whenever possible, answer the questions with your current partner in mind. If you are not currently dating anyone, answer the questions with your most recent partner in mind. If you have never had a sexual relationship, answer in terms of what you think your responses would most likely be.

Strongly agree (1) Moderately agree (2) Neutral (3) Moderately disagree (4)
Strongly disagree (5) Prefer not to answer (6)

I do not need to be committed to a person to have sex with him/her.

Casual sex is acceptable.

I would like to have sex with many partners.

One-night stands are sometimes very enjoyable.

It is okay to have ongoing sexual relationships with more than one person at a time.

Sex as a simple exchange of favors is okay if both people agree to it.

The best sex is with no strings attached.

Life would have fewer problems if people could have sex more freely.

It is possible to enjoy sex with a person and not like that person very much.

It is okay for sex to be just good physical release.

Birth control is part of responsible sexuality.

A woman should share responsibility for birth control.

A man should share responsibility for birth control.

Sex is the closest form of communication between two people.

A sexual encounter between two people deeply in love is the ultimate human interaction.

At its best, sex seems to be the merging of two souls.

Sex is a very important part of life.

Sex is usually an intensive, almost overwhelming experience.

Sex is best when you let yourself go and focus on your own pleasure.

Sex is primarily the taking of pleasure from another person.

The main purpose of sex is to enjoy oneself.

Sex is primarily physical

Sex is primarily a bodily function, like eating.

Q15 Which best describes your identified gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Nonbinary
- Other _____
- Prefer not to disclose

Q16 Below is a listing of 50 adjectives. For each word, consider whether or not the term describes you. Each adjective is to be rated on a scale ranging from 0 = not at all descriptive of me to 6 = very much descriptive of me. Choose a number of each adjective to indicate how accurately the adjective describes you. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be thoughtful and honest.

0 (Not at all descriptive of me) 1 2 3 4 5 6 (Very much descriptive of me)

Prefer not to answer

Generous

Uninhibited

Cautious

Helpful

Loving

Open-minded

Shallow

Timid

Frank

Clean-cut

Stimulating

Unpleasant

Experienced

Short-tempered

Irresponsible

Direct

Logical

Broad-minded

Kind

Arousable

Practical

Self-conscious

Dull
Straightforward
Casual
Disagreeable
Serious
Prudent
Humorous
Sensible
Embarrassed
Outspoken
Level-headed
Responsible
Romantic
Polite
Sympathetic
Conservative
Passionate
Wise
Inexperienced
Stingy
Superficial
Warm
Unromantic
Good-natured
Rude
Revealing
Bossy
Feeling

Q17 Below is a listing of 45 adjectives. For each word, consider whether or not the term describes you. Each adjective is to be rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 0 = not at all descriptive of me to 6 = very much descriptive of me. Choose a number of each adjective to indicate how accurately the adjective describes you. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be thoughtful and honest.

0 (Not at all descriptive of me) 1 2 3 4 5 6 (Very much descriptive of me)

Prefer not to answer

Humorous

Conservative

Smart

Soft-hearted

Unpleasant

Powerful

Spontaneous

Shallow

Independent

Inexperienced

Domineering

Healthy

Loving

Helpful

Passive

Open-minded

Sloppy

Feeling

Arousable

Rude

Broad-minded

Passionate

Wise
Aggressive
Polite
Revealing
Warm-hearted
Stingy
Exciting
Direct
Sensitive
Responsible
Reserved
Experienced
Good natured
Romantic
Shy
Compassionate
Liberal
Kind
Individualistic
Sensual
Outspoken
Lazy
Excitable

Q18 Thank you for completing the survey. In order to receive payment from Mturk, you must put the following survey code in the box on their webpage: MLABE19