

# Sexual satisfaction within marriage: The role of religion

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20-06-2014

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## **Preface**

This bachelor thesis is my completion of the Sociology program at Utrecht University. In the past few months I have gained much knowledge within an interesting area of sociology. Moreover, I have learned to work independently and to motivate myself again if I lost track so now and then.

I would like to thank my supervisor Sarah Westphal, who gave me valuable advice and support; this thesis has been established in collaboration with her.

Utrecht, 18-06-2014

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## **Abstract**

*This study establishes the relationship between religion and sexual satisfaction among married German adults using unique data from the first wave of the German Family Panel (pairfam) (N = 3127). Based on the group reference theory we expect to find a direct positive effect of religion on sexual satisfaction that could partly be explained by the traditional values and attitudes individuals have towards marriage. The results suggest that the Islamic respondents and respondents who adhere another religious denomination experience a significantly higher satisfaction than the nonreligious respondents, whereas there is no difference found between the other religious groups and the nonreligious. Furthermore, having traditional attitudes and values towards marriage does not seem to play a role.*



## Introduction

The picture of marriage has dramatically changed during the last decades. Until the seventies marriage was defined by traditional familial and social obligations, in modern marriages however self-fulfillment and finding happiness come first (Rouse, 2013). Society individualizes, and there is an emphasis on personal autonomy and individual preferences (Van der Troost, 2005). Where once the majority of the population married out of tradition- and religion based values, nowadays these external norms are no longer taken for granted. Everyone 'makes' his or her own life (Van der Troost, 2005). With the focus on self-fulfillment and the quality of partnership, sexual fulfilment has become an important determinant of marital quality (Henderson-King & Veroff, 1994; Yeh et al., 2006; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005). For example, Denny et al. (1998) found that sexual uninhibitedness, the frequency of sexual encounters and the number of orgasms per sexual activity were significantly related to the overall marriage satisfaction.

Similarly, Conger et al. (2006) found that respondents who reported to be more sexually satisfied, tended to be happier with their marriages. Feelings of affirmation are important for a satisfying sexual relationship: these feelings help to set the stage for romance and sexual activity. In addition, the day that sexual satisfaction was defined by the satisfaction of men is far behind us. As there has been a motion in marriage, there has been a motion in female sexuality as well. The awareness of the potential of female sexuality is heightened and there is a focus on the importance of orgasms. Therefore sex has become more enjoyable for women (Henderson-King & Veroff, 1994).

Despite the importance individuals place on sexual satisfaction and activity in their marital relationship, previous research has suggested that many individuals feel insecure about how to fill in their sexual life (Van der Troost, 2005). In the fifties there was a so called 'standard biography', wherein sexuality, reproduction, partnership and marriage were

inseparably linked to each other. How to fill in one's intimate life was guided by clear and externally controlled expectations. Nowadays, individuals have to make choices and are not expected to live their intimate life in accordance with prescriptions (Van der Troost, 2005). To overcome these insecurities, previous research has suggested that individuals should look for social scripts that provide handholds how to live their sexuality (DeLamater, 1981). The media provide such a script: more than two-thirds of the television programs in 1999-2000 had a sexual content, and on the Internet 'sex' is the most popular word people look for. However, the media provide an unrealistic portrayal of sexuality that makes individuals rather insecure about their sexual lives (Brown, 2002).

Besides the media, previous research has identified religion as an important handhold in shaping sexual behavior. For instance, McFarland et al. (2011) examined the role of religion in shaping sexual frequency and satisfaction among married and unmarried older adults. In this study religion is considered as a handhold for individuals defining the social context in which sex is condoned, encouraged or proscribed, as religious norms typically set up the context in which it is appropriate to be sexually active (McFarland et al., 2011). The traditional idea of the Christian religion is that one must not be sexually active, except within marriage (Thatcher, 2011). This applies to the Islam as well: marriage is the stage for sexual desire (Demant, 2005). Hence, marriage is the context that provides clearness for religious people about how to live their sexual life. This given clearness could lead to greater sexual satisfaction within marriage among religious than among nonreligious people. Therefore, the present study will focus on married couples.

Most of the research into the association between sexuality and religion has been done in the United States of America, due to the prominent role of religion in daily life (Frejka & Westoff, 2007). This is surprising, as religion in Europe is far from extinct. For example, in Germany almost two thirds of the population in 2004 were adherents to the Roman Catholic Church (32.3%) or the Evangelical Church (31.9%).



Next to the two Christian churches there were some other religious institutions, like the 4% of the population that adhere to the Islam. 29% of the Germans was not related to a church or religious group. However, it is remarkable that 70% of the population of the eastern part of Germany was not affiliated with a religion, because of the former East Germany's communist history (Heineck, 2004). With this study we contribute to the literature by establishing the relationship between religion and sexuality within marriage in Germany, a theme that has never been studied before.

The aim of this study is to investigate whether there is a difference in sexual satisfaction between the religious and nonreligious married Germans. A factor that could explain this difference in sexual satisfaction is having traditional attitudes and values about marriage. The claim "Men: Want More Sex? Do the Laundry!", originally from an unpublished survey conducted by Chetnik (2006) has led to a lot of media attention (Kornrich et al., 2013). However, there is little empirical support for this claim and some studies even report the opposite. For example, Kornrich et al. (2013) found that the sexual frequency is higher in households in which men do more traditionally male labor and women do more traditionally female labor. Next to media and religion, gender could be seen as a sexual script as well. Kornrich et al. (2013) argue that scripts link sexual behavior to masculinity or femininity, which is why expressions of gender difference give a handhold to create sexual desire.

Kornrich et al. (2013) examined the relationship between egalitarianism, housework and sexual frequency in marriage. Sexual frequency and sexual satisfaction are correlated, but the correlation is far from perfect (Kornrich et al., 2013). Therefore it is interesting to broaden this research and examine the role of traditional marriage values in sexual satisfaction. Moreover, traditional marriage values can be conceived wider than solely the division of housework. Hence in this article traditional marriages values are seen as values on more areas in marriage.

To summarize, we hold the following research questions: (1) What is the difference in sexual satisfaction within marriage between religious

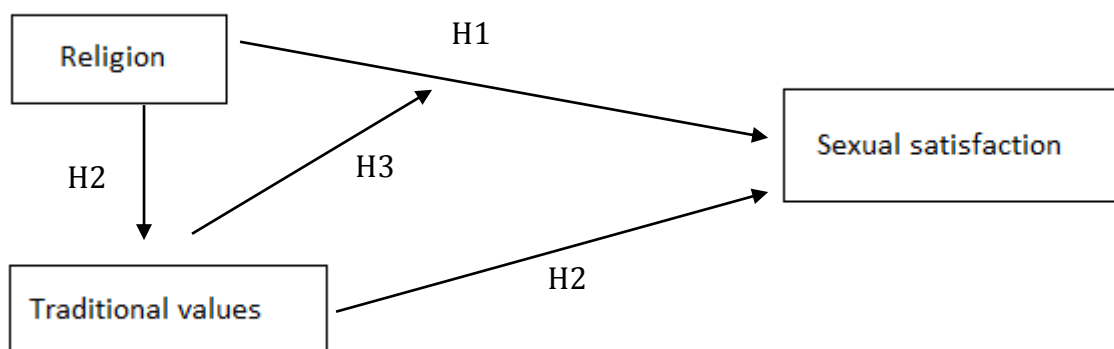
and nonreligious German adults?, and (2) To what extent can the difference in sexual satisfaction between married religious and nonreligious German adults be explained by traditional attitudes and values towards marriage?

These questions will be answered using data from the first wave of the German Family Panel (pairfam), release 4.0 (Nauck et al., 2013), a multi-disciplinary, longitudinal study for researching partnership and family dynamics. The first wave contains 16.415 respondents, both anchors as well as partners. In the present study 3127 married anchors are used. The strength of pairfam lies in the fact that it is a large-scale dataset that contains comprehensive information on gender ideals. Moreover, it is one of the few European datasets including information on sexuality. By using the extensive collected data from the married anchors, a complete image of marriage, religion, traditional values and sexuality can be shaped.

## Theoretical background

Figure 1, the conceptual framework, summarizes the expected relationship between religion, traditional marriage values, and sexual satisfaction. The figure shows a direct effect from religion to sexual satisfaction (H1) that will be explained with the use of the group reference theory. Moreover, the figure demonstrates a mediating effect of traditional values (H2) that is to say that the difference in sexual satisfaction is partly the result of having traditional values towards marriage. At last a moderating effect (H3) is depicted in the figure, which means that having traditional values might have a different effect for religious and nonreligious people.

Figure 1. *Conceptual framework*



### *The role of religion in sexual satisfaction*

To examine the role of religion in sexual behavior, it is necessary to shed light on the conditions under which individuals use their religious group as a reference (Cochran et al. 2004). A short elucidation of the reference group theory to start with. This theory goes back to the core of sociology: the groups in which people participate definitively shape the attitudes and behavior of an individual. Moreover, the membership in groups is used to set a frame of reference (Cochran et al., 2004). A distinction can be made between two different kinds of reference groups: comparative reference

groups and normative reference groups. A comparative reference group provides a context for an individual to evaluate oneself in relation to others (Bock et al., 1983). A group membership in a comparative group is used by people to refer to and evaluate their past behavior (Cochran et al., 2004). A normative reference group is a group that sets up norms and values for an individual (Bock et al., 1983). The membership in a normative group gives individuals directives to current or future behavior. These values and norms can affect behaviors or attitudes of individuals, even if they do not belong to or participate in the group (Cochran et al., 2004). Religious groups are generally seen as the normative type (McFarland et al., 2011). To specify the conditions under which individuals use religious groups as points of normative reference, the five criteria set up by Bock et al. (1983) for the degree to which a group or collectivity serves as such a point can be used.

The first criterion is the degree of similarity between the status attributes of an individual and the other members (Bock et al., 1983), which is met by the fact that members of the same religious group tend to share status attributes, like social class and race (Cochran et al., 2004). The second criterion is the degree to which the values and beliefs of an individual correspond to those of the other members of the group (Bock et al., 1983). This conformity is reflected by the demand of religious groups to their members to confess specific attitudes (Cochran et al., 2004). The third criterion is the degree of clearness of values and beliefs of a group or collectivity (Bock et al., 1983). This is exemplified by the fact that the doctrinal beliefs and guidelines for behavior of a religious group are regularly preached about and published (Cochran et al., 2004). The degree to which an individual concerns constant interaction with the other members of the group is the fourth criterion (Bock et al., 1983), which is met by attending religious services and memberships in religious organizations (Cochran et al., 2004). The fifth and last criterion is the degree to which an individual defines other members as meaningful (Bock et al., 1983). This criterion goes for members of a religious group as well.

The members listen to the leaders at services, like priests or rabbis and tend to use them as counsellors in times of need (Cochran et al, 2004). Religious groups can thus be seen as normative reference groups for their members. However, belonging to a group with normative values and norms does not ensure that individuals will actually adhere to the frame of reference. According to McFarland et al. (2011) the influence of a frame provided by a religious group is determined by its salience in the lives of individuals in two ways: cognitively via beliefs and practically in the religious service attendance habits.

The normative references of religious groups can be applied to sexuality. These groups provide informal scripts that state when sexual activity is and is not correct: sexual activity outside marriage is not appropriate, whereas within marriage it is accepted and promoted, for both increasing and keeping marital intimacy and quality, and with the aim of starting a family (McFarland et al., 2011). Being highly sexually active within marriage is encouraged, as can for example be seen in an article in the New York Times called "Pastor's advice for better marriage: more sex". The pastor argues that it is important for married couples to make time to have sex, because it will bring couples closer to both each other and to God. He states that the church needs to talk about sex, since there is no shame in marital sex. "*God thought it up, it was his idea*" (Kovack, 2008). Based on these arguments, one can expect a direct positive effect of religiosity on sexual satisfaction. This effect is the result of norms and scripts given by religious institutions with regard to marital intimacy, sexual involvement and reproduction (McFarland et al., 2011). Since nonreligious people do not have the same reference regarding to sexuality as religious people, that is to say marriage is not the one and only stage for sexuality, we expect a difference in sexual satisfaction between the two groups. Consequently, our first hypothesis states that *more religious individuals will report a higher level of sexual satisfaction within marriage than nonreligious individuals.*

### *The mediating role of traditional marriage values in sexual satisfaction*

Figure 1 shows a mediating effect of having traditional values and attitudes towards marriage. Amato et al. (2003) explicate that traditional values can be divided into two main issues. The first one is having traditional gender attitudes, for instance the believe that husbands should be breadwinners and wives should be homemakers. The other values have to do with the idea that marriage is a lifelong union that should not be broken. For both type of traditional values, the mechanisms that influence sexual satisfaction in marriage will be discussed.

According to Kornrich et al. (2013) gender still plays a central role in marriage. They argue that there are three different mechanisms that can explain the relationship between traditional gender values and sexual frequency. The first mechanism states that there is a script that links sexual behavior to masculinity or femininity; expressions of gender difference lead to a higher sexual desire (Kornrich et al., 2013). Traditional gender performances, for example cooking for women and earning money for men, serve as cues of masculine and feminine behavior. The individuals' internalized sexual script is activated by these cues, which creates sexual desire and activity (Chantala et al., 2004). Egalitarianism in married couples could give the feeling that the relationship is more 'sibling- or friendship like', which undermines the sexual desire.

The second mechanism is that married couples with more traditional beliefs act in more gender-typical ways; this would lead to more frequent sex. i.e. more masculine-identified men may appreciate more frequent sex and more feminine-identified wives might view providing sex as part of being a good wife (Kornrich et al, 2013). In this mechanism there is no link with desire as in the first mechanism. The third mechanism is that couples may perceive greater affection, love and satisfaction within their marriage under traditional gender division of labor. This, in turn, leads to a higher frequency of sex (Schwartz et al., 2009).

Next to traditional gender division of labor, the idea that marriage is a lifelong union plays a role in sexual satisfaction as well. Couples who have a strong believe in marital permanence will spend time and effort to make the marriage a success (Amato et al., 2003) and a component of marital success is sexual satisfaction (Henderson-King & Veroff, 1994). Couples with a strong believe in marital permanence will thus spend time and effort to make their sexual life a success as well, which could lead to a higher level of sexual satisfaction. The adherence of more individualistic values, by contrast, could lead to less commitment to the norm of lifelong marriage. People who are tolerant of divorce are more likely to heave overboard the marriage to find greater happiness with either a new partner or alone (Amato et al., 2003).

Back to the group reference theory: if individuals are highly integrated in a religious group, it is likely that they live according the norm of that group. Mahoney (2010) states that conservative religious subcultures may reinforce traditional attitudes about the roles in households for men and wife. Furthermore, Ellison et al. (2012) state that for religious people the Bible, seen as the Word of God, contains necessary information to guide human affairs, like marriage. The norm of religious groups is that marriage is a lifelong union (Amato et al., 2003). The reference group theory thus suggests that religious people will be more likely to adhere traditional values about gender and marriage. The following hypothesis now can be derived: *Differences in sexual satisfaction between religious and nonreligious individuals are partly the result of traditional attitudes towards marriage.*

### *The moderating role of traditional marriage values in sexual satisfaction*

As discussed before, individuals are looking for social scripts that provide a handhold to overcome insecurities about how to fill in one's sexual life (DeLamater, 1981). The sexual script provided by religious institutions is clear: sexual activity within marriage is promoted, with the aim of good

marital quality and reproduction (McFarland et al., 2011). Nonreligious do not hold this script and therefore might fall back on their values. In other words, if nonreligious do have traditional values and attitudes towards marriage, the effect of these values on sexual satisfaction might be stronger than for religious. Our third hypothesis hence states that *having traditional marriage values might be less important for religious than for nonreligious.*



## Methods

### *Sample*

Data for this study are from the German Family Panel pairfam ("Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics"), which was launched in 2008. The survey data is a nationwide random sample and contains more than 12,000 individuals of the three birth cohorts 1971-73, 1981-83 and 1991-93 as well as their partners, parents and children. The data have been conducted in four waves, between 2008 and 2012. For the present study the first wave is used, since the other waves did not provide information on religion. The response rate for the first wave was 36.9% and it includes 12,402 respondents of whom 27.78% is married. The respondents are interviewed with a Computer-Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI). It includes Computer-Assisted Self-Administered Interview (CASI) segments for sensitive questions. The average of the interview duration was 60 minutes. For our analysis, we selected married respondents who had provided information on their religion and their values towards marriage, and who had a valid value on sexual satisfaction. 298 respondents refused to provide information about their sexual satisfaction, and 11 respondents indicated that they did not know (9%). Those were dropped from analyses. We imputed missing values on the independent and control variables by the mean (for continuous variables) or the most common category (for discrete variables). The sample ultimately consisted of 3127 respondents.

### *Measures*

#### Sexual satisfaction

Information on sexual satisfaction was collected by the following question: 'All in all, how satisfied are you with your sex life?'. Solely one question on sexual satisfaction might seem meagre, but it has been used in previous research (e.g. Schwartz et al., 2009). An ordinal sexual

satisfaction variable was constructed that varied from 0 (very dissatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied). Because the dependent variable was skewed to the left, the variable is log transformed ( $y' = \ln(y + 1)$ ).

### Religion

Respondents were first asked the following question concerning religion: 'What is your religion?'. The responses to this item were: 'Christian, Roman Catholic', 'Christian, German protestant', 'Islam', 'Judaism', 'Other Christian denomination or group', 'Other religion or religious group' and 'No religion'. Due to the fact that this is a nominal variable, five dummy variables were constructed. 'Judaism', 'Other Christian denomination or group', and 'Other religion or religious group' were taken together in one dummy variable, since there are few respondents that adhere to these beliefs (N = 166). The dummy variable 'no religion' is used as reference.

Those respondents who indicated to belong to a religious denomination were asked a follow-up question: 'How often do you go to church / the mosque / the synagogue or other religious ceremonies?'. The respondents could choose between 'never', 'seldom', 'several times a year', 'one to three times a month', 'once a week' and 'more than once a week'. A continue variable was constructed that measures the religious attendance in a year, in which 'never' = 0, 'seldom' = 1, 'several times a year' = 3, 'one to three times a month' = 24, 'once a week' = 52 and 'more than once a week' = 104. The respondents that stated to have no religion on the previous question (N = 762) were counted as 0. By reconstructing this variable, it is easier to interpret the attendance of religious services, since the number of visits a year is clearer than ordinal values.

### Traditional values towards marriage

There are two dimensions of traditional values towards marriage to be considered: general values and preferences towards marriage, and

gender values. To measure general values and preferences we use the following statements: 'You should get married if you permanently live with your partner', 'Men should participate in housework to the same extent as women', 'Women should be more concerned about their family than about their career', 'Marriage is a lifelong union which should not be broken' and 'Couples should marry at the latest after a child is born'. Responses were rated on an ordinal-level scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). The variable 'Men should participate in housework to the same extent as women' is recoded so that also on this variable a high score means that the respondent has traditional values about marriage.

Information on gender values is measured by the actual division of labor, which was collected by asking the respondent: 'To what extent do you and your partner share duties in the following domains? If you have a housemaid, nanny, or similar household help, then refer in your answers only to the portion of the work done by you and/or your partner'. The domains questioned were: 'Housework (washing, cooking, and cleaning)', 'Shopping', 'Home and auto repairs', and 'Taking care of the children'. The respondents could choose between: '(Almost) completely, my partner', 'For the most, my partner', 'Split about 50/50', 'For the most part, me', and '(Almost) completely, me'. An ordinal-level scale was constructed, ranging from 1 ('(Almost) completely, my partner') to 5 ('(Almost) completely, me'), in which a high score means a traditional division of labor.

'Housework', 'Shopping' and 'Taking care of the children' are considered to be traditional female tasks and 'Home and auto repairs' to be traditional male tasks. Due to this difference, it should be taken into account whether the respondent is male or female. The reverse variable is used for female respondents answering the statement that is considered to be male tasks, so that a high score means that the division of labor is traditional. The same applies for male respondents answering the statements that are considered to be female tasks. One variable on traditional values towards marriage is constructed by calculating the mean

score. Cronbach's alpha was .64, indicating an acceptable internal consistency (Reynaldo et al., 1999).

### Control variables

First of all, an important factor to take into consideration is health. Previous research has suggested that health has a strong effect on sexual satisfaction (McFarland et al., 2011). Therefore a dummy is created that measured the health of the respondent. If the respondent described his/her health status in the past four weeks as 'good' or 'very good', he/she was considered as healthy ( $=1$ ). If the health status was described as 'satisfactory', 'not so good' or 'bad' they were considered to be not (completely) healthy ( $=0$ ). Moreover, education is included as a control variable, because previous research has shown that high education is positively associated with sexual satisfaction (Haavio-Manilla & Kontula, 1997). Three dummy variables were created, 'low educated', 'intermediate educated' and 'high educated'. The dummy 'low educated' includes respondents that left school without a certificate or have a certificate of the intermediate school. Respondents who attained lower secondary school or medium-level secondary school are considered to be 'intermediate educated'. Respondents are regarded as 'high educated' if they have an entrance qualification for universities of applied sciences or for general or subject-specific university. 'Low educated' is used as the reference in the analyses. Furthermore, there is controlled for gender ( $0 =$  male,  $1 =$  female), since previous research suggested that there is a difference in sexual satisfaction between men and women (Haavio-Manilla & Kontula, 1997). We controlled for the duration of marriage in years as well, since previous research has shown that there is a general decline in sexual satisfaction over time (Vaillant & Vaillant, 1993).

Additionally, Heineck (2004) showed that there is a remarkable difference in religion between East and West Germany, so there is controlled with dummy variables for whether the respondent is born in the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic or outside

Germany, in which the variable 'born in East Germany' was used as the reference. Finally, it is included in the analyses whether there are one or more children living with the respondent, because it is more difficult to have a sexual relationship with children living at home (Campbell et al., 2003). Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the variables used in the analyses.

Table 1. *Descriptives of used variables (N = 3127)*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
Dependent variable			
Sexual satisfaction	0 – 10	6.99	2.64
Log sexual satisfaction	0 – 2.40	1.99	0.50
Independent variables			
<i>Religion</i>			
Roman Catholic	0 – 1	0.31	
German Protestant	0 – 1	0.30	
Islamic/Jewish	0 – 1	0.09	
Other religion	0 – 1	0.05	
No religion <sup>5</sup>	0 – 1	0.24	
Frequency visit religious ceremonies in one year	0 – 104	8.10	19.05
Mediating and moderating variables			
Traditional values towards marriage (mean centered)	-2.27 – 1.62	0	0.56
Control variables			
Health	0 – 1	0.67	
<i>Education</i>			
Low education	0 – 1	0.62	
Intermediate education	0 – 1	0.40	
High education	0 – 1	0.38	
Respondent's gender	0 – 1	0.59	
Duration of marriage in years	0 – 22	6.81	4.94
Born in East Germany	0 – 1	0.61	
Born in West Germany	0 – 1	0.16	
Children currently living at home <sup>1</sup>	0 – 1	0.81	

### *Analytic Strategy*

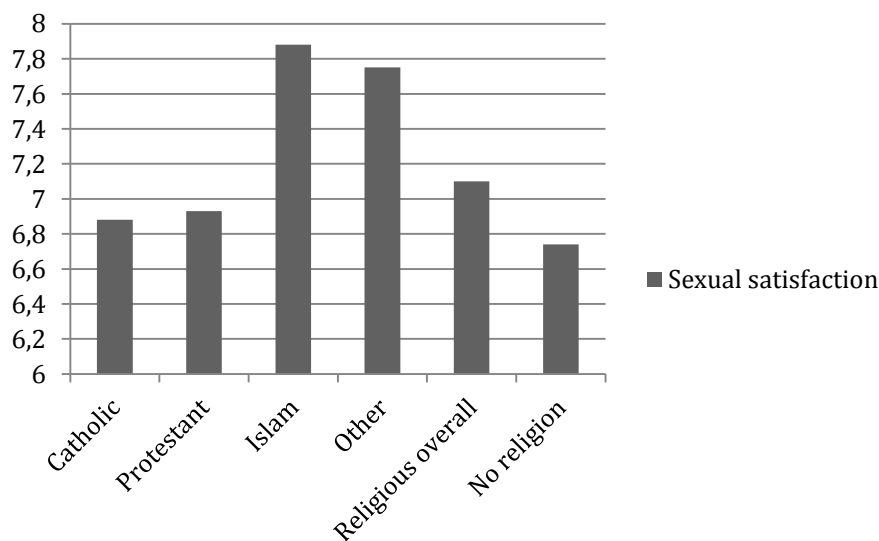
To examine the relationship between religion and sexual satisfaction within marriage, we used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. Model 1 is the baseline model that includes solely the control variables. In Model 2, religion is added to test the first hypothesis, i.e. whether there is a positive direct effect of religion on sexual satisfaction. To test whether the possible differences in sexual satisfaction are partly the result of traditional values towards marriage (H2), the variable of traditional values towards marriage is added in Model 3. In Model 4, we included the

interaction effects between religion and traditional values to test the third hypothesis, i.e. whether having traditional marriage values is less important for religious than for nonreligious. Although not shown in the results, the variance inflation factor (VIF) is calculated to analyze the collinearity. Results indicated that there is no mention of multicollinearity.

## Results

First of all we examined to what extent religious and nonreligious differ in sexual satisfaction. If the five religious categories are taken together, the mean of sexual satisfaction is 7.10, for the nonreligious it is 6.74, as can be seen in figure 2. Figure 2 depicts the differences in sexual satisfaction between religious and nonreligious persons in more detail as well. We see that the average sexual satisfaction of the Islamic respondents is the highest, namely 7.89, followed by the other religious denomination, with a mean score of 7.74. Furthermore, we see a mean score of 6.93 for the Protestants and 6.88 for the Catholics. The sexual satisfaction among the nonreligious is the lowest.

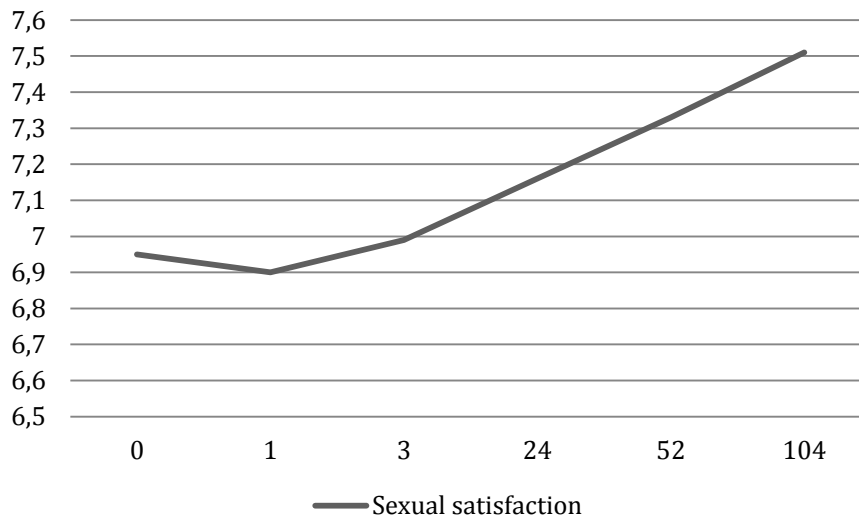
Figure 2. *Sexual satisfaction among the different religious denominations (N = 3127)*



Secondly, we examined whether the frequency of religious attendance has an influence on sexual satisfaction. Figure 3 shows a slight rising trend: A mean score of 6.95 for respondents that are never attending a religious service to 7.51 for respondents that attend a religious service 104 times a year.

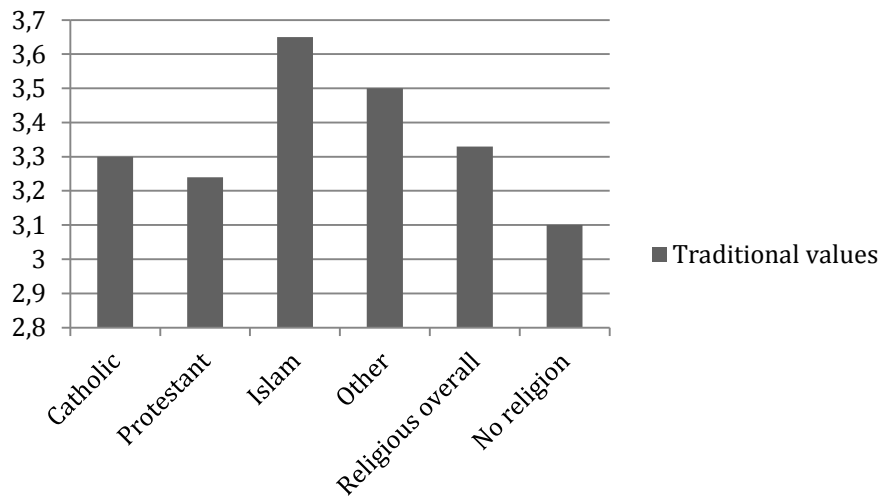


Figure 3. *Sexual satisfaction for frequency religious attendance per year*  
( $N = 3127$ )



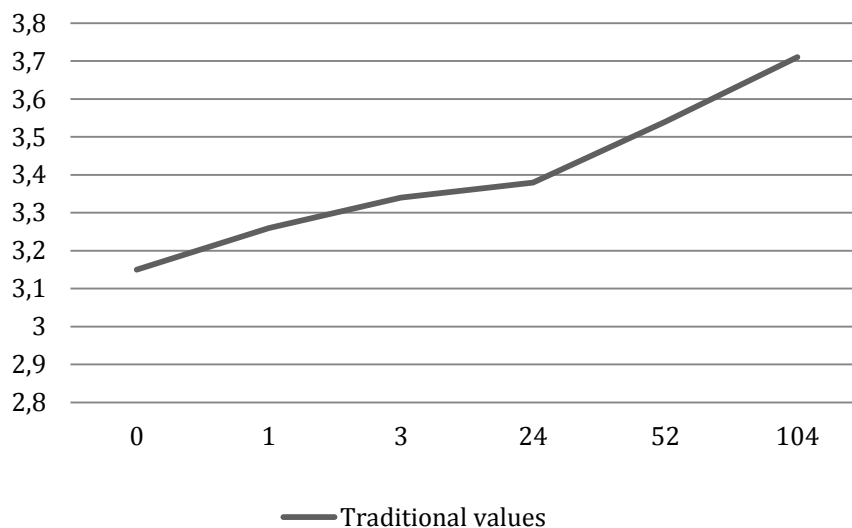
Thirdly, we investigated to what extent religious and nonreligious individuals differ in having traditional values and attitudes towards marriage. The respondents that adhere no religion have a mean of 3.10 on traditional values, for the religious it is 3.33. Figure 4 shows the variable for the different religious groups. We see that the differences between the groups are little: the mean score for the Islamic respondents is the highest, namely 3.65. Moreover, we see that the other religious denomination has a mean score of 3.50, the Catholic of 3.30 and the Protestant of 3.24. The mean score of the nonreligious respondents is with 3.10 the lowest.

Figure 4. *Traditional values towards marriage among the different religious denominations (N = 3127)*



Fourthly, we tested to what extent the frequency of religious attendance has an influence on having traditional values towards marriage. Figure 5 displays an upward trend: respondents who never attend a religious service have a mean score of 3.15 on traditional values and respondents who attend a religious service 104 times a year have a mean score of 3.71.

Figure 5. *Traditional values towards marriage for frequency religious attendance per year (N = 3127)*



Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was executed to test the three hypotheses. The results are presented in Table 2. To start with Model 1, in which solely the control variables are included. Firstly, being healthy is positively related to sexual satisfaction ( $b = .10, p < 0.01$ ), which is consistent with previous research (e.g. McFarland et al., 2011). Secondly, the higher educated are significantly less satisfied with their sex lives than the reference group, the lower educated ( $b = -.05, p < 0.05$ ). This is in contrast with previous research, in which it was found that education is positively related with sexual satisfaction (e.g. Haavio-Manilla & Kontula, 1997). Thirdly, women reported to be significantly higher sexually satisfied than men ( $b = .05, p < 0.05$ ). This difference could possibly be explained by previous findings that show that men's ideal frequency of having sex is significantly higher than women's ideal (Schwartz et al., 2009). Fourthly, being born in another country than West Germany is positively related to sexual satisfaction ( $b = .13, p < 0.01$ ), whereas there is no significant difference between West and East Germany. Lastly, being intermediate educated, the duration of marriage in years and children currently living at home were not found to have significant effects on sexual satisfaction.

Model 2 includes the variables of religion to test the first hypothesis that stated that there is a direct positive effect of religion on sexual satisfaction. We see that solely the Islamic respondents and respondents that adhere to another religion are significantly higher satisfied with their sex lives than the nonreligious, the reference group ( $b = .10, p < 0.05$  and  $b = .11, p < 0.05$ , respectively). However, we find no significant difference for the Catholic and Protestant.

Although not shown in the model, we changed the reference groups to test whether there are differences between the religious groups. This revealed that Catholic respondents are significantly less satisfied with their sex lives than the Islamic respondents ( $b = -0.08, p < 0.05$ ). Moreover, we found that the second measure of religiosity, the frequency of religious attendance, does not have a significant influence on sexual satisfaction.

In Model 3, we included the variable of having traditional values towards marriage to examine the extent to which these values can explain the difference in sexual satisfaction, the second hypothesis. As we can see in this model, there is little change between Model 2 and Model 3. That is to say, having traditional values had no significant effect on sexual satisfaction. The significant effect of adhering the Islam and another religious denomination stayed ( $b = .10, p < 0.05$  and  $b = .10, p < 0.05$ , respectively), which indicates that having traditional values does not mediate the effect of adhering to the Islam and to another religion.

To test our third hypothesis, i.e. whether the effect of having traditional values towards marriage is stronger for nonreligious persons than for religious, the interaction terms between religion and traditional values towards marriage are included. The results of the analysis are shown in Model 4. Not one of the interaction terms reached significance, which indicates that there is no difference in effect of having traditional values on sexual satisfaction between religious and nonreligious. Although not shown in the model, we changed the reference groups to test whether there is a difference in effect for the religious groups. However, we did not find any significant effect.

Table 2. Regression Analysis: effect of religion on sexual satisfaction (N=3127)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
No religion	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Catholic			0.03	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.03
Protestant			0.05	0.03	0.05	0.03	0.05	0.02
Islam/Jewish			0.10*	0.04	0.10*	0.05	0.08	0.03
Other religious denomination			0.11*	0.05	0.10*	0.06	0.10	0.05
Frequency religious attendance			0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Traditional values towards marriage (mean centered)					0.03	0.02	0.03	0.03
No religion X values	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Catholic X values							-0.04	0.03
Protestant X values							0.02	0.04
Islam/Jewish X values							0.05	0.07
Other religious denomination X values							0.04	0.08
Frequency of attendance X values							-0.00	0.00
<i>Control variables</i>								
Health	0.10**	0.02	0.09**	0.02	0.09**	0.02	0.09**	0.02
Intermediate education	-0.02	0.02	-0.01	0.02	-0.01	0.03	-0.01	0.03
High education	-0.05*	0.02	-0.04	0.02	-0.03	0.03	-0.03	0.03
Respondents gender (1=female)	0.05*	0.02	0.05*	0.02	0.05**	0.02	0.05*	0.02
Duration of marriage in years	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00
Born in West Germany	-0.01	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.03
Born in other country	0.13**	0.02	0.10**	0.02	0.10**	0.03	0.10**	0.02
Children currently living at home	-0.04	0.02	-0.04	0.02	-0.04	0.02	-0.04	0.02
(Constant)	1.948**	0.03	1.906**	0.04	1.91**	0.04	50.21**	0.00
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02		0.03		0.03		0.03	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.02		0.02		0.02		0.02	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>	9.52**		2.48*		4.43		0.74	

\* p &lt; .05, \*\* p &lt; 0.01

## Conclusion

This study was one of the first studies that examined the relationship between religion, traditional values towards marriage and sexual satisfaction in Europe, by using the first wave of the pairfam data. First of all, we argued that religion provides a handhold for individuals defining the social context in which sex is condoned, encouraged or proscribed, as religious norms typically set up the context in which it is appropriate to be sexually active. Religion provides reference groups that equip clearness for religious persons about how to live their sexual life, which could lead to greater sexual satisfaction. To what extent individuals live according the norms of a religious group depends on the value they place on their religion. Based on these arguments, we proposed the first hypothesis that more religious individuals will report higher levels of sexual satisfaction within marriage than nonreligious individuals. Our results partly support this expectation, viz. the Islamic group and the other religious denomination group are significantly more satisfied than the nonreligious. However, there was no effect found for the other religious groups. Our findings are in line with those of McFarland et al. (2011), who reported a weak relationship between religiosity and sexual outcomes among married older adults in the United States of America. The lack of effect for the Catholic and Protestant respondents could be due to the idea that the public has become less conservative in their treatment of sexuality (Haavio-Manilla & Kontula, 1997). This suggests that marriage is no longer the one and only stage for sexuality, which would lead to no difference in sexual satisfaction within marriage between religious and nonreligious individuals. Moreover, the significant effect for the Islamic group could be clarified by previous research that suggested that the islamic values about marriage and sexuality are just very important for muslims living in a Western country. These values form an essential part

of their culture and function as a border demarcation between their own ethnic group and the wider environment (Demant, 2005).

Secondly, we included traditional values towards marriage as a possible explanation for the differences in sexual satisfaction between religious and nonreligious. We explicated three mechanisms that suggest a positive effect from traditional gender ideas on sexual satisfaction. The first mechanism is that traditional gender performances may activate the internalized sexual script of an individual, which brings about sexual desire and activity. The second mechanism is that more masculine-identified men may want more frequent sex and more feminine-identified wives might view providing sex as part of being a good wife. The third mechanism is that couples may perceive greater affection, love and satisfaction within their marriage under traditional gender division of labor, and both mechanisms would lead to more sex. Moreover, we argued that individuals that adhere more traditional ideas about marriage are more likely to spend time and effort to make the marriage, and thereby their sex life, a success. Additionally, we discussed that religious individuals are more likely to adhere more traditional values than nonreligious individuals. The second hypothesis was proposed based upon these arguments and stated that differences in sexual satisfaction between religious and nonreligious are partly the result of traditional attitudes towards marriage. This hypothesis was unsupported by the data, as the inclusion of traditional values towards marriage did not significantly change the effect of religiosity on sexual satisfaction, nor had a significant effect itself. These findings are not consistent with those of Konrich et al. (2013), who found that couples with more egalitarian marriages report lower sexual frequency. It should be noted that Konrich et al. (2013) focused on sexual frequency, whereas we focused on sexual satisfaction. Although there is a correlation between those components, they are not exactly equal to each other. However, we neither found support for the idea that husbands who do more housework, and thus have less traditional values towards marriage, get more sex. This is a widely

publicized claim, which is based on the idea that a wife is more satisfied with an equal division of housework, and this would lead to a more sexual satisfied man (North, 2007). Future research is needed to clarify the relationship between traditional values towards marriage and sexual satisfaction.

Thirdly, we expected to find a difference in effect of having traditional values towards marriage on sexual satisfaction for religious and nonreligious individuals, based on the idea that individuals look for scripts to overcome insecurities about how to fill in one's sexual life. Since nonreligious persons do not have the same reference according sexuality as the religious, we expected to find a greater effect for the first group. However, our results did not support this expectation.

To conclude, not much is found in the analyses. Except for the Islamic and other denomination respondents, there is no difference in sexual satisfaction between religious and nonreligious people. The results suggest that as there has been a motion in marriage (van der Troost, 2005), there has been a motion in the role of religion as well. Although religion does play a role in daily life in Germany, it does not have an influence on the majority's sexuality.



## Discussion

By using the pairfam dataset, we provided a unique insight into the religiosity, sexuality and values of German adults. The findings in this study contribute to the existing literature because so far research was limited to the United States. However, some remarks should be noted.

In the first place, solely two measures of religiosity are used to examine the predictors of sexual satisfaction, namely whether respondents adhere to a religious denomination, and their attendance of religious services. However, the degree of religious integration in daily life is missing. Future research may broaden the measurement of religiosity by asking for example questions regarding praying, and to what extent respondents carry their religious beliefs into acts in life.

In the second place, sexual satisfaction was measured by using only one question about the overall satisfaction of the respondent's sex life. Although this measurement has been used earlier in research (e.g. Schwartz et al., 2009), future work may use more information regarding sexual satisfaction, like sexual frequency.

In the third place, the results of this study are only generalizable to married German adults until the age of 38, who are in the first years of marriage. That is to say, 76.6% of the respondents were married up to ten years by the time of conducting the interviews. Future research could examine how the relationship between religion and sexual satisfaction may vary by generation and country.

There is solely a small amount of evidence available of the relationship between religion and the sexual satisfaction of individuals (Lehrer & Waite, 2003). We believe that this study, despite the shortcomings, augments the existing literature and presents a guideline toward understanding the relationship between religion and sexual satisfaction among married German adults.

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