

# “Hooking Up” at College: Does Religion Make a Difference?

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*Recent attention from media, scholars, and religious leadership has focused on the dating activities of college students, particularly in relation to casual physical encounters or what some have termed “hooking up.” In this article, we examine the impact of both individual and institutional religious involvement on “hooking up” in a national sample of college women (N = 1,000). The results of our analysis reveal several important patterns. First, Catholic college women are more likely to have “hooked up” while at school than college women with no religious affiliation. Second, conservative Protestant college women are less likely to have “hooked up” while at school than college women with no religious affiliation; however, this difference is mediated or explained by church attendance, which is protective against “hooking up.” Finally, women who attend colleges and universities with a Catholic affiliation are more likely to have hooked up while at school than women who attend academic institutions with no religious affiliation, net of individual-level religious involvement.*

Changing norms in the dating and sexual behaviors of college students have captured recent media and scholarly attention. For example, “hooking up” has replaced more traditional forms of courtship on college campuses today (Bogle 2008; England, Shafer, and Fogarty 2007; Freitas 2008; Glenn and Marquardt 2001). Although the term is ambiguous in meaning, students generally use the phrase to refer to a physical encounter between two people who are largely unfamiliar with one another or otherwise briefly acquainted (Glenn and Marquardt 2001; Paul, McManus, and Hayes 2000). A “hookup” typically involves moderate to heavy alcohol consumption (a median of four drinks for women and six for men), and carries no anticipation of a future relationship (Bogle 2008; England, Shafer, and Fogarty 2007). Approximately 38 percent of hookups involve sexual intercourse, 15 percent involve oral sex without intercourse, and just over 31 percent involve kissing and nongenital touching (England, Shafer, and Fogarty 2007). In a study of 4,000 undergraduates from five U.S. universities, England, Shafer, and Fogarty (2007) report that roughly 75 percent of students “hook up” at least once during their college career, and 28 percent “hook up” 10 or more times.

Although some researchers argue the benefits of “hooking up” among college students, such as allowing young people to “play the field” without focusing on marriage, others worry about the potentially harmful implications of casual physical relationships (Freitas 2008; Glenn and Marquardt 2001; Jayson 2007). Women, in particular, may face negative mental health outcomes following a “hookup.” In a study of college students, Paul and Hayes (2002) found that women were more likely than men to feel used for physical pleasure following a casual physical encounter. Other evidence suggests college women often feel awkward, embarrassed, or confused following

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a “hookup” (Glenn and Marquardt 2001). A recent article in *Christianity Today*, a popular evangelical magazine, echoes these concerns among religious leadership, likening college dorms to brothels, where young adults “simply cut to the chase, the sexual part of a relationship,” and women often end up the objects of sexual abuse and mistreatment (Guroian 2005).

Regardless of concern from a variety of sources, surprisingly few studies have systematically examined religious variations in dating practices among young adults, including casual physical encounters (see Freitas (2008) for a partial exception to this general trend). Building on prior research on religion, dating, and sexual activity, we investigate the association between individual and college-level religious factors and casual physical encounters (i.e., “hooking up”). Specifically, our research questions include: Does “hooking up” among college women vary by religious involvement? If so, which dimensions of religious involvement are most salient? Are there variations in casual physical encounters between women who attend religiously affiliated universities and those who attend nonreligiously affiliated universities? Finally, does the association between individual religious involvement and “hooking up” vary according to whether an individual attends a university with a religious affiliation?

### INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT AND DATING BEHAVIOR

Several generations of social scientists have recognized that religious involvement is a multidimensional construct (Idler et al. 2003; Levin, Taylor, and Chatters 1995; Stark and Glock 1968). While certain aspects of religious involvement might be linked with positive or desirable outcomes, others may be unrelated or have a negative influence on dating and physical relationships (Manlove et al. 2006; Miller and Gur 2002; Regnerus 2007). For example, research shows that highly religious adolescents initiate a variety of forms of sexual activity later (i.e., sexual touching, oral sex, sexual intercourse) and report fewer sexual partners than their less religious peers (Bearman and Brückner 2001; Hardy and Raffaelli 2003; Meier 2003; Miller and Gur 2002; Regnerus 2007; Thornton and Camburn 1989) while other work finds that teens who hold more conservative religious beliefs, or report higher levels of religious activity, are less likely to use contraception (Brewster et al. 1998; Cooksey, Rindfuss, and Guilkey 1996; Miller and Gur 2002). Although there is a general lack of research specifically exploring the relationship between religion and casual physical encounters, there are sound theoretical reasons to expect that multiple dimensions of religious involvement will impact the dating and sexual choices of young women. The remainder of this section considers three key indicators of individual-level religious involvement, including religious affiliation, religious service attendance, and subjective religiousness.

#### Religious Affiliation

While all major religious traditions place some restrictions on physical relations, religious denominations vary in their emphasis on “sexual purity” and adherence to religious proscription. Conservative Protestant and Catholic leadership, in particular, stress a traditional view of dating, sexuality, and marriage, emphasizing scriptural passages that valorize nuclear family arrangements (Bartkowski 2001; Gallagher 2003; Gay, Ellison, and Powers 1996; Hoffmann and Miller 1997). Movements among some evangelical leadership have encouraged young adults to revert to a more traditional form of courtship, which includes codified procedures, “sexual purity,” and adult involvement in mate selection. Best-selling books, such as *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* (Harris 1999) and *And the Bride Wore White: Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity* (Gresh 1999), discourage young conservative Protestants from participating in contemporary dating behaviors. Freitas (2008) suggests that evangelical collegians are focused on marriage and are trying to remain chaste until then. Evangelical youth are warned to avoid casual affairs that are primarily for companionship and sexual behavior, instead focusing on relationships that are likely to lead to marriage.

Similarly, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) states that sexual relations must take place exclusively within marriage and that sex outside of marriage “always constitutes a grave sin.”

Despite the traditional sexual doctrines of Catholic and conservative Protestant churches, research on the relationship between religious tradition and the sexual behavior of adolescents and young adults has yielded inconsistent results (Beck, Cole, and Hammond 1991; Brewster et al. 1998; Cooksey, Rindfuss, and Guilkey 1996; Regnerus 2007). It may be that conservative religious doctrines reduce the likelihood of participating in casual physical encounters, even if they do not consistently delay or discourage sexual behavior in general. Sexually active Catholics and conservative Protestants may justify their behavior by having sex within the context of a committed relationship, with plans to marry and form a family with their current partner. Although any sort of nonmarital sexual activity may be frowned upon within Catholic and conservative Protestant churches, physical encounters that are perceived as random and unlikely to lead to marriage are prone to be viewed as particularly damaging. Based on the arguments presented thus far, we expect to find that *conservative Protestants (e.g., Southern Baptists, evangelicals) and Catholics will be less likely to “hook up” compared to those with no religious affiliation (H1a).*

The effect of denominational affiliation on “hooking up” may depend heavily on the degree of commitment to one’s religious tradition. Previous research has shown a great deal of variation in attitudes among members of the same religious affiliation, especially among more conservative religious groups such as conservative Protestants and Catholics (Cochran et al. 2004; Gay, Ellison, and Powers 1996; Petersen and Donnenwerth 1997). Much of the internal heterogeneity in premarital sexual conduct may be explained by frequency of church attendance and strength of religious identification (Brewster et al. 1998; Cochran et al. 2004). Brewster and colleagues (1998) reveal a particularly interesting bifurcated pattern in sexual activity among Catholic adolescent women. Committed Catholics are less likely to have had sexual intercourse compared to those teens affiliated with nonfundamentalist Protestant groups, non-Christian denominations, and those teens reporting no religious affiliation. However, those Catholics with lower levels of religious commitment are actually more likely to be sexually experienced as compared to non-fundamentalist Protestant, non-Christian, and nonreligious teens (Brewster et al. 1998). Drawing on this research, *we expect to find an interaction between religious affiliation and religious involvement on “hooking up” (H1b).* Specifically, we anticipate that more committed conservative Protestants will exhibit lower odds of hooking up than less committed conservative Protestants. Similarly, we anticipate that more committed Catholics will exhibit lower odds of hooking up than less committed Catholics.

### **Religious Service Attendance**

Women who participate more in religious communities (of any type) may also be less inclined to “hook up” than their less religiously active counterparts. Regular religious participation exposes congregants to religious messages (e.g., sermons) reinforcing the importance of “sexual purity,” marriage, and the supernatural consequences of deviation. Indeed, previous research suggests that religious participation influences moral attitudes toward sexuality, even among members of less conservative denominations (Hertel and Hughes 1987; Roof and McKinney 1987; Sherkat and Ellison 1997). In addition to tapping the amount of exposure to religious norms and beliefs, church attendance may also indicate the depth of commitment to one’s religious doctrine and community. The level of participation within the religious community may reflect one’s dedication to the faith and, by extension, one’s allegiance to the normative structures and worldviews of the religious group.

Religious attendance may also indicate regular contact with adherents, which could imply the potential for behavioral monitoring, detection of counter-normative behavior, and possible social sanctions (Sherkat and Wilson 1995). Religious youths may witness gossip, ostracism, and other sanctions against persons suspected of casual physical relations within the church. These

informal social sanctions may raise the perceived costs of a casual physical encounter. Young people with highly religious peers may also have fewer available partners within their social network (Thornton and Camburn 1989). Therefore, religious youths who wish to “hook up” may have difficulty finding an adventurous partner.

Religious involvement may further reduce casual physical encounters by limiting the time college students spend in nonreligious environments. Given the obligations of many college students, involvement within religious organizations may consume the time that would otherwise be spent socializing in secular settings. Religious institutions may increase access to “wholesome” social opportunities (alcohol and drug free, less sexualized) to meet and interact with the opposite sex. Instead of spending free time drinking at parties, religiously active college students may spend their time participating in church-sponsored functions, volunteering, and in other environments that are less conducive to casual physical encounters. Taken together, these arguments suggest that *frequency of church attendance will be inversely associated with the likelihood of “hooking up” (H2)*.

### **Subjective Religiousness**

Subjective religiousness may also reduce the likelihood of casual physical relationships among college women. Subjective religiousness refers to how religious one considers themselves to be, and is perhaps the best indicator of the internalization of religious norms, including those concerning dating and sexuality. Whereas measures of church attendance and religious affiliation capture public forms of religious involvement, subjective religiosity measures one’s religious self-concept. Given that all major religious groups eschew casual physical encounters, it is likely that women for whom religion is particularly important would be especially inclined to avoid such behavior. For these religiously committed young women, “hooking up” would likely be followed by feelings of shame, guilt, and regret. The prospect of violating deeply held religious values may induce feelings of psychological and even physical discomfort among highly religious women (Ellison 1994). Based on the arguments presented thus far, we expect to find that *subjective religiousness will be inversely associated with the likelihood of “hooking up” (H3)*.

## **INSTITUTIONAL-LEVEL RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT AND COLLEGE DATING BEHAVIOR**

Why might students at religious colleges and universities exhibit different dating behaviors than their counterparts at secular institutions? The “moral communities” thesis popularized by Stark (1996), and later refined by Regnerus (2003), asserts that religion should be understood sociologically as a group property rather than solely an individual one. Regardless of individual commitment, religious concentration may influence the beliefs and behaviors of those within the community. Specifically, it is reasonable to expect that religious colleges may actively create “moral communities” in several ways that can produce an environment that is less conducive to casual physical encounters. First, these institutions may reinforce and supplement the religious and spiritual training of students in ways that secular educational institutions do not. Specifically, religiously affiliated universities may: (a) require additional religion-specific coursework, (b) mandate attendance at religious services or other religious activities, and (c) employ religious professionals (e.g., priests, nuns, clergy), who may offer religiously influenced counsel as well as monitoring student activities. Second, religious schools may generally sustain a discourse focused on spiritual development and individual morality in addition to academic achievements and career aspirations. These schools may also encourage reflection on physical relationships, and promote interactions based on mutual respect, more so than secular colleges and universities. Third, religious universities may attempt to regulate opposite-sex interactions through specific universities policies (e.g., no co-ed dorms, limited visiting hours, curfews for dorm residents). These policies may contribute to a climate of sexual restraint.

In addition, some religiously affiliated schools may regulate the consumption of alcohol on campus (e.g., no campus bars, no stores selling alcoholic beverages, severe penalties for alcohol possession), which is a well-established correlate of “hooking up” as well as risky sexual behavior (Cooper 2002; Desiderato and Crawford 1995; Glenn and Marquardt 2001; Stall et al. 1986). Such alcohol restrictions are likely more prevalent at conservative Protestant colleges and universities and less common among Catholic institutions, given the disparate denominational and cultural norms regarding drinking. Finally, religious universities may be more likely than secular schools to sponsor “wholesome” contact between the sexes, such as parties and mixers that are monitored by faculty, staff, or administrators and celebrations surrounding homecoming or other traditional occasions. These outlets may further contribute to an atmosphere of propriety and restraint.

Although attending any sort of religiously affiliated college or university may reduce the likelihood of “hooking up” as compared to attending a secular school, these protective effects may be particularly pronounced for those women attending conservative Protestant institutions. In addition to alcohol restrictions, conservative Protestant universities may be more likely than either Catholic or moderate Protestant schools to provide a morally-based community environment. Indeed, recent work by Freitas (2008) suggests that conservative Protestant colleges and universities are unique in creating a shared identity and promoting common values on campus. This community culture may be particularly effective in reducing the “hooking up” culture at these institutions.

Based on the arguments presented thus far, we expect to find that *those women who attend religiously affiliated colleges and universities (particularly conservative Protestant schools) will be less likely to “hook up” compared to those who attend schools with no religious affiliation (H4).*

In addition to the possible main effects discussed above, the association between personal religious involvement and the likelihood of “hooking up” may be contingent upon the religious (or secular) affiliation of the college or university. An additional piece of the “moral communities” thesis suggests that the impact of personal religiosity may be greater when piousness is reinforced by the social environment. Regnerus (2003) refers to this phenomenon as the “light switch” effect. That is, only when a religious individual is surrounded by other affiliates who share a similar belief system is the religiosity light switch “turned on.” In this environment, religious considerations may freely influence surrounding social norms and expectations. When a highly religious person is surrounded by nonreligious individuals, the effects of individual religiousness may be smothered by group indifference toward religion (Stark and Bainbridge 1996). More specifically, when one is surrounded by other persons of faith, one may be more motivated to try and live out the tenets of one’s religion because: (a) the words and actions of one’s fellows serve as a reminder of moral precepts, (b) the context increases the risk of stigma or other social sanctions, and (c) the environment reduces the availability of collaborators (in this case willing partners) with whom to commit social forms of deviance. It is likely that religious colleges and universities constitute “moral communities” due to the distinctive culture they seek to maintain, as well as the type of student they tend to recruit. Based on these arguments, we expect that *the negative association between religious involvement and the odds of “hooking up” will be greater among those women who attend religiously affiliated schools (H5).*

To test these hypotheses, we use data from a national sample of unmarried, undergraduate women, currently enrolled at four-year institutions. Although our analyses are limited to college women primarily as the result of data availability, there is reason to expect that the relationship between religious involvement and casual physical encounters may vary by gender. Studies of adolescents consistently show that religious involvement is more strongly associated with the sexual activity of females (Bearman and Brückner 2001; Burdette and Hill 2009; Regnerus 2007). Although both young men and women may be encouraged to refrain from casual physical encounters, sexual status may be emphasized more for women in religious communities than for men (Freitas 2008). The Bible often notes the sexual status or history of female characters, yet

rarely does so for males, which may reiterate the importance of “sexual purity” among women in particular (e.g., Leviticus 21:7, Luke 1:34, John 4: 17–19). Further, research notes that women are more likely to experience negative mental health outcomes following a hookup (Glenn and Marquardt 2001), as well as be held to a stricter sexual standard than men. While women who hook up with too many people are labeled as “sluts,” men are more likely to receive accolades from other men for “scoring” more (England, Shafer, and Fogarty 2007).

## METHODS

### Data

Data were collected as part of a project funded by the Independent Women’s Forum. The questionnaire used for the survey was developed following the examination of in-depth interviews with 62 undergraduate women on 11 college and university campuses across the country in the spring of 2000. Data were collected in 2001 via telephone to examine the dating and courtship attitudes and values of contemporary college women (see Glenn and Marquardt 2001). The survey was conducted by the research firm of Schulman, Ronca, and Bucuvalas, Inc., using a sample of telephone numbers of college women (excluding those at two-year institutions) provided by Survey Sampling, Inc. A replacement procedure was used whereby a roommate was accepted as a respondent if the target contact was unwilling or unable to be interviewed. Mormons/LDS respondents ( $n = 28$ ) and institutions were removed from the sample because their small number made it impossible to generate reliable estimates for this group. The original sample size consisted of 1,000 respondents. Following the exclusion of Mormon respondents, as well as listwise deletion for missing values, this number was reduced to 919 respondents.

### Measures

#### *Dependent Variable: Casual Physical Encounters*

*Casual physical encounters* (i.e., “hooking up”) is measured via responses to the item: “Now, some people say that a ‘hook up’ is when a girl and a guy get together for a physical encounter and don’t necessarily expect anything further. Since you have been at school have you experienced a hook up?” Responses to this item were coded yes (1) and no (0).

#### *Independent Variables: Religious Involvement*

We measure several distinct aspects of religious involvement. Using a modified version of the coding scheme developed by Roof and McKinney (1987), we measure religious affiliation with six dummy variables. These groupings include: (a) *Catholic*, (b) *conservative Protestant* (e.g., Southern Baptists, Pentecostals, evangelicals), (c) *mainline Protestant* (e.g., Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians), (d) *other Christian* (no specific denominational affiliation), (e) *other religious faith* (e.g., Buddhists, Muslims, Jews), and *nonaffiliate* (the reference category). We have included a dummy variable for “other religious faith” to retain these respondents in our sample, but given its varied composition, we will not attempt to interpret the results for this grouping.

In a similar manner to individual religious affiliation, we classified colleges and universities according to their institutional affiliation ( $n = 195$ ). In order to be classified as a religiously affiliated college or university, a school must currently display a religious mission statement and advertise religion (via the Internet, school materials, etc.) as an important focus of campus life. Additionally, in order to be considered religiously affiliated, a college or university must sponsor religious activities (e.g., required service attendance) and/or employ religiously affiliated faculty and staff. It was not sufficient that a school have a historic affiliation with a certain religious faith (e.g., Harvard, Vanderbilt), but rather must have an active and apparent religious presence

on campus. Colleges and universities were therefore coded as holding a *Catholic affiliation* (e.g., Notre Dame University, Loras College, and Marquette University), *mainline Protestant affiliation* (e.g., Hope College, Luther College, Otterbein College), *conservative Protestant affiliation* (e.g., Baylor University, Lee University, and Olivet Nazarene University), or being a secular institution (the reference category).

We also include a measure of organizational religious involvement: frequency of *church attendance*. The frequency of attendance at religious services is gauged via the following item: “How often do you attend religious services?” Responses range from never or almost never (1) to almost every week (4).

Finally, we include a measure of *subjective religiousness*. This variable is measured using the question, “How religious do you consider yourself to be?” Response categories for this item range from not at all religious (1) to very religious (4). Although each of these measures captures a unique aspect of religious involvement, these items are significantly correlated with one another (see the Appendix).

### **Background Factors**

Previous research establishes a number of individual-level sociodemographic characteristics as correlates or predictors of dating and physical behavior among adolescents and young adults (Bartkowski, Xu, and Fondren 2008; Beck, Cole, and Hammond 1991; Brewster et al. 1998; Browning, Leventhal, and Brooks-Gunn 2004; Cubbin et al. 2005; Santelli et al. 2000; Upchurch et al. 1998; Whyte 1990). We include statistical adjustments for these potentially spurious/confounding factors. The models include controls for: race and/or ethnicity (1 = *African American*, 1 = *other minority*, 0 = *non-Hispanic white*); age (measured in single years); *mother’s education* (range from 1 = less than high school to 5 = graduate degree); *biologically intact family* (1 = parents are married and living together, 0 = other family structure); living off campus (1 = *off campus*, 0 = *on campus*); regional location of the college or university (1 = *West*, 1 = *South*, 1 = *Northeast*, 0 = *Midwest*); and *student population* (actual number of registered students).

### **Statistical Procedures**

Students who attend the same college or university may influence each other’s attitudes and behaviors regarding casual physical encounters. Because “hooking up” behaviors within a college or university may be more similar than those in other schools, within-college behaviors may be correlated. To adjust for this potential departure from statistical independence, we report odds ratios corrected for within-institution correlated errors. We do this with a Stata procedure called cluster (Rogers 1993) that properly bases the significance tests on the 195 institutions rather than the 919 respondents.<sup>1</sup>

### **Sample Characteristics**

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all variables used in these analyses. Approximately 38 percent of respondents reported “hooking up” at least once since their arrival on campus. Of the total sample, roughly 15 percent are members of conservative Protestant faiths, and another 22 percent are members of mainline Protestant groups. Approximately 31 percent of the women in our sample are Catholic. The remaining respondents are other Christians (8 percent), members of other religious faiths (6 percent), or report no religion at all (19 percent). The average respondent

<sup>1</sup> Some scholars may wonder why we chose to use logistic regression rather than more complex methods such as hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). First, the respondents in our survey were not sampled within colleges but were selected randomly at the national level. Second, due to the sample design, there are many schools with only one or two respondents. As a result, institutional-level estimates may be unreliable using HLM.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics ( $N = 919$ )

	Mean/Proportion	SD	Range
<i>Dependent Variable</i>			
Casual physical encounter	.38	–	0–1
<i>Individual-Level Religion Variables</i>			
Catholic	.31	–	0–1
Conservative Protestant	.15	–	0–1
Mainline Protestant	.22	–	0–1
Other Christian	.08	–	0–1
Other religious faith	.06	–	0–1
No religious preference	.19	–	0–1
Church attendance	2.50	1.11	1–4
Subjective religiousness	2.68	.91	1–4
<i>College-Level Religion Variables</i>			
Religious affiliation	.12	–	0–1
Catholic affiliation	.06	–	0–1
Mainline Protestant affiliation	.03	–	0–1
Conservative Protestant affiliation	.03	–	0–1
<i>Sociodemographics/Controls</i>			
African American	.06	–	0–1
Other minority	.08	–	0–1
Age	19.89	1.52	18–24
Mother's education	2.87	.76	1–5
Biologically intact family	.73	–	0–1
Off campus	.39	–	0–1
School is located in the South	.32	–	0–1
School is located in the Northeast	.14	–	0–1
School is located in the West	.07	–	0–1
Student population	19060.88	421.19	650–48906

in our sample attends religious services sporadically (about once per month) and considers herself to be fairly religious. Roughly 12 percent of the women in our sample attend a religiously affiliated college or university, including schools affiliated with the Catholic Church (6 percent), mainline Protestant denominations (3 percent), and conservative Protestant groups (3 percent).

Respondents are overwhelmingly (non-Hispanic) white (86 percent), with minorities of African Americans (6 percent) and other racial/ethnic backgrounds (8 percent combined). The women in our sample tend to have mothers who have at least some education beyond high school, although only about 10 percent have a college degree. A plurality of students attend schools located in the Midwest (46 percent), rather than the South (32 percent), Northeast (14 percent), or West (7 percent). The average respondent is approximately 20 years of age and comes from a biologically intact family (73 percent). Only a minority of the college women in this sample reside off campus (39 percent). The average student population is roughly 19,000 students.

## RESULTS

Table 2 displays the estimated net effects of religious involvement and covariates on the odds of having had a casual physical encounter (“hooked up”) since entering college. Models



Table 2: Odds ratios for logistic regression of casual physical encounter on selected predictors ( $N = 919$ )

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
<i>Sociodemographics/Controls</i>							
African American	.684	.838	.854	.900	.895	.930	.879
Other minority <sup>a</sup>	.650	.617	.636	.617	.624	.608	.615
Age	.999	.998	.995	1.000	.999	.981	.988
Mother's education	1.162	1.176	1.179	1.202	1.200	1.224*	1.235*
Biologically intact family	.712*	.694*	.724	.711	.719	.691*	.673*
Off campus	1.547*	1.524*	1.521	1.420	1.438	1.527	1.511
South	1.389	1.522*	1.587*	1.556*	1.574*	1.636**	1.688**
Northeast	2.316***	2.112***	2.019**	2.008**	1.993**	2.108***	2.026**
West <sup>b</sup>	1.715	1.667	1.687	1.652	1.662	1.752	1.848
Student population	.999	.999	.999	.999	.999	1.000	.999
<i>Individual-Level Religion Variables</i>							
Catholic		1.153	1.557*	1.716*	1.779**	1.758*	1.675*
Mainline Protestant		.929	1.341	1.340	1.432	1.454	1.504
Conservative Protestant		.555*	.837	.920	.973	.917	1.066
Other Christian		.959	1.378	1.360	1.455	1.445	1.520
Other religious faith <sup>c</sup>		1.412	1.723	1.668	1.740	1.756	1.760
Subjective religiousness			.748***		.897	.921	.930
Church attendance				.746***	.789*	.742*	.738**
<i>College-Level Religion Variables</i>							
Religious affiliation						2.191**	3.956***
Catholic affiliation							1.532
Mainline Protestant affiliation							.941
Conservative Protestant affiliation <sup>d</sup>							.063
Pseudo $R^2$	.030	.039	.046	.050	.051	.060	

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

<sup>a</sup>Reference is non-Hispanic white; <sup>b</sup>reference is Midwest; <sup>c</sup>reference is holding no religious affiliation; <sup>d</sup>reference is secular institution.

are organized as follows: Model 1 (the baseline model) includes nonreligious predictors, such as sociodemographic factors and other key variables. Model 2 adds a series of dummy variables to capture individual-level religious affiliation. Model 3 adds a measure of subjective religiousness. Model 4 replaces subjective religiousness with church attendance. Model 5 includes all measures of individual-level religious involvement. Model 6 adds a dummy variable for whether or not the respondent attends a religiously affiliated college or university. Finally, Model 7 replaces the general measure religious affiliation with a more specific measure of college or university religious affiliation.

These results suggest important religious differentials in casual physical encounters. First, Model 2 reveals several notable denominational patterns, though generally not those we anticipated. While holding a conservative Protestant affiliation reduces the odds of “hooking up” in Model 2, lending partial support to hypothesis H1a, this effect appears to be mediated by other measures of religious involvement (i.e., church attendance and subjective religiosity). More notable is the suppression effect that emerges for Catholic affiliation. Although Catholic affiliation is not significant in Models 1 and 2, once frequency of church attendance is entered into the model Catholic affiliation increases the odds of “hooking up”. Catholics display roughly a 72 percent increase in the odds of “hooking up” compared to those women with no religious affiliation (see Model 4). Although we anticipated that the effect of denominational affiliation on casual physical encounters may depend on the degree of commitment to one’s religious tradition, we found no support for this interaction hypothesis (H1b; results not shown but available upon request).

Consistent with H2, more frequent religious attendance reduces the odds of a casual physical encounter. In the full model (Model 7), with all covariates controlled, each one-unit increment in attendance is associated with a 26 percent reduction in the odds of “hooking up” ( $OR = .738, p < .01$ ). We find support for H3, that greater subjective religiousness reduces the odds of participating in a casual physical encounter (see Model 3); however, this effect disappears with the inclusion of church attendance in Model 5.

The inclusion of institutional-level measures of religious affiliation reveals several surprising patterns. Contrary to H4, attending a religiously affiliated college or university increases the odds of participating in a casual physical encounter (see Model 6). This effect appears to be solely driven by an effect for Catholic affiliation (see Model 7). Specifically, women attending colleges and universities affiliated with the Catholic Church are almost four times as likely ( $OR = 3.956, p < .001$ ) to have participated in “hooking up” compared to women at secular schools. By comparison, attending a mainline or conservative Protestant college is not associated with having had a casual physical encounter. Finally, as suggested by the “moral communities” thesis, we test the possibility that the impact of individual-level religious involvement is contingent upon the religious (or secular) affiliation of the college or university. Contrary to H5, we find that the association between personal religious involvement (i.e., church attendance and subjective religiousness) and “hooking up” behavior does not vary according to the religious (or secular) affiliation of the college or university. At no time were any of the interaction coefficients statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ; results not shown but available upon request).

## DISCUSSION

Despite recent media and scholarly attention focused on the dating behaviors of college students (Bogle 2008; England Shafer, and Fogarty 2007; Glenn and Marquardt 2001; ), few studies have examined religious variations in casual physical encounters, or what some have termed “hooking up.” No research to date has systematically examined the influence of institutional-level religious affiliation on “hooking up” in a national sample of college women. Our study has addressed this gap in the research literature by outlining a set of theoretical arguments relating multiple dimensions of both individual and institutional religious involvement with dating and

physical encounters, and testing relevant hypotheses using data from a national sample of college women. The findings confirm that religious involvement is linked with casual physical encounters in several potentially important ways.

We find that religious involvement reduces the odds of "hooking up" at college, and this pattern is driven by religious service attendance, rather than religious affiliation or subjective religiousness. These results suggest that co-religionist networks may be particularly important during the college years, when individuals have increased dating and sexual opportunities, yet little or no supervision. Further, religious service attendance may be a greater predictor of religious commitment once an individual has left home, given that church attendance is not always voluntary for adolescents.

Religious affiliation in and of itself appears to yield few protective effects, except insofar as women from some groups (e.g., conservative Protestants) attend religious services at higher levels than other college women. The effects of religious affiliation are largely indirect through religious attendance. Interestingly, once individual-level variations in religious involvement are controlled, Catholic women are actually more likely than their unaffiliated counterparts to have "hooked up." This somewhat surprising finding dovetails with other work on young women's sexual activity (Brewster et al. 1998), which shows sharply bifurcated patterns among Catholic women—those with high levels of religious commitment tend to delay sexual activity while those with lower levels of commitment display increased odds of sexual behavior compared to their unaffiliated counterparts. Although our multivariate findings on this point are not as pronounced as Brewster et al. (1998) (i.e., our interaction analysis hypothesized in H1b was not significant), we do find a degree of support for this line of thinking at the bivariate level. Specifically, 24 percent of Catholic women in our sample who attend church on weekly bases and report high levels of subjective religiousness have "hooked up" compared to 38 percent of their nonreligious counterparts ( $p < .05$ ). On the other hand, 50 percent of Catholic women who report infrequent church attendance and low levels of subjective religiousness have "hooked up" at college compared to 38 percent of those with no religious affiliation ( $p < .05$ ).

Our findings regarding Catholic women are also somewhat consistent with other work on religious commitment among U.S. Catholic teenagers. Smith and Denton (2005) note that many Catholic teens behave in ways that are contrary to official Church doctrines, including those related to family formation and premarital sex. Part of the explanation for this finding may lie in the religious socialization of Catholic youth. Unlike conservative and mainline Protestant churches, the Catholic Church appears to invest few resources into youth ministry and education. While much of this religious socialization historically took place within Catholic schools, this is no longer the case (Smith and Denton 2005). Therefore, young adult Catholics may not have the same level of knowledge about or commitment to religious principles and Church teachings as their Protestant counterparts. In fact, this lack of spiritual nurturing may lead some young Catholics to rebel against the normative constraints of the Church.

Perhaps the most interesting findings in our data involve college-level effects. Contrary to the "moral communities" thesis (Stark and Bainbridge 1996) and to some widespread assumptions, the odds of "hooking up" are actually much higher at religious schools than at secular educational institutions. Upon closer inspection, this pattern is determined entirely by a large Catholic college effect. Ancillary analysis (not shown but available on request) reveal that this finding is not due to number of schools or clusters. The absence of significant interactions between individual-level and institutional-level religion variables appears to run counter to the "moral communities" argument, which asserts that the effects of individual religiosity on various outcomes will be greater when one is surrounded by those sharing religious norms and expectations.

At first blush, these results might appear to challenge the "moral communities" thesis. On closer inspection, however, our findings might instead suggest that not all religiously affiliated colleges and universities constitute "moral communities." There are two key elements of "moral communities" as posited by Stark (1996) and refined by Regnerus (2003). First, there should be

a critical mass of adherents. However, as Regnerus (2003) notes, religious homogeneity in and of itself does not constitute a moral community. There must also be an actively religious majority that reinforces specific religious principles in the general social environment. As a result, religion becomes a group property, rather than just a matter of individual preference. It is important to note that religiously affiliated schools are not a monolithic whole. Institutions may be more or less successful in establishing a shared moral order based on specific religious doctrines as well as the characteristics of the students they attract.

Catholic universities in particular may face an uphill battle in attempting to create “moral communities.” If the findings of Smith and Denton (2005) are correct, then Catholic youth, who constitute 75 percent of our sample attending Catholic colleges and universities, may not enter college with the same level of religious commitment as their Protestant counterparts. Indeed, the Catholic women in our sample report significantly lower levels of subjective religiousness than both conservative and mainline Protestant respondents. Simply put, it may be that university investments in religious instruction and education are “too little too late” for some students. Without a foundation of religious socialization during childhood and adolescence, religious messages in young adulthood may not be well received. Consequently, while Catholic universities may contain a majority of students affiliated with the Catholic Church, these young adults may not ratify religious principles in the social environment, a critical component of the “moral communities” thesis.

But why are women at Catholic colleges and universities *more likely* to “hook up” compared to their counterparts at secular schools? First, Catholic schools may bring together men and women who have much in common, not only religiously but socially as well. Previous research on dating suggests that young people are likely to date those who are similar to them in terms of social background and experiences (Whyte 1990). This common background is likely to facilitate romantic interactions, which are now able to take place without parental supervision. Second, Catholic colleges and universities, like conservative Protestant schools, may place emphasis on the importance of marriage and family. As a result, finding one’s future mate may not only be an individual goal, but an institutional priority as well. Therefore, Catholic schools may sponsor activities designed to bring women and men together on a regular basis. Third, in sharp contrast to conservative Protestant educational institutions, Catholic schools often have loose regulations on alcohol. For example, at the University of Notre Dame (one of the most well-represented Catholic universities in our sample), students are allowed to have beer or wine in their dorm rooms. Quite unintentionally, the combination of these three factors may create an environment that is conducive to casual physical encounters.

In contrast, conservative Protestant colleges and universities may be more effective in establishing “moral communities.” Although protective effects did not emerge in the current study, this may be a function of the small number of respondents in our sample attending conservative Protestant institutions. There are several plausible—albeit speculative—reasons to expect the conservative Protestant homogeneity on campus may constitute more effective moral communities than other types of religious homogeneity. First, like Catholics, conservative Protestants constitute the majority of students at universities affiliated with their religious institutions. However, conservative Protestants tend to enter college with higher levels of religious commitment than their Catholic counterparts, and are less likely to reduce their commitment during young adulthood (Regnerus 2007; Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007). Recent evidence also suggests that those attending Protestant high schools exhibit higher levels of religious commitment during young adulthood (Uecker 2009). These same students are likely to attend conservative Protestant colleges and universities. Additionally, conservative Protestants place great emphasis on personal and collective morality, particularly in the area of sexuality. Indeed, recent work by Freitas (2008) suggests that evangelical colleges and universities may be unique in creating a culture of shared morality.

Several other important limitations of this research inspire caution when interpreting our findings and underscore the need for further research into the links between religion and “hooking up” behavior. First and foremost, the cross-sectional nature of the data makes it impossible to establish the causal direction of these empirical associations. Rather, our study has identified significant patterns or associations between religious involvement and casual physical encounters. Although it seems unlikely that the associations reported here are spurious, it is plausible that they are bidirectional in nature. For example, consistent with research on the links between religion and cohabitation (Thornton, Axinn, and Hill 1992), it is conceivable that religious factors influence the likelihood of casual physical encounters, which in turn impact religious involvement (e.g., perhaps diminishing religious attendance). Such a causal process could result in overestimation of the possible religious influence on casual physical encounters in cross-sectional data. However, limited evidence suggests that the association between religiosity and other forms of sexual activity is not bidirectional. While longitudinal evidence suggests that religion influences sexual activity, it does not appear that sexual activity influences later religious involvement (Hardy and Raffaelli 2003; Meier 2003). Although these studies tend to support our findings, it is for future studies to explore these relationships using longitudinal data. Specifically, it would be beneficial to track women throughout their college experience, gauging their attitudes, dating, and sexual behavior upon entering school and monitoring new experiences and attitudinal and behavioral change.

It is also possible that some parents may press their daughters to attend religiously affiliated colleges or universities because they perceive their child’s dating behavior to be problematic. Parents who view their daughters as “bad girls” may send them to religious schools in hopes of constraining dating behavior. If this scenario is accurate, we might expect to find significant institutional variations in other attitudes and behaviors related to physical interactions. Ancillary analysis (not shown, but available on request) reveal no notable variations between the women in our sample attending religious colleges and universities and those enrolled in secular institutions in terms of a variety of attitudes and behaviors, including: views on sexual morality, marital goals, parental influence, and romantic partner expectations. Although these findings do not rule out possible selection effects, they do cast doubt on selectivity as a primary explanation for our findings. While future research in this area is clearly warranted, the large odds ratios for “hooking up” among women at Catholic institutions along with the null differences in attitudes related to physical relations suggest that Catholic colleges and universities may have unintentionally facilitated the rise of a “hook up” culture on their campuses.

Additionally, research of this kind necessarily relies on self-reports of physical encounters, and some skepticism about the reliability of such data may be warranted. However, despite some allegations to the contrary, studies have turned up little clear association between religiosity (especially the kinds of religious variables considered in this study) and the tendency to give biased, socially desirable responses. At least one recent, thorough, study of this issue among young adults argues strongly against such a view (Regnerus and Smith 2005). Nevertheless, it would be helpful for future studies to rule out obvious sources of response bias.

Future work in this area should also clarify the link between religious school composition, school policies (e.g., policies related to alcohol use, co-ed dorms, etc.), and individual-level romantic behaviors and attitudes. Examining the influence of school policies on college sexual activities is particularly important given recent adoptions of “gender neutral” housing policies at certain colleges and universities (e.g., University of Pennsylvania, University of Southern Maine, Sarah Lawrence College), which allow males and females to share dorm rooms (Marklein 2004). Future scholarship should also examine the mediating influence of individual alcohol and drug use regarding the relationship between religiosity and “hooking up.” Although it would have been optimal to account for both of these influences in the present study, data on alcohol consumption and drug use were not available. Finally, this study should be extended to college males as well. Without incorporating the male perspective, our current understanding of religion and casual

physical encounters is incomplete. At this point, it is unclear how (if at all) religion shapes the romantic attitudes and behaviors of men at colleges and universities.

It will also be important to investigate the range of meanings associated with “hooking up” and how these definitions might vary across schools, religious tradition, and other personal characteristics of individual students (e.g., race/ethnicity, social class). The appeal of the term for some young people lies in its ambiguous meaning. “Hooking up” may refer to a broad range of physical acts ranging from kissing to sexual intercourse. It is important to know how normative behaviors that occur during a “hookup” may vary by individual and school religiosity. Recent discussions underscore the elasticity of some definitions and terms in this domain. For example, some young people do not define oral sex as constituting “real” sex, and they may therefore participate in this and other nonintercourse sexual behaviors partly as a means of maintaining “technical virginity” (Regnerus 2007). Unfortunately, the data used in this study do not contain more specific information on precisely what happens when young people “hook up.”

Despite the limitations of this study, we find that individual and institutional religious involvement contributes significantly to casual physical encounters (i.e., “hooking up”) in a nationwide sample of college women. Given recent alarm over the dating lives of students at colleges and universities, the possible role of religious factors in this arena clearly warrants careful investigation. Many parents shopping for “wholesome” environments for their college-aged offspring struggle to shoulder escalating costs of private/religious institutions, at least in part because they wish to shield their children from the casual physical culture espoused in secular media. However, these findings suggest that some unwelcome secular cultural influences are also operating at religious colleges, and more importantly, the startling finding that “hooking up” is much more common at some religious schools clearly invites further investigation of romantic and sexual activity.

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Appendix: Bivariate correlations among religion variables

	A.	B.	C.	D.	E.	F.	G.	H.	I.	J.
A. Catholic	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
B. Mainline Protestant	-0.35***	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
C. Conservative Protestant	-0.28***	-0.22***	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
D. Other Christian	-0.19***	-0.15***	-0.19***	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
E. Other Religious Faith	-0.16***	-0.13***	-0.16**	-0.07*	-	-	-	-	-	-
F. No Religious Affiliation	-0.32***	-0.26***	-0.20***	-0.14***	-0.12***	-	-	-	-	-
G. Subjective Religiousness	0.06	0.19***	0.25***	0.09**	-0.07*	-0.52***	-	-	-	-
H. Church Attendance	0.16***	0.10**	0.28***	0.03	-0.13***	-0.49***	0.74***	-	-	-
I. Institutional Catholic Affiliation	0.23***	-0.08*	-0.09**	-0.05	-0.02	-0.06	0.01	0.12***	-	-
J. Institutional Mainline Protestant Affiliation	-0.04	0.09**	0.04	0.00	-0.05	-0.09	0.09**	0.11***	-0.05	-
K. Institutional Conservative Protestant Affiliation	-0.07*	-0.06	0.28***	0.01	-0.05	-0.06**	0.13***	0.18***	-0.04	-0.04

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .