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Shyness, Love-Shyness, and Individual Differences in Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors

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## Abstract

The term “love-shyness” was coined by Gilmartin in 1987 to separate sexual issues from other intrapsychic and interpersonal issues involved in the psychology of shyness. Based on his interpretation of American gender roles, Gilmartin (1987) believed that love-shyness was predominantly a male phenomenon. However, his argument that love-shyness does not affect women lacked empirical support (Cheek, 1989). Therefore, the purpose of the present research was to investigate the relationship between shyness and sexuality in two samples of college women obtained in 2012 and 2015 (total  $N = 268$ ). Shyness was significantly and negatively correlated with measures of sexual quantity, such as total number of lifetime partners, in both the 2012 and 2015 samples. In addition, shyness was significantly and negatively correlated with measures of sexual quality, such as frequency of orgasm with a partner, in both samples. These results indicate that Gilmartin’s conclusion that love-shyness is only a significant problem among men was premature.

### Shyness, Love-Shyness, and Individual Differences in Sexual Attitudes and Behavior

Shyness has been defined as the tendency to feel tense, worried, or awkward during social interactions, especially with unfamiliar people (Cheek & Melchior, 1990). This definition views shyness as a personality characteristic in the normal range of individual differences. Psychological research and theory on shyness was stimulated by Zimbardo's (1977) popular paperback on the topic and has continued to expand into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (e.g., Crozier, 2003). Recently, shyness also has become the subject of scholarly concern and debate in other disciplines: history (McDaniel, 2003), sociology (Scott, 2007), and medicine (Lane, 2008).

The term "love-shyness" was coined by Gilmartin in his 1987 book *Shyness and Love* to describe the relatively small percentage of American heterosexual men who are "single, never married", not by choice, but because their shyness prevents them from fulfilling their strong desire for a romantic sexual relationship and marriage. Love-shy men are virginal, exclusively heterosexual in orientation, and lack any history of meaningful relationships with the opposite sex. In fact, the mere thought of casually interacting with a woman is enough to produce extreme anxiety (Gilmartin, 1987, p. 117-118). These love-shy men represent an extremely phobic subset of the 30-40% of American men who report ordinary shyness (Zimbardo, 1977).

In *Shyness and Love*, Gilmartin (1987) describes the interviews that he conducted with 300 love-shy men, who ranged in age from 19 to 50. During these interviews, most love-shy men revealed painful childhoods and lonely, unhappy current lives. They were made to feel inadequate and invisible by their parents, and were raised by mothers often described as "petulant", "irascible", or "prone to outbursts of temper" (Gilmartin, 1987, p. 152-155). Growing up, these men avoided the "rough and tumble" play that is expected of boys, and were subsequently bullied by their all-male peer group (Gilmartin, 1987, p. 232-233). Gilmartin

persuasively argues that their fundamental problem is being psychologically feminine in a masculine culture. He introduces the controversial concept of the “male lesbian” to describe the love-shy man's contempt for masculine activities, such as sports, their deep envy of the traditional feminine role, and their occasional fantasies of being a beautiful women making love to another beautiful woman (Gilmartin, 1987, p.125-127). These love-shy men have never liked their own gender, and do not want the companionship of male friends. Instead, “All they really want is a girl!” (Gilmartin, 1987, p. 26).

Based on his interpretation of gender roles in American society, Gilmartin believed that love-shyness was primarily a male phenomenon, and therefore chose not to include women in his research. Although both men and women are afflicted by general shyness at similar rates, Gilmartin claims that the strong traditional sex role expectation that men, versus women, must assume the assertive role in initiating romantic relationships prevents women from experiencing debilitating love-shyness (Gilmartin, 1987, p. 6). According to Gilmartin, since women are not required by social norms to initiate informal conversations with men, their future prospects in terms of dating, courtship, and marriage are not impeded at all by shyness. As a result, he believed that the very shy woman is just as likely to date and marry as the self-confident, non-shy woman (Gilmartin, 1987, p. 18).

Throughout *Shyness and Love*, Gilmartin frequently discusses how “men need women a great deal more than women need men”. In the opinion of Gilmartin (1987), even if shyness still impeded a woman's romantic success, she would almost always manage to adapt quite successfully and happily to her “single, never married” status (p. 4-5). He references “spinsters” as an example of this- research has shown that they often become successful career women and experience fewer mental and physical health problems than their married female counterparts

(e.g. Luhmann et al., 2012). Since women are traditionally expected to be more passive, shyness among women is often tolerated and viewed as “pleasantly feminine” and “nice”, whereas shyness among men is seen as “deviant” and inspires bullying or discrimination from their all-male peer group (Gilmartin, 1987, p. 5). As a result, love-shy men oftentimes reports having few, if any, friends among their same sexed peers. Shy women, on the other hand, typically are not isolated from all-female peer groups (Gilmartin, 1987, p. 6). Since the majority of Americans initially meet their future marriage partners through informal friendship networks, Gilmartin uses this to illustrate how love-shyness is more detrimental for men than women (Gilmartin, 1987, p. 6-7).

In addition, he cites several studies to demonstrate why he believes that love-shyness is far more prevalent and deleterious for men than women. For instance, a study conducted by sociologists David Knox and Kenneth Wilson (1983) found that 20% of the male students surveyed complained of painful feelings of shyness vis-a-vis the opposite sex in informal social situations, whereas less than 5% of the female students did. Gilmartin goes further to assert, without evidence, that very few of the women in this study who experienced painful shyness during informal heterosexual interactions suffered to the debilitating extent that love-shy men do (Gilmartin, 1987, p. 6).

To demonstrate how love-shyness, and being without female companionship, is more problematic for men than women, Gilmartin also draws upon the work of sociologist Christopher Jencks (1977), who followed a large sample of Indiana high school students for ten years until they were 28. He then compared men and women who had dated in high school and those who had not dated at all. He found that the non-daters were found to be substantially less successful than the daters financially, career-wise, and adjustment-wise (Jencks, 1977). These findings were

considerably stronger for the men than the women-the men who had not dated in high school were found to be the least successful and happy overall (Jencks, 1977). Similarly, Gilmartin cites a study that he conducted at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City where he found that satisfaction with amount of informal boy/girl interaction was positively correlated with happiness and general sense of well-being ( $r= 0.65$  for men,  $r= 0.32$  for women). He also found that the average number of dates per month was positively associated with general happiness ( $r= 0.49$  for men,  $r= 0.16$  for women) (Gilmartin, 1987, p. 12-13). Therefore, Gilmartin concluded that shyness was not as troublesome for women because informal heterosexual interaction was less associated with life satisfaction and happiness, possibly due to the fact that shy women often still have a same-sexed friendship network, whereas shy men do not (Gilmartin, 1987, p. 12-13).

Throughout *Shyness and Love*, Gilmartin repeatedly asserts that shy women have essentially no problems in comparison to shy men. He states that a main reason, in addition to shyness not being a barrier to marriage for women, he chose to focus his research solely on men is because male shyness is much more likely than female shyness to be associated with neuroticism (Gilmartin, 1987, p. 6). He discusses a study conducted by Paul Pilkonis at Stanford University that suggested that shy women are no more likely than non-shy women to be neurotic, but shy men are much more likely than non-shy men to be neurotic (Gilmartin, 1987, p. 6). However, Gilmartin ignores the fact that Pilkonis acknowledged that the sample of Stanford University women may be unrepresentative (Pilkonis, 1976). Indeed, a study conducted by Cheek and Buss (1981) suggested that the gender difference in neuroticism reported by Pilkonis was irregular. Therefore, his claim that shyness is associated with neuroticism to a greater extent for men was premature.

Gilmartin's argument that love-shyness does not affect women lacked adequate previous research (Cheek, 1989). For example, his claim that shyness is not a barrier to marriage for women is sharply contradicted by Wilson's (1958) study of the records of 500 single women who sought help from the American Institute of Family Relations because they wanted to marry. The majority of these women listed shyness as one of the main reasons that they had not yet found a husband, which suggests that shyness indeed may prevent some women from marrying (Wilson, 1958). Additionally, a study on dating anxiety conducted by Arkowitz, Hinton, Perl, and Himadi (1978) surveyed 3,800 randomly selected students at the University of Arizona and found that 37% of the men and 25% of the women indicated that they were "somewhat" or "very" anxious about dating. This finding indicates that dating anxiety is common for both sexes, but to some extent more prevalent amongst men. Similarly to Gilmartin (1987), Arkowitz et al. (1978) hypothesized that this may be due to traditional sex-role stereotypes and expectations. Since men are expected to initiate heterosexual interactions, whereas women are conventionally allowed to be more passive, it is likely that greater performance anxiety and fear of rejection would be associated with the more assertive male role (Arkowitz et al., 1978).

To test if changing sex-role norms and behaviors have changed in light of the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Arkowitz et al. (1978) employed a practice dating procedure where undergraduate men and women were randomly paired with each other for "practice" dates. Both partners were given the other's phone number and instructed that one of them should make arrangements for the date by the end of the week. They found that the men in over 90% of the cases called to set up the date, suggesting the traditional view of the man "making the first move" was still quite relevant at the time of the study (Arkowitz et al., 1978). However, unlike Gilmartin (1987), Arkowitz et al. (1978) acknowledged that the traditionally passive role of the

woman creates problems as well, as evident by the fact that a quarter of the women in this sample experienced anxiety surrounding informal heterosexual interaction.

Extending beyond the literature that demonstrates the impact that shyness has on dating and marriage, Gilmartin also failed to acknowledge several studies that demonstrated how shyness impacts various facets of sexuality for both men and women. For example, in a study of fifty-four females enrolled in child psychology classes at a southern university, Fehr and Stamps (1979) found that shyness was significantly positively correlated with a measure of sex guilt ( $r(22) = .41, p < .01$ ). Additionally, Zimbardo (1977) in an anonymous sex survey of 260 Stanford University undergraduates found that a lower percentage of shy ( $N = 100$ ), versus non-shy ( $N = 160$ ), participants had engaged in oral sex or had sexual intercourse, indicating that shyness likely impedes sexual quantity for shy individuals. Zimbardo also found that a lower percentage of shy participants (81%) than non-shy (66%) had masturbated. Zimbardo states that the lower rate of masturbation among shy students is accounted mostly by shy women, but does not provide the separate percentages for men and women (Zimbardo, 1977, p.74-75).

The only study that extensively examined the relationship between shyness, sexual behaviors, and sexual attitudes prior to the publication of *Shyness and Love* was conducted by Leary and Dobbins (1983). Similar to Zimbardo's 1977 findings, Leary and Dobbins (1983) found that both male and female college students high in shyness were less sexually experienced, engaged in sexual activity less frequently, had fewer sexual partners, and were less likely to have engaged in oral sex. Shy men reported looking at pornographic materials more often than non-shy men, whereas shy women reported looking at pornographic materials less often than non-shy women (Leary & Dobbins, 1983). In addition, shy men also reported masturbating more often

than non-shy men, whereas shy women reported masturbating less often than non-shy women (Leary & Dobbins, 1983).

With regards to sexual quality, subjects high in shyness rated their sexual experiences as significantly less enjoyable than subjects who were low in shyness (Leary & Dobbins, 1983). A somewhat higher proportion of shy than non-shy men reported experiencing premature ejaculation, and a lower proportion of shy women than non-shy women reported experiencing orgasm, further illustrating shyness' impact on sexual quality. Shyness was also associated with experiencing greater anxiety about sex for both men and women, although this relationship was stronger for women (Leary & Dobbins, 1983). There was no relationship between shyness and sexual attitudes, although men more strongly approved of sexual behaviors than women overall (Leary & Dobbins, 1983). These findings suggest that shyness is negatively associated with sexual quantity and quality for both men and women, with gender differences emerging surrounding the use of pornographic materials and masturbation.

Although dating and courtship may be somewhat more difficult for shy men, Gilmartin's claim that love-shyness was only a problem among men was premature, as shyness does have an impact on many facets of women's sexuality. Since the publication of "Shyness and Love", love-shyness, and the relationship between shyness and sexuality more generally, has been largely ignored by empirical research. Although online support communities have formed and resources been published by self-proclaimed love-shys, such as Talmer Shockley's "The Love-Shy Survival Guide" (2009), love-shyness remains to be largely uninvestigated. However, there has been a recent (albeit modest) revival of research on the relationship between general shyness and sexuality.

As defined earlier, shyness is a personality trait characterized by the tendency to feel tense, worried, or awkward during social interactions, especially with unfamiliar people (Cheek & Melchior, 1990). In social situations, shy individuals tend to be preoccupied with aspects of the “self” when faced with social interactions. This preoccupation leads to anxiety/worry before the interaction, self-consciousness during the interaction, and rumination afterwards (Jones, Briggs, & Smith, 1986). The fear of social rejection that shy individuals face may cause shy individuals to feel anxious and afraid, increasing the likelihood that they will experience behavioral inhibition or withdrawal (Leary, 2001a). In addition, the social interactions that shy individuals do have may be of lower quality than their non-shy counterparts (Jones & Carpenter, 1986).

Beginning in childhood, shy individuals are more prone to difficulties in socioemotional functioning than their non-shy counterparts. These difficulties in establishing and maintaining social relationships are likely to continue into adulthood. As a result, shy individuals report more social isolation, loneliness, and lower relationship quality than their non-shy counterparts (Cheek & Melchior, 1990). In addition, shyness has been shown to be positively correlated with internalizing negative emotions, leading to an increased likelihood of experiencing low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression (Jones, Schulkin, Schmidt, 2014).

As noted, shy individuals typically experience high levels of anxiety and self-consciousness that persists across a variety of settings. These feelings may be particularly exacerbated in situations pertaining to potential romantic or sexual partners (Leary & Dobbins, 1983). Although shy individuals may wish to pursue romantic or sexual relationships, their anxiety and fear of social rejection may inhibit them from initiating and maintaining committed romantic and sexual relationships. Indeed, recent research has found that shy individuals tend to

date less and are less likely to report being in a committed romantic relationship (Leck, 2006; Nelson et al. 2008; Rowsell & Coplan, 2013). In addition, shy individuals experience lower quality romantic relationships (measured by intimacy and sexual satisfaction) than their non-shy counterparts (Rowsell & Coplan, 2013). Rowsell and Coplan (2013) speculate that this may be because shyness is associated with a difficulty communicating and decreased responsiveness (critical components for sexual satisfaction), and also with lower self-disclosure and warmth (critical components for intimacy) (Rowsell & Coplan, 2013).

Since Leary and Dobbins' (1983) study, there has been extremely limited research investigating how shyness explicitly impacts sexual behaviors and attitudes. In addition, there have been many changes regarding sexual attitudes and behaviors within America, with attitudes and behaviors being more permissive than they were in the past (Malacad & Hess, 2010). Despite this, sex differences exist within the realm of sexuality. Men, in general, are more willing to have sex with strangers and are more accepting of casual sex than women. They also are more likely to masturbate and view pornography than women. With regards to attitudes, men typically have more permissive sexual attitudes than women (Petersen & Hyde, 2010).

One of the few recent attempts to study the role that shyness has in impacting individual's sexuality was conducted by Penke and Asendorpf (2008). Specifically, this study focused on the construct of sociosexuality, the degree of willingness to engage in uncommitted sexual relationships. They found shyness to be significantly and negatively correlated with sociosexual behaviors and attitudes for both men and women. However, sociosexual orientation is only one component of sexuality.

The most extensive recent study on shyness and sexuality was performed by Luster et al. (2013). They found that men were more permissive in their attitudes toward sexuality,

masturbated more, engaged in more relational sexual behaviors, and reported more lifetime sexual partners than women, replicating the results of previous studies (e.g. Leary & Dobbins, 1983). For men, shyness was associated with more permissive sexual attitudes and increased solitary sexual behaviors (i.e. masturbation), but was significantly and negatively associated with relational sexual behaviors and number of lifetime partners. Although sexual attitudes typically influence sexual behavior, this finding suggests that shy men's fear in social settings may lead them to turn to masturbation and/or pornography use versus engaging in sexual relations with a partner (Luster et al., 2013).

However, for women, shyness was associated with more conservative attitudes towards sex and (as for men) was significantly negatively associated with relational sexual behaviors and number of lifetime sexual partners. Luster et al. (2013) theorize that the gender difference surrounding sexual attitudes may be due to the sexual double standard, which is the normative belief that men are socially rewarded for sexual activity, whereas women are disparaged for similar sexual behaviors (Marks & Fraley, 2005). They speculate that since shyness is often influenced by a desire to project a positive image of oneself to others, shy men and women may feel an increased pressure to conform to the societal expectations scripted for their gender, which would explain the more liberal sexual attitudes for shy men, and the more conservative sexual attitudes for shy women (Luster et al., 2013). There was no significant relationship found between shy women and masturbation, which likely stems from the gender differences surrounding masturbation in general (Luster et al., 2013). For example, Oliver and Hyde (1993) in their meta-analysis on 21 different measures of sexual attitudes and behaviors found that the largest gender difference surrounded masturbation, with men engaging in such behavior much more frequently than women. Overall, the findings by Luster et al. (2013) largely replicate those

of Leary and Dobbins' 1983 study, as shyness was negatively associated with relational sexual quantity for men and women in both studies. However, shyness was only related to sexual attitudes in Luster et al.'s 2013 study, which may be due to the changes in sexual attitudes and behaviors since the 1980s.

In order to continue expanding the literature on shyness and sexuality, Cheek et al. (2004) conducted a study that was used as a pilot study for this thesis where archival data collected on 166 Wellesley College students in 2003 were analyzed. According to Gilmartin (1987), virginity is one of the identifying criteria of a love-shy. In the 2003 sample of college juniors and seniors, the 65 women who were virgins ( $M = 53.9$ ,  $SD = 13.9$ ) scored somewhat, but not significantly, higher on the 20-item Shyness Scale than the 102 women who were not virgins ( $M = 49.9$ ,  $SD = 15.9$ ),  $t = 1.69$ ,  $p = .09$ ;  $d = .27$  (Cheek et al., 2004). Shyness also was not significantly correlated with the measures of sexual quantity, such as frequency of sex in past six months ( $r = -.07$ ,  $p > .05$ ). However, shyness was significantly negatively correlated with the following measures of sexual quality: sexual self-esteem ( $r = -.25$ ,  $p < .05$ ), self-rated sexual attractiveness ( $r = -.43$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and comfort revealing one's body to a sexual partner ( $r = -.22$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (Cheek et al., 2004). There was no relationship between shyness and attitudes towards casual sex ( $r = .03$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (Cheek et al., 2004). These results indicate that although shyness did not have a strong relation to the quantity of women's sexual activity by the time they were college seniors in 2002-2003, it did have a significant negative impact on the quality of those experiences.

The seniors in the 2003 sample were the last class at Wellesley College to graduate before the rise of the "hook-up culture" on campus. Hooking-up is a casual sexual encounter, often a one-time encounter, where the non-dating parties have no plans to pursue a relationship

(Helm et al., 2015). A hook-up can include a variety of sexual behaviors, including but not limited to kissing, oral sex, and penetrative intercourse. Hooking-up has become normative on college campuses, and has become as popular, if not more so, than traditional dating in recent years (Bradshaw et al., 2010). The increase in the popularity of the hook-up since 2003 may explain why shyness was not significantly related to sexual quantity in the 2003 sample of college women, but was significantly related in Luster et al.'s more recent 2013 study. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the relationship between shyness and sexuality in college woman. This will be accomplished by analyzing a recent (2012) sample of Wellesley College students, in conjunction with a supplementary 2015 sample.

Specifically, this study will focus on investigating the following research questions:

1. How does shyness relate to sexual attitudes?
2. How does shyness relate to sexual quantity?
3. How does shyness relate to sexual quality?

Regarding question one, based on the previous research described above, it is hypothesized that shyness will be associated with more conservative sexual attitudes for women. Concerning question two, it is hypothesized that shyness will be negatively associated with measures of relational sexual quantity. Concerning solitary sexual behavior, it is hypothesized that shyness will be negatively associated with frequency of masturbation for women. Finally, in considering the third question, it is hypothesized that shyness will be negatively correlated with measures of sexual quality.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Data were analyzed from survey research conducted with 268 Wellesley College students in 2012 ( $N = 165$ ) and 2015 ( $N = 103$ ). In both studies, the participants had anonymously completed a survey about self-concept and sexual attitudes and behaviors, and received \$10.00 as compensation for their participation in the study. The 2012 study is the primary focus of this thesis, as its questionnaire packet includes a much more comprehensive sexuality survey than the 2015 study. Therefore, the 2015 sample will be used to supplement key findings in the 2012 sample.

### Materials

#### Measure of Shyness.

##### *2012 Study*

The 13-item Revised Cheek and Buss Shyness Scale (RCBS) was used as a measure of shyness ( $\alpha = .90$ ) (Cheek, 1983). The RCBS is a revision of the original 9-item Cheek & Buss (1981) Shyness Scale. Items included statements such as “I am socially somewhat awkward” and “I feel tense when I’m with people I don’t know well”. Items were rated on a 5-point scale from “very uncharacteristic or untrue, strongly disagree” to “very characteristic or true, strongly agree”. The RCBS correlates .96 with the original 9-item version (Cheek, 1983) and, in a sample of 261 participants, had a 2-week test-retest reliability of .88 (Hopko et al., 2005).

##### *2015 Study*

The 20-item Shyness Syndrome Inventory (SSI) was used to assess participant’s level of shyness ( $\alpha = .94$ ) (Cheek & Melchior, 1985). The SSI is a revision of the original 9-item Cheek & Buss (1981) Shyness Scale that assesses the somatic (e.g. “Sometimes being introduced to new

people makes me feel physically upset (for example, having an upset stomach, pounding heart, sweaty palms, or heat rash)”), behavioral (e.g. “I am socially somewhat awkward”), and cognitive (e.g. “I feel painfully self-conscious when I’m around strangers”) components of shyness. Items were rated by participants on a 5-point scale from “very uncharacteristic or untrue, strongly disagree” to very characteristic or true, strongly agree”. The SSI correlates .96 with the original 9-item version and, in a sample of 31 college women, had a 45-day test-retest reliability of .91 (Cheek & Melchoir, 1985).

### **Measures of Sex Variables.**

#### ***Attitudes.***

In both the 2012 and 2015 samples, long-term and short-term mating attitudes were measured by administering the Long-Term Mating Orientation (LTMO) and the Short-Term Mating Orientation (STMO) scales of the Expanded Multidimensional Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (EM-SOI; Jackson & Kirkpatrick, 2007). The 7-item LTMO scale ( $\alpha = .88$ ) assess attitudes toward a committed, long-term romantic relationship and includes items such as, “I am interesting in maintaining a long-term romantic relationship with someone special” and “I can see myself settling down romantically with one special person”, rated on a 7-point scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” (Jackson & Kirkpatrick, 2007). The 10-item STMO ( $\alpha = .88$ ) assesses attitudes towards sex without commitment and includes items such as, “Sex without love is OK” and “I believe in taking sexual opportunities when I find them”, rated the same as the LTMO scale (Jackson & Kirkpatrick, 2007; as modified by Cheek, McCracken, Merrill, & Norem et al., 2012).

**Behaviors.***Sexual Quantity.*

In both the 2012 and 2015 samples, participant's past sexual behavior was assessed using the EM-SOI and Clark's supplementary sexuality questions (2003). The Previous Sexual Behavior scale ( $\alpha = .83$ ) of the EM-SOI consists of three self-report items: 1) "During your entire life, with how many partners of the opposite sex have you had sexual intercourse?", 2) "With how many partners of the opposite sex have you had sexual intercourse within the past year?", and 3) "With how many partners of the opposite sex have you had sex on one and only one occasion?" (Jackson & Kirkpatrick, 2007). Since these questions assume heterosexuality, Clark (2003) created additional questions that assess past sexual behavior with the same-sex: 1) "During your entire life, with how many partners of the same sex have you had sexual intercourse?", 2) "With how many partners of the same sex have you had sexual intercourse within the past year?", and 3) "With how many partners of the same sex have you had sex on one and only one occasion?". These six questions will be used to calculate participant's "Previous Sexual Behavior Total".

In the 2012 sample, participant's past solitary sexual behavior (i.e. masturbating) and frequency of orgasm was assessed using the Sex-Drive Questionnaire (SDQ) ( $\alpha = .82$  for women) (Ostovich, 2004). These questions include: 1) "How often do you experience sexual desire?" (rated on a 7-point scale from "never" (1) to "several times a day" (7)), 2) "How would you compare your level of sex drive with that of the average person of your gender and age?" (rated on a 7-point scale from "very much lower" (1) to "very much greater" (7)), 3) "On average, over the past 6 months, how often have you masturbated?" (rated on a 8-point scale from "never" (1) to "at least once a day" (8)), and 4) "On average, over the past 6 months, how often have you had

an orgasm (from sex or masturbating)?" (rated on a 8-point scale from "never" (1) to "at least once a day" (8)) ( Ostovich, 2004).

### *Sexual Quality.*

Clark's (2003) supplemental questions were used to assess aspects of participant's satisfaction with their sexual experience, or lack of, so far in both the 2012 and 2015 samples. The items used to examine this will be: 1) "How do you feel about the amount of sexual experience you have had so far?" (ranging from "I wish I had a lot less sexual experience" (1) to "I wish I had a lot more sexual experience" (5)), 2) "Concerning my sexuality and sex life, I consider myself:" (followed by a rating scale from "extremely unhappy" (1) to "extremely happy" (7)), 4) "Concerning my sexual attitudes and behavior, I wish I was:" (followed by a 5-point rating scale from "much less inhibited" to "much more inhibited"), 5) "Concerning my sexual attitudes and behavior, I am:" (followed by a 7-point rating scale from "extremely unhappy" to "extremely happy"), and 6) "When having sexual relationships with a partner, how often do you achieve orgasm?" (rated from "never" to "almost always more than once" on an 8-point scale).

Additionally, to further assess sexual quality, body-image experiences in the context of sexual relations will be assessed. In the 2012 study, the 7-item Self-Regard subscale of the Self-Rating Scale (SRS) ( $\alpha = .82$ ) (Fleming & Courtney, 1984) was used as a measure of self-rated sexual attractiveness. Items from the SRS include statements such as, "Have you ever been concerned or worried about your ability to attract potential romantic and/or sexual partners?" and "How confident are you that others see you as being physically appealing?", which were rated by participants on a 5-point scale that varied on a per-item basis from "Never" (1) to "Always" (5), or from "Not at all confident" (1) to "Very Confident" (5). In the 2015 sample, participant's

responses to The Body Exposure during Sexual Activities Questionnaire (BESAQ) will be used to measure the extent to which participants experience anxiousness about body exposure during sexual activity ( $\alpha = .96$ ) (Cash, 2004). This scale is a 28-item measure that participants rate on a 5-point Likert scale from “never” (0) to “always or almost always” (4), with items including “During sexual activity I am thinking that my partner will notice something about my body that is a turn-off” and “I prefer to keep my body hidden under a sheet or blanket during sex”.

## **Results**

### **Demographic Information.**

#### ***2012 Study.***

One-hundred and sixty-five juniors and seniors. Approximately 50% of the participants were White/Caucasian, 20.6% were Asian, 10.9% were Black/African American, 8.5% were Hispanic, 2.4% were Indian/South Asian, 1.2% were Middle Eastern, and 6.7% identified as Other. The mean age of the participants was 21.29 ( $SD = 0.99$ , range 18-23).

#### ***2015 Study.***

One-hundred and three primarily first years and sophomores. Approximately 45.5% of the participants were White/Caucasian, 35.4% were Asian, 10.1% were Black/African American, 7.1% were Hispanic, and 2.0% identified as Other. The mean age of the participants was 19.46 ( $SD = 1.18$ , range 18-23).

### **Measure of Shyness.**

In the 2012 sample, the 13-item Shyness Scale was found to have excellent internal consistency reliability ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Participant’s mean score on the Shyness Scale was 35.71 ( $SD =$

9.52), which is comparable to the original female participant's mean score of 32.4 ( $SD = 7.7$ ) (Cheek, 1983). In the 2015 sample, the alpha coefficient of internal consistency reliability for the 20-item Shyness Scale was 0.92. Participant's mean score on the 20-item Shyness Scale was 54.75 ( $SD = 15.27$ ). The original participant's mean score on the 20-item Shyness Scale was 51.8 ( $SD = 13.6$ ) (Cheek & Melchior, 1985).

### **Measures of Sexuality.**

According to Gilmartin (1987), virginity is one of the identifying criteria of a love-shy man. In the present research, virginity was defined as reporting zero sexual partners as of the time of the survey. In order to examine differences in shyness between women who reported being virgins and women who were not virgins, independent samples t-tests were conducted. In the 2012 sample, for the items on the 13-item Shyness Scale, which were answered on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 5, the 46 women who were virgins ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ) had average item means that were significantly higher than the 119 women who were not virgins ( $M = 2.64$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ),  $t(163) = 3.35$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $d = .58$ . Replicating this key finding, in the 2015 sample, on the 20-item Shyness Scale, the 43 women who were virgins ( $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ) had average item means that were significantly higher than the 58 women who were not virgins ( $M = 2.48$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ),  $t(99) = 3.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $d = .80$ .

Despite the fact that all of the love-shy men studied by Gilmartin were virginal, they indeed had sexual outlets (Gilmartin, 1987). In comparison to their non-shy counterparts, the love-shy men masturbated much more frequently. Indeed, they actually averaged a greater number of weekly ejaculations from masturbation than the non-shys number of weekly ejaculations from masturbation and sexual intercourse combined (Gilmartin, 1987, p. 324). Quite contrary to Gilmartin's claim that shyness doesn't impact women's sexual activity, past research

(Cheek et al., 2004; Leary & Dobbins, 1983; Luster et al., 2013) has found shyness to be negatively correlated with frequency of masturbation for women. In order to investigate differences in shyness between women who reported masturbating and women who did not masturbate, independent samples t-tests were conducted. In the 2012 sample, on the 13-item Shyness Scale, the 130 women who reported masturbating ( $M = 2.69$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ) had average item means that were significantly lower than the 35 women who did not masturbate ( $M = 2.99$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ),  $t(163) = 2.17$ ,  $p = .031$ ;  $d = .41$ . In the 2015 sample, on the 20-item Shyness Scale, the 81 women who reported masturbating ( $M = 2.67$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ) had average item means that were significantly lower than the 21 women who did not masturbate ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ),  $t(100) = 1.97$ ,  $p = .052$ ;  $d = .47$ .

The correlations between shyness and sexual attitudes, sexual quantity, and sexual quality are presented in tables 1 and 2, as well as summarized below. In terms of sexual attitudes, both the Short Term Mating Orientation (STMO) scale and Long Term Mating Orientation (LTMO) were found to have high internal consistency reliability in both the 2012 and 2015 samples (STMO:  $\alpha = .94$  and  $.95$ , respectively; LTMO:  $\alpha = .86$  and  $.91$ , respectively). In the 2012 sample, shyness was significantly and negatively correlated with STMO ( $r = -0.24$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but was not significantly correlated with LTMO ( $r = -0.03$ ,  $p > .05$ ). There were no significant correlations between shyness and STMO or LTMO in the 2015 sample.

Regarding sexual quantity, in the 2012 sample, shyness was significantly and negatively correlated with lifetime total of sexual partners ( $r = -0.34$ ,  $p < .01$ ), total number of sexual partners within the past year ( $r = -0.25$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and frequency of sex with a partner in the past six months ( $r = -0.31$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In the 2015 sample, shyness was significantly and negatively correlated with both lifetime total of sexual partners ( $r = -0.21$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and total number of

sexual partners within the past year ( $r = -0.22$ ,  $p < .05$ ). There was no measure of frequency of sex with a partner in the past six months in the 2015 survey packet.

Concerning sexual quality, in the 2012 sample, shyness had significant negative correlations with both frequency of orgasm with a partner ( $r = -0.23$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and frequency of orgasm when masturbating ( $r = -0.30$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Shyness was also significantly and negatively correlated with self-rated sexual attractiveness ( $r = -0.27$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and happiness with sexuality and sex life ( $r = -0.27$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In the 2015 sample, shyness was significantly and positively correlated with body self-consciousness during sexual activity ( $r = 0.36$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and significantly negatively correlated with sexual satisfaction ( $r = -0.34$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

**Table 1. Correlations between Shyness and Measures of Sexuality, 2012 Sample**

	Shyness Scale
Frequency of Sex In Past Six Months	<b>-.31**</b>
Total Sexual Partners in Past Year	<b>-.25**</b>
Lifetime Total of Sexual Partners	<b>-.34**</b>
Long-Term Mating Orientation	<b>-.03</b>
Short-Term Mating Orientation	<b>-.24**</b>
Frequency of Orgasm with Partner	<b>-.23**</b>
Frequency of Orgasm when Masturbating	<b>-.30**</b>
Self-rated Sexual Attractiveness	<b>-.27**</b>
Happiness with Sexuality and Sex Life	<b>-.27**</b>

*Note. N per correlation ranges from 158 to 165, except for 122 for orgasm with partner and 130 for orgasm when masturbating; \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$*

**Table 2. Correlations between Shyness and Measures of Sexuality, 2015 Sample**

	Shyness Scale
Total Sexual Partners in Past Year	<b>-.22*</b>
Lifetime Total of Sexual Partners	<b>-.21*</b>
Long-Term Mating Orientation	<b>-.11</b>
Short-Term Mating Orientation	<b>-.12</b>
Sexual Satisfaction	<b>-.34**</b>
Body Self-Consciousness During Sexual Activity	<b>.36**</b>

*Note.* *N per correlation = 103, except for 97 for body self-consciousness and 74 for sexual satisfaction; \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01*

### Discussion.

The main purpose of this study was to empirically examine Gilmartin's (1987) claim that love-shyness is not a significant problem for women by exploring the relationship between shyness and sexuality in two recent samples of college women. Gilmartin (1987) was particularly concerned with the issues of virginity and masturbation among love-shy men. One key finding of the present research is that in both the 2012 and 2015 samples, women who were virgins scored significantly higher on the shyness scale than those who were not virgins. This finding is in contrast with the 2003 sample of Wellesley College women analyzed by Cheek et al. (2004), where participants who were virgins scored somewhat, but not significantly, higher on the 20-item Shyness Scale than women who were not virgins.

The love-shy men studied by Gilmartin (1987) masturbated much more frequently than their non-shy counterparts. In both samples, women who masturbated had average item means on the Shyness Scale that were significantly lower than the women who did not masturbate. This replicates previous research (Leary & Dobbins, 1983; Zimbardo, 1977) and illustrates that shyness influences women's solitary sexual behaviors, contrary to Gilmartin's (1987) assertion that shyness does not impact women's sexuality.

Previous research has found that, for women, shyness is associated with more conservative sexual attitudes (Luster et al., 2013; Penke & Asendorpf, 2008). In the present research, shyness had significant negative correlations with attitudes towards casual sex only in the 2012 sample, which replicates Penke and Asendorpf's (2008) finding that shyness was significantly negatively associated with sociosexuality. However, in the 2003 and 2015 samples, shyness was not correlated with attitudes towards casual sex. A possible explanation for this may be because Wellesley College is a diverse, liberal campus, and therefore the study participants may hold more liberal attitudes towards casual sex than at other undergraduate institutions.

With regards to sexual quantity, in the 2012 sample, shyness had significant negative correlations with frequency of sex within the past six months, total number of sexual partners within the past year, and lifetime total of sexual partners (see Table 1). In the 2015 sample, shyness had significant negative correlations with participant's total number of sexual partners within the past year and lifetime. This replicates Luster et. al's (2013) finding that shyness was significantly and negatively correlated with number of lifetime partners. This is another important finding of the present study, as there was no significant relationship between shyness and sexual quantity found in the 2003 sample of Wellesley College women. This may be due to the rise of the hook-up culture, as more Wellesley students are having casual sex in the 2012 and

2015 samples than in the 2003 sample. Therefore, there is a wider range of individual differences in sexual behavior and attitudes that would allow for shyness to correlate with more measures, such as sexual quantity. In other words, the least shy students are quick to embrace the hook-up culture, and the most shy are most resistant to increasingly liberal social sexual practices.

In both samples, shyness was significantly and negatively associated with measures of sexual quality. In the 2012 sample, shyness had significant negative correlations with frequency of orgasm with a partner, frequency of orgasm when masturbating, self-rated sexual attractiveness, and happiness with sexuality and sex life. In the 2015 sample, shyness was significantly negatively correlated with sexual satisfaction, and significantly positively correlated with anxiousness about body exposure during sexual activity. In both samples, shyness appears to be meaningfully correlated with experiencing lower quality sexual encounters. This may be because shyness is associated with difficulty communicating and decreased responsiveness, both critical components of sexual satisfaction (Rowell & Coplan, 2012).

There are several limitations to the present study. For one, this study lacks ethnic diversity. In both samples, the majority of participants identified as White/Caucasian, with Asian following as a close second. A sample of greater ethnic diversity would allow for stronger conclusions to be drawn with regards to the relationship between shyness and sexuality among all women. Obtaining a larger and more demographically diverse sample of participants would increase the statistical power of the present study and allow for the results to be more generalizable to all women.

An additional limitation to this study is that the data were obtained at a historically all-women's college, and as a result, the two samples lack diversity in both sex and age range. Recruiting participants from a non-undergraduate sample, for example, utilizing Amazon

Mechanical Turk (MTurk), could increase both diversity in sex and age range. Doing this study in a sample of both male and female participants would allow for examining empirically the differences in the relationship between shyness and sexuality among participants who self-identify as male or female.

Although all seniors received e-mails asking for their participation in both studies, the students who participated may have been motivated to do because the surveys asked about topics relating to sexuality. Therefore, the participants in both samples may have been more open to discussing sex than most women.

A final limitation of the present study is that the 2015 survey contained very few direct measures of sexual quantity and quality. Therefore, the 2012 study was the primary focus of the present research. In future studies, more measures of sexual quantity and quality should be included in the questionnaire packet in order for more conclusions to be drawn surrounding specific aspects of the relationship between shyness and sexuality (e.g. sex-guilt, sexual dysfunction, etc.)

The findings of my archival data analysis indicate that Gilmartin's claim that love-shyness was only a problem among men was premature, as shyness impacts many facets of sexuality for college-aged women. In the future, this study should be replicated in different environments, as Wellesley College is a diverse, liberal campus, and therefore the findings of the present study may be different if done in a more conservative area, for example. Recruiting a more ethnically diverse sample would also be beneficial, so that the present findings can be more generalizable. Future studies could also recruit subjects beyond undergraduate institutions in order to obtain a sample with a greater age range. Since the present research was limited to an all-female sample, it would be greatly beneficial to examine the relationship between love-

shyness, shyness, and sexuality in a large sample of both men and women in the future. Through future studies, hopefully research on love-shyness will be revived, and research on the relationship between shyness and sexuality will continue.

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