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Brandon Solis
bsolis@skidmore.edu

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In the Eyes of God: The Role of Religion in the Lives of LGB Persons*

Brandon Solis

Skidmore College

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*Please direct all correspondence to Brandon Solis, 815 N. Broadway, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866. E-mail: bsolis@skidmore.edu. I would like to thank, Professor Andrew Lindner, Professor Mueller and my Senior Seminar colleagues for their support and guidance throughout this project.

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In the Eyes of God: The Role of Religion in the Lives of LGB Persons

ABSTRACT

Religion and sexuality have long been conflicting in the lives of LGB Persons. If someone were to identify as Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual, a conflicting understanding of religion may be present. This conflicting identity may be the cause of the negative perception of God that is examined in this study. Previous literature discusses the ways that religion has impacted the lives of LGB individuals; It has made the attempt to explain how religion may affect the mental health of participants or has tried to understand the stigma surrounding LGB individuals. In this study, I examine the extent to which sexual minorities have less confidence in the existence of God using the years 2008 to 2018. The sample in this study consists of 4792 non-institutionalized respondents from the General Social Survey. Results showed that identifying as Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual does bear significantly on having less confidence in the existence of God. Results indicate a negative relationship between religion and sexuality. Therefore, if one identifies as Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual, their confidence in God decreases by $-.316$.

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INTRODUCTION

They looked to God for guidance, but he frowned in return. They looked to God to accept him but were turned away. They cried out for help but were ignored. It is a difficult reality being separated from a world that one looks to for guidance. One that might cause hatred for oneself. At times, it would be helpful to wish for insensibility. To sit and think back to the vacancy of intellect. Perhaps it would cause a more joyful world? Perhaps the tears and the apologies would go away? Maybe LGB individuals would not have to implore that they didn't exist since they did not seem to fit in? To constantly be erased, be torn to pieces, to be incomplete is often the reality of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) individuals. As Mark Chaves expresses "As long as who we are and how we differ from others remains a salient organizing principle for social movements and institutions, religion can be expected to thrive" (Chaves 2002). Religion has remained a salient institution in defining what is seen as correct or incorrect. The extent that which people believe scriptures to be true varies; but it cannot be said that religion hasn't influenced how LGB persons are viewed in society. It may be a conjecture but to be any sexual minority in the face of religion is to have one's presence denied within a Book of scriptures. Again, this topic is complex, some religions may be more tolerant than others. However, Conservative Christianity has had a lot of influence in the US and globally, but no two religions are similar. They call for solidarity amongst collectives, however, deny numerous persons into the collective. Religion has had a solid drive in history. It has had the capacity to implement thoughts and suggest an idealized world that we must live in. When LGB persons look at scriptures that deny them answers to understand themselves, they internalize this understanding of themselves. Religion is utilized to bring mankind together. Be that as it may be, in the event that one does not fit the rules set by religion, one is marginalized and looked down upon.

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It may be a universal experience for some LGB people to have experienced stigma by the hands of religious groups. Yet, there are still many members of this community that become active participants in the religious communities that embrace them. It is clear that the relationship between sexuality and religion is anything but simple. Religion plays an interesting role in the lives of each individual; the way that it may influence a person depends on many factors surrounding that individual. One must look at how long they have followed that religion, what role religion plays in their culture and what religion means to them. It is important to look at how the cultural and structural factors influence how LGB individuals conceptualize their identities.

Religion and sexuality have long been conflicting in the lives of LGB Persons. Religion has been a major factor in deciding how individuals should act in Society. It has set the example for how one should carry themselves throughout the social world. In most religions to be anything but heterosexual was demonized. One of the most recognizable instances is in the Bible. Although, the bible may have been changed to demonize homosexuality. It states clearly that “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (Leviticus 18:22). Being gay was seen as a defiance of God’s will. One must note that the majority of American Christians are not scriptural literalists, but this text has been used to validate arguments that deems homosexuality as abnormal. In numerous periods, societies, and religions, non-heterosexual behavior has been differently endorsed or prohibited. This scripture has been used to argue that all LGB Persons are immoral and that they are sinners who will be punished. Research conducted by Darren Sherkat indicates that LGBT persons are likely to be rejected and condemned by various religious group in the United States (Sherkat 2002). Multiple religious conservative denominations have condemned homosexuality and barred it as sinful. This pattern

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is consist across conservative sects in multiple religions. Research conducted by the Pew Research Center concluded “religious institutions that include the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Jewish Movement, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and Islam, are against same-sex marriage/relations” (Masci 2015). Being gay to many religious individuals is otherworldly, not of God. It may be said that the arguments against LGB persons have shifted but it cannot be argued that prejudice against this collective is completely gone. The alienation that sexual minorities experience from religion might influence their perceptions of God.

There has been a lack of research done on the ways that LGB Persons perceive religion and more specifically perceptions of God himself. This is compelling because religion has always been a major influence in the lives of individuals. Why hasn't this conversation been explored? Researchers have spoken about the hardships that this population may go through. Research has considered that they may be more inclined to feel ostracized (Beagan & Brenda 2015; Hickey 2017; Foster 2017; and Meanley 2016). Yet, most studies have been qualitative and have not focused on how their views may differ based on sexuality.

A key explanation for why religion has had an impact on the lives of this group is in a theory by Emile Durkheim. Durkheim explains that religion is a system of beliefs that is unified and sacred. Religion binds people together and shows one's morality (Wallwork 1985) When one does not follow these rules, they are more susceptible to being viewed as outcasts. This theory makes an attempt to explain why we act a certain way in society. In other words, the way that one understands themselves is determined by their surrounding world. There are beliefs that unite us and others that separate us. Durkheim explains that there are beliefs and practices that come together to define a moral community. In order to make progress, one must think of our societal ties.

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In this study, I examine the effect that religion has had on the confidence that sexual minorities have that God exists using the years 2008 to 2018. Previous research has shown that the way that sexual minorities participate in religious activities and their feelings of being accepted vary across religions. Is this true for this community and their beliefs in a higher power? In order to understand the role religion plays in the lives of sexual minorities, I plan on asking: Are sexual minorities less likely to have confidence that God exists? I hypothesize that Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual persons will have less confidence that God exists than heterosexual persons.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The current study draws on both Social Identity Theory and Queer Theory to guide my research. Social Identity Theory is used as a means of understanding how identity plays a role in our socialization in society. The interaction of multiple identities (Religion and Sexuality) can either work together in conflict or they can be integrated. This theory predicts that one understands their identity through the groups that they belong to (Meanley 2016; Rodriguez 2019 and Barringer 2020). Social identity theory explains that conservative religious groups tend to view homosexuality as a sin and this perception has the power to influence the LGB persons that exist within this group. This negative perception of LGB persons is likely to affect how sexual minorities view God. Queer Theory allows one to understand heteronormativity and why heterosexuality is considered “normal” while all other sexualities are considered deviant. It is a call to transgress all categorizations of gender and sexuality (Stein and Plummer 1994). Queer theory allows one to understand how “deviant” sexualities hold an ostracized position in society. This ostracized position may cause damage to the ways that LGB persons understand themselves and God. Social Identity Theory and Queer Theory allow one to understand why homosexuality

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is demonized and how the way these identities are viewed and how they influence perceptions of God. Since, the identities of sexuality and religion are opposing and being LGB is in direct contrast to heteronormativity. These theories can be used to explain the negative perceptions of God that this group may have. The identities of sexuality and religion are opposing and being LGB is in direct contrast to heteronormativity. They can either work in opposition or together. It is clear the opposition of these identities may cause less confidence in the existence of God for this group. Not only because these identities are conflicting but because they are deemed as abnormal. Using these theoretical frameworks will allow a deeper understanding for why the lived experiences of this group influences the development of their opinions. Social Identity Theory and Queer Theory will guide my research to further portray the stories that must be heard. With these theories, I intend to understand and examine the ways that religion and sexuality create conflict in the lives of sexual minorities.

This study analyzes whether those who identify as a sexual minority have less confidence in the existence of God than their heterosexual counterparts. Literature discusses the ways that religion has impacted the lives of LGB individuals; It has made the attempt to explain how religion may affect the mental health of participants or has tried to understand the stigma surrounding LGB individuals. However, there is still a gap in the conceptualization of what and how much God means to this group. This literature review will look at three main themes related to sexuality and religion: the concept of “pushback” and how to overcome it, Damaging the self, and the complex relationship between the intersecting identities of religion and sexuality. These three themes will be used to guide the conceptualization of this project.

LITERATURE REVIEW

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There is a complex relationship between religion and sexuality: it is clear that they affect each other but the ways that do changes based on sexuality, religion, ethnicity, race and other identities. Pushback can be defined as how negative rhetoric about LGB individuals can influence self-perception. It is characterized by the intense feeling of isolation experienced for identifying as LGB. Damaging the self is a concept that looks at how the negative perceptions that LGB individuals have from religious experiences creates harmful psychological and physical effects. In other words, participants feel as if they must harm themselves and their identity in order to be accepted. My understanding of how these concepts relate to my hypothesis is that the opposing relationship between sexuality and religion drives the negative perceptions of LGB persons and this creates psychological and physical damage to LGB persons that in turn will cause less confidence in the existence of God.

Complex relationship between intersecting identities

Religion impacts the individual differently based on sexuality, religion, ethnicity, race and other identities. Participants identified having to struggle in order to understand themselves. Sexuality and religion worked in opposition. It was clear that the pushback participants experienced and the act of damaging themselves was key to how they understood religion and how it worked. There were clear instances where these individuals struggled with understanding how they could intersect identities that worked in opposition. Overall, participants spoke about how religion had negative effects in their interpersonal relationships and mental health. They explained that they were bullied, ostracized at family events, bullied and this took a toll on their overall wellbeing. The way they understood religion had vast difference between different religious denominations. Most of the differences observed were most profound in Christian denominations such as Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Christian, Jewish. The

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qualitative analysis of a survey conducted by Ghazzawi Alhasan found that for some transgender persons their religious community and identity took priority, even over gender identity. (Alhasan 2020 and Barringer 2020). There was discourse between which identity held more power in the lives of participants. They were forced to choose between being accepted by an entire community or being rejected. Although, the current study does not look at transgender individuals, these concepts still hold true for LGB persons. Many participants explained how they were forced to participate in religious activities, but rather than resisting, they engaged in the activities because it mattered to their guardians and kin. They would regularly attend religious meetings to please religious companions (Izienicki 2017). Literature speaks to how LGB individuals must choose between identities in order to feel welcomed. Religion is a defining social component that has the ability to determine how others view us in some instances.

Religion and spirituality are important social components for understanding's one's position in society. Religion and spirituality, develops one's understanding of anything considered sacred. These two things have been associated with mental, physical health and as a tool for coping (Lassiter 2017). The importance of Religion in the lives of LGB individuals differs from person to person but religion still plays a fundamental role in socialization. The study shows the impact and importance of spirituality and religiosity in the lives of many LGB individuals (Rodriguez 2019). Different factors affect how an individual will come to terms with their identities. If the individual grows up in an environment that strongly disagrees with homosexuality; the likelihood of that individual to have negative experience with their identities increases (Lease and Shulman 2003). One can only imagine that growing up in an environment where their identity is demonized, their understanding of their own sexuality or their relationship

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to religion can produce a disconnect between what seems correct to the individual and their community.

Someone who is LGB must find ways to understand the disconnection between religious beliefs and sexuality. Data suggests that until this is often settled, young individuals are helpless to a number of negative wellbeing results (Hillier 2017, Meanley 2016, and Craig 2017). Each person's LGB experience with the Christian identity was unique. Authenticity of a person's faith, beliefs about sexuality, assumptions about LGB Christian identities, and knowledge of the extent of a persona integrated LGB and Christian identities: together they can create an environment that either has a negative or positive experience (Hickey 2017). It is possible that belief and nonbelief may function differently for LGB individuals as compared to heterosexual people (Foster 2017). Although some people may identify as non-religious, they also have a more individualistic approach to understanding faith. Having faith in humanity rather than in God or a Higher Power (Levy 2011). LGB persons may still choose to engage with religious institutions, even when they hold conflicting identities (Meanly 2016 and Levy 2011). Researchers have proposed a number of reasons to clarify the positive relationship that exists between religion and wellbeing. They have suggested that social support and resources, meaning in life, prescribed health behaviors/lifestyle, religious coping strategies and positive affect have all contributed to this relationship (Boppana 2019).

It might also be helpful to discuss the distinctions that persons of color experience in regard to religion. Religion is a defining quality for how some people of color understand themselves in relation to society; this may be less true of others. It is one of the things that define us. There is a struggle to accept what is viewed as wrong. In many cases, there is also a struggle to accept those that are viewed as wrong. Participants talked about how their religion was taught

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by family and culture. (Garcia 2008 and Walker and Torres 2017). Religion also has the ability to have a cultural aspect. It plays a key role in strengthening these communities. If one were to grow up in a conservative environment, they would likely want to suppress any identities that were viewed as abnormal. Self-perception is important to how one decides to navigate the social world. If the negative rhetoric of LGB persons is constantly repeated and accepted amongst a group, it will influence how that group will be viewed. So, it is no surprise that this negative perception will influence the discourse LGB individuals experience when understanding their opposing identities. The anti-gay messages that are received are also likely to have harmful effects on the lives of LGB individuals. They are forced to constantly navigate negative messages being told about their lived experiences but also have to find ways to overcome them.

The Concept of Pushback and how to overcome it

The concept of pushback and how to overcome the act of being otherized was one of the first themes identified in the conceptualization process of literature. This population suffers inner turmoil from being a sexual minority. Pushback can be defined as how negative rhetoric about LGB individuals can influence self-perception. It is characterized by the intense feeling of isolation experienced for identifying as LGB. Many participants explained not being able to understand their sexuality in relation to religion. Often times, having to hide part of themselves from the world (Beagan 2015, Levy 2011 and Walker 2017). There was also pushback that resulted from how individuals were perceived. In other words, how religious text made others view sexual minorities. Religious texts drove most of the dialogue about this group. The pushback is the result of how society views sexual minorities. They have been told that they were wrong and immoral. They are excluded from their family/community, but participants found peace within this. This can be understood as how this group coped with pushback.

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Some people spoke about having to find ways to cope. This looked like gaining a new understanding of what religion was. They were still able to find coping methods. The inner voice from their personal faith was able to guide them towards greater self-awareness and acceptance (Alhasan 2020). Results show that there are two key pathways for LGB individuals to reduce the negative mental health effects of sexual orientation and religious and spiritual conflicts (one is through identity integration and one by creating a safe distance between the self and organized religion) (Rodriguez 2019). Participants expressed different views on the identities they hold. They expressed gratitude for the conflict they have experienced. Since they suffered as a sexual minority they could relate more towards the suffering of others (Hickey 2017). Participants were able to break the increased involvement with the church, the secrets, and depression, when they gained the knowledge that challenged idea prominent in the church. It became a turning point for them (Levy 2011, Rodriguez 2019, and Alhasan 2020).

Although many religions have demonized homosexuality, it was interesting that some studies found religious institutions to have been more accepting. The Jewish religion and mainline Protestantism have historically been more accepting of sexual and gender minorities compared to Evangelical and the Catholic Church. In other words, perceptions of religion vary depending on the different religions and sexualities being asked (Barringer 2020). Participants in one study minimized their sexual personality in favor of their religious one. They emphasized having morals but caring less about their gay identity. In other words, they see themselves as a catholic who was gay rather than a gay Catholic (Izienicki 2017). In another study of religious schools, students in devout schools were instructed that being LGBTQ implies the severance of an ungodly relationship. Numerous individuals have been raised in devout social settings that incorporate family, instructive, and church frameworks. This battle to live really both as a devout

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and an otherworldly individual, as a LGBTQ person posed a challenge for numerous students. This setting kept on to influence and shape how the student acknowledged and accepted their LGBTQ identity when transitioning into adulthood (Craig 2017). Many people understood their position because of their involvement with the church. They understood sexuality through this lens.

Paul Froese concluded that an individual's religious view determines how religion will affect levels of tolerance (Froese 2017). Tolerance has a lot to do with how sexual minorities are viewed in terms of religion. In general, people who have more tolerance, will have a more positive understanding of LGB individuals. Some of studies explained homophobic abuse as a result of being identified as gay. Homophobic abuse result in the impact of young people having to deal with alienation from the abuser. They were often people who they need. Abusers could include companions, family or community members. Christian parents some of the time distanced their children by speaking about religious scriptures that situated their children negatively. They reflected on being stunned by the messages and felt that such sermons did not speak to the love that included their understanding of religion and God (Hillier 2017, Walker 2017, Levy 2011, Izienicki 2017, and Hickey 2017). In order to feel accepted by the people in their lives, many LGB individuals resorted to changing themselves. Participants in these studies are forced to change themselves to feel welcomed by their peers, mentors, teachers and parents. Since participants are likely to have experienced negative discourse related to their sexuality, they might be more likely to have a negative association with God. This negative discourse has effects psychologically and physically.

Damaging the self

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Another major theme in the literature was the idea of having to damage oneself in order to be accepted. LGB individuals often found that religion had negative effects in their lives. They felt like they needed to hide themselves. This was also a result of the pushback many LGB individuals experienced. Since the pushback was so intense, in terms of how others viewed LGB individuals and how they decided to treat them. Many individuals turned to self-harm and self-hate as a coping mechanism. Most research supported the idea that religion contributed to mental health disparities compared to heterosexual counterparts. Studies have shown that their conflicts with faith and acceptance of often led to addiction problems and depression (Meanly 2016, Craig 2017 and Hillier 2017). Sexual minority youth continue to exhibit mental health disparities.

People find meaning in their social communities, yet their sense of purpose, value, and self-worth may be threatened when socially excluded (Meanly 2016). In one instance, students clearly enunciated a culture of fear that was present in their experiences as LGBTQ understudies. They detailed a fear of presentation of their LGBTQ personalities. Young individuals acknowledged the negative positions that their sexuality put them in. Having to live against homophobic convictions definitely brought about in misery and self-hate. Participants spoke about the conflict between religious texts regarding sexual orientation and their personal experiences with being gay. (Alhasan 2020, Meanly 2016, Craig 2017 and Hillier 2017). Faith traditions have negatively affected LGB people, including shame, guilt, sex negativity, disconnection from body, and severing of relationships to self and others (Beagan 2015 and Moon 2014). Retrospective secondary data analysis from Eric Rodriguez (2019) indicates that identifying as gay had a negative score on every measure for mental health. These measures looked at depression, anxiety and self-esteem. These measures looked at depression, anxiety and self-esteem. When compared to participants who rated their church as rejecting of

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homosexuality, participants who rated their church as accepting of homosexuality had lower levels of depression and higher levels of well-being (Boppana 2019). There was a sense of being separated or misunderstood by his or her own family and religious community. The creation of a tall wall contributed to family tension and exclusion from the church communities (Hickey 2017). It may be that religion is an explanation for sexual and gender prejudice, since devout adherents can defend their preference by claiming religious benefit. There may be difference among religious attitudes towards different groups. The findings suggests that religious practice may lie at the heart of prejudice attitudes toward sexual minorities (Cragun 2015, Alhasan 2020, Meanly 2016, Craig 2017 and Hillier 2017).). The damaging effects of opposing identities influence how one might come to think of God.

The literature that was used to guide this study have makes conclusions on the experiences of LGB persons with religion. There is an understanding that religion has impacted their lives in multiple ways. Yet, the articles do not push further to ask how participants think of God. It is true that we are influenced by our social community but how does one understand religion through a singular lens. Rather than focusing on how outside sources influence the understanding of sexuality. This study will explain how negative rhetoric shape their understanding of God. Does the detrimental effects of religion on the lives of LGB individuals have any effect on how they view God? It is crucial to understand the conception of God. Not only because it will provide us with a clearer image of the role of God in the lives of sexual minorities, but because it provides the frameworks to reshape religions and communities to restructure ideologies that have historically been fatal.

METHODS

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To make sense of this question, I used data from the General Social Survey, The GSS collects and gathers data on contemporary American society to monitor trends in attitudes and beliefs (Smith et. Al 2008-2018). The GSS is a survey created by the National Opinion Center in 1972. It is collected every two years. The unit of analysis used in this study is individuals. Participants are interviewed in their home, or in another place such as a coffee shop or library. Participants may also be interviewed over the phone. The population consists of respondents that are selected randomly, 18 years or older and able to speak English or Spanish. All participants are in the United States. The target sample size is 1500 respondents, but this number varies for each year. For this study, I will be using data from the years 2008- 2018 because LGB persons are a small subset of the population, and I would like a larger sample. The original sample consisted of 10554 cases that were valid, while 54240 cases were missing. After deleting missing data and recoding variables, I was left with 4792 respondents. Missing data included respondents that couldn't choose an answer, had no answer or there was no applicable respondents. Response rates for this sample in 2008 was .704 but it declined to .595 in 2018. For more information on how the data were collected, see the Frequently Asked Questions menu on the National Opinion Research Center General Social Survey website: <http://gss.norc.org/>.

Independent Variable

The independent variable I plan on using is Sexual Orientation. In the GSS, it is coded as nominal variable. It was asked in the High-Risk Behaviors Module and the subject was Gay and Lesbians, Sex. It asks: Which of the following best describes you? It was coded as Gay, Lesbian or Homosexual=1, bisexual=2, heterosexual or straight=3, don't know=8, No answer=9 and Not applicable=0. After deleting missing cases from the dataset, I recoded this variable into two dummy variables. Since the variable was nominal it needed to be recoded, so I could give each

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category a value. I wanted to focus on gay, lesbian and bisexual respondents and use heterosexual respondents as the reference group. Sexual Orientation (Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual) was coded as 1= GAY, BI OR LESBIAN, 0= HETERO.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is God. This variable is coded as a Nominal variable. It was asked in the Religion module and its subject is Religion. It states: "Please look at this card and tell me which statement comes closest to expressing what you believe about God". It was coded as I don't believe in God=1, I don't know whether there is a God and I don't believe there is any way to find out=2, I don't believe in a personal God, but I do believe in a Higher Power of some kind=3, I find myself believing in God some of the time, but not at others=4, While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God=5, and I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it=6. The sociological concepts, I plan to look at the relationship between sexuality and religion. I am looking specifically at how being Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual can affect one's perception of religion. In this project, I aim to look at how strong one associates with believing the idea that God exists. One of the concepts is sexuality. I will operationalize this as how one defines themselves sexually. The other is Religion. This will be defined as one's confidence in the existence of God.

Control Variables

I intend to use the control variables: race, sex, education, age, region of residence at 16 and religion in which raised. The first variable is race. The GSS codes this variable as Nominal. For this variable, GSS asked respondents, "Which race do you consider yourself?". It was coded as the following choices: 1 = White, 2 = Black, and 3 = Other. Since I was only interested in comparing Non-white to White respondents and the variable was nominal, I made a dummy race

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variable. For the RACE(WHITE) variable, 1 was coded as White and 0 was Non-White. For the RACE (NONWHITE) variable, 1 was coded as Non-White and 0 was white. The second is sex, it is coded as nominal. The variable had two categories, male and female. Male was coded as 1 and female was coded as 2. This variable is dichotomous, therefore I had to create one dummy variable for it. The first dummy variable was SEX (MEN) and it was coded 1 = Men and 0 = Women. I had a MEN variable, so it served as a Women dummy as well. The third variable is education. The GSS codes it as a scale variable. Education was measured on the GSS scale from having zero to 20 years of education. It measures the years of school a respondent has completed. The next control variable is age, it was coded as a scale variable. It asked respondents for their age. This variable was measured on a scale from 18 to 89 years or older, 98 = don't know, and 99 = no answer. After the listwise deletion of the "don't know" and "no answer", I was left with respondents that were 18 to 86 years old. I also used the control variable region of residence at age 16. This variable asks respondents: "In what state or foreign country were you living when you were 16 years old?". The variable was coded as a nominal variable. It was coded using the options: 0= Foreign, 1=New England, 2= Middle Atlantic, 3= East North Central, 4=West North Central, 5= South Atlantic, 6=East South Central, 7=West South Central, 8= Mountain and 9= Pacific. Since this variable was nominal, I recoded it to focus just on respondents that lived in the south or north east at age 16. I recoded it into two different variables. The first was South16 (South) where 1= South Atlantic, East South Central and West South-Central, and 0= Other Regions. The second recoded variable was NE16(Northeast) where 1=New England, North Atlantic and 0=Other Region. The last control variable is Religion in which raised. This variable was coded as a nominal variable. This variable asks, "In what religion were you raised?". It is coded using the following options: 1=Protestant, 2=Catholic, 3=Jewish, 4=None, 5= Other, 6=

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Buddhism, 7= Hinduism, 8= Other eastern, 9= Moslem/Islam, 10= Orthodox-Christian, 11= Christian, 12= Native American, 13= Inter-nondenominational, 98= Don't know, 99= No answer and 0= Not applicable. In this study, I focused on Christian religions and Non-Christian religions. Therefore, I created two dummy variables to reflect that. The First Christian Religion was coded as: 1= Protestant Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Christian, 0= Jewish, None, Other, Buddhism, Hinduism, Other Eastern, Moslem/Islam, Native American and Inter-nondenominational. . This variable was dummied only to look at Respondents that follow a Christian Religion. The second dummy variable was Non-Christian Religion. This variable looked at respondents who followed a Non-Christian Religion. It was coded as: 0= Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Christian, 1= Jewish, None, Other, Buddhism, Hinduism, Other Eastern, Moslem/Islam, Native American and Inter-nondenominational.

FINDINGS

Univariate Results

The independent variable in this study is Sex Orientation (LGB). On average respondents scored a .04, which means that on average the respondents were heterosexual. The standard deviation is .21, meaning that respondents varied by .21 from the mean. About 95 % of the respondents identified as Heterosexual, while the remaining 4% were Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual. Figure 1 displays the Bar Graph for variation in responses to whether respondents were Gay/Lesbian, Bisexual or Heterosexual. 95 percent of respondents were heterosexual, while only 4.7 percent were Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual.

When we look at the dependent variable of Confidence in the existence of God, the mean was 4.75. On average, respondents believed in God sometimes. The standard deviation of 1.58 means that respondents believed in some higher power or had believe in God but had

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doubts. Figure 2 displays the Bar Graph for variation in responses to Confidence in the Existence of God, 5 percent of the respondents believed God didn't exist, 8 percent believed there was no way to find out. 14 percent of the respondents believed in some higher power. 51 percent believed in God sometimes. 18 percent believed in God but had doubts and 50% of respondents knew God existed.

[Insert Table 1]

[Insert Figure 1]

[Insert Figure 2]

Figure 3 shows the bar graph of respondent's race. As shown, about 23 percent of the respondents are non-white and 76 percent are white. Figure 4 shows the bar graph of respondent's sex. About 57 percent of the sample size in this study are women and about 43 percent of the sample size are men. Figure 5 displays the respondents that follow a Christian Religion. Around 25 % of respondents followed a Non-Christian Religion and 74 percent followed a Christian Religion. Figure 6 displays the amount of people in the sample that lived in South at Age 16. About 18 percent lived in the South and 81 percent lived in Another Region. Figure 7 shows the Histogram of the respondent's age. The respondents age ranged from 18 to 86 years old. If we look at table 1, the mean age of respondents was 44 years old. The standard deviation was about 16, meaning that on average respondents ages fell between the ages of 28 and 60 years old. Figure 8 shows the histogram of highest level of education of the respondent, measures years of education from 0 to 20 years., Most of the respondents have 12 years of education, which is equivalent to a high school diploma. If we look at Table 1, the median is 14, which is higher than the mean of 13. This shows us a right-skew distribution. The standard

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deviation of around two shows that two-thirds of the sample falls between having 12 to 15 years of education.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

[Insert Figure 5 about here]

[Insert Figure 6 about here]

Bivariate Analysis

Table 2 displays the Correlations (r) between Confidence in the Existence of God and all the variables. None of the correlations between the variables are above .7. Therefore, multicollinearity is not present.

[Insert Table 2]

Table 2 suggests that there is a significant relationship between Confidence in the Existence of God (Dependent Variable) and all other variables including identifying as Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual (GLB), which is the Independent Variable at the .01 level. According to the table, there is a very weak and negative relationship between Confidence in the Existence in God and Being Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual. If participant identified as Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual, their confidence in the existence in God would decrease by -.073. Identifying as Non-White had a very weak but significant relationship with the dependent variable. If respondent was Non-White, their confidence in the existence of God would increase by .108.

Identifying as a Man resulted in a significant negative and weak relationship with the dependent variable ($r = -.178$). This means that if respondent was a man, their confidence in God would decrease by -.178. Identifying with a Christian Religion produced a significant, positive and weak relationship, where there was a .227 increase in Confidence in the Existence of God.

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Being Born in the South at age 16 created a significant relationship that was positive and weak ($r = .074$). Age had a weak, positive but significant relationship ($r = -.178$). Education was also significant but weak and negative ($r = -.178$). Identifying as Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual, only had a significant relationship with Christian Religion ($r = -.051$), Age ($r = -.095$) and Education ($r = .043$). So, because someone is GLB they will have a negative relationship or is it because GLB respondents are younger and more educated, they will have a negative perception of the religion. Therefore, their confidence will decrease.

Multivariate Findings

The F-test for the regression (see Table 3), shows that confidence in the existence of God (110.308) regression equation is statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level. This model is significantly different than just the y-intercept model. The R^2 value is .139, therefore 13.9 percent of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent and control variables. All of the variables in this model are significant at the .01 level. The strongest predictor for the confidence in the existence in God model is Christian Religion (.758), followed by Man (-.557), Non-White (.416), Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual (-.316), South (.322), Education (-.079), and finally Age (.011). It is interesting to note that if the participant identified as Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual, Man or more educated, they had a decrease in their confidence that God existed. According to my results, for every metric unit change in Sexual Orientation, Confidence in God changes by -.368 units. These findings support the hypothesis that Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual persons will have less confidence that God exists than heterosexual persons.

[Insert Table 3]

DISCUSSION

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This study looked to answer whether identifying as a sexual minority (Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual) had any effect on whether they had less confidence in the existence of God or less. In order to understand the role religion plays in the lives of sexual minorities, I answered the question: Are sexual minorities less likely to have confidence that God exists? I hypothesized that Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual persons will have less confidence that God exists than heterosexual persons. Using a sample of 4792 Non-Institutionalized Respondents from the years of 2008 to 2018 in the GSS, Data showed that identifying as Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual does bear significantly on having less confidence in the existence of God. Therefore, my hypothesis was supported but the effect was not that big. These findings are supported by previous literature on the topic. Although previous research does not explain specifically if identifying as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual has any effect on the confidence in the existence of God. There are a wide array of sources that discuss their negative understandings of Religion. Based on previous literature, I concluded that the opposing relationship between sexuality and religion drives the negative perceptions of LGB persons and this creates psychological and physical damage to LGB persons that in turn will cause less confidence in the existence of God. If someone identifies as Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual, the more likely there is to be conflicting understanding of religion. This conflicting identity may be the cause of the negative perception of God that is present in this study.

Looking again at the bivariate analysis, all of the relationships are weak and negative except Education which would result in a correlation of .043 between LGB and Education. It is interesting to note that being GLB was correlated with Christian Religion, Age and Education, which are all correlated with the belief in the existence of God. This leads me to question whether there is something inherent about being gay, lesbian or bisexual and having lower

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confidence in the existence of God. So, because someone is GLB they will have a negative relationship or is it because GLB respondents are younger and more educated, they will have a negative perception of the religion. Therefore, their confidence will decrease. The regression model was statistically significant, and the strongest predictor was Christian Religion. Even when controlling for all of my variables, the negative association with confidence in the existence of God still holds true. Yet, when compared to Christian Religion, Man and Non-White, sexuality is still relatively small.

The Non-White control variable had a positive effect in the study. Walker and Torres (2017) and Garcia (2008) discuss religion in their articles and find that religion has an impact on the ways that POC Gay, Bisexual and Lesbian persons are stigmatized. At the same time, religion had the ability to possess a cultural aspect. These findings might be supported by this study. The variable resulted in a .416 increase on the dependent variable. Therefore, Non-White respondents scored higher on the six-point scale of confidence in the existence of God. The higher score can be attributed to the strong cultural ties of Religion. This may also be explained by Social Identity theory and Queer Theory. Since being a sexual minority and following a conservative religion are opposing identities and being a LGB person is in direct contrast to heteronormativity. Both of these theories allow one to understand why homosexuality is demonized. It is viewed as deviant in the eyes of some conservative religions. This opposition that exists between these identities can explain why some LGB persons may have a negative perception of God. These identities can be integrated or exist in conflict. These theories can be used to explain the positive effect of this variable. It might be plausible that because religion is a cultural aspect of many POC individuals, they have learned to integrate the two

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identities and navigate the negative perceptions, others may hold of them. Overall, the finding support my hypothesis as well as previous literature on these topics.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that the GSS has such a small sample size of GLB participants and there are no studies on Transgender individuals. Therefore, this analysis does not examine the experience of Transgender individuals. Another notable limitation is the lack of questions from the GSS on perceptions of God. There was only one question asked about confidence in the existence of God but none on religion or views of God and Religion. The General Social Survey does not give participants the ability to explain if they are gender non-conforming or identifying as anything other than gay, lesbian or bisexual. The measures does not explore the complex ways in which religion may influence Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual persons everyday lives. It is true that GLB respondents explain that religion plays a crucial role in their lives, but there is still questions to be answered. Specifically, ones that examine why participants may have a negative or positive perception of religion. Perhaps, the ways that LGB individuals engage with religious communities is completely different than their heterosexual counterparts.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I examined the effect that religion has had on how sexual minorities (Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual persons) view God and how their confidence in God has shifted throughout the years of 2008 to 2018. In order to understand the role religion plays in the lives of sexual minorities, I answered the question: Are sexual minorities less likely to have confidence that God exists? And I hypothesized that Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual persons would have less confidence that God exists than heterosexual persons. Using a sample of 4792 Non-Institutionalized Respondents from the years of 2008 to 2018 in the GSS (Smith et. Al. 2008-2018), Data showed

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that identifying as Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual does bear significantly on having less confidence in the existence of God. Therefore, my hypothesis was supported. Social Identity theory and Queer Theory can be used to explain this effect. Since the identities of sexuality and religion are opposing and being LGB is in direct contrast to heteronormativity. They are either work in opposition or together. It is clear the opposition of these identities has caused less confidence in the existence of God for this group.

Further research should focus on the experience of each sexuality. This population was a small population in the study, so I couldn't explain the ways that different sexualities felt. I assume that a difference might be present. Overall, more research needs to be done on the intersectionality that exists when one speaks of religion and sexuality. The implications of these findings reveal the framework of the way LGB individuals understand God. It is crucial to understand the conception of God. Not only because it will provide us with a clearer image of the role of God in the lives of sexual minorities, but because it provides the frameworks to reshape religions and communities to restructure ideologies that have historically been fatal. The negative rhetoric that LGB individuals experience has caused intense feeling of isolations. It is only right that this is examined for inclusivity. Everyone deserves to be accepted. This group should have someone to look to for guidance, when everyone else fails to be there for them.

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Figure 1. Bar Graph of Sexual Orientation

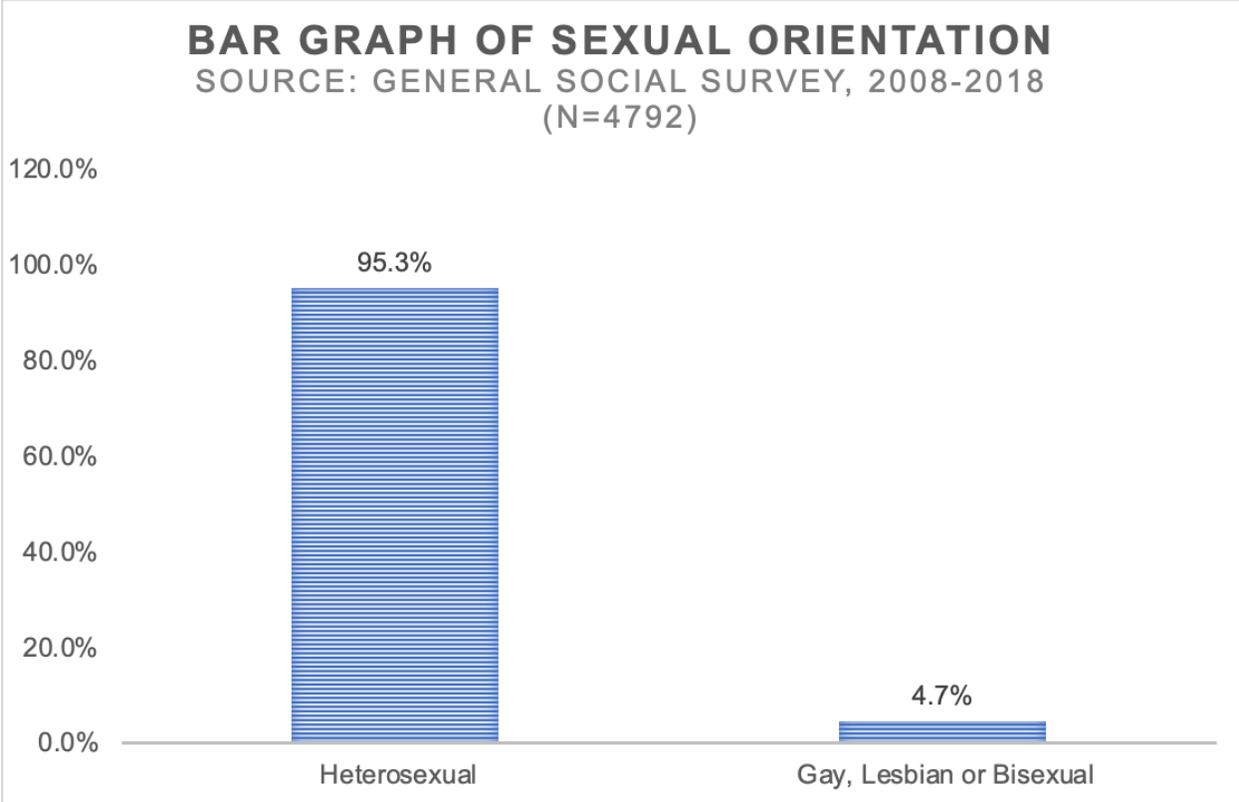


Figure 2. Bar Graph of Confidence in the Existence of God

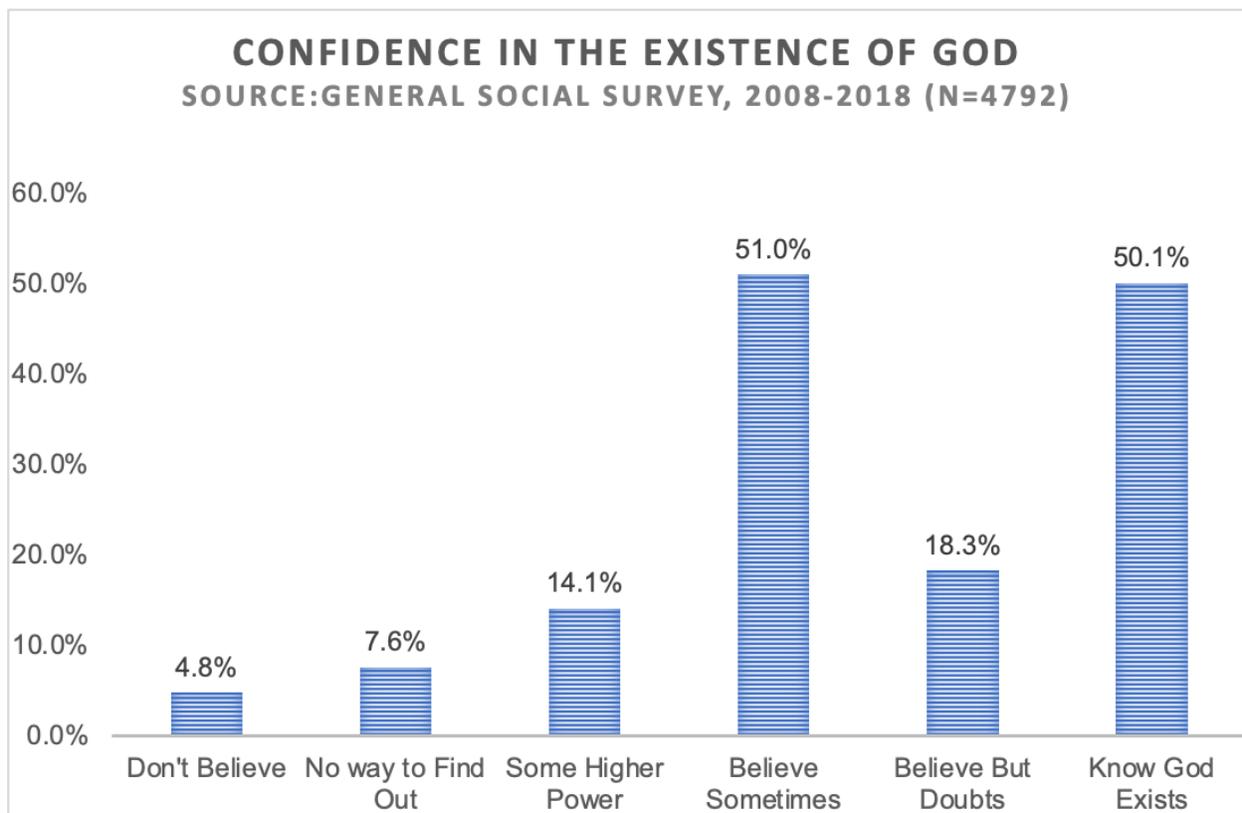


Figure 3. Bar Graph of Race

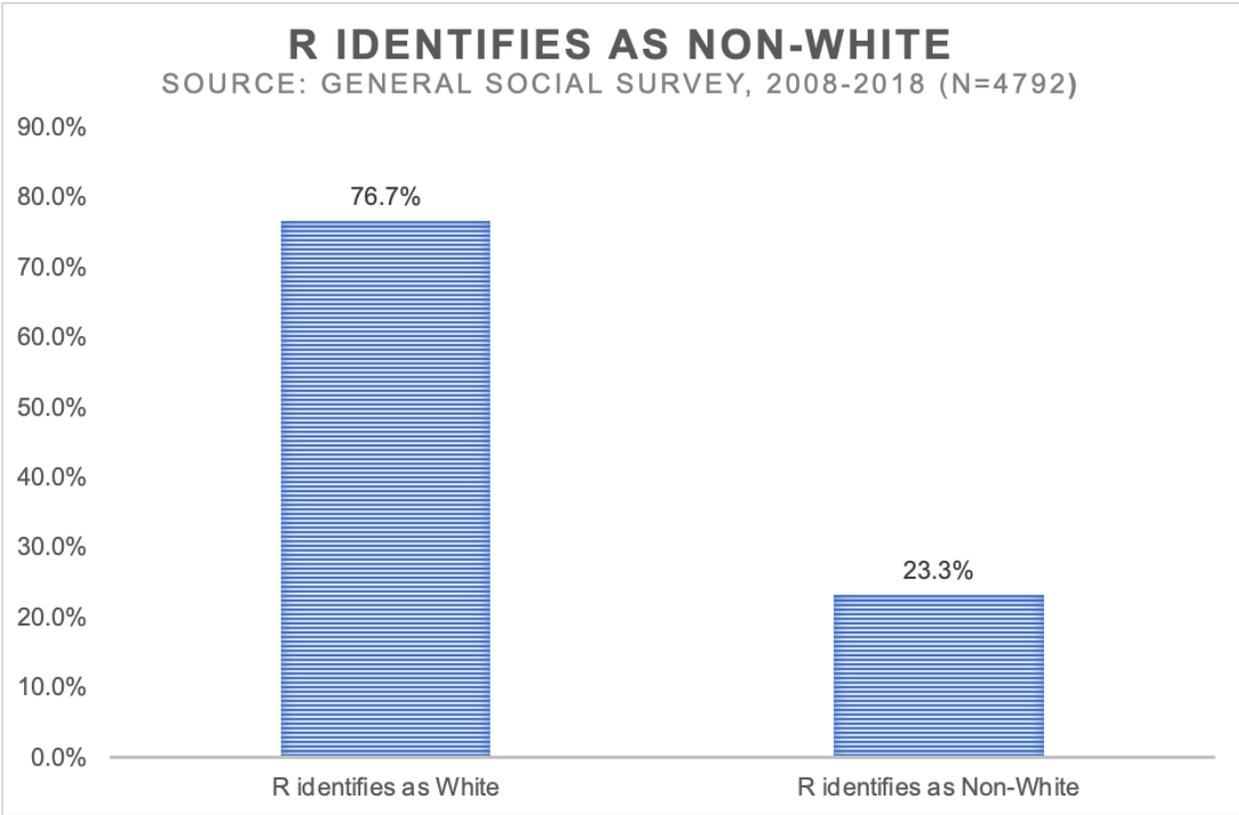


Figure 4. Bar Graph of Sex

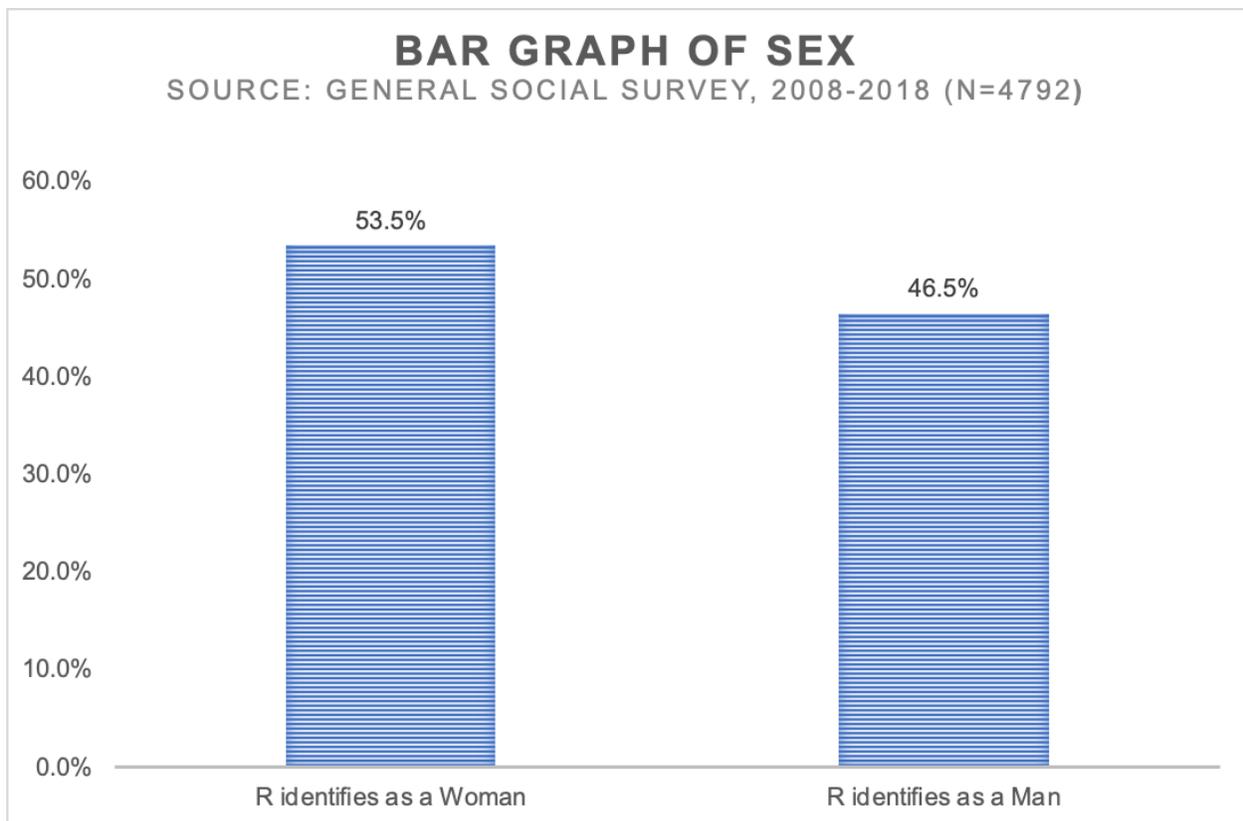
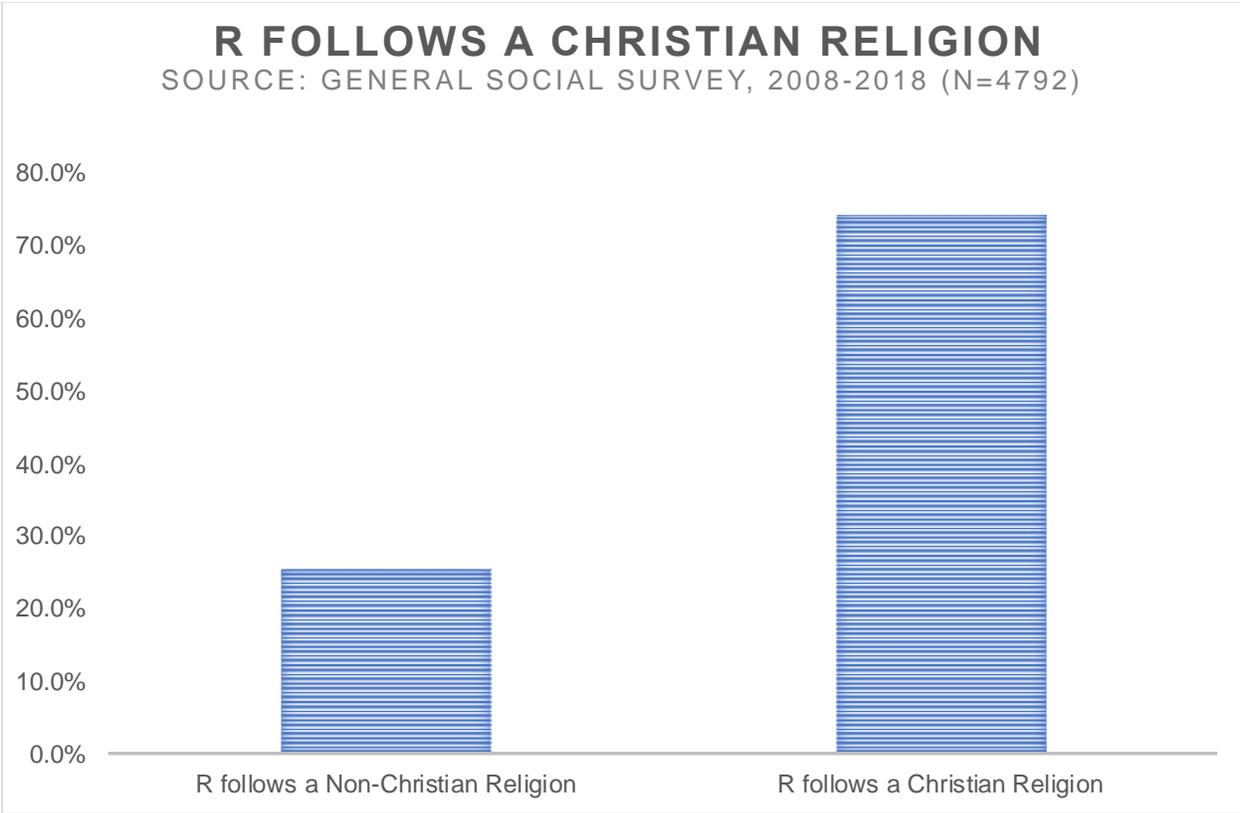


Figure 5. Bar Graph of Respondents who follow a Christian Religion



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Figure 6. Bar Graph of Region of Residence at Age 16 (South)

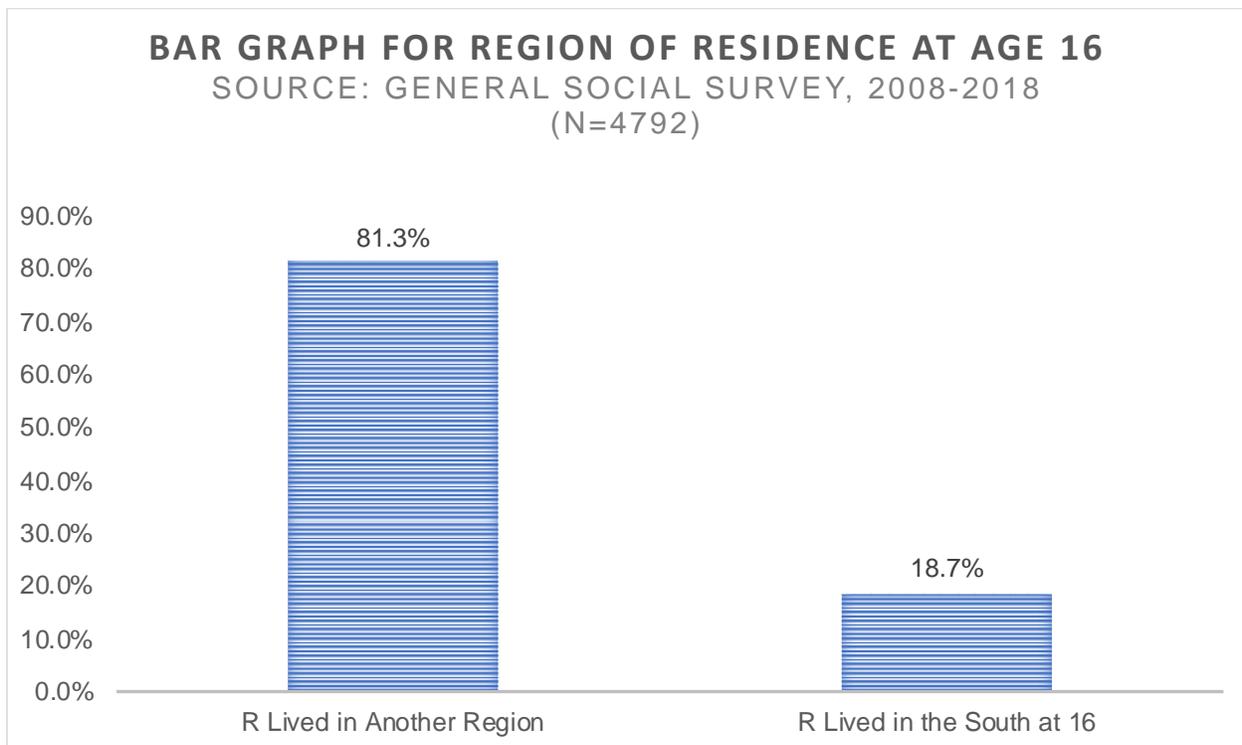


Figure 7. Bar Graph of Age

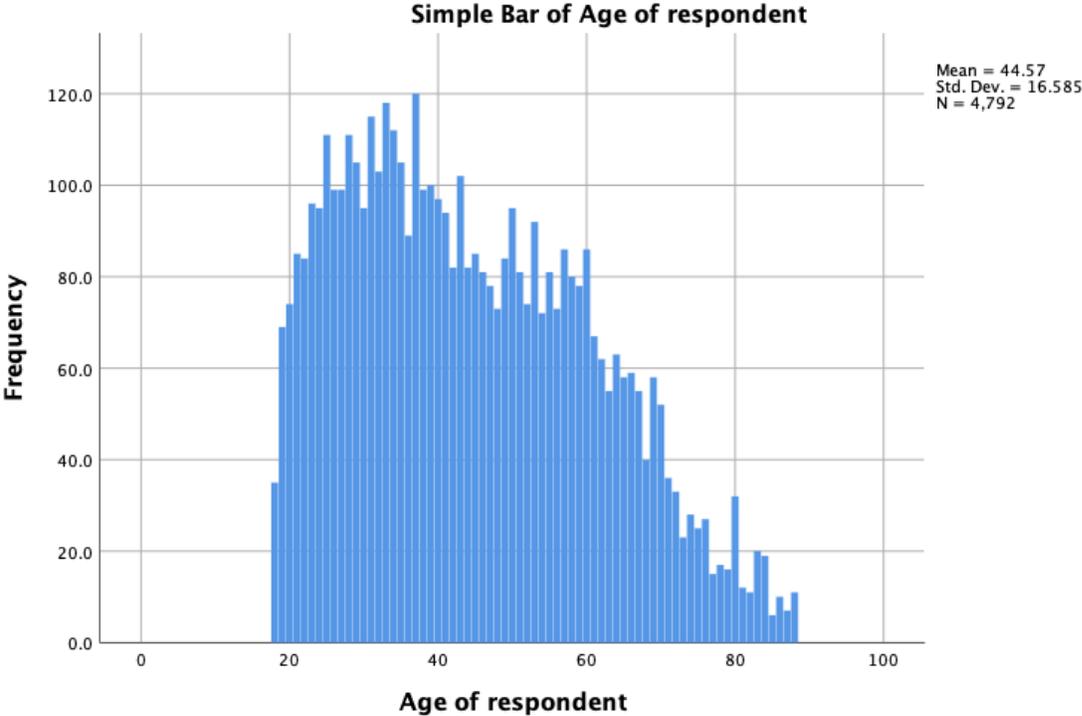
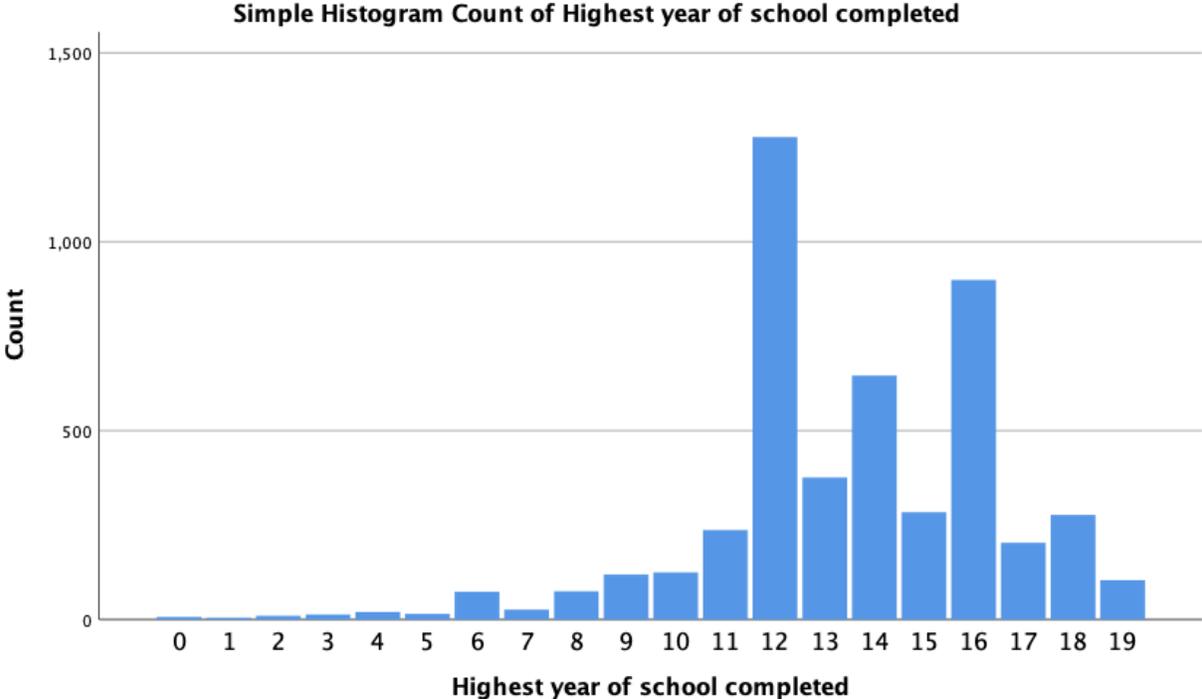


Figure 8. Bar Graph of Years of Education



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Table 1. Means, Medians, and Standard Deviations for Variables (N=4792)

Variable	Mean	Median	S.D.
Sexual Orientation (LGB)	.04	.00	.211
Confidence in the Existence of God	4.75	6.00	1.58
Non-White	.23	.00	.422
Men	.46	.00	.498
Follows a Christian Religion	.74	1.0	.436
South	.18	.00	.389
Age	44.57	43	16.58
Education	13.50	14	2.93

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Table 2. Correlations (r) between Confidence in the Existence of God and Seven Variables (Listwise Deletion, Two Tailed Test, N=4792)

Variable	Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual	Non- White	Man	Christian Religion	South	Age	Education
Existence in God	-.073*	.108*	-.178*	.227*	.074*	.110*	-.178*
GLB		-.010	-.025	-.051*	.007	-.095*	.043*
Non- White			-.007	-.036	.030	-.189*	-.147*
Man				-.012	-.014	-.010	-.017
Christian Religion					-.022	.090*	-.060
South						-.105*	-.042
Age							.007

* $p < .01$

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Table 3. Regression of Confidence in the Existence of God on all Variables

Variable	<i>b</i>	β
Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual	-.368	-.049*
Non-White	.416	.111*
Man	-.557	-.176*
Christian Religion	.758	.209*
South	.322	.079*
Age	.011	.115*
Education (Years)	-.079	-.147*
Constant	4.887	

* $p < .01$; $R^2 = 0.139$; $F(7, 4784) = 110.308^*$