

RELIGIOUS WOMEN AND HOMOSEXUALITY:  
A DENOMINATIONAL BREAKDOWN

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this research is to examine women's attitudes toward homosexuality by religiosity, and how these attitudes may vary across denominations. To examine this, I will use the General Social Survey to analyze the extent to which women's attitudes toward same-sex relations vary by denominational affiliation, religious participation, and spirituality. Based on the current literature, women are generally considered to be more tolerant than men regarding homosexuality. However, research has not examined the extent to which their attitudes vary across denominational affiliation. This research will contribute to the current literature by examining variations by denomination, religiosity, and spirituality in regards to women's attitudes on a controversial, hot-button issue in our society. Following the analysis and explanation of the results, directions for future research are discussed.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **Introduction**

Homosexuality is a contentious issue among many religious groups in the United States (Djupe et al. 2006.; Herman 1997; Olson and Cadge 2002) and has been one of the most volatile political issues in recent years (Herman 1997; Sherkat et al. 2011; Van Geest 2007a). In that time, gays and lesbians have campaigned for full and equal citizenship with a multitude of proposed legislation and public policies (e.g., same-sex marriage, adoption, antidiscrimination legislation, military inclusion, employment benefits). The gay and lesbian movement has had some success in shifting the American public perception toward acceptance during the last decade (Anderson and Fetner 2008; Avery et al. 2007; Herman 1997; Macgillivray 2008). For instance, an increasing number of people support civil rights for homosexuals. In 1999, 35% of Americans supported same-sex marriage while the latest polling data indicate that 40% of men and women in America agree that homosexuals should have the right to marry (Gallup Poll 2009).

Expectedly, gender is an important factor in a respondent's attitudes toward homosexuality and civil rights. Women are less likely than men to hold negative stereotypical beliefs toward homosexuals (Moskowitz et al. 2010). The interplay between gender, religious denominations, and heterosexual attitudes toward homosexuality are largely unknown. What we do know is that heterosexual women as a whole are substantially more tolerant of homosexuals than are heterosexual men (Hinrichs and Rosenberg 2002; Maltz and Boss 1997; Moskowitz et



al. 2010). Based on extensive previous research, we also know that, although there has been some success with the inclusion of homosexuality into mainstream America, opposition and discrimination continues to ferment in organized religion (Sherkat 2002).

Most religious denominations in the United States have formal and informal positions relating to homosexuality (Olson and Cadge 2002), just as they have formal and informal positions on gender roles (Chaves 1997). Many mainline Protestant congregations have officially welcomed homosexuals to join their congregations (Cadge 2008), but many conservative congregations remain opposed to homosexual equality. While most mainline congregations discuss homosexuality, it is usually in the context of policy debates within the respective denominational bodies. Most mainline denominational bodies and congregation's discussion of homosexuality is maintained within a fairly neutral context (Olson and Cadge 2002) and is often the result of minor policy changes within the religion (the split among Episcopalians is an exception).

Despite the widespread acceptance of homosexuality in many mainline Protestant religions, conservative Christian congregations are generally less accepting and more diligent with their prejudicial views. Van Geest (2008) argues that the vocal opposition toward gays and lesbians among conservative Christian congregations results from theological orientation, religious tradition, and a centralized authority structure. The prevalence of these three factors increase the likelihood that a religious group will be active in maintaining opposition to gay and lesbian rights.

Opposition to gay rights is most visible regarding same-sex marriage. The controversy surrounding same-sex marriage puts it at the forefront of most social and political debates

(Stenger 2005). These debates focus on whether the legal rights and benefits that heterosexuals gain from marriage should be extended to gays and lesbians. The current social policy (or lack thereof) reduces gays and lesbians to second-class citizens due to the failure of same-sex marriage legislation, while heterosexual marriage inherently becomes first-class citizenship (Peplau and Fingerhut 2007). Gays and lesbians are not only denied the right to marry, but they are also denied 1,138 additional federally granted benefits and privileges, classified under the United States Code of marital status for heterosexual couples (Defense of Marriage Act: Update to Prior Report 2004; Marriage: Same-sex and Opposite-sex 2009).

To date, there are currently forty-one states that have enacted Defense of Marriage Acts (DOMA) statutes defining marriage as between one man and one woman, and thirty states have defined marriage in their constitutions (Same-sex Marriage, Civil Unions and Domestic Partnerships 2010). Due to varying degrees of legislative action, currently, six districts have legalized same-sex marriage - Connecticut, Iowa, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont, and Washington D.C. (Goodnough 2009). California granted same-sex marriage licenses for a brief period of time before Proposition 8 was passed restricting marriage as defined between one man and one woman. A California judge declared the ban unconstitutional, but same-sex marriages are on hold for further appeals. Same-sex marriage remains a polemic issue within the majority of states, affecting millions of gays and lesbians' rights and liberties next to their heterosexual counterparts. For example, marriage licenses granted to heterosexuals are recognized in all fifty states. In contrast, the civil liberty licenses granted to homosexual couples are distinct in that they may only be recognized in the district in which they were issued. The few exceptions are Maryland, New York, and Rhode Island which recognize same-sex marriage licenses from other states (Same-sex Marriage, Civil Unions and Domestic Partnerships 2010). The complex and

ever shifting dynamics that currently surround same-sex marriage in America are met with vocal opposition at nearly every turn. The uncertainty of the legalization that surrounds same-sex marriage leaves the unanswered question of where and from whom will the expansion of support be derived.

Current support for homosexual rights has largely been shown to come from women rather than men. Heterosexual females are more likely to support employment, civil rights (including same-sex marriage), and adoption for homosexuals (Whitley 2001). Meanwhile, heterosexual men tend to hold more negative attitudes toward homosexuals than heterosexual women (Whitley 2001). These gender differences also reveal stronger negative attitudes toward gay men, and less negative attitudes toward lesbians (Whitley 2001). Research consistently shows men to be more homophobic than women (Herek 2002; Raja and Stokes 1998; Thompson et al. 1985).

The existing literature shows that gender differences and religiosity may affect an individual's attitude toward homosexuality, but there have been relatively few studies that have examined the gender differences by religious denominations. Although women generally tend to be more tolerant than men regarding homosexuality (Herek 2002; Raja and Stokes 1998; Thompson et al. 1985), women's attitudes are most likely not to be homogeneous across denominations.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationship between religion, spirituality, gender, and attitudes toward homosexuality. I address the following: First, does the acceptance of homosexuality vary by gender? Second, which religious denominations are more accepting of homosexuality? Third, does female's religiosity (e.g., involvement with organized religion,

religious participation, church attendance) affect their attitudes toward homosexuality? And fourth, is a respondent's spirituality an indicator of acceptance toward homosexuality?

Chapter Two addresses the literature concerning the relationship between men's and women's attitudes toward homosexuality. Chapter Three presents the recent literature concerning the relationship between religion and spirituality and attitudes toward homosexuality among women. Chapter Four presents the methods and measurement of variables in the study. The first analysis that will be presented in Chapter Four will focus on whether gender differences are evident in the General Social Surveys (GSS) data. The second analysis in Chapter Four uses multiple regression to explore the effects of religious affiliation, public participation, subjective religiosity, and subjective spirituality on these attitudes.

## CHAPTER 2

### Gender Differences in Attitudes and Behaviors

Much of the current literature has examined gender differences between men's and women's attitudes, and what accounts for these differences toward homosexuality. Researchers have found various factors affecting why women generally seem to have more positive attitudes toward homosexuality than do men (e.g., gender roles, homophobia, anti-egalitarian values). These factors contribute to the difference in attitudes toward homosexuals among women and men. However, very little research has examined the differences between men and women across religious denominations. The purpose of this research is to examine the variation among denominations and religiosity with regards to women's attitudes towards homosexuality. This research will address the gap in the literature by demonstrating that although women generally tend to be more tolerant of homosexuality than men, women's attitudes are most likely not homogeneous across denominations. Of course, this research will also take into account that gender roles affect attitudes toward homosexuality.

Traditional beliefs about gender roles are a major predictor of less accepting attitudes toward homosexuality (Whitley 2001). Gender-role beliefs support ideas of men maintaining a masculine identity and females maintaining a feminine role. These gender-role beliefs represent the idea of what is the behavioral norm for males and females. Whitley's (2001) study examined gender-role self-concept, old fashioned sexism, and modern sexism on attitudes toward homosexuality. The results from the meta-analysis indicated that gender-role beliefs are closely linked to attitudes toward homosexuality. The study also found a correlation between gender-role beliefs and antigay behavior. Whitley's (2001) research indicated that heterosexuals' beliefs in

traditional gender roles regarding “hypermasculinity” and “hyperfemininity” play a large role in responses to homosexuality (p. 716). Whitley (2001), however, did not examine if there was a difference between heterosexual male and female attitudes regarding gender role beliefs, and the impact those beliefs may have on the acceptance of homosexuality.

Gender role violations tend to be perceived more strongly by heterosexual men regarding homosexuality than for heterosexual women (Maltz and Boss 1997). Acceptance of the traditional male gender role may create a conflict for those that view homosexuality, particularly gay men, as defying the masculine role. According to Bem’s (1981, 1993) gender schema theory, men and women tend to organize their world-views in terms of gender roles and what is considered gender appropriate. One’s own gender schema manifests what is gender appropriate for one’s own self as well as their gender-role beliefs for others. Therefore, if men and women hold more stringent gender beliefs, they will mostly likely view gay men and lesbians as breaking gender norms. If gay men are displaying characteristics that are often categorized as feminine behaviors (e.g., dressing feminine, speaking with a lisp, snapping of the wrist, wearing make-up, holding hands with another male) most will view this behavior as taking on feminine characteristics; equating gay men with heterosexual females. It is also true for lesbians that display characteristics that typically are defined as masculine (e.g., wearing over sized clothing, short haircuts, no make-up, having a deeper voice); they will be viewed as breaking the feminine norm while trying to display masculine characteristics.

Gay men are often equated with femininity because they are not displaying the typical masculine characteristics, and femininity is symbolically defined as lacking, i.e. gay men are feminine because they sleep with other men (Barringer 2010). Gay men are excluded on many micro and macro levels within Western society because of their inadequacy to meet hegemonic

standards (Barringer 2010). Connell (1995) defines hegemonic masculinity as the power that is constructed and displayed by men through their dominance over women and other men that do not meet the ideals of hegemony. The male individual that conveys power through hegemony may be relatively small in terms of the effects on the macro level, but the individual will construct masculinity in ways that seem much greater on the micro level.

Sexual identity is one of the ways in which the individual displays the power of hegemony. A subordinated form of masculinity is formed through the stigmatization and exclusion by heterosexual males; i.e. gay men are forced into a subordinated form of masculinity. Heterosexual males' sexual identity is constructed through the power in which they gain through 'normalcy.' The identity of being a heterosexual male creates a dichotomy of the ideal 'normal' sexual identity (heterosexuality) and the lesser 'other' sexual identity (homosexuality). Anything that falls into the 'other' sexual identity is defined as lacking because it's not the norm of heterosexuality. The dominance of heterosexual males over gay males has caused subordination and rejection for those that identify as homosexual. Homosexuality fails to meet the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, therefore gay men are oppressed within this hegemonic masculinity (Barringer 2010).

If heterosexual women are viewed as a subordinate group by heterosexual males and if homosexual males are equated with femininity, it does not come as a surprise that heterosexual males would hold more negative views toward homosexuals. The word *homosexual* itself tends to evoke thoughts of gay men rather than of lesbians or both gay men and lesbians for most people (Black and Stevenson 1984). Therefore, the term itself already conjures a sexual connotation involving gay males for most people (Maltz and Boss 1997). Heterosexual males and females focus on the intercourse between two gay men and the sexual element with the word

*homosexuality*, rather than relationship between two persons of the same gender (Maltz and Boss 1997). If heterosexual males are negatively associating gay men with heterosexual females because they have intercourse with other men this identity may be formed due to the term *homosexual*. These negative thoughts regarding homosexuality can lead to the formation of a heterosexual-homosexual dynamic in which the majority (heterosexuals) enforces their own group normalcy, thus suggesting that negative stereotypes held by individuals are often the basis for homophobic attitudes toward gays and lesbians (Moskowitz et al. 2010; Raja and Stokes 1998).

Moskowitz et al. (2010) examined heterosexual attitudes toward same-sex marriage and whether a correlation existed between attitudes and homophobia. The study also examined whether males or females had differing attitudes towards gays and lesbians. The results included that homophobia seemed to be the most influential variable on attitudes toward same-sex marriage. Heterosexual men were likely to favor lesbian marriage over gay male marriage and were also less homophobic toward lesbians than gay men. Heterosexual females tended to not differentiate between gay male marriage and lesbian marriage, nor did the females as a whole harbor as many homophobic attitudes compared to men. Moskowitz et al.'s (2010) examination is another instance in which the effects of gender on attitudes toward homosexuality extend to what is currently understood about heterosexual attitudes; heterosexual women are more tolerant than heterosexual men toward homosexuality. The study also concluded that heterosexual males held more homophobic beliefs toward gay men than they did lesbians (Moskowitz et al. 2010) because they consider it revolting and “unmasculine” (Renaud and Byers 2001).

Raja and Stokes (1998) found that men were significantly more homophobic toward gay men than women were, and men were more homophobic toward gay men than lesbians. In their



study, they developed the Modern Homophobia Scale (MHS), a scale that includes measures of attitudes toward lesbians (MHS-L) and attitudes toward gay men (MHS-G) (Raja and Stokes 1998). The MHS revealed that the highest level of homophobia was among men toward gay men and the least was among women toward gay men. Raja and Stokes (1998) also found that men and women did not differ in their overall levels of homophobia toward lesbians. When individual factors were examined, it is revealed that “compared to women, men were more likely to think lesbianism is deviant and changeable; women reported more personal discomfort with lesbians than did men” (Raja and Stokes 1998; p. 130). Heterosexual men also tend to eroticize lesbianism in pornography and personal fantasies. The authors try to account for the difference for lower levels of homophobia toward lesbians citing that lesbians are generally more accepted, particularly on college campuses (Raja and Stokes 1998).

Hinrichs and Rosenburg (2002) examined the climate for gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals on six liberal arts campuses. This study examined the relationships between each of these independent variables- contacts with gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, Greek membership, sex, sex role attitudes, religiosity- and attitudes toward homosexuals and homosexuality (Hinrichs and Rosenburg 2002). The study revealed that females are significantly more likely than males to express positive attitudes toward gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. Weak correlations were found between religiosity (attendance, fundamentalism of Protestant denominations, and agreement with traditional religious values) and acceptance when stronger correlates, such as *sex role attitudes*, were simultaneously considered; but when controlling for sex traditional religious values there was a stronger correlation for women than men (Hinrichs and Rosenburg 2002). Students with more liberal sex-role attitudes were also more accepting of homosexuality. The

authors found that gender role attitudes were the strongest predictor for most of the dependent variables.

Although the liberal arts campuses seemed to foster more accepting attitudes toward homosexuality than the non-liberal arts populations, traditional gender role beliefs still affected those that had negative attitudes toward gays and lesbians. The negative attitudes held by heterosexual males toward homosexuals, particularly gay men, are difficult to differentiate from patriarchal and heterosexist attitudes. Patriarchal and heterosexist attitudes, along with traditional gender role beliefs, may affect heterosexual males more strongly than heterosexual females with negative feelings toward homosexuals. Lannutti and Lachlan (2008) revealed that in both college and non-college samples, men were significantly less supportive of same-sex marriage and homosexuality, also suggesting that it's difficult to distinguish the males' attitudes from patriarchal held beliefs. The researchers designed a survey to assess heterosexual attitudes on their support and/or opposition on allowing homosexuals the right to marry. The Attitude Toward Same-Sex Marriage Scale (ASSMS) was developed to assess three dimensions of attitudes toward same-sex marriage: civil equality, cultural endorsement, and personal exposure (Lannutti and Lachlan 2008).

Attitudes toward same-sex marriage and homosexuality are suggested to be linked to gender-role beliefs in both college and non-college samples. Along with gender-role beliefs as constructs in themselves (Whitley 2001), these beliefs are also known to be part of a broader anti-egalitarian belief system (Levin and Sidanius 1999). Those with anti-egalitarian beliefs exhibited greater support for attitudes that reinforce social and political hierarchy, valuing group inequality (Levin and Sidanius 1999). Anti-egalitarian values have generally been found to be related with negative attitudes toward homosexuality (Whitley 2001). Negative attitudes toward

homosexuality justify heterosexuals' dominant social position (i.e. heterosexual's right to legally marry) while subordinating the status of homosexuals (i.e. limiting homosexuals right to marriage). Anti-egalitarian beliefs of inequality across political and social life for varying groups of people create and reinforce the system of gender-role beliefs, therefore giving rise to negative attitudes toward homosexuality.

While most of the aforementioned literature accounts for the gender differences in attitudes toward homosexuals and how these gender-roles also factor into religious beliefs, there appears to be little research examining religiosity and denominational variations in attitudes toward homosexuality within genders. The first step in this research is to explore the extent to which there are gender differences in attitudes toward homosexuality. The second step is to examine the impact of religious affiliation, religiosity, and spirituality on women's attitudes toward homosexuality using the GSS.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Religious Affiliation**

Most Protestant Christian denominations hold formal positions regarding homosexuality, and some have formally developed anti-homosexual policies. For example, The Southern Baptist Convention opposes the legalization of same-sex marriage, as well as homosexual civil unions (Van Geest 2007b). The Roman Catholic Church will not commune politicians if they support homosexual legislation. The proponents of opposition to homosexuality and civil rights for gays and lesbians draw support from the Old Testament (Leviticus 18:22) and the New Testament (Romans 1:18-32), which is read as describing homosexual acts as wrong and immoral. Homosexuality is defined as sinful acts that not only defy God, but the natural order of reproduction between men and women. The controversy surrounding whether homosexuality is morally acceptable in terms of political and social policies has caused an increasing number of denominations to take formal positions (Van Geest 2007b). Many denominations are even participating in public debates regarding homosexual policies. The larger denominations formal and even informal positions on homosexuality can often affect members' attitudes toward homosexuals. The attitudes held by the members of the varying denominations regarding homosexuality are not homogeneous and differ on the levels of acceptance. Therefore, it is expected that women's attitudes are most likely not homogeneous, even though women generally tend to be more accepting of homosexuality than men. The purpose of this research is examining the variations amongst religiosity, spirituality, and religious affiliations regarding women's attitudes toward homosexuals.

The relationship of denominational affiliation with attitudes about family life and homosexuality has been found to affect the degree of social conservatism which the members hold. Social conservatism in behaviors and attitudes often vary based on the strength of conviction regarding Christian doctrines a particular denomination holds (Hertel and Hughes 1987). The contemporary sociological understanding of differences among Christian Denominations with their religious beliefs has been heavily influenced by the early work of Glock and Stark (1965). They proposed that the variation among denominations could be classified into a four-category continuum: (1) liberals (e.g., Episcopal, Jewish); (2) moderates (e.g., Methodists, Lutherans); (3) conservatives (e.g., Catholics); (4) fundamentalists (e.g., Southern Baptists). This four-category continuum provides the baseline used by researchers to differentiate denominational groups' religious behaviors and attitudes toward current social issues (e.g., homosexuality, abortion). Several different strategies have been developed over the years to operationalize religious affiliation. Roof and McKinney (1987) propose a strategy that results in a six fold typology of "religious families." Others (e.g., Hertel and Hughes, 1987, Gay et al. 1996) use denominational affiliation, and the General Social Surveys includes a measure that operationalizes affiliation into three categories. Recently, Steensland, Brian, Jerry Z. Park, Mark Regnerus, Lynn Robinson, W. Bradford Wilcox, and Robert D. Woodberry (2000) developed a religious categorical scheme that has been accepted by many researchers in the discipline and will be used for the current analysis. The religious categories include Mainline Protestants, Evangelical Protestants, Black Protestants, Catholics, Jews, "other Protestants," and no preference respondents.

The growing body of evidence indicates that the members of these religious denominations differ significantly in behaviors and attitudes (Cadge 2002; Ellison 1991; Gay et

al. 1996; Hertal and Hughes 1987; Roof and Mckinney 1987; Van Geest 2007b). In particular, the literature has addressed varying dynamics with mainline Protestant denominations and the debate about homosexuality. Homosexuality has been a formal debate in Protestant denominations since the 1970s (Cadge 2002), when the issue of homosexuality was being addressed socially and politically. During the 1980s, national mainline Protestant denominations addressed the issue of same-sex marriage and commitment ceremonies between gays and lesbians at the national meetings (Cadge 2002). The 1990s had several court cases and other public policy debates on issues related to sexuality. The federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) of 1996 marked the beginning of a resurgence of social and political activity for many of the denominations. The dynamics of homosexuality-related conflicts have since been understood by many scholars in religious conflicts because of the ways in which denominations have responded to sexuality. The contexts of these debates vary by denominations in the extent to which they provide congregations with resources for the discussion of homosexuality, sexuality, and same-sex rights.

Today, denominations in the U.S. have many differences on their positions toward homosexuality; most do not support same-sex marriage, but support other gay rights (e.g., United Methodist Church) some denominations do not support any legislation supporting homosexuals (e.g., Southern Baptists, Catholics), while others do not take formal positions (e.g., Church of Christ) on homosexuality (Van Geest 2007b). Even within denominational families, there are significant differences between churches regarding homosexuality. Mainline denominations that are often thought to be the more liberal, progressive churches only have a few that advocate for the legalization of same-sex marriage. The same is also true for the black Protestant denominations; there are significant differences between the various churches (Van Geest

2007b). Previous research has shown that not only is there a great deal of variation amongst the denomination's positions on homosexuality, but also among the members of the same religious affiliation (Burdette 2009; Cochran et al. 2005; Gay et al. 1996).

The larger denominations formal and even informal positions on homosexuality can often affect members' attitudes toward homosexuals because these denominations create "moral communities" for their members. The "moral communities" thesis was coined by Stark (1996) to understand religion as a larger group identity rather than just focusing on the individual member. The religious concentration in congregations may influence the behaviors and beliefs of those members. Therefore, if the larger denominations have very conservative ideals regarding homosexuality, these resources will be given to the congregations which in turn will be used to create the "moral communities" within the churches. The shared identity and common values regarding homosexuality and same-sex rights will most likely influence the attitudes of the members. The group property of religion should also be understood as an individual one as well. The effect of "moral communities" and denominational affiliation on attitudes toward homosexuality may depend heavily on the individual's commitment to one's religious tradition. Variations among members' attitudes toward homosexuality will most likely be explained by public religious participation (i.e. church attendance) and subjective religiosity (i.e. importance of religion on a daily basis). It is anticipated that attitudes toward homosexuality will vary by religious affiliation.

### **Public Religious Participation**

Women who participate more frequently in public religious communities (e.g., church attendance, Bible studies, prayer groups) often have less accepting attitudes toward homosexuality (Finlay and Walther 2003; Herek and Glunt 1993; Sherkat et al. 2011).

Involvement in formal church activities exposes members to messages that reinforce that homosexuality is a sin and the importance of working with God to combat the moral dilemma of same-sex relations. Similar types of lessons can also be found during Bible Studies and prayer groups that are used as reinforcements for the consequences of engaging in same-sex behavior. The exposure to the norms and consequences pertaining to sexuality through religious participation influences moral attitudes toward homosexuality (Finlay and Walther 2003). The extent to which people are involved in church attendance and faith groups may indicate the depth of one's commitment to religious doctrine. The level of public religious participation may also reflect one's dedication to the faith and beliefs one adopts pertaining to homosexuals.

Religious communities are often used as a normative reference group for the individuals' personal beliefs and the moral messages of the denomination. Frequent attendance at religious services provides values and norms that unite members. The effect of public religious participation on the relationship between members' attitudes toward homosexual relations will most likely differ across denominations. The frequency and framework in which homosexuality is discussed in various denominations provide different moral values and norms for the members, i.e. depending on whether homosexuality is discussed in a positive or negative framework. The level of participation along with the framework (most likely a negative one) that is used to discuss homosexuality and same-sex rights at the congregations will become the discourse in which individuals construct their meanings of homosexual relations. These discourses pertaining to homosexuality are often reinforced through the social interactions with other members of the moral communities.

Religious participation provides frequent contact with other members that adhere to similar norms and beliefs. The moral similarity between individuals and the members of the



congregations will provide a point of reference for their own beliefs and behaviors. The frequent contact with members through religious attendance may act as a type of behavior monitoring and belief control for individuals. This implies that there are possible social sanctions for members that display counter-normative behavior (Sherkat and Wilson 1995). The informal sanctions of being ostracized by the group for those that support homosexuality and/or engage in same-sex behavior may act as a deterrent for some individuals. Fellow members of the religious communities may encourage an individual to apply their religious teachings against thoughts of homosexuality, serving as a type of informal spiritual support that is formed through public religious participation.

Religious involvement at conservative churches will be expected more frequently than involvement at moderate and liberal churches. Moderate and liberal churches may experience greater fluctuation in weekly attendance at religious services where there is not as much emphasis placed on members to attend. Despite the varying degrees of moral commitment that are placed on members of conservative and liberal congregations, Cochran et al. (2004) found that homosexual relations are condemned by all mainstream religious faith groups. They found that the influence of religiosity (church attendance) across different faith groups and homosexual relations did not vary. Conservative Protestant denominations tend to unanimously interpret homosexuality as a sin and the threat of eternal sanctions are used during public religious participation (Cochran et al. 2004). Although, it's understood that there is no variation between Protestant denominations moral lessons regarding homosexuality, this study did not examine the members' attitudes toward homosexuals. The religiously active members may spend more of their time attending weekly services, prayer groups, and Bible studies that are less inclusive to

homosexual relations. Thus, women that frequently participate in public religious communities will most likely be associated with less accepting attitudes toward homosexuals.

### **Subjective Religiosity**

Subjective religiosity may also affect women's attitudes toward homosexuality.

Subjective religiosity measures an individual's religious self-concept and how important religion is in their everyday lives. The internalization of religious norms and learned moral lessons will perhaps best be determined by how individuals apply these on a daily basis (Burdette et al. 2009). This includes how subjective religiosity will affect behaviors and attitudes concerning sexuality and homosexual relations outside of congregations. Subjective religiosity captures one's religious self-concept whereas public religious participation measures church attendance and other public forms of religious involvement. Public religious participation may reinforce one's commitment to religious doctrine and beliefs, but if and how these beliefs are applied privately may determine behavior.

Most measures of public religiosity indicate that women tend to score higher than men (Smith et al. 2010). Gender differences in weekly service attendance also show that women partake more so than men (Eliassen, Taylor, and Llyod 2005; Polch and Hastings 1994), but these public forms of religiosity may differ from private religiosity for women. The external participations in public religious communities may be internalized (self-concept) by women differently therefore affecting attitudes toward homosexuals. Given that most major religious groups do not condone nor embrace homosexual relations, it is expected that women receive moral messages about avoiding such behaviors. Engaging in homosexual behavior would most likely be followed by feelings of regret and remorse for committing an immoral act because of one's religious self-concept. Even supporting homosexuality and same-sex rights would violate

deeply held moral values for religiously committed women, which could also induce feelings of physiological discomfort.

Given that both men and women are most likely taught that homosexuality is wrong in public forms of religiosity, it is important to take into account subjective religiosity and how this may explain gender difference in attitudes toward homosexuality. The importance of religion in everyday life and differential gender socialization (e.g., gender roles) may shape women's views regarding homosexual relations. Gender differences due to subjective religiosity are also likely to vary across denominations as well. Subjective religiosity will most likely have an inverse effect on positive attitudes toward homosexuality for religiously committed individuals, but it is not expected that this will be homogeneous.

### **Spirituality**

Spirituality may also affect how individuals view same-sex relations and the context in which attitudes toward homosexuality are formed. Social scientists have recently suggested that spirituality and religion must be recognized as two distinct concepts (Schlehofer, Omoto, and Adelman 2008). Spirituality must be given a clear operational definition aside from religiosity in order to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be spiritual (Schlehofer, Omoto, and Adelman 2008). Schlehofer, Omoto, and Adelman (2008) define spirituality as more personal beliefs, emotions, and a "lived consciousness" relating to a higher power. The belief in God or a divine being may be encompassed with a more functional New Age approach, such as belief in astrology. The individual's understanding of the aforementioned concepts are used in relation to understanding life events (e.g., death, suffering, loss, births) and diversity (e.g., homosexuality, varying religions and worldviews). Thus, religion represents a more concrete focus on morality, beliefs, and practices than spirituality. Religion is established on tradition and a set of organized

practices that are conducted and reinforced through a central place of worship (Schlehofer, Omoto, and Adelman 2008).

Spirituality may be how some individuals define their relationship with a higher power and their own moral beliefs that exist independently of organized religion (e.g., church membership). Therefore, those that self-identify as spiritual but not religious may have a different understanding of whether homosexuality is morally wrong. If those that are spiritual are not attending congregations nor internalizing the learned moral lessons in public religious communities, they are less likely to be exposed to the moral condemning of homosexuality. The religious concentration that may influence those involved in organized religion may influence the beliefs and behaviors of how same-sex relations are viewed. The environment of the spiritual individual may be one that is more conducive to the acceptance of homosexuality versus the organized religion environment. Church attendance and membership is supplemented by the individual's own personal belief and understanding of what is morally acceptable. Thus, the concept of spirituality should be used as a separate form of measurement in understanding women's attitudes toward homosexuality.

There has been a strong correlation found between gender and spirituality (Houtman and Aupers 2008). Heelas and Woodhead (2005) found that women make up the majority of those that define themselves as spiritual, much like how women are also more religious and partake in public religious communities more so than men. Women who are using spirituality to represent an integrative force while providing meaning and principles on how to live one's life may have different attitudes than women that define themselves as religious. This is also true for men that define themselves as spiritual who refrain from formal or informal religious practices (public or private). Understanding women's view of homosexuality is not necessarily mediated through

congregations, but yet through the individual's personal faith, may offer a new insight on the relationship between gender and attitudes toward homosexuality.

Therefore, this study proposes to examine women's attitudes toward homosexuality by religiosity and spirituality. Toward the end, the GSS will be used to analyze respondents based on religious affiliation, attendance at religious services, subjective religiosity, and spirituality. Other studies show that a number of sociodemographic variables affect respondents' attitudes toward homosexuality. As a result, this analysis will include controls for the following factors: age, educational attainment, household income, marital status, and southern residence.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Methods**

This study uses the 2006 and 2008 General Social Surveys in order to examine the impact of religiosity and spirituality on women's attitudes toward homosexuality. The GSS are conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago every two years (annually until 1994; biennially since then). The GSS are cross-sectional data collected at only one point in time that draws from a sample of English-speaking persons, 18 years of age or over, living in non-institutional arrangements within the United States. The GSS data are collected in face-to-face household interviews by professional interviewers who ask each question and record the answers. The interviews generally last about 90 minutes per interview per household (Babbie, Halley, and Zaino 2003). The GSS questions tend to vary from year to year, but an unchanging core of questions often includes occupation and income, political attitudes, race relations, sex relations, social activities, civil liberties, and religious attitudes (Chambliss and Schutt 2010).

In order to provide accurate data for analysis, the exact wording of the GSS questions remains the same and enables researchers to conduct time trend studies. Some of the questions are asked of all the respondents within the sample, while other questions are asked in a sub-sample of the households. The questions that are asked to the sub-sample only still produce responses that are representative of the U.S. population, but there may be a higher degree of sampling error.

The GSS are national area multistage probability samples that are selected by researchers across the country. A random sample of cities and counties are selected and grouped in a way that ensures those selected accurately reflect the variations in cities and counties throughout the U.S. Within each of the selected cities and counties, researchers then select a random sample of city blocks or equivalent units in rural areas. This method of sampling ensures that the data set is representative of the diverse U.S. population (Babbie et al. 2003).

The information obtained from the GSS is the most frequently analyzed source of data in the social sciences, besides the U.S. Census (Davis and Smith 2009). Babbie et al. (2003) report that the GSS samples are representative of U.S. adults and that the results are an accurate reflection of the attitudes of all U.S. adults. The 2006 and 2008 years of the GSS are used because they contain the religious, spirituality, and social demographic variables needed for the analyses of my research questions. Therefore, attitudes toward homosexuality is the dependent variable, religious affiliation, public religious participation, subjective religiosity, and subjective spirituality are the independent variables, and age, educational attainment, family income, marital status, and southern residence are the control variables.

### **Dependent Variable**

The question addressing attitudes toward homosexual relations was asked in both the 2006 and 2008 GSS data sets. The question wording was: “What about sexual relations between two adults of the same-sex do you think it is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?” The responses to this question are recoded as (1) always wrong, (2) almost always wrong, (3) sometimes wrong, and (4) not wrong at all. All other responses are excluded from the analysis.

## **Independent Variables**

### *Religious Affiliation*

The measurement of the religious affiliation is based on two questions in the GSS. The first question was: “What is your religious preference? Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion, or no religion?” The possible responses to this question were (1) Protestant, (2) Catholic, (3) Jewish, (4) none, (5) other (specify), (6) Buddhism, (7) Hinduism, (8) other Eastern, (9) Moslem/Islam, (10) Orthodox-Christian, (11) Christian, (12) Native American, (13) inter-denominational, (0) not applicable, (98) don’t know, and (99) no answer.

An additional question was asked if the response to the first question was Protestant. The question was: “What specific denomination is that, if any?” The responses were coded as (10) American Baptist Association, (11) American Baptist Church in the U.S.A., (12) National Baptist Convention of America, (13) National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., (14) Southern Baptist Convention, (15) other Baptist Churches, (18) Baptist, don’t know which, (20) African Methodist Episcopal, (21) African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, (22) United Methodist, (23) other Methodist Churches, (28) Methodist, don’t know which, (30) American Lutheran Church, (31) Lutheran Church in America, (32) Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, (33) Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Church, (34) other Lutheran Church, (35) Evangelical Lutheran, (40) Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., (41) United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., (42) other Presbyterian Churches, (43) Presbyterian, merged, (48) Presbyterian, don’t know which, (50) Episcopal Church, (60) other (specify), (70) no denomination given or non-denominational church, (0) not applicable, (98) don’t know, and (99) no answer.

These two questions are used to create a religious affiliation variable according to the Steensland et al. (2000) religious categorical scheme. The religious affiliation categories are



Mainline Protestants, Evangelical Protestants, Black Protestants, Catholics, Jews, no preference respondents, and other Protestants. The responses: American Baptist Church in the U.S.A., American Lutheran Church, Lutheran Church in America, Evangelical Lutheran, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., other Presbyterian Churches, Presbyterian-merged Presbyterian- don't know which, and Episcopal Church; were collapsed and recoded as Mainline Protestants. The responses: American Baptist Association, Baptist-don't know which, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, other Baptist Churches, other Lutheran Churches, other Methodist Churches, other Presbyterian Churches, Southern Baptist Convention, and Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod; were collapsed and recoded as Evangelical Protestants. Evangelical National Baptist Convention of America, National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., Southern Baptist Convention, other Baptist Churches, Baptist-don't know which, African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, United Methodist, other Methodist Churches, and Methodist-don't know which; were collapsed and recoded as Black Protestant. See Steensland et al. for specific coding for the Other Protestant category.

#### ***Public Religious Participation***

The independent variable public religious participation is measured by religious attendance. The question was: "how often do you attend religious services?" The possible responses to this question were (0) never, (1) least once a year, (2) once a year, (3) several times a year, (4) once a month, (5) 2-3 times a month, (6) nearly every week, (7) every week, (8) more than once a year, and (9) don't know/not applicable.

#### ***Subjective Religiosity***

Subjective religiosity is measured by an individual's religious self-concept and how important religion is in their everyday lives. The question in the GSS was: "To what extent do

you consider yourself a religious person? Are you...” The possible responses to this question were (1) very religious, (2) moderately religious, (3) slightly religious, (4) not religious at all, (0) not applicable, (8) don’t know, and (9) no answer. The responses are recoded so that respondents who report that they are very religious are given the highest score. Hence, the subjective religiosity variable is coded (1) not religious at all, (2) slightly religious, (3) moderately religious, and (4) very religious. Other responses are excluded from the analysis.

### *Spirituality*

Subjective spirituality refers to how individuals define their relationship with a higher power and/or their own moral beliefs that exist independently of organized religion. The question in the survey was: “To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Are you...” The possible responses to this question were (1) very spiritual, (2) moderately spiritual, (3) slightly spiritual, (4) not spiritual at all, (0) not applicable, (8) don’t know, and (9) no answer. The responses are recoded so that respondents who report that they are very spiritual are given the highest score. As a result, the subjective spirituality variable is coded (1) not spiritual at all, (2) slightly spiritual, (3) moderately spiritual, and (4) very spiritual. Other responses are excluded from the analysis.

### **Control Variables**

I control for a variety of additional demographic characteristics that the literature shows affect attitudes toward homosexuality. Age is recoded in actual years and ranges from 18 to 89 in the data set.

The impact of a respondent’s educational attainment on their attitudes toward homosexuality is also controlled this study. The educational attainment of a respondent is assessed using the highest year of school completed at the time of the survey. The coding for

educational attainment in the GSS is in actual years of school completed and ranges from 0 to 20. The assumption is that the number of years beyond high school reflects the appropriate years in college and graduate school to earn corresponding vocational and academic degrees.

The study also controls for the effect of family income on attitudes toward homosexuality. The respondents are asked to indicate their household earnings from all sources for either 2005 or 2007, depending on whether the sample is from the 2006 or 2008 GSS. Family income is coded as (1) under \$1,000, (2) \$1,000 to 2,999, (3) \$3,000 to 3,999, (4) \$4,000 to 4,999, (5) \$5,000 to 5,999, (6) \$6,000 to 6,999, (7) \$7,000 to 7,999, (8) \$8,000 to 9,999, (9) \$10,000 to 12,499, (10) \$12,500 to 14,999, (11) \$15,000 to 17,499, (12) \$17,500 to 19,999, (13) \$20,000 to 22,499, (14) \$22,500 to 24,999, (15) \$25,000 to 29,999, (16) \$30,000 to 34,999, (17) \$35,000 to 39,999, (18) \$40,000 to 49,999, (19) \$50,000 to 59,999, (20) \$60,000 to 74,999, (21) \$75,000 to 89,999, (22) \$90,000 to 109,999, (23) \$110,000 to 129,999, (24) \$130,000 to 149,999, (25) \$150,000 or over, (26) refused to answer, (98) don't know, and (99) no answer. Mean substitution will be used for respondents who refused to answer.

Marital status is the next control variable to be included in the analysis. The question in the GSS asks the respondents if they are currently- married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have ever been married? The possible answers were (1) married (2) widowed (3) divorced (4) separated (5) never married, or (6) no answer. Marital status is recoded to represent three statuses. Dummy variables are created to represent respondents who are married or widowed, divorced or separated, and never married. Never married respondents will serve as the reference category in the subsequent analyses.

The final control variable represents regional residence. Many studies include a dummy variable for the South or southern residence. Research in this area has demonstrated that southerners tend to be more conservative on a number of sociopolitical attitudes (Gay et al. 1996; Kosmin and Lachman 1993; Moore and Vanneman 2003). While this conclusion or assumption may be changing, I will include a dummy variable for southern residence in my analyses. An item in the GSS indicates respondent's area of residence. The coding follows the U.S. census coding for region. The resulting codes in the GSS are (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. A dummy variable is created for southern residence using the South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central codes to represent the South (South = 1, all others = 0).

### **Analytic Strategy**

In order to address my research questions, the analytic strategy will proceed in two stages. The first analysis will examine whether there is a significant difference between men and women in their attitudes toward homosexuality with and without controls. The second aspect of the analysis is to examine the impact of religious and spiritual variables on these attitudes for women. That is, the sample consist of women respondents only since examination of these issues is not prevalent in the existing literature.

## CHAPTER 5

### Results

Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3 present the results of the analyses. Overall, the results of this study indicate that there is a difference between men's and women's attitudes toward homosexuality. Women are generally more accepting of homosexuality than men.

Table 1 reports the means and standard deviations for attitudes toward homosexual sex relations for both men and women. A t-test to examine differences between males and females in their attitudes reveals a statistically significant difference. The results from this t-test find that women (mean = 2.33, standard deviation = 1.372) are more accepting of homosexual relations than men (mean = 2.16, standard deviation = 1.412). The mean difference adjusted for covariates remains significant. These results align with the prior research reported in Chapter 2 that women are generally more accepting of homosexuality than men.

Table 1: Overall Attitudes toward Homosexual Relations by Gender\*

Gender	<i>N</i>	Unadjusted Mean	Standard Deviation	Adjusted Mean
Male	1189	2.16	1.372	2.03
Female	1474	2.33	1.412	2.44

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\*indicates that the unadjusted and adjusted mean differences are statistically significant at the .05 level.

The subsequent analysis examines the effect of the independent and control variables on attitudes toward homosexual relations for women. Table 2 reports the means and standard deviations for attitudes toward homosexuality, religiosity, and control variables. As noted in the discussion of the t-test, the mean for women's attitudes toward homosexuality is 2.33 on a four point scale with "not wrong at all" coded (4). The table also shows that women attend religious services about once a month and have a mean of 2.80 for subjective religiosity and 3.01 for subjective spirituality. The average age for women is 48.25 years and they have a mean educational attainment of 13.3 years. A majority of the women are married and one-third of them live in the south.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics (N=1456)

	Mean/Proportion	SD
<i>Dependent Variable</i>		
Homosexual Sex Relations	2.33	1.41
<i>Religious Affiliation Variables</i>		
Catholic	.279	.448
Jewish	.021	.142
Black Protestant	.098	.296
Evangelical	.225	.417
No religious preference	.151	.358
Other Protestant	.044	.205
<i>Public Religious Participation</i>		
Attendance at Religious Services	3.92	2.84
<i>Subjective Religiosity</i>		
Religious Person	2.80	.945
<i>Subjective Spirituality</i>		
Spiritual Person	3.01	.877
<i>Sociodemographics/Controls</i>		
Age	48.25	18.00
Education	13.30	3.11
Income	16.12	5.45
Married	.588	.492
Divorced	.177	.381
Southern Residence	.370	.483

Table 3 displays the results of the multiple regression analysis. The Model in Table 3 shows the net effects of religious affiliation, public religious participation, subjective religiosity, subjective spirituality, and sociodemographic variables on attitudes toward homosexuality. The model is significant at the .01 level and explained 30.3% of variance in attitudes toward homosexual relations.

The multivariate analysis estimates a set of nominal, ordinal, and interval level variables in a regression model to see how the factors influence a female respondent's attitude toward homosexuality. The model is developed in a way that presents the effects of religiosity and basic sociodemographic variables on attitudes toward homosexual sex relations.

The Model in Table 3 presents the effects of the religious affiliation of a respondent, which has been coded using the Steensland et al. (2000) denominational affiliation schema with Mainline Protestants serving as the reference category. Jewish women have more accepting attitudes toward homosexuality than Mainline Protestants. Catholic women are found to have moderately accepting attitudes toward homosexuality. No preference respondents do not show any differences in their attitudes from Mainline Protestants. Black Protestants, Evangelical Protestants, and other Protestants are less accepting in their attitudes toward homosexual relations.

The Model in Table 3 also presents the independent variable of public religious participation; how often a respondent attends religious services. The effect of public religious participation, controlling for all other variables, has a significant impact on attitudes toward homosexuals. As an individual's attendance at religious services increases, so does their negative attitude toward homosexual relations. Therefore, frequent attendance at religious services is



associated with less accepting attitudes toward homosexuality.

The Model in Table 3 presents the independent variables of subjective religiosity and spirituality. The effect of a religious respondent, controlling for all other variables, has a significant impact on attitudes toward homosexuals. An individual that self identifies as religious is more likely to have less accepting attitudes toward homosexual relations. The effect of a spiritual respondent, controlling for all other variables, also has a significant impact on attitudes toward homosexuals. An individual that self identifies as spiritual is more likely to be accepting of homosexual relation, compared to religious individuals. Overall, those that identify as religious are associated with less accepting attitudes toward homosexuality, while those that identify as spiritual have more accepting attitudes toward homosexuality.

The last set of variables included in the Model in Table 3 shows the effects of the sociodemographic variables that were used as controls for female respondents' attitudes toward homosexuality. First, the effect of age, controlling for all other variables, has a significant impact on attitudes toward homosexuality. Therefore, older persons are more likely than younger respondents to have less accepting attitudes toward homosexuality.

The next demographic variable in the model is educational attainment. Controlling for all other variables, educational attainment has a significant impact on attitudes toward homosexual sex relations. As an individual's educational attainment increases, so does their level of acceptance toward homosexuality. The model shows that the more education an individual obtains, the more likely they are to have more accepting attitudes toward homosexual relations. Thus, lower education is associated with less accepting attitudes toward homosexual relations.

Total family income, controlling for all other variables, also has a significant impact on attitudes toward homosexuality. As an individual's income increases, the respondent's level of

acceptance toward homosexual relations decreases. Thus, higher family incomes of an individual are associated with less accepting attitudes toward homosexual relations.

Marital status is the next sociodemographic control variable presented in the model. Being married has a significant effect on attitudes toward homosexual relations. Individuals who are married are more likely to have less accepting attitudes toward homosexual relations than respondents who have never been married. In contrast, divorced respondents are no different in their attitudes toward homosexual relations than their never married counterparts.

Finally, the dummy variable representing southern residence indicates that respondents who live in Southern regions of the United States have less accepting attitudes toward homosexuality compared to people of other locales net the effects of all other variables in the model.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Results: Effects of Religiosity and Spirituality Variables on Attitudes toward Homosexuality

<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>Model</b>
Catholic	.011/.003 (.096)
Jewish	.523/.053* (.230)
No Preference	-.104/-.026 (.126)
Black Protestant	-.445/-.094** (.130)
Evangelical	-.566/-.168** (.101)
Other Protestant	-.439/-.064** (.168)
Attendance at Religious Services	-.089/-.181** (.015)
Subjective Religiosity	-.282/-.189** (.052)
Subjective Spirituality	.088/.055** (.045)
Age	-.007/-.091** (.002)
Education	.077/.169** (.011)
Income	.029/.111** (.006)
Married	-.332/-.116** (.090)
Divorced	-.110/-.030 (.104)
Southern Residence	-.253/-.087** (.068)

*Intercept* 2.568

*N* 1456

*R*<sup>2</sup> .310

Note: Cell entries are given as unstandardized regression coefficient/standardized (beta) coefficient with the standard error given in parentheses. \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$

In general, the findings associated with the sociodemographic variables are consistent with the extant literature on attitudes toward homosexual relations. However, the finding that is unique to this study is the independent variable of those that claim to be spiritual rather than religious. Female respondents that self-identify as spiritual individuals have much more accepting attitudes toward homosexual relations. Spiritual individuals would likely have somewhat higher levels of acceptance toward marginalized groups of people because of the new age practices that many spiritual individuals partake in. Still, very few studies have actually examined this phenomenon.

## CHAPTER 6

### Discussion

The primary objective of this research is to examine the influence that religious affiliation, public religious participation, subjective religiosity, and spirituality had on females' attitudes toward homosexuality. As reported by previous researchers (e.g., Hinrichs and Rosenberg 2002; Maltz and Boss 1997; Moskowitz et al. 2010), women are generally more accepting of homosexuals than males. The results from this study support the previous research that women are generally more accepting of homosexual relations than males, but differ from previous studies because women's attitudes were analyzed by varying religious affiliations and spirituality. These findings provide insight into the role that religious participation and personal religious affiliations play in shaping women's attitudes toward homosexuals. It confirms that different religious affiliations have varying effects on women's acceptance of homosexuality. The general differences across religious denominations can be explained by the values and context in which homosexuality is regarded by each affiliation. The denominations' formal and informal positions on homosexuality affect members' attitudes. The "moral communities" (Stark 1996) created within the larger denominations that have conservative ideals regarding homosexual relations influence the attitudes of the members. Because denominations are social systems that often adapt to the changing needs of society, it is necessary to continually study the effects that religion has on its members and the religious norms pertaining to sexuality. It is also important to study spirituality as it is becoming a vital component to many people's lives. Spirituality supplements the organized religious element and this affects attitudes toward homosexuality.

These results are important because they provide insight into the differences between religion and spirituality, and women's attitudes toward homosexual relations. The attitudes of women that self-identify as religious (subjective religiosity) are less accepting of homosexuality than those that self-identify as spiritual. Spirituality is defined as more a personal belief and a "lived consciousness" relating to a higher power and is often encompassed within a New Age approach (Adelman 2008). Those that are spiritual do not often receive the organized practices and beliefs that religion establishes on tradition and reinforces through a central place of worship. The concrete ideas of morality and beliefs in religion, and how sexuality is understood through these concepts greatly affects the framework that is presented to individuals. Women make up the majority of those that define themselves as spiritual, (Healas and Wood 2005) just as the majority of those that claim to be religious are women (Finlay and Walther 2003; Herek and Glunt 1993; Pew Research Center 2009).

These results are also noteworthy because women belonging to conservative denominations are found to have less accepting attitudes toward homosexuality. Although these results are similar to the findings of past research (Moore and Vanneman 2003; Van Geest 2007b) regarding members of conservative denominations having more traditional beliefs concerning homosexuality; this study is not similar to past research because women respondents were examined separately from men by denominations. It was somewhat expected that women's attitudes toward homosexual relations would not differ dramatically from previous research, and it was expected that women's attitudes would vary across denominations.

The findings reveal that a significant relationship exists between religious affiliation and women's attitudes toward homosexuality. Black Protestants, Evangelicals, and Other Protestant

respondents are found to have less accepting attitudes toward homosexuals. Jewish and no preference respondents are found to have more accepting attitudes toward homosexual relations. Also, Catholics were found to be moderately accepting of homosexual relations. This could be explained by the larger congregations' stance on homosexuality and how each denomination incorporates the teachings and framework of those who identify as gay and lesbian. The traditionally conservative denominations (Black Protestants and Evangelicals) are most likely presenting homosexuality in a negative framework or hardly addressing it in a positive manner to their members. Jewish and various other denominations are perhaps presenting homosexual relations in more positive contexts during teachings and moral interpretations to its members. Depending on which religious denomination a female respondent belongs to greatly affects the moral identity and common values that she subscribes too. Thus, women that belong to more conservative denominations will have less accepting attitudes toward homosexuals than those belonging to more moderate and liberal denominations.

The results from this study also reveal that the individual's level of commitment to religious teachings through public religious participation (i.e. church attendance) affects attitudes toward homosexual relations. The findings are congruent with past research showing that women who attend religious services more frequently have less accepting attitudes toward homosexuality (Sherkat et al. 2011). Gender involvement in public religious participation is often associated with more traditional practices and moral attitudes (Finlay and Walther 2003; Herek and Glunt 1993; Sherkat et al. 2011). The extent to which the individual is involved with religious services may indicate the depth of one's commitment to religious doctrine. Women that attend religious services more frequently may also be attending denominations that adhere to more conservative teachings pertaining to sexuality (e.g. that homosexuality is sin and there are

eternal sanctions for those that engage in homosexual behavior). Moderate and liberal denominations may also experience greater fluctuation in church attendance because there is not as much emphasis placed on members' attendance.

The findings that women partaking more frequently in public religious participation have less accepting attitudes toward homosexuality may also be explained by informal sanctions of denomination's members. Fellow members of denominations may act as a type of social control for individuals by monitoring behaviors, beliefs, and participation. Frequent contact with fellow members through public religious participation may encourage women to apply religious teachings against homosexuality. This type of informal spiritual support may act as a deterrent for women to express attitudes of acceptance regarding same-sex relations. Thus, women that are frequently partaking in public religious communities through church attendance will have less accepting attitudes toward homosexuals.

The results concerning subjective religiosity (one's religious self-concept) that were previously discussed in comparison to spirituality are found to affect women's attitudes toward homosexuality. Subjective religiosity has an inverse effect on positive attitudes toward homosexual relations because of the internalization (self-concept) of external religious participation and teachings. Public religious participation may reinforce women's commitment to religious doctrine, but how these beliefs are applied privately by the individual most likely determines behaviors and attitudes. Women that view themselves as religiously committed women would be violating their own moral values by supporting homosexuality and same-sex rights.



In support of previous findings regarding residents of southern regions and less accepting attitudes toward homosexuality, this study examines the impact of southern residence on women's attitudes toward homosexual relations. The findings reveal that there is a significant impact upon women that reside in the South corresponding to less accepting attitudes toward homosexuality. These results could be explained by the strong presence of religious authority (i.e. conservative denominations that adhere to strict doctrinal beliefs) in southern regions which influence the attitudes of its members. The southern regions are also known as the "Bible Belt states" because of this strong presence of religion and traditional beliefs (Kosmin and Lachman 1993; Moore and Vanneman 2003). It is not surprising that these findings also support previous individual findings relating to women of the South having less accepting attitudes toward homosexuality.

The regression models used in this study examine the effects of sociodemographic variables on women's attitudes toward homosexual relations. The effects of age, education, income, married, and divorced are controlled for in order to test for significant impacts pertaining to women's attitudes. Respondents that are married have less accepting attitudes toward homosexuality than those that were previously married, but are now divorced. These findings can be explained in part by those who have been divorced who may have more liberal type attitudes and behaviors than those that are married (Fahs 2007). These liberal attitudes are most likely reflected in respondents' attitudes toward sexuality and same-sex relations as well. Age and education are also significant predictors of women's attitudes toward homosexuality. Women that are older have less accepting attitudes versus women that are younger. Education is also found to have a significant impact on attitudes as well. The higher the education one received the more likely one would also be more accepting of same-sex relations. As education

levels decrease so does one's level of acceptance regarding homosexuality. Controlling for income also reveals that as one's income increases, their level of acceptance decreases.

This study's main focus was to investigate the relationship between religion, spirituality, gender, and attitudes toward homosexuality. The findings reveal that women are more accepting of homosexual relations than men, but women's attitudes are not homogeneous. Women belonging to more traditionally conservative denominations will have less accepting attitudes than those belonging to more moderate and liberal denominations. Religiosity (e.g., involvement with organized religion, religious participation, church attendance) significantly impacts a respondent's attitudes toward homosexual relations. Women that frequently attend religious services and self-identify as religious will be less likely to support homosexuals. Comparing women's subjective religiosity (one's religious self-concept) to subjective spirituality (one's spiritual self-concept) there is a significant difference between women's attitudes. Those that self-identify as spiritual rather than religious are more likely to support homosexuality. A respondent's spirituality is an indicator of acceptance toward homosexuality and same-sex rights. In other words, women are more accepting than men in relation to homosexual relations, but their attitudes are not homogenous due to influences such as denominational affiliation, religiosity, and spirituality.

### **Limitations**

In this study, there are several limitations that need to be addressed. The GSS has a core set of questions that interviewers ask respondents each time the survey is conducted. Although there are core questions that do not change over the years, there are some questions that may not be included each year the survey is administered. Data from the years 2006 and 2008 were used

in this study because these years specifically included questions regarding respondents' religious and spiritual self-concepts. Perhaps if women's attitudes were examined as a longitudinal study rather than a purely cross-sectional study it would have rendered different results. The results of this study from 2006 and 2008 were figuratively compared to past results, but trends over time were not specifically analyzed.

This study has various limitations in regards to examining the sociodemographics of women's attitudes toward homosexuality. The current study does not test the relationship between political ideology and women's attitudes toward homosexual relations. Although it may be safe to assume that those with extremely conservative political ideologies will most likely be less supportive of homosexuality, this study does not test for that possibility. It would have been interesting to examine whether there is a correlation between women's religious affiliation and political ideology and their attitudes toward homosexuality, especially since past findings have indicated there has been a correlation found between respondents' religious affiliation and political identity (Gay et al. 1996; Sherkat et al. 2011). Testing for this correlation by gender may also reveal factors that impact respondents' attitudes toward homosexuality and whether those attitudes vary by gender.

Another limitation of this study is that it only examined women's responses to the GSS question relating to attitudes toward homosexual sex relations. Examining the GSS question addressing whether homosexual couples should have the right to marry one another as the dependent variable may have rendered different results. It is assumed that women would also have higher levels of acceptance toward same-sex marriage rights than men based on this study as well as past literature. Examining women's attitudes using the same-sex marriage question as

well as the one used in this study that examined attitudes toward homosexual relations would offer further insight pertaining to same-sex rights.

A final limitation of this study pertains to right-wing authoritarianism as it relates to negative attitudes toward homosexuality and anti-egalitarian beliefs. Right-wing authoritarianism has varying manifestations and forms, including homophobia, religious fundamentalism, and aggression (Gormley and Lopez 2010). Authoritarians hold negative attitudes toward homosexuals because they deviate from the norm and threaten society's social order. Findings have also revealed that men are generally more authoritarian than women (Altemeyer 1996). Examining questions from the GSS that are used to measure right-wing authoritarianism (e.g., submission, aggression, and conventionalism) may offer greater insight with gender differences, religiosity, and attitudes toward homosexuality.

### **Implications**

The results of this study can be used to impact the field of gender studies, equal rights for same-sex individuals, and various religious organizations in several ways. As it relates to the field of gender studies, more research was needed pertaining to women's attitudes toward homosexual relations. This study adds to the research by providing the results of examining women's attitudes by religious affiliations, religiosity, and spirituality. It can fill a gap in the literature by presenting current information that women may be more accepting as a whole toward homosexuals, but those attitudes are not homogenous. This study debunks the idea that women are one uniform group that supports homosexuality, but instead their attitudes are affected by diverse factors.

Supporters of the equal rights movement for same-sex individuals can use these results to further understand where proponents of homosexual relations are coming from, and perhaps

where future support may be derived from for gays and lesbians. Gender-roles beliefs, religious affiliations, and privately held creeds need to be translated into more accessible rhetoric in which the human aspect of gays and lesbians is heard. This study attempts to address some of those concepts by investigating which factors are influencing respondents' attitudes in either a positive or negative manner pertaining to homosexuality. It also provides information that could potentially bring about clarity or challenge issues regarding the influence of religiosity on the equal rights movement for gays and lesbians.

This study raises questions regarding the impact of factors such as religious affiliations and religious participation has on its members' attitudes relating to homosexuality. Persons in positions of power that influence religious teachings and programs with each denomination may want to challenge how gays and lesbians are being affected. Moderate and liberal denominations that are accepting of homosexuality and same-sex relations may want to improve some of their religious programs to be more inclusive for gays and lesbians. Places of worship may become more aware that acceptance of gays and lesbians is still a struggle for many in our society. Perhaps religious programs for young adults and teens can create healthy support systems for gays and lesbians, combining acceptance of gays and lesbians with religious support.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The results of this study show that the relationship between gender, religiosity, spirituality, and attitudes toward homosexuality merits additional research consideration.

1. It would be beneficial to examine these data over time, even if that means dropping the spirituality variable and examining the religiosity variables. This examination would provide a better understanding as to whether men's and women's attitudes in regards to religiosity and homosexuality have changed over time.

2. Using other variables such as ethnic identity, prejudice/discrimination, and right-wing authoritarianism would give a clearer understanding of what additional factors have an effect on women's attitudes toward gays and lesbians.

3. It would be beneficial to enhance this study by adding a qualitative component to the design. Analyzing printed material (e.g., newsletters, magazines, newspapers) from various religious denominations for any information regarding homosexuality.

Examining the religious material may offer better insight on the type of framework that is being used to address homosexuality by denominations.

4. It would be useful to explore the relationship between religion, spirituality, and women's attitudes on college campuses. It would be interesting to compare the results from college students to the results from this study to examine whether similar patterns exist.

5. Expanding the issue to include examining attitudes toward same-sex marriage rights may offer a clearer understanding as to whether there are similar results concerning the differences by gender, as there were with attitudes toward homosexual relations.

### **Conclusion**

This study attempts to address the relationship between gender, religiosity, spirituality and attitudes toward homosexuality. It finds that women are more accepting of homosexual relations than men. In particular, focus is placed on analyzing women's attitudes by religiosity and spirituality to understand if women's attitudes are homogenous. The results indicate that women's attitudes are not homogenous and there are various factors that account for these differences. Religious affiliation and public religious participation have significant impacts on whether women are more or less accepting of homosexuality. Women belonging to conservative

denominations and/or frequently participating in church attendance are shown to have less accepting attitudes toward homosexuals. Women that self-identify as spiritual tend to be more accepting of homosexual relations than those that self-identify as religious.

Overall, it is not surprising that this study finds that women are more accepting of homosexuality than men, nor that women belonging to traditionally conservative denominations will be less accepting of homosexual relations. Although this study does not offer 'new' information regarding negativity in attitudes toward homosexuality by gender, it does show that there is a difference between women that self-identify as religious and spiritual. Future research is needed to investigate those that identify as spiritual and how this is affecting attitudes toward gays and lesbians, as well as other diverse populations. The hope with this study is that it will fill part of the gap in the literature while simultaneously inspiring research at the micro and macro levels regarding homosexuality. This way we can hopefully further the progress of civil liberties and human rights for gays and lesbians.

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