

Relationships In America Survey



Sponsored by The Austin Institute for the Study of Family and Culture

2014

Introduction



AMERICAN SOCIETY HAS UNDERGONE A VERITABLE REVOLUTION OVER THE PAST HALF-CENTURY IN THE WAY IN WHICH ITS POPULATION UNDERSTANDS AND APPROACHES FAMILY LIFE, RELIGIOUS FAITH, AND SEXUALITY. WITHIN THAT SPAN TECHNOLOGICAL, CULTURAL, AND LEGISLATIVE CHANGES HAVE SHIFTED THE WAY MANY THINK ABOUT EACH OF THESE.

No doubt some of the changes in the way we perceive families and relationships have made life better, promoting individual and familial well-being. Some, however, have not been as successful in helping us reach these ends. At bottom, many of the changes in American family life are neither unqualified successes nor obvious failures, but rather have both positive and negative consequences, the merits of which we will leave to others to debate. Nevertheless, the rapidly changing nature of relationships and families in America necessitates a fresh look at how social forces, demography, and religion continue to shape attitudes about family and intimate relationships. The *Relationships in America* survey is uniquely equipped to do that, answering a wide variety of questions and providing up-to-date estimates, which can inform our national discussion of family matters.

The survey was designed to provide a broad overview of the social forces that shape American society, as well as to document trends that affect individual and familial well-being. As such it asks respondents about a wide variety of human-interest topics, from their participation in religious services and religious beliefs, to questions about their attitudes regarding marriage, divorce, cohabitation, and other family forms, to specifics about sexual behavior, abuse, and domestic violence.

Since the project is wide in its scope—with lots of diverse questions germane to families, relationships, sexuality, and religion—we chose to organize this summary report in a

unique manner. Instead of summarizing what we learned about one general area, we present each section as a question that addresses the unifying themes of that section. As such, the sections (or questions) can stand alone, and we encourage readers to skip around and pay attention to those most interesting to them, or most relevant to their work or area of study. The table of contents contains the questions that guide each of the sections of the research and that should help guide the reader to the topics that interest them the most.

The survey employs a very large weighted probability sample and as such represents the diversity of American adults' contemporary experience. GfK, formerly Knowledge Networks, fielded the survey in early 2014 using their nationally-representative panel of adults. We acquired 15,738 completed surveys from this group. The survey includes only those Americans who are between the ages of 18 and 60, and is representative of this population. The survey is not poised to talk about the actions and attitudes of populations outside of this age range. More details about survey weighting, methodology, and sample selection are available in Appendix A.

We recognize that any analyses of these issues are incomplete, and this report is no exception. All analysis builds on previous work, and we are grateful to the many researchers whose work has helped us to shape and position this report. The sections, or questions, should not be thought of as comprehensive as more thorough examinations consonant with academic journal articles or book chapters. Additionally, this report is not peer-reviewed. But we hope that the research featured here adds to growing interest in research in these fields, and that others who come after will find this data and these analyses useful in shaping their understanding of the complex issues that shape American families and society. We invite comments and further inquiries, as we have just begun to explore all that the survey has to offer. We anticipate further study on these and other topics, and hope that others will join us as well in analyzing this data, and use it as a tool to enhance our collective understanding of social forces shaping American families. We invite readers to sign up for future research updates. In an effort to allow others to build upon our work, and as part of our commitment to transparency in research, we are pleased to announce that the full data set will be made available in mid-2015.

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What's the religious faith of Americans today?

Although there will long remain debate about the faith of the nation's Founding Fathers, it is inarguable that America has long been a nation composed of religious believers. Indeed, it's unique among Western countries for its exceptional religiosity. Still today, nearly three out of four Americans report a religious affiliation, well above the rates noted in European nations.¹ It's no secret, however, that things are changing. For well over a decade now sociologists have mapped the rise in the segment of Americans who claim no religious affiliation. Most surveys, however, are not nearly as large as the *Relationships in America* (RIA) data collection effort, often limiting scholars' ability to offer accurate assessments of smaller faiths and religious subgroups. So what does America look like when over 15,000 of its people are asked a set of questions about their religious affiliations and self-identities?

To begin, two out of every three (66 percent) Americans still identify with some form of Christianity. Among these, Protestants account for just over half of American Christians, at 34 percent of the nation's total, while about one in three American Christians are Catholics, which comprise just over 22 percent of American adults under age 60.

But the survey is able to go deeper than surface-level affiliations, which often tell us very little about what Americans believe and how they actually practice their faith.

When we do, we find that only about one-quarter of Catholics self-identify as "traditional" Catholics (5.7 percent of American adults), while more consider themselves "moderate" (7.5 percent), and a comparable number (5.8 percent) identify as "liberal" Catholic.

Table 1.1

Religious Affiliation	% of Population
CHRISTIAN	65.9
PROTESTANT	34
<i>Evangelical</i>	8.7
<i>Mainline</i>	3.2
<i>Liberal</i>	3.8
<i>Fundamentalist</i>	2.5
<i>Pentecostal</i>	3.3
<i>Other Protestants</i>	11.9
CATHOLIC	22.2
<i>Traditional</i>	5.7
<i>Moderate</i>	7.5
<i>Liberal</i>	5.8
<i>Other Catholics</i>	3.2
MORMON/LDS	1.9
OTHER CHRISTIANS	7.8
JEWISH	1.4
ORTHODOX	0.2
CONSERVATIVE	0.3
REFORM	0.5
OTHER JEWS	0.4
BUDDHIST	0.9
HINDU	1.0
MUSLIM	0.3
SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS	7.6
NOTHING/ATHEIST/AGNOSTIC	13.2
OTHER	3.7
DON'T KNOW	4.3

Among Protestants, self-identified evangelicals are the largest subgroup, at just under nine percent of the U.S. population. Mainline Protestants (like Presbyterians, Methodists, and Episcopalians) have long been perceived to be in a membership free fall, and while the survey is not a longitudinal one, it does indicate that mainliners comprise

¹ "The American-Western European Values Gap." Pew Research Global Attitudes Project. November 17, 2011. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

less than 10 percent of all Protestants today, and only 3.2 percent of the American public.

Mormons, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims all account for relatively small shares of the population, with each representing less than 2 percent.

So what about the religiously unaffiliated? The survey explicitly distinguished between two forms of disaffiliation—the “spiritual but not religious” and those that say they are either “nothing,” an atheist, or an agnostic. In keeping with recent surveys, this share of Americans represents a significant minority group in American religious life. Just over 13 percent of American adults identify as “nothing,” atheist, or agnostic, while 7.6 percent claim the “spiritual but not religious” moniker. Despite talk of religious diversity, irreligious Americans are far more numerous than all non-Christian religions *combined*.

Religious affiliations are, of course, not randomly distributed but rather commonly associated with a variety of demographic traits, including age. While in previous research early adulthood is commonly assessed as the trough or “lowest point” in the religious life cycle, what does the RIA data say? It found that older Americans are moderately more likely than younger adults to affiliate with a Christian religious tradition. Among those ages 25-34, just under 60 percent identify as Christians while nearly 73 percent of those ages 55-60 say the same. Older Christians also attend church more often than younger ones.²

Figure 1.1 reveals that religious disaffiliation is most characteristic—barely—of the 25-34-year-old age cohort, followed by the youngest group in the survey data. Just under 30 percent of each self-identified as “spiritual but not religious,” nothing/atheist/agnostic, or simply told us they “don’t know” if they have a religious affiliation (which is typically interpreted to mean that they do not). Interestingly, the oldest survey takers—anyone above age 45—were the *most* likely to identify as “spiritual but not religious,” but were the least likely to say they were “nothing,” atheist, or agnostic.

Although much is made popularly about the connection between greater education and the sloughing off of religious

belief and behavior, academic researchers have not reached consensus here. The *Relationships in America* survey reveals why—those adults with more education are only *slightly* less likely to report a religious affiliation than their less-educated peers.

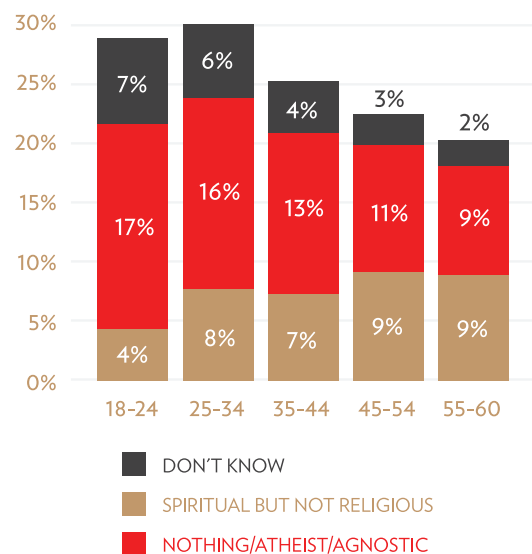
ADULTS WITH MORE EDUCATION ARE ONLY SLIGHTLY LESS LIKELY TO REPORT A RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION THAN THEIR LESS-EDUCATED PEERS.

Among Americans with less than a high school education, 77 percent claim a religious affiliation, while an equal proportion of high school graduates do the same. Among those who have some college education, that number drops slightly to 74 percent, and dips further—but only to 72 percent—among those who have a bachelor’s degree or higher. Hardly slam dunk stuff for equating education with religious skepticism.

On the other hand, religious affiliation is just one component of assessing the religiousness of Americans. It says nothing about the level of religiosity among those who affiliate with specific groups. In Question 2 we explore the association between education and religious *activity*.

Figure 1.1

Religiously unaffiliated persons as a percentage of the population, by age



Just how religious are Americans?

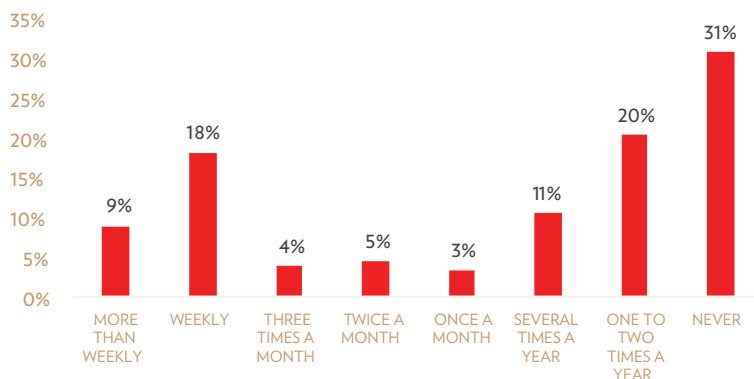
For years, Gallup polls³ and other surveys have found that roughly 40 percent of Americans say they are in the pews on any given Sunday. Scholars often reacted with incredulity,⁴ and not a few clergy have as well—unable to reconcile such figures with their own observations of more modest attendance at worship services.

Social scientists attribute inflated rates of church attendance to a phenomenon called *social-desirability bias*, or the tendency to make oneself look or sound better than is actually true.⁵ Some speculate that people think it will make them look better if they say they went to church, which is a big problem for survey-takers who are primarily interested in accurate estimates.

To gauge the magnitude of this problem, a few enterprising researchers found ways to estimate church attendance without asking about it directly. Three scholars spent a month counting attendance on weekends and estimated that church attendance rates were roughly *half* of what would be expected if people were taken at their word on a survey.⁶ They estimated that only about 20 percent of Americans attended a worship service in any given week. Other researchers employed “time use diaries” where respondents are asked to record their activities over a time period, and *estimated* that just over one quarter (29 percent) of Americans attend religious services in any given week.⁷

Figure 2.1

Frequency of church attendance



In the *Relationships in America* survey, we find that 27 percent of Americans report attending church weekly (on average). Yet this may remain an undercount of the number of people that attend worship services in *any given week* because it misses those who attend occasionally, but less often than once a week. According to self-reports, when occasional attenders are accounted for, we find that 35 percent of Americans attend religious services in any given week.⁸

Which faiths are most likely to pack the pews?

Who are the most and least likely to be at religious services? Very few of the religiously unaffiliated attend religious services—as anyone could have guessed—while Mormons report much higher attendance than any other group, at

³ “Religion.” Gallup Historical Trends. September 16, 2014. Retrieved August 8th, 2014.

⁴ Brenner, Philip. “Exceptional Behavior or Exceptional Identity? Overreporting of Church Attendance in the U.S.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75 (2011): 19-41; Woodberry, Robert. “When Surveys Lie and People Tell the Truth: How Surveys Over-Sample Church Attenders.” *American Sociological Review* 63, no. 1 (1998): 119-122.

⁵ Regnerus, Mark and Uecker, Jeremy. “Religious Influences on Sensitive Self-Reported Behaviors: The Product of Social Desirability, Deceit, or Embarrassment?” *Sociology of Religion* 68 (2007): 145-163.

⁶ Hadaway, C. Kirk et al. “What the Polls Don’t Show: A Closer Look at U.S. Church Attendance.” *American Sociological Review* 58, no. 6 (1993).

⁷ Presser, Stanley and Stinson, Linda. “Data Collection Mode and Social Desirability Bias in Self-Reported Religious Attendance.” *American Sociological Review* 6, no. 1 (1998).

⁸ To calculate the percentage in church in any given week we assign each respondent a probability of attending religious services in any given week based on their self-reported religious service attendance. (i.e., those who attend about twice per month have a probability of 0.5 of attending in any given week.) We then find the mean of this probability measure to find the percentage of people attending church in a given week.

MORMONS REPORT MUCH HIGHER ATTENDANCE THAN ANY OTHER GROUP, AT JUST OVER 80 PERCENT WEEKLY.

just over 80 percent weekly. Protestants are slightly more likely to say they attend services than Catholics, a **recent change**.⁹ At just 22 percent attendance in a given week, Jewish Americans are notably less likely to show up to the synagogue than their Christian peers are to be in church. Other world religious traditions also have varied attendance patterns, with Muslims more likely than all other major religious groups (with the exception of Mormons) to attend services at least weekly, while Hindus and Buddhists rate relatively low on attendance in comparison with Christian groups. Given that regular services at specific locations are less central to those two religions, this should not surprise.

There is also considerable diversity between groups under the same religious umbrella. For example, among Catholics, those who consider themselves “traditional” Catholics are the most likely to say they were in church recently: nearly 3 in 5 (58 percent) report being there in any given week. Meanwhile, liberal Catholics report church attendance at about one-third of that rate (21 percent). Similar variation can be seen among Protestants: evangelicals and Pentecostals lead all Protestant groups at 74 percent and 70 percent weekly attendance, respectively. Meanwhile, self-identified liberal Protestants have the lowest attendance numbers among Protestants, at less than half that rate—around 33 percent.

Keep in mind that some of these figures may remain inflated, since people have a tendency to report that they attend church more often than they actually do. So it’s difficult to know if evangelicals actually attend church more regularly than mainliners and if traditional Catholics really are three times as likely to be in church as their liberal Catholic peers, or on the other hand if certain groups are just more likely to overestimate their attendance. But the general trends noted here certainly remain, and who knows but that liberal

Figure 2.2

Percentage attending church in a given week (Catholics)

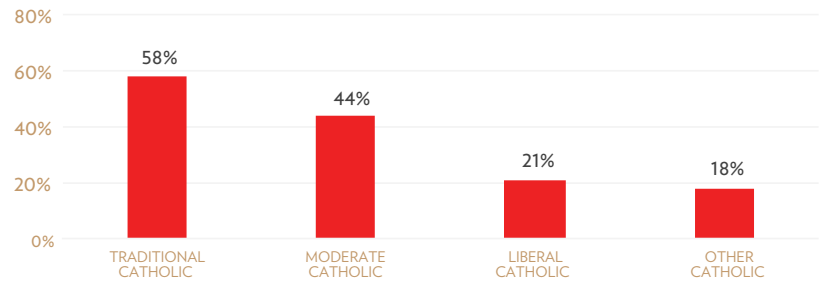
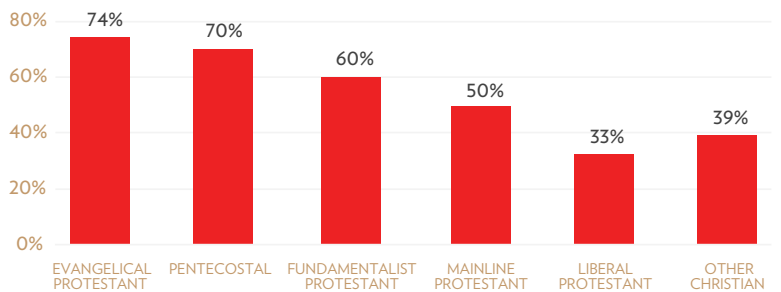


Figure 2.3

Percentage attending church in a given week (Protestants)



Protestants or Catholics may perceive themselves as liberal in part because they don’t attend very often. That’s a plausible theory best left to be tested in another study.

Where are the men?

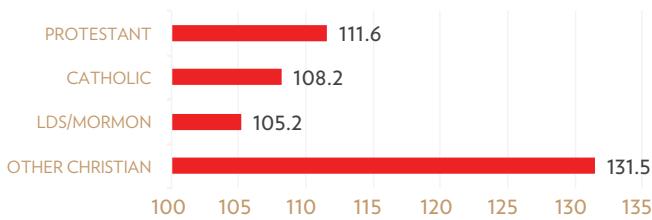
It’s long been **noted** that significant **gender gaps** exist in American Christian congregations, with women much more likely to attend than men.¹⁰ The *Relationships in America* survey finds that the gender gaps in religious *affiliation* for most Christian groups are small, usually statistically indistinguishable from 50/50. Overall, 64 percent of men and 68 percent of women claim an affiliation with some Christian church. But when you factor in that there are more women in the US than men (the **gender ratio** for the populations as a whole in 2014 was 97 males per 100 females), and that women report attending church more often than men, these small

⁹ Gallup, George. “Catholics Trail Protestants in Church Attendance.” Gallup. December 16, 2003. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

¹⁰ “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey.” The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. 2007. Retrieved August 26, 2014 ; “Gender Gap in Church Persists; Worse Among Evangelicals.” Austin Institute for the Study of Family and Culture. August 20, 2013. Retrieved August 26th 2014.

Figure 2.4

Number of women per 100 men at religious services



THERE ARE 115 WOMEN FOR EVERY 100 MEN (AGES 18-60) AT THE AVERAGE CHRISTIAN WORSHIP SERVICE.

differences compound to cause skewed gender ratios.¹¹ We estimate that there are 115 women for every 100 men (ages 18-60) at the average Christian worship service.¹² The numbers are fairly similar between Protestants and Catholics at 111 and 108 women per 100 men, respectively. Mormons are closer to numerical equality between men and women with 105 women at church for every 100 men.

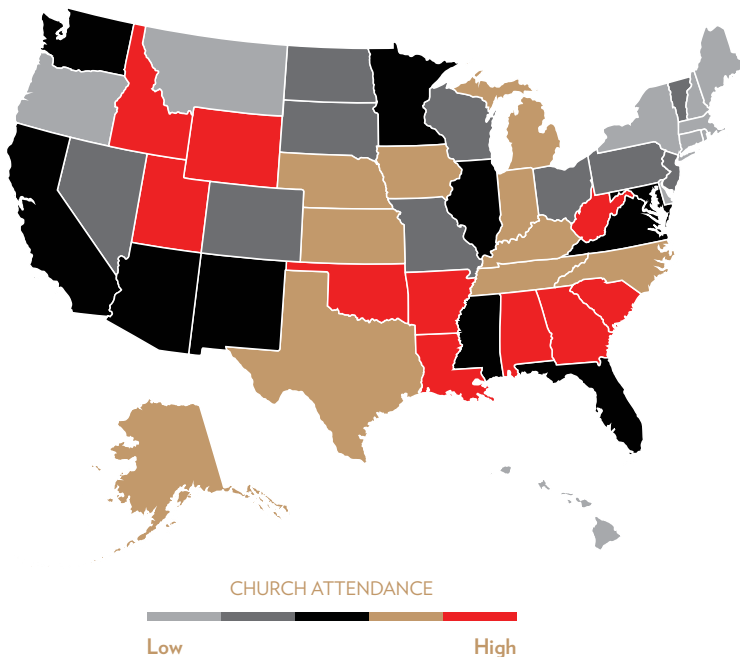
Is going to church a Southern thing?

Church attendance varies quite a bit by region¹³. Where are you most likely to see your neighbors in church, and where are they more likely to join you for a Sunday morning on the back nine of the local golf course instead? New England and the surrounding region reports the *lowest* church attendance numbers, with five of the six New England states in the bottom 10, and the remaining state, Vermont, at 35th. New Hampshire exhibits the lowest attendance: about 12 percent of its respondents reported attending worship services in a given week.

In contrast, the South is called the “Bible Belt” for good reason. Additionally, the “Mountain West” also exhibits high rates of church attendance. Of the top 10 states in church attendance six are in the south, and three are in the Mountain West region. Utah, with its majority Mormon population, leads the nation in attendance—by far—at 65 percent in any given week. The second state, Arkansas, is 14 percentage points back, at 51 percent.

Figure 2.5

Church Attendance by State



¹¹ “Sex Ratio.” CIA World Factbook. Retrieved August 26th 2014.

¹² Gender ratios in worship services were generated by assigning each person a probability of attending in a given week based on their self-report of how often they attend church. These probabilities are then summed for each gender, and then the sums are divided to calculate an expected gender ratio.

¹³ Figure 2.5 is organized by quintile with 10 states in each quintile. All states in the same quintile received the same coloring. Darker blues represent higher rates of church attendance.

Are churches filled with old people?

Traditionally college-aged adults are less religious than older adults. Even 40 years ago polls showed **lower religiosity** and church attendance among young adults. A 1970 Gallup report on the subject expressed the sentiment:

“An accumulating mass of data suggests that organized religion is currently a significant object of commitment for only a minority of young people. Gallup polls conducted in 1970 and 1971, for example, reveal that only 28 percent of those age 21 to 29 have attended church during the previous week and that a striking 80 percent in this age category perceive religion as losing its influence in American life (Gallup Opinion Index, January 1970; February 1971).”¹⁴

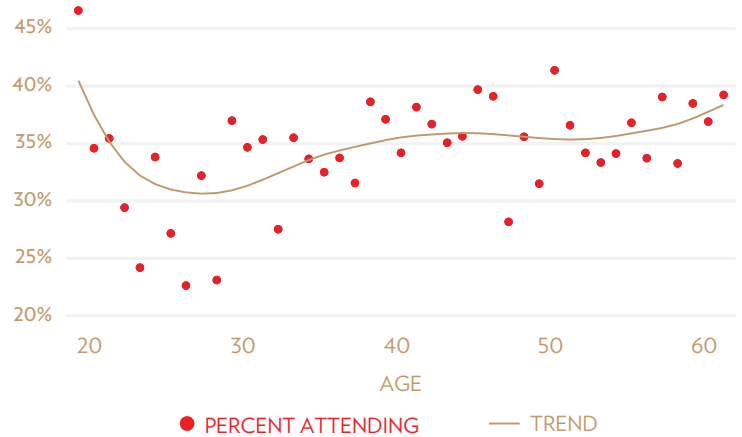
Similarly, the RIA data find that church attendance rates are lower among young adults in their 20s: 30 percent of adults ages 21 to 29 say they attend church in any given week, statistically *indistinguishable* from the 1970-71 Gallup poll. Church attendance rates increase moderately among older adults. If self-reports of attendance are to be believed, in any given week you can expect 29 percent of adults ages 20-25 to attend a worship service, while among the oldest adults in the survey, those 55-60, you would expect to see 37 percent in attendance that week. The data suggests an age effect, but not as profound of one as many may expect. While many popular accounts of religious behaviors suggest a lack of religious zeal among Millennials, it is not clear

WHILE MANY POPULAR ACCOUNTS OF RELIGIOUS BEHAVIORS SUGGEST A LACK OF RELIGIOUS ZEAL AMONG MILLENNIALS, IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER THIS IS INDICATIVE OF A SECULARIZING TREND AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE OR IF IT IS SIMPLY REFLECTIVE OF LONGSTANDING PATTERNS OF RELIGIOSITY OVER THE LIFE COURSE.

whether this is indicative of a secularizing trend among young people or if it is simply reflective of longstanding patterns of religiosity over the life course.

Figure 2.6

Percent attending worship service in a given week by age



Note: Trend is estimated using lowess regression estimation.

We reported earlier that those who are more educated are moderately less likely to be religiously affiliated, but the same is not true for religious service attendance. The groups with the highest church attendance are the two extremes of the education distribution—those with less than a high school education and those with a bachelor’s degree or more (at 37 percent attendance each in any given week). The figures for those with only a high school diploma or some college education are 32 percent and 33 percent, respectively.

While the most educated Americans are the most likely to be unaffiliated, they are also the most likely to attend church *if they have a religious affiliation*. Just over half (51 percent) of those with a bachelor’s degree who claim a religious affiliation report attendance in a given week, compared with 40 percent of affiliated people with a high school diploma. Education, then, has neither a linear increasing nor decreasing effect on religiosity, but rather a mildly polarizing effect: those with more education are modestly less likely to subscribe to a faith tradition, but those who do also say they’re more active in their faith than less-educated believers.

THOSE WITH MORE EDUCATION ARE MODESTLY LESS LIKELY TO SUBSCRIBE TO A FAITH TRADITION, BUT THOSE WHO DO ALSO SAY THEY’RE MORE ACTIVE IN THEIR FAITH THAN LESS-EDUCATED BELIEVERS.

¹⁴ Pahman, Dylan. “Are Young Millennials Less Religious or Simply Young?” Acton Institute Power Blog. April 27, 2012. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

Do people still believe in life after death?

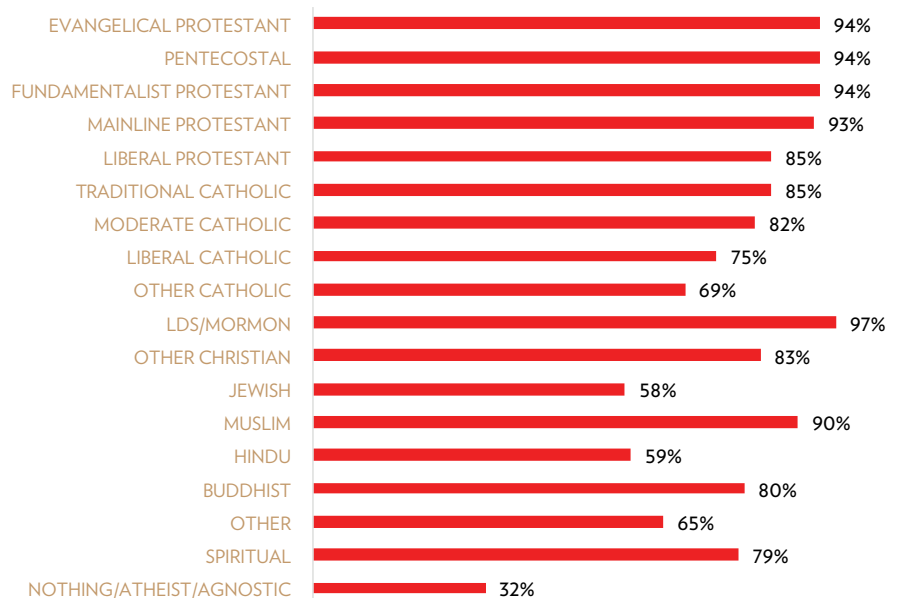
While it's been a long time—if ever—since weekly religious attendance characterized a majority of the American population, particular religious *beliefs* continue to be expressed by many, including the idea of a benevolent creator. Confidence in an afterlife isn't a dead issue, either. We asked Americans about what they think happens when people die. Specifically, we asked, "Do you think there is life, or some sort of conscious existence, after death?" Overall, just under three out of four—72 percent—Americans said yes.

Mormons reported the highest rate of belief in a conscious afterlife (98 percent), followed by evangelicals, Pentecostals, and fundamentalist Protestants (94 percent). Even mainline Protestants only trailed slightly, at 93 percent. Nine in ten Muslims indicated their agreement, while varieties of Catholic American trailed them (with traditional Catholics peaking at 85 percent). Jews (58 percent) and Hindus (59 percent) were the least likely among religious Americans to believe in life after death. Predictably, those without a religious affiliation (or who called themselves atheists or agnostics) were least confident in life after death, at 32 percent. By contrast, Americans who identify as spiritual-but-not-religious, which represents nearly eight (8) percent of the population, were far more confident in life after death (79 percent).

Education has a rather modest effect on belief in life after death. While 69 percent of those with less than a high school education concur, the share of people who believe in an afterlife increases to 78 percent among Americans with some

Figure 3.1

Belief in life after death, by religious tradition



college education before dipping to 72 percent among those with a bachelor's degree or higher.

While most Americans believe in some sort of life after death, not everyone holds a similar vision of what this existence will be like. Most major religions hold that there is some form of conscious existence after death, but they vary on the particulars. In keeping with the monotheistic faiths, we asked those who reported believing in life after death a few follow-up questions, including one about heaven and hell and one about a bodily resurrection from the dead—each a subject with which historic Christian teaching is familiar.

As expected, more particularized beliefs about the afterlife are less common than general confidence in the thing itself.

¹⁵ "Americans' Belief in God, Miracles, and Heaven Declines." Harris Polls. December 16, 2013. Retrieved August 18th, 2014.

Among afterlife believers, 68 percent said, “Yes, I think both heaven and hell are real places.” If we presume that Americans who do *not* believe in an afterlife also do not believe in heaven or hell, then belief that heaven and hell are real places can be said to be characteristic of 51 percent of American adults. An additional 8 percent believe in heaven only, but not hell. This is not a new gap; for years, belief in heaven has outpaced belief in hell.¹⁵ Predictably, religious service attendance matters here. Figure 3.2 reveals just how much: weekly attenders are about twice as confident that heaven and hell exist when contrasted to those who never attend.

While women are more likely than men to believe in heaven and hell, the difference largely reflects the fact that more women than men believe in an afterlife. Among those who believe in an afterlife, nearly equivalent percentages of men and women believe in heaven and hell.

Among major religious groups, Mormons expressed the highest levels of belief in heaven (83 percent), as well as hell (71 percent). Except for those with no religion, Hindus were the least likely to believe in heaven, while Jewish respondents were the least likely to believe in hell.

Muslims report the smallest gap between belief in heaven and belief in hell, with less than one percent saying they believed in heaven but not in hell.

Figure 3.3 reveals that those with at least a bachelor’s degree report slightly less belief in heaven and hell than those with less education. Those with a bachelor’s degree or higher were the least likely to believe in heaven and hell, with 54 percent believing in heaven and 44 percent believing in hell.

Will there be a resurrection of the dead?

The resurrection of the dead is a topic commonly on the lips of Christians—and some Jews—but one rarely posed to Americans on a large survey. Fascination with the subject is not, however, confined to the religious, if popular media and

Figure 3.2

Belief in heaven and hell, by frequency of religious service attendance

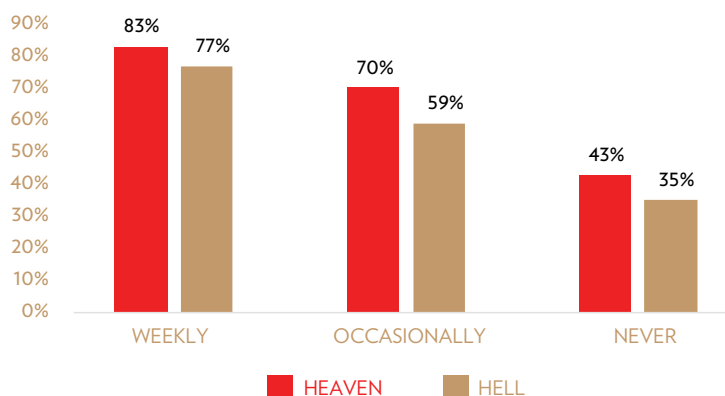
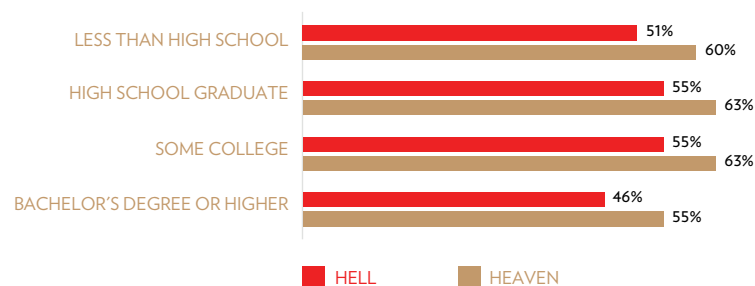


Figure 3.3

Belief in heaven and hell, by education



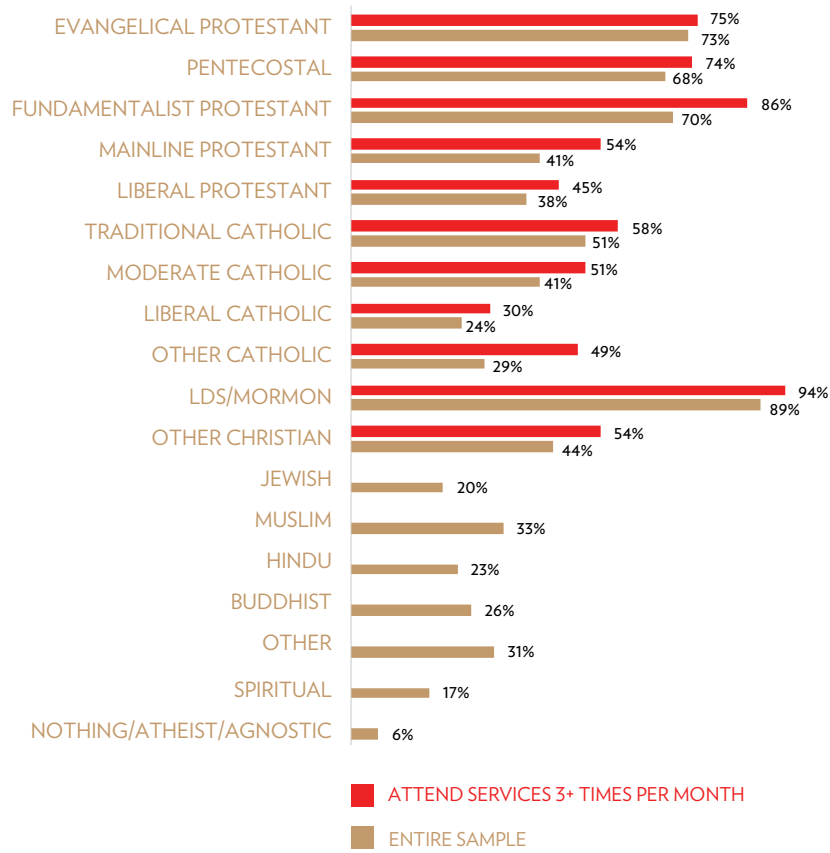
films are to be believed. But how many Americans actually believe that the dead will rise again in a bodily resurrection? Fewer than the share that believes in heaven and hell. Overall, 37 percent of Americans believe there will be a bodily resurrection of the dead.

As elsewhere when dealing with afterlife issues, the resurrection is most popular among Mormons, who exhibit by far the highest percentage of belief in it—94 percent of attending members said they believed—with fundamentalist Protestant congregants second, at 86 percent.

Unsurprisingly, Americans who attend religious services more often are more likely to believe in resurrection: 61

Figure 3.4

Belief in bodily resurrection, by religious tradition



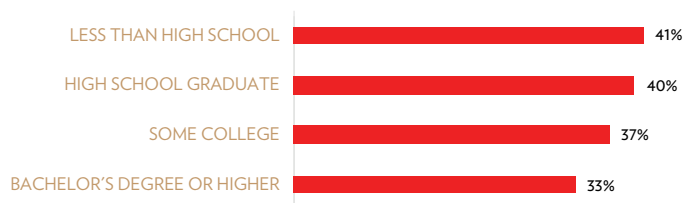
percent of weekly attenders report belief, while only 22 percent of those who rarely or never attend say the same.

As with belief in heaven and hell, Americans who are more educated are less likely to report belief in a future resurrection.

AS WITH BELIEF IN HEAVEN AND HELL, AMERICANS WHO ARE MORE EDUCATED ARE LESS LIKELY TO REPORT BELIEF IN A FUTURE RESURRECTION.

Figure 3.5

Belief in a bodily resurrection, by education



Are religious people happier?

The link between religion and various psychological states has been the subject of many social scientific studies, many of which have found a connection between self-reported happiness and religious practices.¹⁶ Research has suggested that religious faith may be adept in its ability to offer significance and meaning to life, that religious coping mechanisms can improve physical and emotional health, that faith can be a powerful motivating force, and that congregants may receive emotional support from others in their congregations.¹⁷

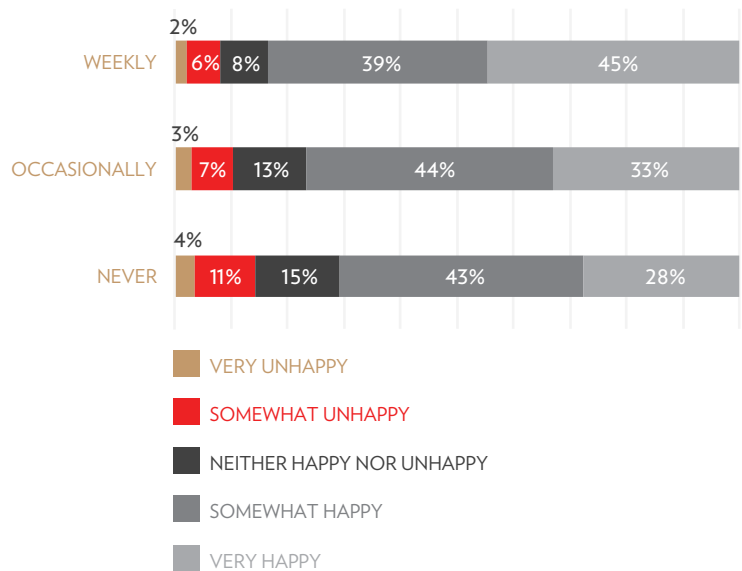
RESEARCH HAS SUGGESTED THAT RELIGIOUS FAITH MAY BE ADEPT IN ITS ABILITY TO OFFER SIGNIFICANCE AND MEANING TO LIFE, THAT RELIGIOUS COPING MECHANISMS CAN IMPROVE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH, THAT FAITH CAN BE A POWERFUL MOTIVATING FORCE, AND THAT CONGREGANTS MAY RECEIVE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT FROM OTHERS IN THEIR CONGREGATIONS.

We explored the link between religious service attendance, self-reported religiosity, and affiliation with happiness. Similar to past studies, we find that all of these measures are to varying degrees associated with increased reported levels of happiness.

One of the most plausible theories as to why religion and happiness are connected has to do with the social support that religious communities can provide. Such a network of

Figure 4.1

Self-reported happiness, by religious service attendance



friends and fellow congregants, sharing common purposes and motivations, is a key way in which happiness is associated with being religious.

The *Relationships in America* survey results suggest there may be something to this theory. In regression analyses (not shown) that account for other possible explanations,¹⁸ we find that while all three measures of religion are positively associated with general life satisfaction, frequency of attendance at religious services has a stronger effect on overall happiness than either belonging to an organized religion or self-reported personal religiosity. Greater levels of church attendance predict higher life satisfaction even when we

¹⁸ Control variables included in regressions were self-reported physical health, marital status, age, educational attainment, race/ethnicity, gender, and marital happiness.

account for how important religious faith is in people's lives. This result offers tentative evidence that actual integration into a religious support network through attendance at religious services may in part be responsible for the increased happiness observed among religious people.

We also explored whether the religion-happiness connection comes about because religious Americans are more apt to be involved in their communities.¹⁹ But even here we still find that those who attend religious services often are happier than their peers with *similar* levels of involvement in the community. It's possible that there are certain intangibles—things difficult to measure and account for—that are associated with higher levels of religious commitment. Such things may promote greater happiness via offering a more stable sense of purpose, or an assurance of a benevolent higher power directing the events of their lives.

We're hardly the first to report this. Several other studies have found that the positive effect of religious commitment on happiness persists even among people with similarly-sized friendship networks.²⁰ One study suggested that it is not the size of the network, but the sense of belonging to a group of like-minded people that results in the increased levels of happiness.²¹

Whatever the case, it appears that religious commitment contributes to happiness beyond simply increased social interaction or support.

¹⁹ To control for community involvement we employed an index that adds the number of community activities that respondents selected as activities that they had participated in within the past year. Selection options were volunteering for a charitable or religious organization, attending a political protest or rally, attending a neighborhood association meeting, playing on a sports team, helping with a senior citizen's center or group, volunteering time working with youth, attending a hobby club, and donating blood.

²⁰ Lim, Chaeyoon and Putnam, Robert. "Religion, Social Networks, and Life Satisfaction." *American Sociological Review* 75 (2010): 914-933; Ellison, Christopher et. al. "Does Religious Commitment Contribute to Individual Life Satisfaction?" *Social Forces* 68, no. 1 (1989): 100-123.

²¹ *Ibid.*

How do race and religion predict Americans' voting intentions for the 2016 presidential election?

American politics are deeply divided and have become increasingly so in recent decades.²² Partisan antipathy is higher than in recent years, and compromise seems elusive. Congressional standoffs have resulted in paralyzing gridlock, including the extended government shutdown in 2013, the first of its kind in 18 years. The partisan divide is also, in part, occurring along racial and religious lines.²³

The 2012 election is a good case study. In 2012 President Barack Obama won the popular vote by a modest margin over Republican challenger Mitt Romney, 50 percent to 48 percent.²⁴ But the raw percentages don't tell much of the story. While Romney carried white voters by a 20-percentage-point margin (59 to 39 percent), President Obama was the favorite among over 70 percent of Asian and Latino voters, and more than 90 percent of black voters.²⁵

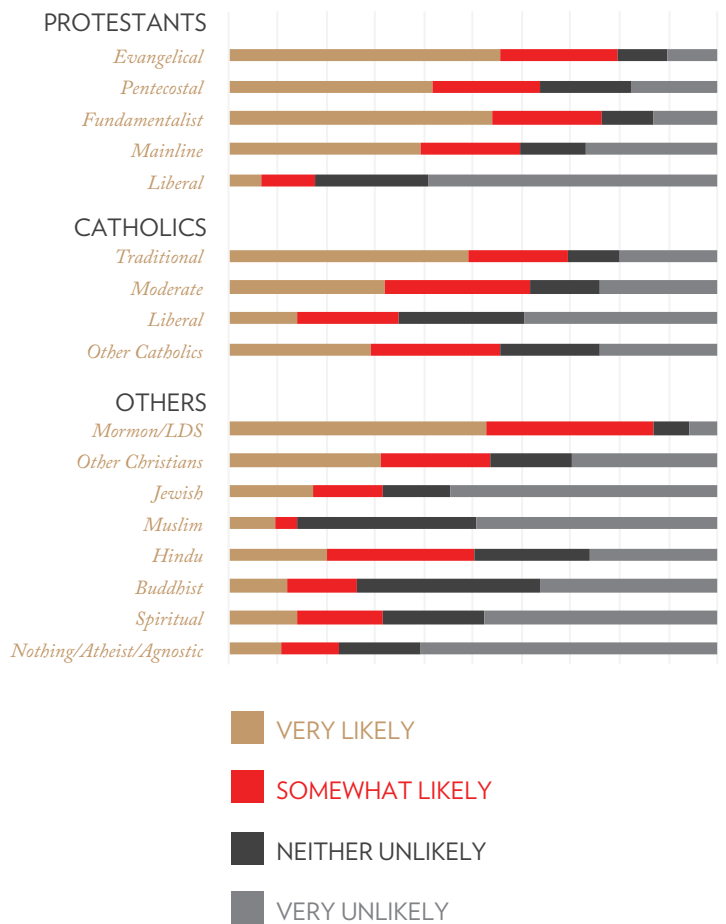
Self-identified Christian voters largely voted for Romney. Among Protestants, Romney led by a wide margin (57 vs. 42 percent), while Catholics were nearly evenly split, slightly favoring President Obama (50 percent to 48 percent). Meanwhile, voters who reported no religious affiliation heavily favored President Obama (70 percent).

With talk of the 2016 presidential nomination already underway, we wondered how people were intending to vote when asked (about one year into President Obama's second term), and if race and religion continue to divide American voters.

Despite official voter turnout hovering around 55 percent in recent presidential elections, survey respondents remained optimistic about their likelihood of voting in the 2016

Figure 5.1

Likelihood of voting Republican in 2016, by religious tradition (all)



presidential race. Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) report that they will definitely vote and an additional 15 percent say they might. Despite the fact that over 40 percent of the population consistently does not vote in presidential elections, only 12 percent say they will probably not vote.

²² "Political Polarization in the American Public." Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. June 12, 2014. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

²³ Abramowitz, Alan. "How Race and Religion have Polarized American Voters." *The Washington Post*. January 20, 2014. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

²⁴ "How the Faithful Voted: 2012 Preliminary Analysis." Pew Research Religion and Public Life Project. November 7, 2012. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

²⁵ "How Groups Voted in 2012." Roper Center Public Opinion Archives. Retrieved August 26, 2014

Among those who say they will vote or might vote, 47 percent say that they are somewhat or very likely to vote for a Republican candidate in the next presidential election. Christian voters have historically backed Republican candidates, but is the conservative Christian voter base still intact? And how extensively have Democrats made inroads with religious voters?

AMONG THOSE WHO SAY THEY WILL VOTE OR MIGHT VOTE, 47 PERCENT SAY THAT THEY ARE SOMEWHAT OR VERY LIKELY TO VOTE FOR A REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE IN THE NEXT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

Figure 5.1 reveals that most Protestant potential voters²⁶ continue to heavily favor Republican candidates. Only liberal Protestants—who account for just 11 percent of Protestants—do not. Catholics are split along particular identities, with “traditional” Catholics squarely leaning Republican, in contrast to liberal Catholics (who do not).

Non-Christians, however, are far less likely to signal support for a Republican candidate. Of those who say they “might” vote or “will” vote, 50 percent of Hindus say they are likely or very likely to vote for a Republican. From there Republican support diminishes to 31 percent among Jews, 31 percent among “spiritual-but-not-religious” voters, 26 percent among Buddhists, 23 percent among the unaffiliated/agnostic/atheist, and 14 percent among Muslims.

Those identifying with traditionally conservative Christian groups such as evangelical, Pentecostal, and fundamentalist Protestants, as well as traditional Catholics, remain squarely in favor of a Republican in the White House in 2016. While Republicans garner broad support from most Christian groups, some are skeptical, including mainline Protestants and “moderate” Catholics. In large measure these still report majority support for a future Republican presidential nominee, but with notably less enthusiasm than their more religiously

conservative peers. Meanwhile, liberal Protestants and liberal Catholics are squarely in the Democratic camp, expressing low levels of support for potential Republican candidates.

Race and ethnicity will also likely prove to be important factors in the coming presidential election. While Mitt Romney captured the white vote 59 percent to 39 percent, only 53 percent of whites say they are at least somewhat likely to vote for a Republican candidate, meaning that whites may split closer to down the middle in the next election. Meanwhile, Republicans may have gained some ground among Latino voters, 42 percent of whom say they are somewhat likely to vote for a Republican, compared to just 27 percent who actually voted for Mitt Romney in 2012. A future Republican nominee’s chances are better among religious Latinos: 55 percent of Latino Protestants and 43 percent of Latino Catholics say they are somewhat or very likely to vote Republican. Black voters remain staunchly democratic and show few signs of changing.

But the 2016 presidential election is still a long way away. No nominees have even indicated they will run yet. Thus this remains an intellectual exercise—one without names. But of one thing we can be confident—that the next presidential race will remain deeply divided along racial and religious lines.

²⁶ “Potential voters” are those who said they will definitely vote, or that they might vote. These two groups comprise 88 percent of the population ages 18–60. This group was used in all subsequent analyses of voting behavior and in figures in this section.

What share of Americans identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual?

Public policy matters concerning LGBT rights are certainly among the most divisive cultural issues of the past decade. To contextualize the debate, it's important to get up to date on the share of American adults who consider themselves gay, lesbian, and bisexual. Indeed, many Americans are remarkably uninformed about the true share of LGBT persons in the U.S. One May 2011 Gallup poll found that, on average, Americans think that one-in-four of their fellow citizens is gay or lesbian.²⁷ (The question did not ask about bisexuals.) Moreover, 35 percent of American adults thought the true number was even higher. Only four percent of Americans in that poll thought that “less than

ONE MAY 2011 GALLUP POLL FOUND THAT, ON AVERAGE, AMERICANS THINK THAT ONE-IN-FOUR OF THEIR FELLOW CITIZENS IS GAY OR LESBIAN.

five percent” of the country was gay or lesbian, but that four percent is on target with most recent scholarly estimates, including this one from the *Relationships in America* survey.

Gary Gates, a senior researcher at the Williams Institute, estimates that 3.5 percent of adults identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, while just over eight percent have had some same-sex sexual experience at some time in their lives.²⁸ And transgender Americans, for all the attention paid them of late, are thought to comprise at most 0.3 percent—or three out of every 1,000—American adults.²⁹ Gates' figures are slightly lower than that of the *Relationships in America* survey, which estimates that 3.9 percent of women and 5.6 percent of men identify as gay,

Table 6.1

SEXUAL ORIENTATION	MEN	WOMEN
100% HETEROSEXUAL	89.7%	85.7%
MOSTLY HETEROSEXUAL	3.5%	9.0%
BISEXUAL	1.0%	1.9%
MOSTLY HOMOSEXUAL	1.1%	0.8%
100% HOMOSEXUAL	3.5%	1.3%
ASEXUAL	1.2%	1.4%

lesbian, or bisexual, accounting for a little over 11 million adults nationwide.³⁰ A July 2014 report released by the Center for Disease Control puts the number even lower than Gates' estimate, at 1.6 percent who identify as gay or lesbian, 0.7 percent who say they are bisexual, and 1.1 percent who say “something else,” “I don't know,” or who refused to answer the question.³¹

Whereas men's self-reported sexual identity varies little across the different ages of respondents, women's patterns are notably more age-graded, in keeping with assessments of women's sexual orientations as more malleable than men's.³² Given women's greater malleability and fixed fertility schedule, we should not be surprised to see an age-graded shift in sexual orientation around the time of women's peak fertility

3.9 PERCENT OF WOMEN AND 5.6 PERCENT OF MEN IDENTIFY AS GAY, LESBIAN, OR BISEXUAL, ACCOUNTING FOR A LITTLE OVER 11 MILLION ADULTS NATIONWIDE.

²⁷ Morales, Lymari. “U.S. Adults Estimate that 25 Percent of Americans are Gay or Lesbian.” Gallup Politics. May 27, 2011. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

²⁸ Gates, Gary. “How many people are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender?” The Williams Institute. April, 2011

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ We also find that 11 percent of women and 9 percent of men have at some point engaged in same-sex sexual behavior, roughly twice the number who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. These estimates also do not include the 3.5 percent of men and 9 percent of women who say they are mostly heterosexual but at least sometimes attracted to people of the same sex. Keep in mind that our estimates are only for those ages 18–60, so they may differ slightly from estimates by Dr. Gates and the CDC for this reason.

³¹ Ward, Brian et al. “Sexual Orientation and Health in U.S. Adults: National Health Interview Survey, 2013.” *National Health Statistics Reports 77*. National Center for Health Statistics. July 15, 2014.

³² Diamond, Lisa. *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

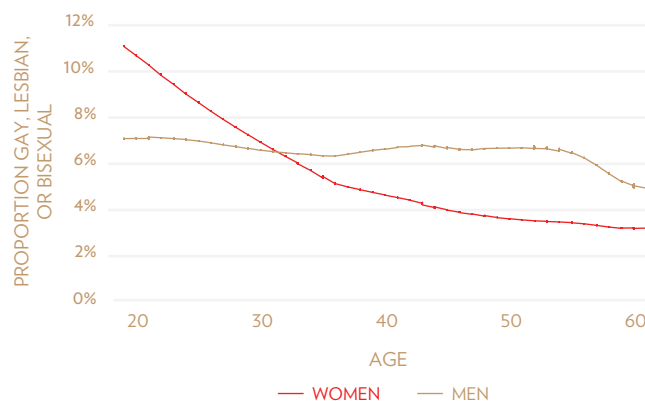
years. The distinctive curve to their reporting of bisexual or homosexual attraction is evidence of exactly that. The survey's pattern is consonant with that found in other data as well: women reporting that they are "only attracted to men" is at its lowest (in the latest iteration of the National Survey of Family Growth) at age 21 and highest at age 43 (the survey is only offered to persons below age 45).³³ Given the evidence of women's plastic sexuality, one psychologist, whose own research and pedagogy in the area has received considerable flak from intellectuals on both the Left and the Right, wonders aloud about just what women's sexual orientation consists of.³⁴

British social theorist Anthony Giddens was on target in his landmark 1992 book entitled *The Transformation of Intimacy*, where he asserted that the sexual revolution was not simply "a gender-neutral advance in sexual permissiveness," but instead "a revolution in female sexual autonomy," one which fostered the flourishing of non-heterosexual expressions, identities, and orientations.³⁵ The "new" plasticity afforded by the advent of contraception has made sexuality autonomous from reproduction. And this plasticity is visible in the figure above.

So how do we explain such an age-graded disparity in sexual identity among men and women? Do some women—like New York City mayor Bill De Blasio's wife Chirlane McCray—go through a lesbian or bisexual "phase" which they "outgrow" later in life? Perhaps—and research hints in that direction.³⁶ Among those women in the *Relationships in America* survey who report having had at least one female sexual partner in their lifetime, only 1 in 3 currently self-identify as lesbian or bisexual. But something has changed: younger women are *far more likely* than older women to report having had a female sexual partner, despite having far less time (in years) in which to do so, suggesting that the higher number of lesbian and bisexual women among the young may not be a longstanding phenomenon in female sexuality across the life course, but rather a temporary experiment in same-sex relationships, experiences,

Figure 6.1

Percentage of the population gay, lesbian or bisexual by age



Note: Estimates are generated using lowess regression estimation.

and/or self-identities. Since the RIA survey was only fielded once, it is unable to assess changes in self-identities within persons or track trends. Further research that follows the same people *over time* would illuminate this phenomenon.

By contrast, the men's line is largely flat. Overall, men's sexual identity self-reports are believed to be much less prone to shifts over time. The *Relationships in America* data also confirm that few men self-identify as bisexual. Among them, bisexuality is more often a behavioral observation.

BUT SOMETHING HAS CHANGED: YOUNGER WOMEN ARE FAR MORE LIKELY THAN OLDER WOMEN TO REPORT HAVING HAD A FEMALE SEXUAL PARTNER, DESPITE HAVING FAR LESS TIME (IN YEARS) IN WHICH TO DO SO, SUGGESTING THAT THE HIGHER NUMBER OF LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL WOMEN AMONG THE YOUNG MAY NOT BE A LONGSTANDING PHENOMENON IN FEMALE SEXUALITY ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE, BUT RATHER A TEMPORARY EXPERIMENT IN SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS, EXPERIENCES, AND/OR SELF-IDENTITIES.

³³ A similar u-shaped curve is visible for women's same-sex behavior in the National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior. See Herbenick, Debby et al. "Sexual Behavior in the United States: Results from a National Probability Sample of Men and Women Ages 14-94." *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 7, no. 5 (2010): 255-265.

³⁴ Bailey, J. Michael. "What is sexual orientation and do women have one?" *Contemporary Perspectives on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities* 54 (2009):43-63.

³⁵ Giddens, Anthony. *The Transformation of Intimacy* (p. 28). Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1992.

³⁶ Diamond, Lisa. *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Finally, most of us are familiar with—and commonly speak in terms of—the sexuality continuum from straight to gay, a spectrum that appears to have originated in a sexual behavioral preference scale employed by early sexologist Alfred Kinsey. Yet few scholars pay attention to “asexuality” as an orientation. Asexuality is the state of *not* being sexually interested in men or women. Some consider it a sexual orientation, while others think it’s the lack thereof. The RIA survey offered respondents the option of saying they were “not sexually attracted to either males or females.” How many respondents selected that category when asked? In keeping with previous national estimates, just over one percent.

Given how easy it is to conflate sexual attraction and behavior with orientation, as well as to overlook how each of these operates differently for men than for women, it’s not difficult to see how many Americans come to inaccurate conclusions about the prevalence of different sexual orientations.

How often do Americans have sex?

Many American adults wonder on occasion about the sexual habits of other people, seeking to assess whether they themselves are “normal” when compared to other people of similar age and relationship status. Since the answer to such a question is not easily discerned in polite company, it devolves to research organizations to pursue accurate data and dispel (or reinforce) myths.

The answer to the question, of course, depends upon a variety of common factors: the age of the respondent, stressors in their lives, their relationship status, how long they’ve been in that relationship, and if there are young children at home. While many young adults—saturated in Hollywood narratives about the single life—worry that marriage spells the end of stable sex, is such a piece of conventional wisdom accurate?

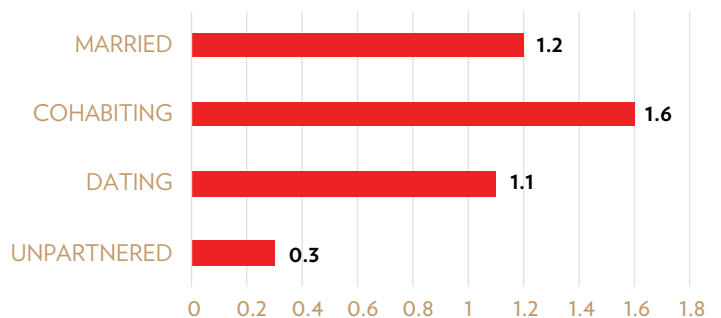
WHILE MANY YOUNG ADULTS—SATURATED IN HOLLYWOOD NARRATIVES ABOUT THE SINGLE LIFE—WORRY THAT MARRIAGE SPELLS THE END OF STABLE SEX, IS SUCH A PIECE OF CONVENTIONAL WISDOM ACCURATE?

NOT REALLY.

Not really. When it comes to sex, it’s all about opportunity. Married Americans reported having sex an average of 1.2 times per week, or just about five times a month, while cohabiting couples reported 1.6 times per week (or about 6.5 times per month). Persons who’ve never been married and were not currently cohabiting understandably reported a much lower average figure—0.3 times a week.

Figure 7.1

Average sexual frequency per week, by relationship status

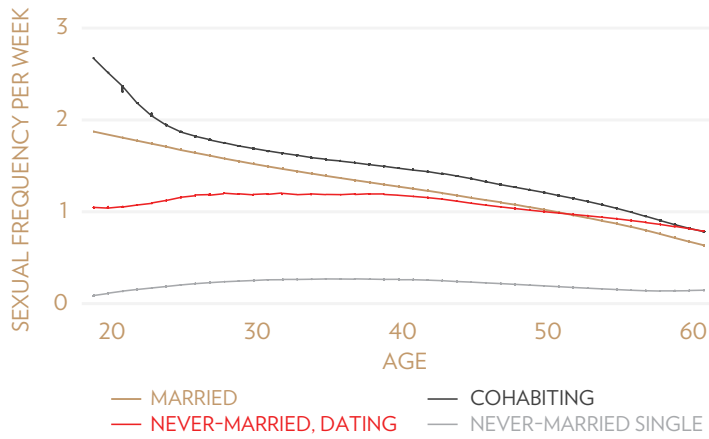


But when we restrict the analyses to those people who have never been married but who are *currently* romantically involved with someone, they report having sex 1.1 times per week, almost as much as married couples. Altogether unpartnered adults who are not dating report a more modest average of 0.3 times per week.

It might seem that moving in with a significant other increases sexual frequency—by expanding opportunity—but that getting married reduces it (perhaps by familiarity). This sort of thinking, however, fails to account for the fact that cohabiting and dating people tend to be younger and in newer relationships than married couples. Married people in the *Relationships in America* survey data are older than cohabiters or never-married persons, on average, by about a decade. Advancing age, of course, is associated with decreased sex drive and other stressors that are associated with declining frequency of sexual activity, right? Yes, but not drastically so. Figure 7.2 illuminates the age-and-relationship association with sexual frequency. To be sure, cohabiting couples still report more frequent sex than married couples, but the

Figure 7.2

Sexual frequency per week by age and marital status



Note: Respondents were asked "About how many times in the past 2 weeks did you have sex?" Responses above 25 were censored. Estimates are obtained using Lowess Regression estimation.

difference is only pronounced until around age 25, by which time married and cohabiting couples display parallel patterns of similar sexual frequency. Moreover, the decline with age is not a very pronounced one. Married 30-year-olds report a sexual frequency (about 1.5 times per week) not dramatically different from that of married 50-year-olds (about once a week). By contrast, never-married singles report notably less sex at every age. So neither marriage nor advancing age spells the end of a consistent sexual relationship.

How many people have Americans had sex with?

Americans vary widely in the number of sexual partners they report over a lifetime. Few never have sex, while a non-trivial number report sex with only one person: those who have had only one sexual partner comprise 16 percent of adults ages 18-60. (Keep in mind that such an estimate can diminish as people age, but won't likely rise.)

On the opposite end of the spectrum, very few people report high numbers of lifetime sexual partners: just two (2) percent of heterosexual³⁷ women and three (3) percent of heterosexual men report having had more than 50 opposite-sex sexual partners, while two (2) percent of self-identified lesbian women³⁸ have had over 50 female partners. Thus, the experience of large numbers of sexual partners is uncommon for the vast majority of the population. The exception to this is self-identified gay men. Indeed, 30 percent of gay men report over 50 male sexual partners in their lifetime

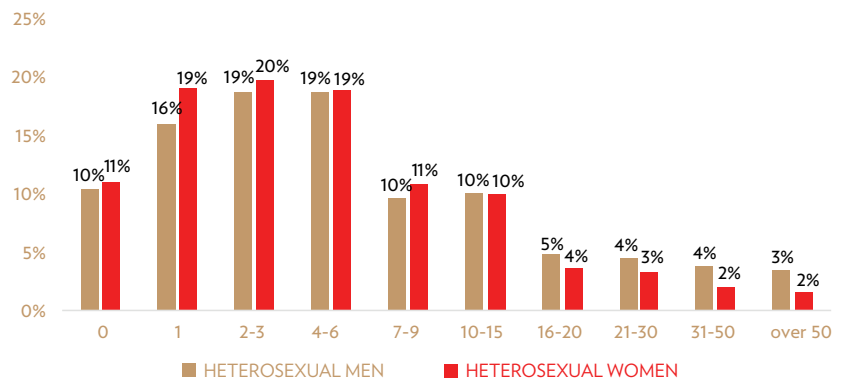
But what is typical? How many sexual partners does the average adult have?

The median heterosexual man or woman (age 18-60) reports somewhere between four and six opposite sex partners in their lifetime. Lesbian women, too, report about the same number of partners. Meanwhile, the median gay man has notably more partners—reporting between 16 and 20 same-sex sexual partners to this point in their lifetime.

While sexual orientation is predictive of the gender of sexual partners, it is by no means deterministic. A notable share of

Figure 8.1

Number of lifetime opposite-sex sexual partners: heterosexuals



THE MEDIAN HETEROSEXUAL MAN OR WOMAN (AGE 18-60) REPORTS SOMEWHERE BETWEEN FOUR AND SIX OPPOSITE SEX PARTNERS IN THEIR LIFETIME.

lesbian women (70 percent) and gay men (30 percent) who report attraction exclusively to members of their own sex also report having had at least one opposite sex sexual partner in their lifetimes. On the other hand, among those who considered themselves exclusively (or “100 percent”) heterosexual, the share who had sex with someone outside of what their reported sexual orientation would predict were much lower: just three (3) percent of heterosexual men and five (5) percent of heterosexual women had at least one sexual partner of the same sex.

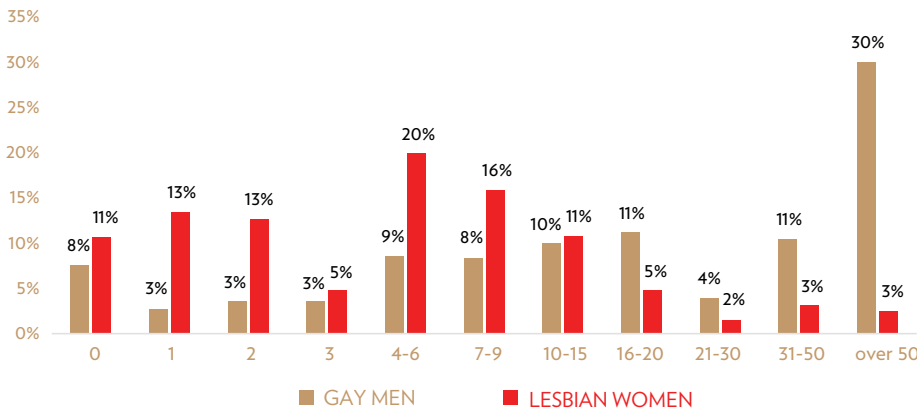
The reasons for this are being debated, no doubt, but it is clear that it should not be assumed that sexual orientation indicates exclusive sexual contact, especially so for sexual minorities.

³⁷ For measurement purposes we grouped those who said they were “100% heterosexual” and those who identified as “Mostly Heterosexual.” The figure represents percentages for both of these groups.

³⁸ To increase sample size and thus confidence in our point estimates, we grouped women who said they were 100% homosexual and those who said they were “mostly homosexual.” The same procedure was done for men who identified as mostly or 100% homosexual. The results of these estimates are those displayed in the corresponding figure.

Figure 8.2

Number of lifetime same-sex sexual partners (self-identified gay men and lesbian women)



A NOTABLE SHARE OF LESBIAN WOMEN (70 PERCENT) AND GAY MEN (30 PERCENT) WHO REPORT ATTRACTION EXCLUSIVELY TO MEMBERS OF THEIR OWN SEX ALSO REPORT HAVING HAD AT LEAST ONE OPPOSITE SEX SEXUAL PARTNER IN THEIR LIFETIMES.

As such, public health officials are taking note that significant percentages of lesbian women may at some time face **public health risks** such as unplanned pregnancy or certain sexually transmitted infections that are more commonly passed in opposite-sex sexual contact.³⁹

³⁹ Marrazzo, Jeanne and Stine, Kathleen. "Reproductive Health History of Lesbians: Implications for Care." *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 190, no. 5 (2004): 1298-1304.

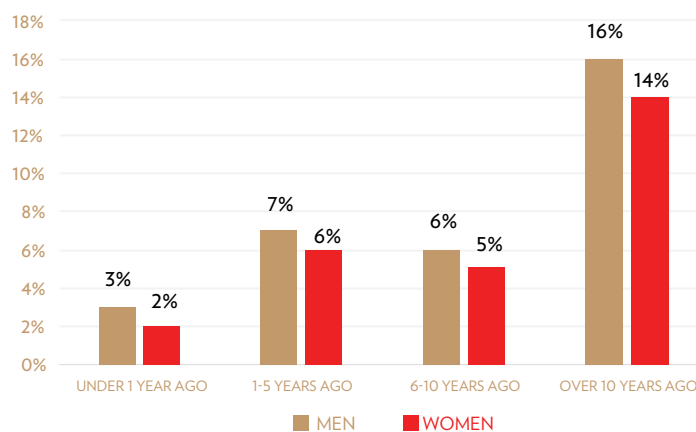
How many Americans have experienced nonmonogamy, or overlapping sexual relationships?

Serial monogamy—the practice of one sexual partner at a time—is still the norm in America, but the *Relationships in America* survey data documents a sizeable group of Americans (34 percent of men and 28 percent of women) who report having had concurrent sexual relationships at least once in their lifetimes. Besides the risk such actions pose to one or both of the relationships in question, public health officials have long worried that having overlapping sexual partners dramatically exacerbates the risk of passing sexually transmitted infections. [Research on HIV transmission](#) concludes the same—that overlapping sexual relationships pose a key hazard to public health by increasing the efficient spread of HIV/AIDS.⁴⁰ Those who engage in concurrent sexual relationships often endanger their sexual partners without their knowledge. One study found that sexually-active adolescents often do not know when their partner has had other sexual partners over the course of their relationship. As such, many adolescents—in what they believed to be exclusive relationships—did not use condoms and heightened their exposure to transmission risk.⁴¹

So how much more likely are those who've reported overlapping sexual partners to also report experience with a sexually transmitted infection? We find that among those American adults who reported no history of overlapping sexual partners, 11 percent had ever been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection, compared to 28 percent among those who report having had more than one partner at a time (at some point).

Figure 9.1

Timing of most recent overlapping sexual relationship, by gender



Note: Bars do not add up to 100%. For ease of display those who have never had overlapping sexual relationships are not shown. 66% of men and 72% of women reported never having overlapping sexual relationships.

How common is it to have multiple simultaneous sex partners? It depends on how you count it. Thirty-one (31) percent of adults below the age of 60 report having had overlapping sexual relationships at some point in their lives. But most of those relationships are not current. Only three (3) percent of adults report overlapping sexual relationships within the past year, while 10 percent report overlapping

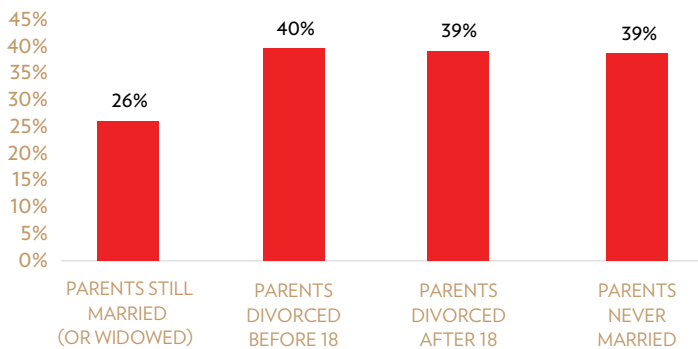
THIRTY-ONE (31) PERCENT OF ADULTS BELOW THE AGE OF 60 REPORT HAVING HAD OVERLAPPING SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS AT SOME POINT IN THEIR LIVES.

⁴⁰ "Overlapping Relationships: How important is Long-Term Concurrence?" Aidsmap. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

⁴¹ Swartzendruber, Andrea et al. "Perceptions About Sexual Concurrence and Factors Related to Inaccurate Perceptions Among Pregnant Adolescents and Their Partners." *Sexually Transmitted Diseases* 39, no. 8 (2012): 577-582.

Figure 9.2

Percentage of population who have had overlapping sexual relationships, by family structure of origin



relationships within the past five years. Thus while having overlapping sexual relationships is not remarkably uncommon within a lifetime, few Americans report overlapping sexual partners *at present*.

While most groups are not at substantial risk for the health consequences of overlapping sexual relationships, those in sexual networks with black men, or gay or bisexual men are at increased risk. In *the Relationships in America* survey, seven (7) percent of African American men and 10 percent of gay or bisexual men report simultaneous sexual partners within the past year, and about half of both groups report overlapping partners at some point in their lives.

Men are more likely than women to report having ever had multiple concurrent sexual partners (34 percent vs. 28 percent), a difference that is neither trivial nor large. In light of the fact that men and women tend to report their sexual behaviors quite differently, the difference may be due to underreporting by women.⁴² The gender distinction is most pronounced among African Americans, among whom 54 percent of men and 34 percent of women say they've had overlapping sexual relationships. Some attribute this gap to skewed gender ratios in black populations due to higher mortality and incarceration rates among black males, a structural reality that positions African American men more favorably in their local mating markets, and hence to be more selective about the terms of their romantic relationships.⁴³

High numbers of sexual partners, as well as concurrent sexual partners, are not only a public health concern because of the risk of spreading sexually transmitted infections, but have also been linked to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. In the RIA survey data, those who've ever reported concurrent sexual partners were also more apt to report taking medication for depression or anxiety than those who haven't (18 percent vs. 12 percent), and reported significantly less overall happiness. It isn't clear if concurrent sexual relationships cause psychological harm, detrimentally affecting happiness, or if depression or dissatisfaction with life causes people to "self-medicate" by seeking out multiple sexual partners (or both). But accounting for education, gender, household income, and whether the person had ever experienced a divorce, sexually transmitted infection, or abortion did not erase the association (results not shown). "Religious guilt" does not seem to explain the association either, meaning that those who have had overlapping sexual relationships are less satisfied with life even after accounting for the importance of religion in their lives. It isn't clear what factors drive this association, but it is clear that the kind of Americans who report concurrent sexual partners are the kind of Americans who tend to be less satisfied with life in general, and are more prone to depression than those whose sexual relationships have not overlapped.

As a public health risk some are interested in reducing the number of people in concurrent sexual relationships. What's the best way to do this? Our data suggests that one way may be upstream—by helping families stay together. People who came from families where their parents were married, and stayed married until the present day (or who stayed married until the death of one of the parents) were *far* less likely to have ever report being in overlapping sexual relationships (26 percent of those raised by parents who stayed married so report compared to 39 percent whose parents did not.) Age, education, gender, race, depression, household income, and importance of religion did not account for the differences we observe in prevalence of concurrent sexual partnerships between those who grew up in families with married parents who stayed married and all others. In other words, it's not just about selectivity—family structure matters.

⁴² Clark, Shelley et al. "Do Men and Women Report Their Sexual Partnerships Differently? Evidence from Kisumu, Kenya." *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 37, no. 4 (2011).

⁴³ Banks, Ralph. *Is Marriage for White People? How the African American Marriage Decline Affects Everyone*. New York: Dutton, 2011.

How much pornography are Americans consuming?

Pornography has been around for centuries. Ancient brothels contained images of sex acts etched on walls, creating a menu from which a curious customer could select a desired act. Today, the Internet allows people to view those same acts on any computer, and in high resolution. The combination of accessibility, affordability, and anonymity that Internet pornography offers has led to more porn produced and consumed than ever imagined. The changing nature of pornography necessitates an updated look at how many people use it and what compels them to do so.

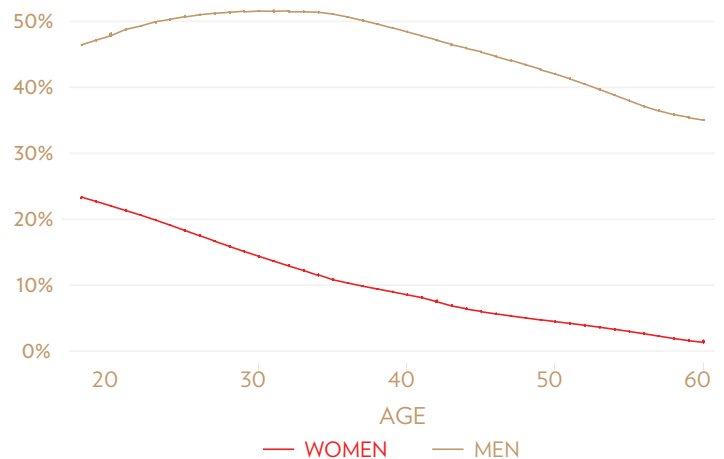
Pornography use is a decidedly gendered behavior, even more so than masturbation. Men use pornography much **more often** than women and have done so for decades.⁴⁴ The *Relationships in America* data reveal that 43 percent of men and 9 percent of women report watching pornography in the past week. On the flip side, far more women than men have not used pornography recently: 34 percent of men and 72 percent of women report not viewing pornography in at least a year, if at all.

Many associate porn use with teenagers and young adults. Is that fair? Are pornography consumers mostly young, or are older adults just as likely to use pornography? To find out we calculated the percentage of respondents at each age that reported viewing pornography within the past week. Figure 10.1 shows that for men pornography viewing peaks in the 20s and 30s before beginning to

60-YEAR-OLD MEN ARE STILL ONLY SLIGHTLY LESS LIKELY TO HAVE VIEWED PORNOGRAPHY WITHIN THE PAST WEEK THAN MEN IN THEIR 20S AND 30S.

Figure 10.1

Past week pornography use, by age and gender



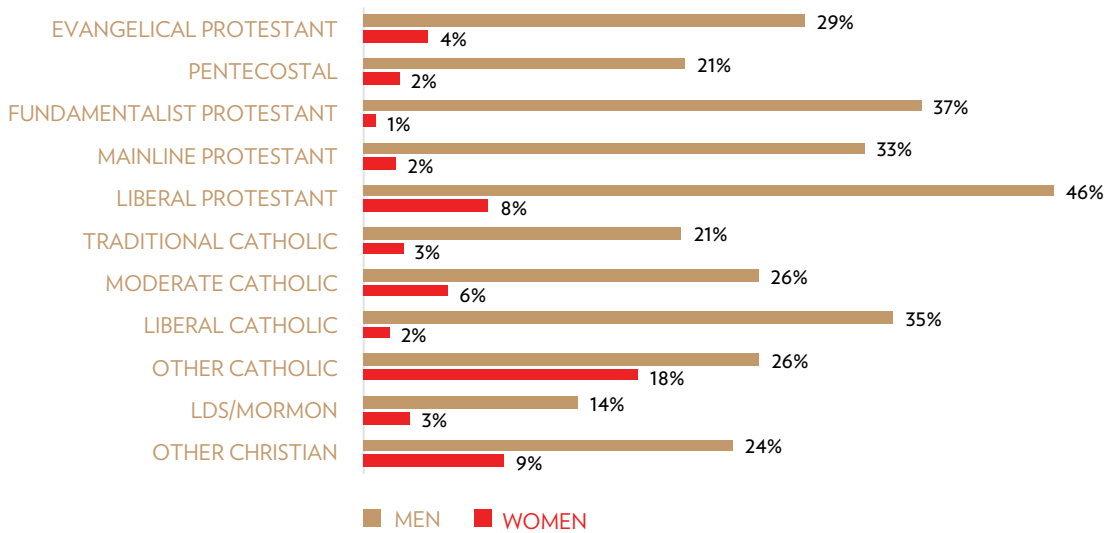
diminish *slowly* among older men in the sample. Nevertheless, 60-year-old men are still only slightly less likely to have viewed pornography within the past week than men in their 20s and 30s. Among women, however, there is a more linear downward trend in pornography use with age. While 19 percent of women under age 30 report viewing pornography in the week prior to the survey, only three percent of women in their 50s report doing so, meaning that—unlike men, the youngest women are over six times as likely to have viewed pornography recently as the oldest women.

Religious groups care about—and often seek to combat—the influence of pornographic material among congregants. Just how do religious groups fare with respect to the pornography consumption patterns of their parishioners? It would appear that religious affiliation itself is associated with moderately lower levels of pornography usage. While the religiously

⁴⁴ Patterson, Richard, and Price, Joseph. "Pornography, Religion, and the Happiness Gap: Does Pornography Impact the Actively Religious Differently?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 1 (2012): 79-89.

Figure 10.2

Percent viewing pornography within past week, by religious affiliation (attend 3+ times per month)



unaffiliated (“Nothing/Atheist/Agnostic”) report the highest rates of pornography usage within the previous week for both men and women, pornography use is far from absent among the faithful. Slightly less than 40 percent of male Protestants and Catholics report using pornography in the week prior to the survey. Those who attend religious services regularly view pornography at slightly lower rates, but pornography usage is still common among male churchgoers as 27 percent of Christian male attendees report pornography use in the week prior to the survey. Religiously conservative groups such as traditional Catholics, Mormons, and Pentecostals report the lowest rates of pornography viewing. Meanwhile, men self-identifying with less-conservative Christian affiliations have higher rates of pornography usage than those affiliated with more traditional or conservative groups, although the effect is much more pronounced among Protestants than it is among Catholics. (Unfortunately, for smaller religious groups like Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus, sample sizes were not sufficient to yield reliable results.)

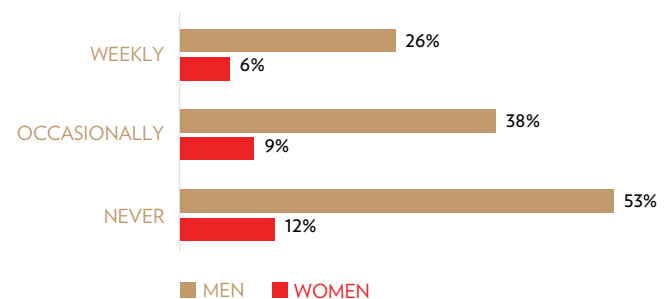
Religious service attendance also matters for pornography use. Weekly church attenders are the least likely to report pornography use in the past week, while those who rarely or never attend do so at double the rate. Although some

of the difference in pornography use between those who affiliate with and attend American churches may be due to users avoiding congregations that are perceived to be more anti-pornography (or simply more conservative about sex), difference in usage rates are fairly stark, and are not likely to be accounted for entirely by self-selection.

Pornography is a rapidly evolving part of American culture, and is fast becoming taken-for-granted. The effects of this have yet to be properly documented, and the debate in scholarly literature about the benefits and consequences of pornography use continues.

Figure 10.3

Percentage using porn past week, by religious service attendance



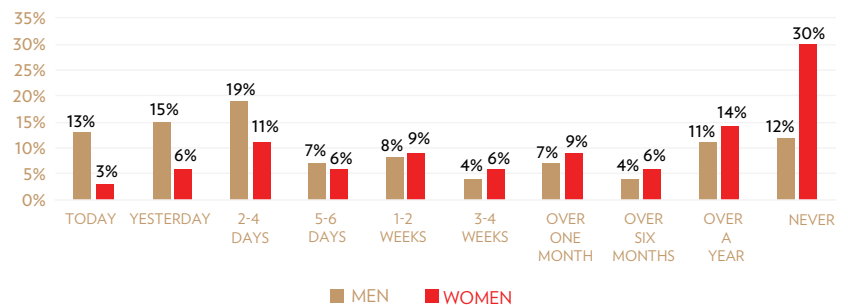
What predicts masturbation practices?

Despite its commonality as a sexual experience, masturbation is often considered taboo, more so than other sex-related topics. As with most taboo subjects, many wonder what's normal or average in this area. To begin, the vast majority of American men and women report having masturbated at some point, although more men than women say they have masturbated at least once (89 percent and 70 percent respectively). But the frequency with which men and women report masturbating is widely divergent. Nearly twice as many women as men (50 percent vs. 27 percent) report that it has been at least six months since they last masturbated (or that they have never masturbated). Meanwhile, men are far more likely to report recent masturbation. Twice as many men as women report masturbating *within the past week* (54 percent and 26 percent, respectively) and over three times as many men as women report masturbating either the day of the survey or the day before (28 percent and 9 percent, respectively). So while most men and women have masturbated, men report doing so substantially more often than women.

As people age and health declines, libido also changes. Is there evidence of an age effect on masturbation patterns? Just over 60 percent of the youngest men in the sample report masturbating in any given week, with this number declining to just under half of men by age 60. So while masturbation decreases slightly as men age, it doesn't change substantially. For women the drop-off is more evident, despite common assumptions about women's later elevated sex drive (which should not simply be equated with interest in masturbation). Just under 40 percent of the survey's youngest women report masturbating in a given week, while by age 60 the proportion

Figure 11.1

Date of most recent masturbation

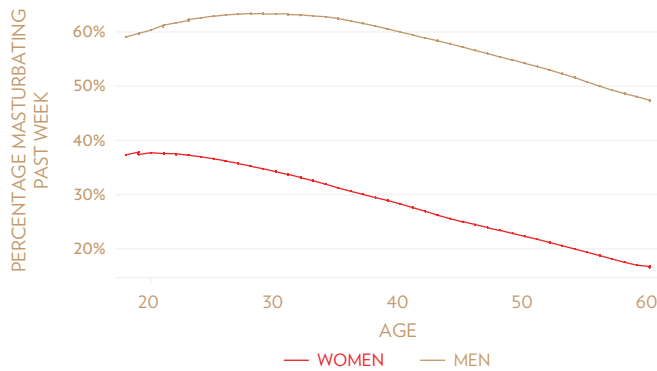


falls to well under 20 percent—less than half the rate for the youngest women in the sample. Similarly, as women age many cease masturbating. Among women ages 18–25, 7 percent had masturbated in the past but had not done so within the past year, while 18 percent of women ages 50–60 said the same. Taken together, these results suggest that age corresponds with both a lower number of women self-reporting masturbation as well as a lower frequency of the same.

Although masturbation is more common among those who are not romantically involved with anyone, it is hardly uncommon among those who are in romantic and/or sexual relationships. Among men who have no romantic partner, two in three (66 percent) report masturbating within the past week, compared to half (51 percent) of those who are involved with someone. Among women the differences are much smaller: 29 percent of single women and 25 percent of coupled women report masturbating in the week prior to the survey, a difference that can be accounted for by the differing age distributions of single and coupled women.

Figure 11.2

Percent reporting masturbation in past week, by age and gender



Note: Estimates are generated using lowess regression estimation.

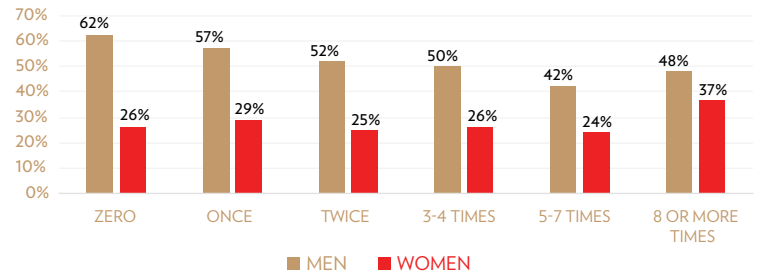
One explanation, consistent with research in this area, is that men use masturbation as a replacement for sex. Apart from the minority of men who report having sex more frequently than every other day, we see a steady decline in the percent who report masturbating within the past week as their self-reported frequency of sex increases, suggesting that masturbation is a substitute for partnered sexual activity. To highlight this trend, 62 percent of men who have had no sex within the past two weeks reported masturbating within the past week, compared to 42 percent of those who had sex 5-7 times and 48 percent of those who had sex eight or more times within the two weeks prior to the survey.

For women the story is quite different. The relationship between self-reported masturbation and sexual frequency for women is not statistically significant, meaning that women who have sex frequently are just as likely to have masturbated as women who have sex infrequently. While men may substitute sex for masturbation, or vice versa, women masturbate at about the same (lower) rates regardless of their rates of partnered sexual activity.

Masturbation may not be an emotionally neutral practice, however. The *Relationships in America* survey data reveal notable associations between masturbation and current life satisfaction for both men and women. Those who reported masturbating within the past week were less likely to report being “very happy” with their life and more likely to be unhappy than those who did not report masturbation. Even

Figure 11.3

Percentage who report masturbation in the past week, by frequency of sex in the past two weeks



WOMEN MASTURBATE AT ABOUT THE SAME (LOWER) RATES REGARDLESS OF THEIR RATES OF PARTNERED SEXUAL ACTIVITY.

after accounting for basic demographic characteristics such as race/ethnicity, age, level of education, as well as physical health, and whether the respondent is currently on anti-depressant medication, the results still suggest that those who masturbated recently were less likely to be happy with life in general than those who did not. Some suggest that religious guilt is responsible for the difference in happiness. While the respondent’s self-reported importance of religion affects both happiness and masturbation, it only partly explains the happiness gap. Even after accounting for whether someone has a romantic partner or not, and the frequency with which they had sex within the past two weeks, the results still suggest that those who had not masturbated recently were happier than those who had.

The direction of effect is not clear, however. That is, does masturbation cause some to be unhappy, or are unhappier people simply more likely to turn to masturbation as a way of self-medicating? Longitudinal data is required to solve this puzzle, but it’s clear that adults who have masturbated recently are, on average, less happy with their lives than those who have not.

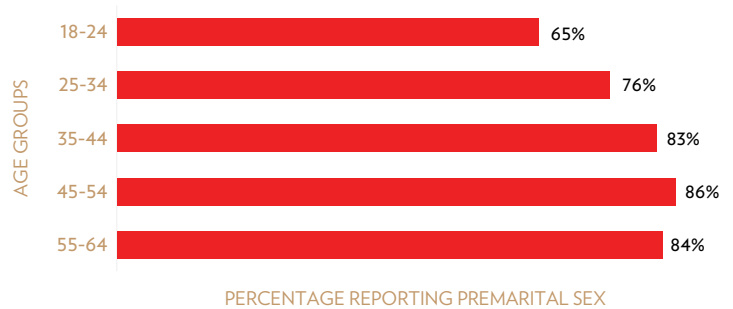
How common is premarital sex?

The *Relationships in America* survey asked participants when they began having sex with their current spouse or partner. The question keeps recurring—just how common is premarital sex? The topic particularly piques the interest of clergy and youth workers, who want to better understand the culture in which the people they serve are living. The question, however, is not as straightforward as you might think. In one sense, anyone who has ever had sex before getting married can be said to have experienced premarital sex. On the other hand, the term implies an eventual marital relationship. In a context where fewer people marry, the term makes less sense. This is why some scholars have spoken of “pre-premarital” sex, or the sexual activities many people experience with others prior to those experienced with an eventual spouse.⁴⁵ The phrase arguably now refers to all unmarried nonmarital sex—a sexual relationship that occurs outside of marriage and typically without marital intent—as distinct from premarital sex (sex between eventual spouses) and extramarital sex (historically dubbed adultery). In these analyses, then, we are talking about premarital sex in the technical use of the term—sexual experience with a spouse prior to getting married (among currently-married persons). Because we define premarital sex in this way, we focus our attention on married respondents and tally those who report having sex with their current spouse before they married as those indicating premarital sex.

In what might appear at first glance as ironic, older married respondents tend to report higher levels of premarital sex. The percentage of each age group reporting premarital sex increases as the age of the respondent increases through the age group 35-44, where the percentage of each group reporting premarital sex levels off. But before you conclude too much about this, remember that younger married respondents likely exhibit lower frequencies of premarital

Figure 12.1

Premarital sex, by age group



sex because more religious young adults are more apt to marry prior to age 25, or shortly thereafter. Which brings us to the key question we hear about premarital sex: does religion matter?

In short, yes. Increased religious service attendance is negatively associated with reports of premarital sex. Among married weekly religious service attenders, 65 percent reported first sex prior to getting married, compared to 88 percent who report occasional attendance and a full 96 percent of those who never attend religious services. But perhaps those who attend regularly are more prone to social desirability bias and less likely to give a straight answer to the question. What about inward rather than outward religiosity?

Those married Americans who report religion being “not at all important,” “not very important,” or “somewhat important” report approximately the same proclivity to premarital sex. But there is a statistically significant difference for those who report religion being “very important” and “more important than anything else.” In these two groups, increased self-reported importance of religion corresponds with a lower percentage of the group reporting premarital sex. Among those for whom

⁴⁵ Gagnon, John and Simon, William. “The Sexual Scripting of Oral Genital Contacts.” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 16 (1987): 1-25.

religion is “very important,” there is a 15-percentage point drop in premarital sex, and another 20-percentage point drop among those who said religion is “more important than anything else.” So yes, religiosity appears to make a difference, whether it’s a public form of religiosity or a private one.

Affiliation differences?

Different religious traditions treat the matter of premarital sex with greater or lesser seriousness. Some stick to the practicalities of sex outside marriage as largely unwise or constituting a physical or emotional health risk, but one largely lacking spiritual ramifications. Others almost exclusively privilege possible spiritual consequences of sex outside marriage. Evangelical Protestants often emphasize marital “sexual boundaries,” that is, sex after and within marriage. Mormons tend to encourage the “law of chastity” which prohibits “any sexual contact outside of marriage.” Roman Catholicism formally emphasizes premarital abstinence. Among Catholics in (or not in) the pews, however, there are varying degrees of sexual conservatism.⁴⁶

And the results largely support these assumptions. Those reporting their religion as “Nothing” or “Spiritual but not religious” report the highest levels of premarital sex, while Mormons (LDS) report the lowest levels. Among Protestants, those that classify themselves as “liberal Protestants” report the highest levels of premarital sex while more conservative “evangelical Protestants” report the lowest levels. Similarly, more conservative “traditional” Catholics report the lowest levels of premarital sex among Catholics while “liberal” Catholics report the highest levels.

THOSE REPORTING THEIR RELIGION AS “NOTHING” OR “SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS” REPORT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF PREMARITAL SEX, WHILE MORMONS (LDS) REPORT THE LOWEST LEVELS.

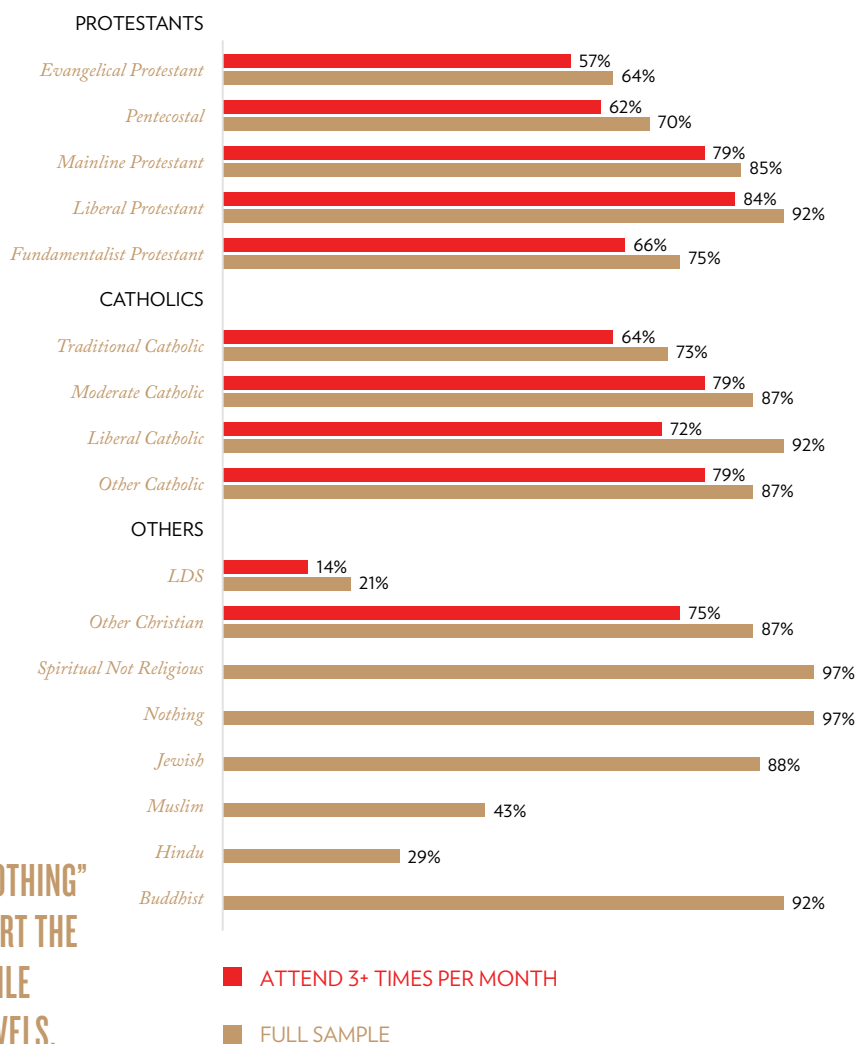
Figure 12.2

Premarital sex, by religious service attendance



Figure 12.3

Premarital sex, by religious affiliation



⁴⁶ Regnerus, Mark. *Forbidden Fruit: Sex & Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers*. Oxford, 2007.

How common are sexually “inactive” marriages?

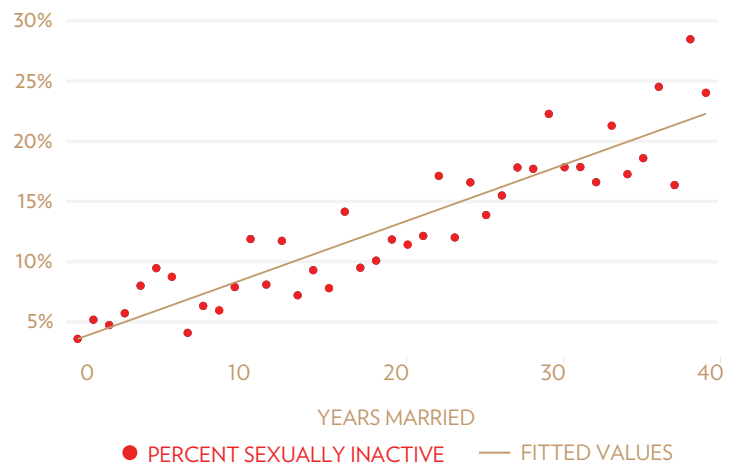
Consistent sex is a normative expectation for most married Americans. A 2007 Pew Survey found that a happy sexual relationship was the second most important predictor of a marital satisfaction, with 70 percent of adults saying it was “very important” for a successful marriage.⁴⁷ Yet *Relationships in America* survey data reveals that a notable minority—12 percent of all married persons ages 18–60—reported *not* having had sex for at least three months prior to participating in the survey.

12 PERCENT OF ALL MARRIED PERSONS AGES 18-60 — REPORTED NOT HAVING HAD SEX FOR AT LEAST THREE MONTHS PRIOR TO PARTICIPATING IN THE SURVEY.

Sexual inactivity is **hardly** a new phenomenon, of course.⁴⁸ In their 1994 landmark study of human sexuality, Edward Laumann and colleagues reported that 1.3 percent of married men and 2.6 percent of married women between the ages of 18 and 59 had not had sex within the past year. In contrast, twenty years later—in the *Relationships in America* data—4.9 percent of married men and 6.5 percent of married women in the same age range report that it has been over a year since they have had sex with their spouse. Although the questions were asked in slightly different manners, it appears that there may have been an uptick in marital sexual inactivity in the past twenty years. The General Social Survey, which has consistently employed the same question since 1989 to determine sexual frequency, confirms this trend (results not shown). But what prompts sexual inactivity in marriage? The

Figure 13.1

Percentage sexually inactive, by years married⁴⁹



⁴⁹Note: Sexually Inactive couples are defined as those who have not had sex for 3 months or more.

presence of children? Age-related sexual disinterest? Or something less relationship-oriented, such as spouses working and living in two different places?

For those whose sexual inactivity is not explained by being in a “commuter” marriage, sociologist Denise Donnelly of Georgia State University **argues** that habituation may be at fault: while sex may be exciting at first, over time one becomes accustomed to sex with a spouse, until eventually what once was exciting is now rather dull.⁴⁹ Such an explanation is also increasingly on the lips of nonmonogamy proponents.⁵⁰ At first glance it would appear that habituation—as measured by length of marriage—may be responsible for sexual inactivity in relationships. Figure 10.1 reveals a tight

⁴⁷ “Modern Marriage.” Pew Research Social & Demographic Trends. July 18, 2007. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

⁴⁸ Laumann, Edward et al. *The social organization of sexuality: Sexual practices in the United States*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994; Donnelly, Denise. “Sexually Inactive Marriages.” *The Journal of Sex Research* 30, no. 2 (1993): 171–179.

⁴⁹ Donnelly, Denise and Burgess, Elisabeth. “The Decision to Remain in an Involuntarily Celibate Relationship.” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 70, no. 2 (2008): 519–535.

⁵⁰ Laslocky, Meghan. “Face it: Monogamy is Unnatural.” June 21, 2013. Retrieved August 19, 2014; Sheff, Elisabeth “The Polyamorists Next Door.” *Psychology Today*. Retrieved August 26, 2014

association between sexual inactivity rates and the length of time a couple has been married. Those who have been married for longer are quite a bit more likely to be sexually inactive. But length of marriage and age are also highly correlated, making it appear as if the length of a marriage is responsible for sexual inactivity, when in fact the age of the respondent may be the culprit. What happens to sexual inactivity among married couples when we account for the effects of age? Older couples are much more likely to be sexually inactive. Older people are more likely to be ill, have **lower energy levels**, and experience decreased testosterone and libido, all of which contribute to decreased sexual activity.⁵¹

RESPONDENTS WHO ARE THE SAME AGE — BUT WHO HAVE BEEN MARRIED LONGER — ARE ACTUALLY LESS LIKELY TO BE SEXUALLY INACTIVE THAN THEIR COMPARABLE-AGE PEERS WHO WERE MARRIED MORE RECENTLY.

For most age groups there is a brief “honeymoon phase” where sexual inactivity levels are lower for those who haven’t been married for long, but then increase sharply for those married a few years. However, after the first few years of marriage,

sexual inactivity levels off (or trends downward), meaning that those respondents who are the same age—but who have been married longer—are actually *less* likely to be sexually inactive than their comparable-age peers who were married more recently. When we account for the effects of age, we actually see a *positive* correlation. As length of marriage increases, sexual inactivity decreases.

It’s important to remember that sexually-inactive couples are certainly more likely than sexually-active couples to get divorced (and so be absent from these analyses), deflating the sexual inactivity rates for those who remain married. It isn’t clear if having a longer marriage decreases rates of sexual inactivity, or if sexually-active marriages are simply more likely to last, or both. Either way, with the exception of the first few years, the longer a couple is married, the more likely they are to be sexually active, whether because sexless marriages end, or because couples settle into an established pattern of sex, or both.

⁵¹ Greenblat, Cathy. “The Salience of Sexuality in the Early Years of Marriage.” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 45 (1983): 277-288.

Domestic violence: when given the chance to self-report, what do people say?

Intimate partner violence is a serious public health concern that can have deep and lasting impact on the lives of those affected. Unfortunately, intimate partner violence is not rare, and official reports undercount such offenses since many victims never report them. In the *Relationships in America* survey, 12 percent of women and 10 percent of men say that they have been slapped, punched, bit, scratched or kicked by their *current* romantic partner at least once during their relationship, and four percent of both

12 PERCENT OF WOMEN AND 10 PERCENT OF MEN SAY THAT THEY HAVE BEEN SLAPPED, PUNCHED, BIT, SCRATCHED OR KICKED BY THEIR CURRENT ROMANTIC PARTNER AT LEAST ONCE DURING THEIR RELATIONSHIP.

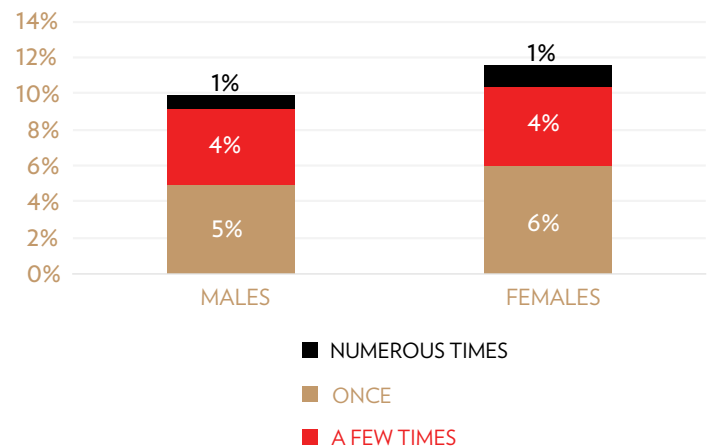
men and women say it has happened “a few times,” while one percent of both men and women report they have been a victim of such abuse “numerous times.” These numbers nevertheless represent an undercount of those who have ever experienced physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner, since they do not count abusive relationships that end (since the measure only concerns *current* relationships).

When we asked divorcees about their reasons for wanting a divorce, an alarming 21 percent of women and eight (8) percent of men say that physical

21 PERCENT OF WOMEN AND EIGHT (8) PERCENT OF MEN SAY THAT PHYSICAL VIOLENCE WAS AT LEAST ONE OF THE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS IN THEIR DIVORCE.

Figure 14.1

Frequency of physical violence victimization in current relationship, by gender



violence was at least one of the contributing factors in their divorce, suggesting that while physical violence is present in a minority of intact relationships, for women it is more common in past relationships (in this case, marriages).

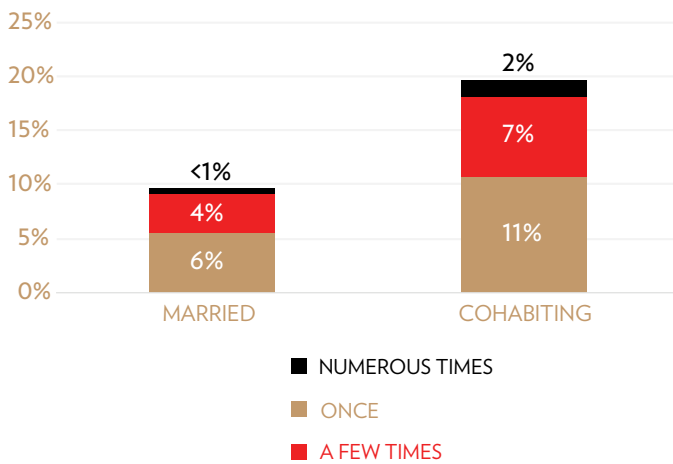
Stereotypes about men initiating violence against their intimate partners are prevalent. While numerous studies⁵² have noted that men are the perpetrators of the majority of domestic abuse, intimate partner violence is not exclusively a women’s issue. Nearly 1 in 10 partnered men reports having experienced violence at the hands of their *current* partner. However, resources are often less available for male victims of domestic violence. One study even found that male victims of domestic violence who sought help were more likely to be arrested than the perpetrator of the violence.⁵³

⁵² Tjaden, Patricia and Thoennes, Nancy. “Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey.” National Institute of Justice. 2000. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

⁵³ Douglas, Emily and Hines, Denise. “The Helpseeking Experiences of Men Who Sustain Intimate Partner Violence: An Overlooked Population and Implications for Practice.” *Journal of Family Violence* 26, no. 6 (2011): 473-485.

Figure 14.2

Number of times a victim of physical violence in a current relationship, by marital status



Brad Wilcox, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Virginia and director of the National Marriage Project, created some controversy in June 2014 when he published an **opinion** in the *Washington Post* noting that rates of domestic violence against both women and their children are lower for married women than for those who cohabit.⁵⁴ When we evaluated his statement with *RLA* data, we found support for Wilcox’s assertion. In their current relationship, cohabiting women are far more likely to report violence than their married peers. Twice as many say they have been victims at least once in their current relationship (20 percent vs. 10 percent). Cohabiting women are also twice as likely to say they have been victims “a few times” (7.4 percent vs. 3.6 percent), and three times as likely to be routinely victimized (1.6 percent vs. 0.5 percent).

Wilcox’s critics say that marriage may not be a panacea, because those who marry tend to be better educated and have more material resources, each of which reduces personal risk of domestic abuse. In other words, some assert that marriage may not reduce abuse, but that those kinds of people who get married are less prone to abuse—or less apt to tolerate abuse—than those who cohabit. While it’s beyond the scope

of cross-sectional data to answer such questions of “social selectivity,” it is clear that women are more likely to experience abuse in cohabiting relationships than in marital ones. Experiences in childhood can have a profound impact on the likelihood of tolerating physical violence in adulthood. Although the survey did not inquire about respondents’ exposure to domestic violence during their childhood, it is clear that negative family *experiences* in childhood predict higher likelihood of currently being in a relationship in which one has been a victim of intimate partner violence. Reporting a warm, close relationship with your mother and a loving atmosphere in the home as a child are both associated with lower rates of being a victim of domestic violence perpetrated by one’s current partner. Meanwhile, reporting that one’s family relationships as a child were “confusing, inconsistent or unpredictable,” or that matters from family experience are still “difficult to come to terms with” predict higher rates of experiencing intimate partner violence.

It may be the case that those who come from broken homes or confusing familial relationships have fewer resources, and may be less able to escape domestic violence once it begins because of financial dependence on an intimate partner. Perhaps, but when we account for the effects of education, household income, race, age and gender, we still find that those who report bad childhood experiences such as those noted above are more likely to be in a relationship that has involved physical violence.

While the present data is insufficient to make strong claims on the matter, we can say that those who had worse childhood experiences are more likely to experience domestic violence in their current relationships. Further research should focus on mechanisms that might underlie this link.

⁵⁴ Wilcox, Bradford and Wilson, Robin. “**One Way to End Violence Against Women? Married Dads.**” *The Washington Post*. June 10, 2014. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

Who self-reports sexual assault?

In response to rising reports of sexual assault on America's college campuses, President Obama established the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. The president's January 2014 push to curb sexual violence brought the issue back into the public eye as universities and government institutions wrestled with how to prevent and effectively respond to sexual assault. Legislation is pending (in late summer 2014) that would mandate American colleges and universities to both collect and report sexual assault data from their students. The matter is a serious one.

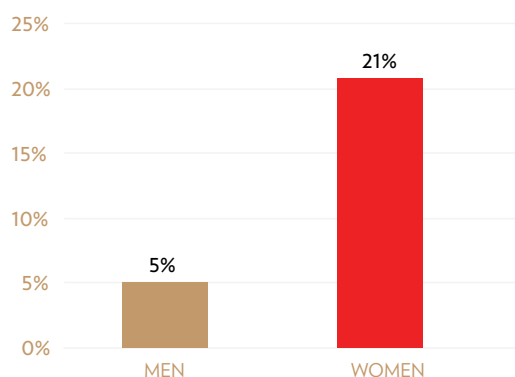
Tragically, sexual assault is not rare. In the *Relationships in America* survey data, one in five women as well as one of every twenty men report having ever been physically forced to engage in some sort of sexual activity. Women from all walks of life are affected: white, black, and Latino women report statistically indistinguishable rates of forced sex, as do women living in urban and rural communities.

While the administration's new task force focuses on America's college students, women who have graduated with a bachelor's degree are actually *less* likely to have been victims of forced sexual activity than their less-educated peers. Sexual violence and its emotional aftermath may derail some women from earning a college degree, which may explain in part the

IT APPEARS THAT COLLEGE CAMPUSES ARE NO MORE DANGEROUS FOR WOMEN THAN NOT GOING TO COLLEGE.

Figure 15.1

Percent physically forced to have sex, by gender



higher rates of sexual assault among those who have finished “some college” education compared to women who have completed their bachelor's degrees, but it appears that college campuses are no more dangerous for women than not going to college (see Figure 15.2).

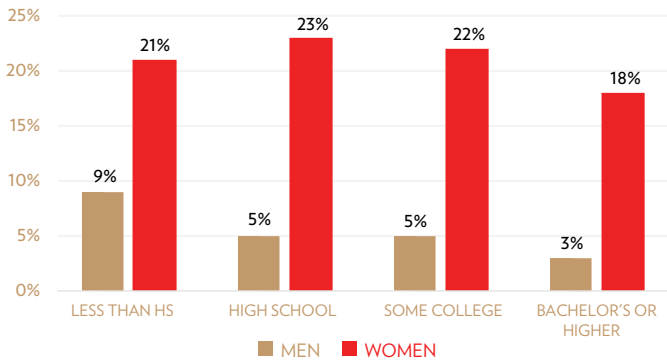
Men who do not complete high school are at especially high risk for sexual violence when compared with other men, perhaps an artifact of their higher than average **incarceration rates**, and the prevalence of sexual assault in prison populations.⁵⁵

Victims of sexual assault face a host of difficulties. Among their hardships, victims are much more likely than non-victims to be on depression or anxiety medication (27 percent vs. 11 percent), to report being in counseling or therapy (14 percent vs. 5 percent), to report lower levels of (current)

⁵⁵ Sum, Andrew et al. “The Consequences of Dropping out of High School.” Northeastern University Center for Labor Market Studies. October, 2009.

Figure 15.2

Percent physically forced to have sex, by educational attainment



relationship happiness, and are more likely to be unhappy with life in general (20 percent vs. 10 percent). While sexual assault is difficult for anyone to recover from, those with lower levels of education show markedly worse outcomes in terms of depression and life satisfaction, and are more likely to have never had counseling or therapy than victims with a bachelor's degree (results not shown).

ADDRESSING SEXUAL ASSAULT ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES IS A GOOD PLACE TO START, BUT IF OUR NATION IS TO BE FREE FROM VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ABUSE, EFFORTS TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE MUST EXTEND FURTHER THAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

Our analysis reveals that sexual assault is a problem for women in all walks of life, of all races, all education levels, and in urban or rural areas. Addressing sexual assault on college campuses is a good place to start, but if our nation is to be free from violence and sexual abuse, efforts to prevent sexual violence must extend further than institutions of higher education.

Who's more interested in marrying—men or women?

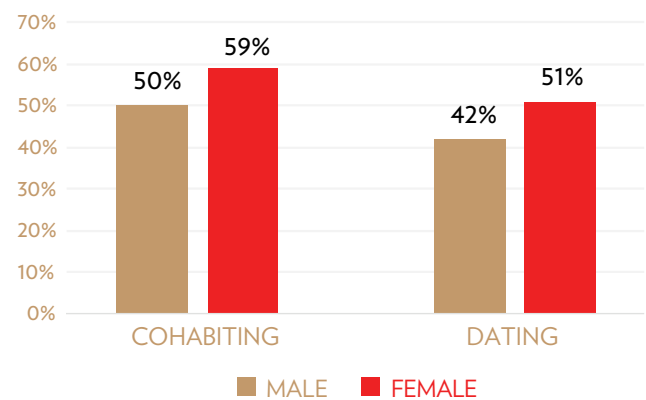
Despite the ongoing cultural conflict over marriage, most American adults still value the institution, and consider it an important part of a life well lived. While marriage is an eventual goal for most, it is not always an immediate goal. A 2012 survey conducted by Pew Research found that nearly equal numbers of men and women (83 percent and 84 percent, respectively) said that having a successful marriage was “one of the most important things,” or “very important” in their lives.⁵⁶ But when we asked those who were *not* currently married if they would prefer to be married, just 47 percent of people said yes. Women were slightly more likely to say yes than men: 59 percent of cohabiting women and 51 percent of dating women (who were not cohabiting) said so, compared to 50 percent of cohabiting men and 42 percent of dating men. While the vast majority of unmarried adults desire eventual marriage, a large percentage of them appear to be in no particular hurry.

Whether or not someone prefers to be married can have much to do with the way they feel about their current relationship. So we asked heterosexual respondents who are cohabiting or dating if they or their partner is more interested in getting married. Thirty-four (34) percent of cohabiters and 26 percent of those who were dating said that both partners are equally interested in marriage, while 13 percent of each said that they were both equally disinterested in marriage.

However, one in three respondents expressed that their level of enthusiasm for marriage did not align with that of their current partner. In these cases, are (heterosexual) men or women more likely to want to get married?

Figure 16.1

Percent preferring to be married, by gender and relationship status



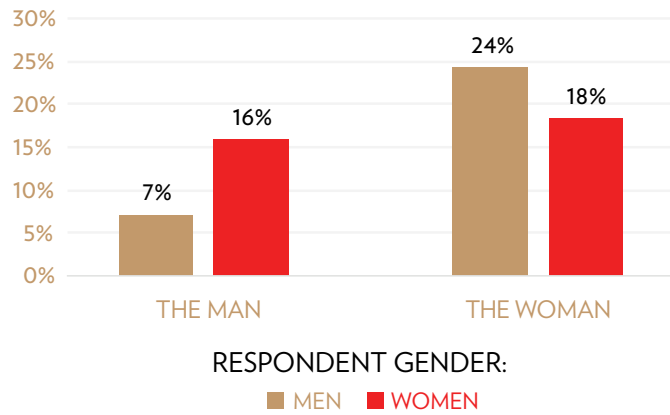
Women report little gender distinction in who they believe desires marriage more: 18 percent of women report they want to get married *more* than their partner, while 16 percent report that their partner wants to get married more than they do. Men, on the other hand, perceive things quite differently. Only seven (7) percent of men believe *they* are more interested in marrying, but 24 percent—over three times as many—believe that their partner is the more interested party.

ONLY SEVEN (7) PERCENT OF MEN BELIEVE THEY ARE MORE INTERESTED IN MARRYING, BUT 24 PERCENT—OVER THREE TIMES AS MANY—BELIEVE THAT THEIR PARTNER IS THE MORE INTERESTED PARTY.

⁵⁶ Patten, Eileen and Parker, Kim. “A Gender Reversal on Career Aspirations.” Pew Research Social & Demographic Trends. April 19, 2012. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

Figure 16.2

Who is more interested in getting married (heterosexual respondents)



Why the gender disparity in perceptions? It could be as simple as men are less likely to want to get married and that their girlfriends overestimate their enthusiasm. It may be, however, that men downplay their interest in getting married (on surveys), or that men and women are both poor judges of the level of enthusiasm of their partners for marriage. All we can state for sure is that men perceive women as more interested in marriage, but the data doesn't really suggest that their perceptions are correct.

Who thinks of leaving their marriage more—men or women?

Since the 1970s, the share of Americans who eventually leave their marriages has hovered between 40 and 50 percent. The *Relationships in America* survey sample includes nearly 4,000 ever-divorced adults ages 18-60, and assessed how couples think about—then actually *do*—separate and divorce, as well as who wants out of their marriage more. What did we learn?

First, women are more prone than men to report discontent in marriage. Twenty percent of married women, and thirteen percent of married men, report having thought about leaving their spouse within the past year (compared to 41 percent of cohabiting women and 26 percent of cohabiting men).

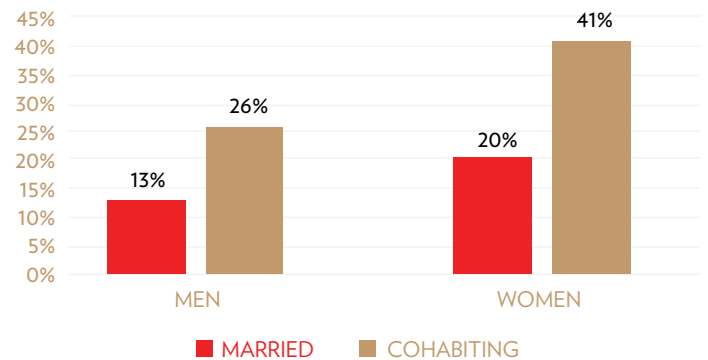
TWENTY PERCENT OF MARRIED WOMEN, AND THIRTEEN PERCENT OF MARRIED MEN, REPORT HAVING THOUGHT ABOUT LEAVING THEIR SPOUSE WITHIN THE PAST YEAR.

However, thoughts about separating—or conversations with one’s spouse or partner about it—do not signify that a relationship is over. While separated persons make up only two percent of the overall sample, 13 percent of married respondents report having talked about separating (within the past year) but so far have elected not to do so.

Across 25 data sets and over 125 years, wives are consistently more likely to *file* for divorce than husbands.⁵⁷ These results are remarkably resistant to the time period of the data, which is surprising since economic opportunities for women have

Figure 17.1

Percent who thought about leaving spouse/partner past year, by gender and marital status



WIVES ARE CONSISTENTLY MORE LIKELY TO FILE FOR DIVORCE THAN HUSBANDS.

expanded dramatically—giving women more outside options—and divorce laws have been altered, typically in their favor.

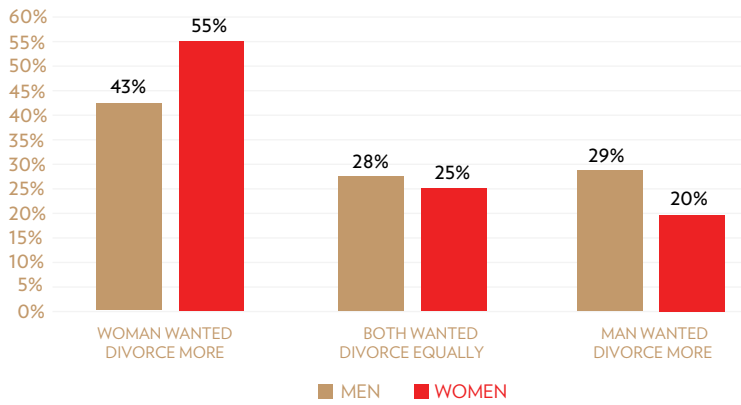
In consonance with previous work on the question, the *Relationships in America* study reveals that women remain far more likely to want out of their marriages than men: among divorcees, 55 percent of women said they wanted their

AMONG DIVORCEES, 55 PERCENT OF WOMEN SAID THEY WANTED THEIR MARRIAGES TO END MORE THAN THEIR SPOUSES WHILE ONLY 29 PERCENT OF MEN REPORTED THE SAME.

⁵⁷ PBrinig, Margaret and Allen, Douglas. “These Boots are Made for Walking’: Why Most Divorce Filers are Women.” *American Law and Economics Review* 2, no. 1 (2000): 126-169.

Figure 17.2

Perceptions of desire for divorce, by gender



marriages to end *more* than their spouses while only 29 percent of men reported the same. And the gap is not due to gender differences in perception: 43 percent of men report that their spouse wanted the marriage to end more than they did, but only 20 percent of women said the same. Both men and women's perceptions converge here—they agree that the majority of the time the wife wanted a divorce more than the husband.

What reasons do divorcees offer for leaving?

A decision to divorce is seldom uncomplicated, and often involves numerous factors and criteria. The *Relationships in America* survey presented respondents with 17 distinct reasons commonly cited for pursuing divorce (plus a catch-all “other reason” category). Sixty-six (66) percent of those divorcees who wanted the divorce as much as or more than their spouse selected more than one of those 17 reasons for pursuing the divorce, while one in four offered five or more reasons. The most-cited reasons for wanting a divorce were, by order of frequency:

- **INFIDELITY BY EITHER PARTY: 37 PERCENT⁵⁸**
- **SPOUSE UNRESPONSIVE TO NEEDS: 32 PERCENT**
- **GREW TIRED OF MAKING A POOR MATCH WORK: 30 PERCENT**
- **SPOUSE'S IMMATURITY: 30 PERCENT**
- **EMOTIONAL ABUSE: 29 PERCENT**
- **DIFFERENT FINANCIAL PRIORITIES/SPENDING PATTERNS: 24 PERCENT**
- **ALCOHOL AND/OR DRUG ABUSE: 23 PERCENT**

Moreover, some popular claims about causes of divorce exhibited comparatively fewer responses than might have been anticipated, including pornography use (5 percent), and persistent religious or cultural differences (5 percent). This is not to say that pornography usage was not a factor in creating other relationship issues, but rather that despite emerging news stories to the contrary⁵⁹, few divorcees identified pornography as the source of their relationship troubles. And

the 17 reasons offered captured most respondents: only nine percent also checked “some other reason.”

Men and women differ notably in their reasons for wanting a divorce. Women are far more likely to cite emotional abuse (37 vs. 13 percent), physical abuse (21 vs. 8 percent), their spouse’s pornography usage (7 vs. 1 percent), and alcohol or drug problems (29 vs. 14 percent). Men are slightly more likely than women to cite marrying too young (24 vs. 18 percent). Overall, women cited *more* reasons than men.

The top five reasons listed by men were:

- **GREW TIRED OF MAKING A POOR MATCH WORK: 32 PERCENT**
- **SPOUSE'S ROMANTIC OR SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH SOMEONE ELSE: 30 PERCENT**
- **SPOUSE UNRESPONSIVE TO NEEDS: 30 PERCENT**
- **SPOUSE'S IMMATURITY: 28 PERCENT**
- **VERY DIFFERENT FINANCIAL PRIORITIES OR SPENDING PATTERNS: 24 PERCENT**

And the top five reasons offered by women were:

- **EMOTIONAL ABUSE: 37 PERCENT**
- **SPOUSE UNRESPONSIVE TO NEEDS: 34 PERCENT**
- **SPOUSE'S IMMATURITY: 31 PERCENT**
- **ALCOHOL OR DRUG USE PATTERNS: 29 PERCENT**
- **GREW TIRED OF MAKING A POOR MATCH WORK: 29 PERCENT**

⁵⁸ 28 percent of people listed their spouse’s romantic or sexual relationship with someone else as the reason while 11 percent listed their own relationship and 3 percent listed both their own and their spouse’s extramarital relationship as reasons for their divorce totaling in whole 37 percent of people who listed either their own or their spouse’s extramarital relationship as a reason.

⁵⁹ “National Review: Getting Serious on Pornography.” National Public Radio. March 31, 2010. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

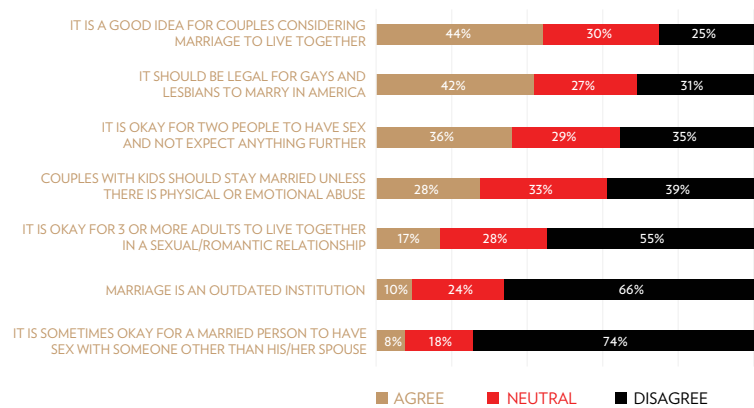
Is marriage outdated? What are Americans attitudes about relationship issues?

In recent decades, the spectrum of socially accepted relationships has expanded. No-fault divorce legislation was enacted in every state (except New York) between 1969 and 1985. More recently, marriages of same-sex couples have received legal recognition in 19 states and the District of Columbia, as of July 2014.⁶⁰ The family law landscape has certainly shifted rather dramatically in the past fifty years, and further changes are being debated in legislatures and courtrooms around the country. Along with legal changes in the structure of relationships, Americans have altered their behavior quite radically. Marriage rates have declined for decades. Divorce rates rose rapidly through the 1960s and 70s before peaking in the 1980s, and have been slowly declining ever since, remaining largely in step with marriage rates. What do Americans think about new forms of intimate relationships? In sections 19 to 25 we discuss these and other issues.

AMERICANS LARGELY ARE MORE SUPPORTIVE (OR TOLERANT) OF COHABITATION, THE LEGAL RECOGNITION OF SAME-SEX UNIONS, AND NO-STRINGS-ATTACHED SEX. ALTHOUGH ONCE POPULAR, STAYING TOGETHER “FOR THE SAKE OF CHILDREN” DOESN’T SEEM TO BE SOUND ADVICE TO MANY AMERICANS. THEY ARE EVEN LESS ENAMORED OF POLYAMOROUS RELATIONSHIPS, THE NOTION THAT MARRIAGE IS OUTDATED, AND THE IDEA THAT ADULTERY MIGHT BE PERMISSIBLE, ON OCCASION.

Figure 19.1

Attitudes about relationships & marriage

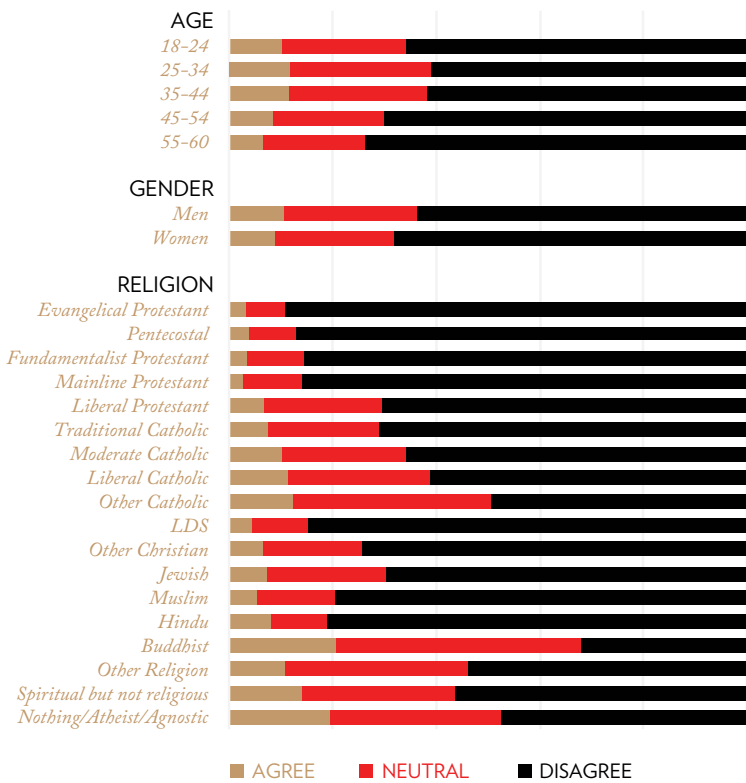


In declining order of enthusiasm, Americans largely are more supportive (or tolerant) of cohabitation, the legal recognition of same-sex unions, and no-strings-attached sex. Although once popular, staying together “for the sake of children” doesn’t seem to be sound advice to many Americans. They are even less enamored of polyamorous relationships, the notion that marriage is outdated, and the idea that adultery might be permissible, on occasion. What is also of note here is how many fence-sitters there are—the share of adults who neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements posed to them. Given time, neutrality in the sphere of family change tends to track in the direction of greater acceptance. But this is not universally the case, or randomly so, and attitude shifts occasionally slow, stop, or even begin to reverse. Let’s take a closer look at each of these seven attitudes in

⁶⁰ “Same Sex Marriage State-by-State,” Pew Research Religion & Public Life Project. June 25, 2014. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

Figure 19.2

Marriage is an outdated institution



complementary roles in the process of discerning and regulating marriage, but their distinctive roles are a subject of increasing disagreement and contest, including between faith traditions. In general, Christians disagree that marriage is outdated, with only small variations between groups. Hindus, Jews, and Muslims are similarly conservative. Buddhists and the religiously unaffiliated tend to be more ambivalent on the issue, but even among them fewer people agree that marriage is outdated than disagree.

In the end, America still likes marriage—however defined—though perhaps not as universally as in the past and a little bit later in the life course.

Sections 19-25. Sections 19-25 show breakdowns of attitudes towards each of these social issues by religious affiliation. Appendix B provides supplementary material that shows the attitudes of those who attend worship services three or more times a month for those religious groups where the sample size is sufficient to make reliable estimates.

Is marriage outdated?

As noted above, marriage rates in the U.S. remain on the decline. Does this signal that Americans perceive marriage as outdated? Perhaps more than before, but Americans are still pretty enamored of marriage. It's hardly antiquated in their minds. Nearly seven times as many adults said marriage is not outdated as said it is (66 percent vs. 10 percent).

Although young Americans are more likely to think marriage is outdated, a majority at every age disagrees, and the differences between age groups do not appear to be substantial.

Historically, most marriages have involved both religious ceremonies as well as state recognition of the union. Church and State have long played

Is no-strings-attached sex OK?

The “hook-up culture” has been the subject of significant controversy in recent years, with pundits arguing that attitudes toward casual sex, especially on college campuses, have become far too lax, while others herald the arrival of less-committed sexual relationships as a sign of liberation and believe concerns about it amount to “moral panic.” Still others either deny its existence altogether or concentrate any concern to the public health consequences of widespread casual sex.⁶¹ To a large degree, traditional dating has indeed been replaced by *something* less clear and obvious to many young adults. College-aged young adults now average more hookups during their college years than they do first dates.⁶² But are Americans generally accepting of the now normative “no strings attached” sexual relationships, or do most think that sex should involve commitment?

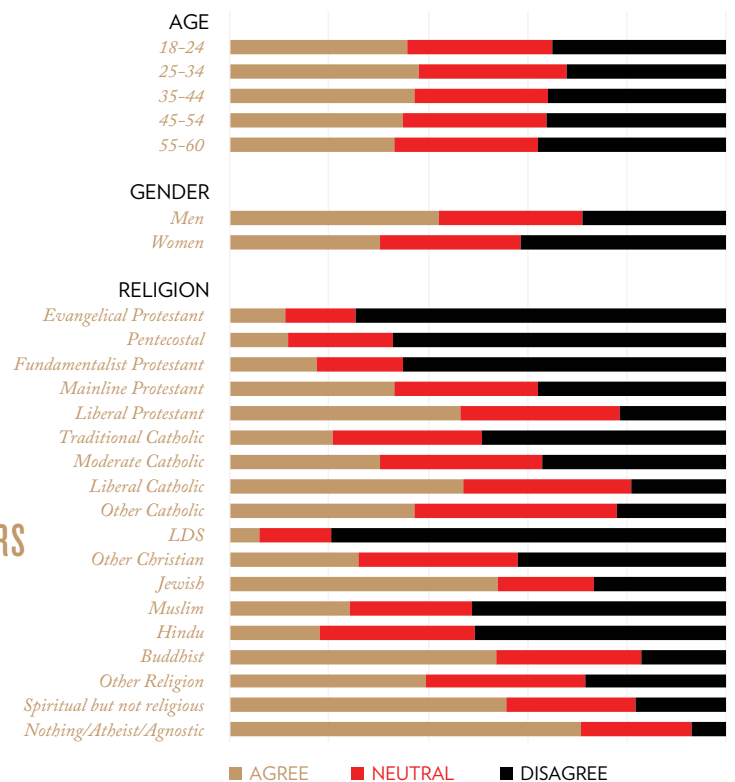
COLLEGE-AGED YOUNG ADULTS NOW AVERAGE MORE HOOKUPS DURING THEIR COLLEGE YEARS THAN THEY DO FIRST DATES.

When we asked Americans if it is okay “for two people to get together for sex and not necessarily expect anything further,” about equal shares agreed and disagreed (36 percent and 35 percent, respectively.) This, of course, leaves plenty of middle ground—people who just aren’t sure. Surprisingly, that neutral crowd was comparable in size *at all age groups*. Indeed, no obvious age effect even appears.

Gender, however, does matter. Men are more likely than women to approve of casual sex (42 percent vs. 30 percent). We expected those of particular religious affiliations to have more qualms about the practice because of their faith’s doctrine on sexuality, and we find this to be the case. Mormons (80 percent of all Mormons and 89% of those who

Figure 20.1

“It is OK for two people to get together for sex and not expect anything further.”



attend church three times a month or more (See Figure 20.1B in Appendix B)) oppose casual sex the most, while Jewish respondents (54 percent) are the most tolerant of all religious groups. Approval rates for casual sex are highest among those who claim no religious affiliation, with 71 percent of those who say their religious affiliation is “Nothing/Atheist/Agnostic” approving of no-strings-attached sex.

⁶¹ Yglesias, Matthew. “Who Will Save College Students from the Scourge of Doomed Campus Relationships?” Slate, July 16, 2013. Retrieved August 26, 2014; Armstrong, Elizabeth et al. “Is Hooking Up Bad for Young Women?” *The Contexts* 9, no. 3 (2010).

⁶² Garcia, Justin et al. “Sexual Hookup Culture: A Review.” *Review of General Psychology* 16, no. 2 (2012): 161-176.

Is cohabitation a good idea for couples considering marriage?

In step with a stumbling marriage rate, the share of Americans who are cohabiting is rising, leading some to speculate that cohabitation is both normal—which it is, statistically—and largely poised to replace marriage (which it’s unlikely to do). What exactly do Americans think about living together?

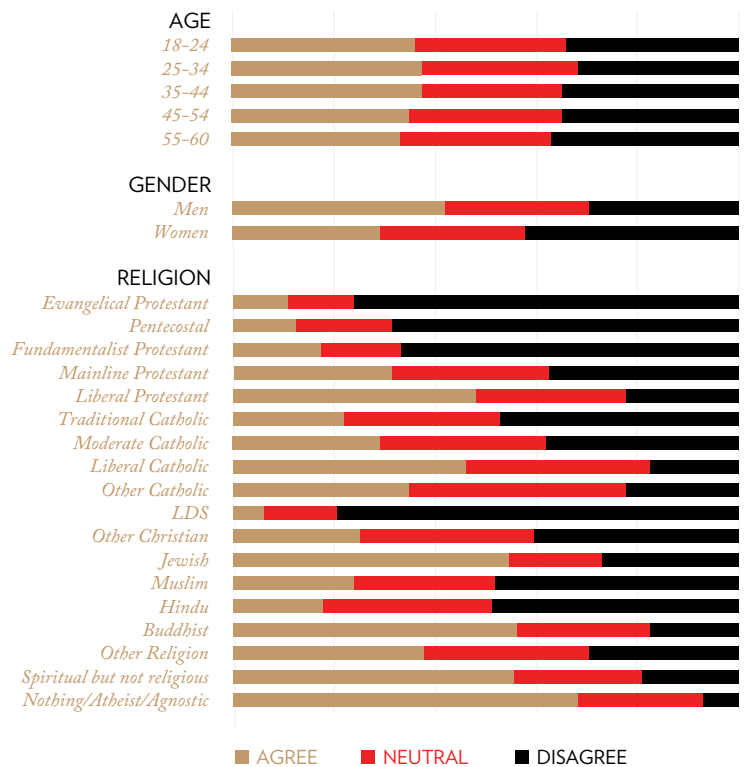
Most either approve or remain neutral on the wisdom of cohabiting before marriage. Forty-four percent of Americans agree (or strongly agree) that “it is a good idea for couples

FORTY-FOUR PERCENT OF AMERICANS AGREE (OR STRONGLY AGREE) THAT “IT IS A GOOD IDEA FOR COUPLES CONSIDERING MARRIAGE TO LIVE TOGETHER IN ORDER TO DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT THEY GET ALONG WELL ENOUGH TO BE MARRIED.”

considering marriage to live together in order to decide whether or not they get along well enough to be married.” A little over half as many (25 percent) disagree. Older Americans are predictably less likely to approve, but the generational gap in support is smaller than most might expect. Religious affiliation plays a significant role in how cohabitation is perceived. Both Mormons (76 percent) and Muslims (56 percent) are far more likely to disagree than agree. Protestants are split nearly down the middle, with slightly more disapproving, although more conservative Protestant groups such as Evangelicals and Pentecostals are decidedly opposed to cohabitation. Catholics are on the opposite end with twice as many who think cohabitation is a good idea as those who do not. Even “traditional” Catholics are split on the subject. Meanwhile, Buddhists and the

Figure 21.1

Cohabitation is a good idea for couples considering marriage



religiously unaffiliated are least likely to express opposition to cohabitation and report high levels of support. So while marriage is not outdated, older ways of arriving there sure seem to be.

Should couples stay together for the sake of the kids?

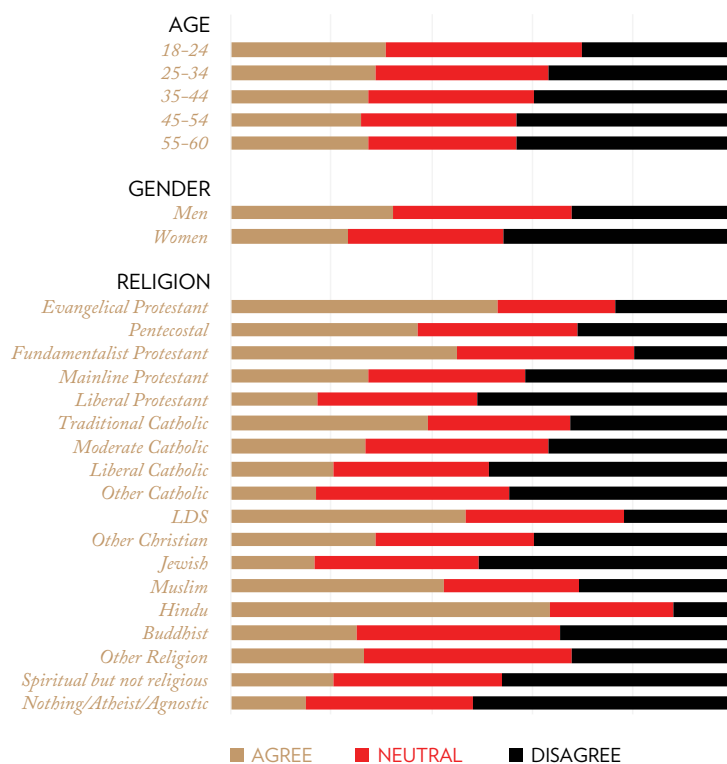
Remaining in an unhappy marriage “for the sake of the kids” is an historically common mantra and practice as many parents believe—not without good reasons—that children are better off being raised in stable families with married parents. Debate remains, however, over whether staying together in an unhappy marriage benefits children, or if prolonged exposure to parental unhappiness harms them.⁶³ We’re not able to address the costs and benefits of sticking together for the sake of the children; rather, we’re only documenting Americans’ opinions about the issue (absent a particular context or example). We asked people how much they agreed with the statement “If a couple has children they should stay married unless there is physical or emotional abuse.”

Americans are split—no surprise there. Just under 40 percent disagreed, while 28 percent agreed, and one-third were on the fence. Younger people are slightly more likely to say couples should stay together than are older Americans, although the differences are not profound. Meanwhile, men are more likely than women to say that staying together is the right thing to do.

Religious groups vary widely in their beliefs about the acceptability of these terms for divorce. Many Christian faiths have strong objections to divorce and believe that divorce ought to be a last resort for those whose spouses are guilty of serious offenses. Other faith traditions have more lenient guidelines (and no doctrines) about the acceptability of divorce. Yet American believers in almost every religion are split as to whether having children exerts a moral imperative on couples to stay married in the absence of serious abuse. Hindus are squarely in support of sticking together—64

Figure 22.1

Married couples with children should stay married



percent say they should. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Jews are the least likely to report that couples ought to stick it out—just 17 percent say they should. Most other faiths are divided here, with substantial portions of their ranks on either side of the issue. Meanwhile, the religiously unaffiliated are far more likely than their affiliated peers to believe that the presence of children does not obligate couples to stay together.

⁶³ “As Marriage and Parenthood Drift Apart, Public is Concerned about Social Impact.” Pew Research Centers Social Demographic Trends Project. July 1, 2007. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

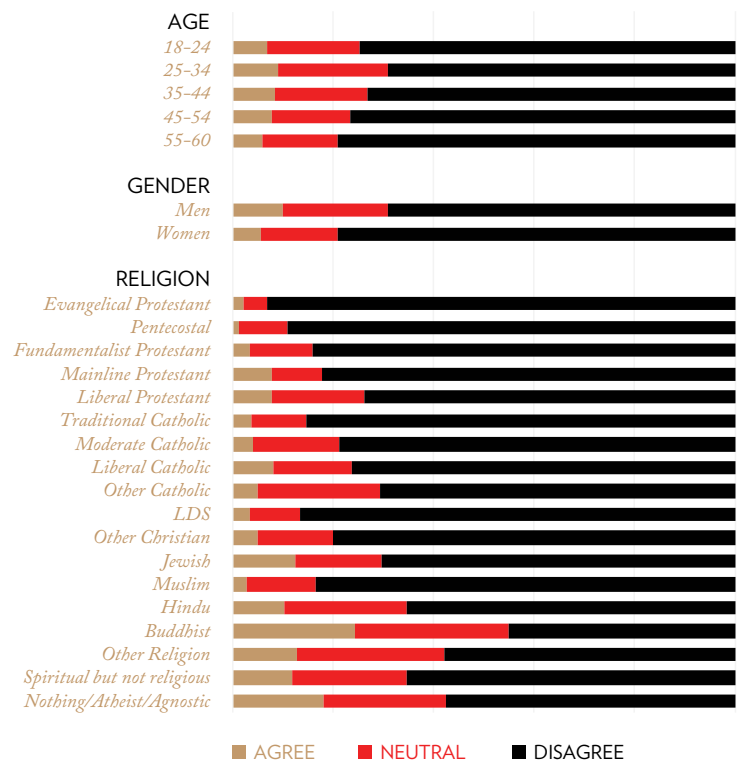
Is marital infidelity still off limits?

While Americans are split on casual sex, the vast majority (74 percent) disagree that it could be OK for a married person to have sex with someone other than their spouse. That estimate should not indicate that 26 percent think it's OK to cheat; most of those who did not clearly disagree said they weren't sure. Very few Americans openly agree with the statement. Age seems to matter little here. Men are only slightly more likely than women to be tolerant of the idea of extramarital dalliances. Predictably, there is very little support for extramarital sex among religious Americans. In fact for every religious group except Buddhists, and among the religiously unaffiliated, a majority disagree that extramarital sex is acceptable. Nearly 20 percent of liberal Protestants and liberal Catholics agreed that extramarital sex might be OK, while nearly 30 percent of spiritual-but-not-religious persons did so. The highest rates come from Buddhists and agnostic/atheist/ nothing, at just over and just under 40 percent, respectively.

Although recent trends have tracked toward greater sexual liberation and more permissive sexual attitudes, Americans still largely disapprove of married persons straying.

Figure 23.1

It is sometimes permissible for a married person to have sex with someone other than his/her spouse



⁶³ "As Marriage and Parenthood Drift Apart, Public is Concerned about Social Impact." Pew Research Centers Social Demographic Trends Project. July 1, 2007. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

Should same-sex marriage be legal?

Debates about same-sex marriage continue to saturate the airwaves, blogosphere, and print news. Polls differ in their findings about the level of support for same-sex marriage, but most that track attitudes over time find that support for same-sex marriage is on the rise.⁶⁴ In the *Relationships in America* survey, 42 percent of American adults believe same-sex marriage should be legal, while 31 percent express opposition and 29 percent “neither agree nor disagree” that same-sex marriage should be legal.

42 PERCENT OF AMERICAN ADULTS BELIEVE SAME-SEX MARRIAGE SHOULD BE LEGAL, WHILE 31 PERCENT EXPRESS OPPOSITION AND 29 PERCENT “NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE”.

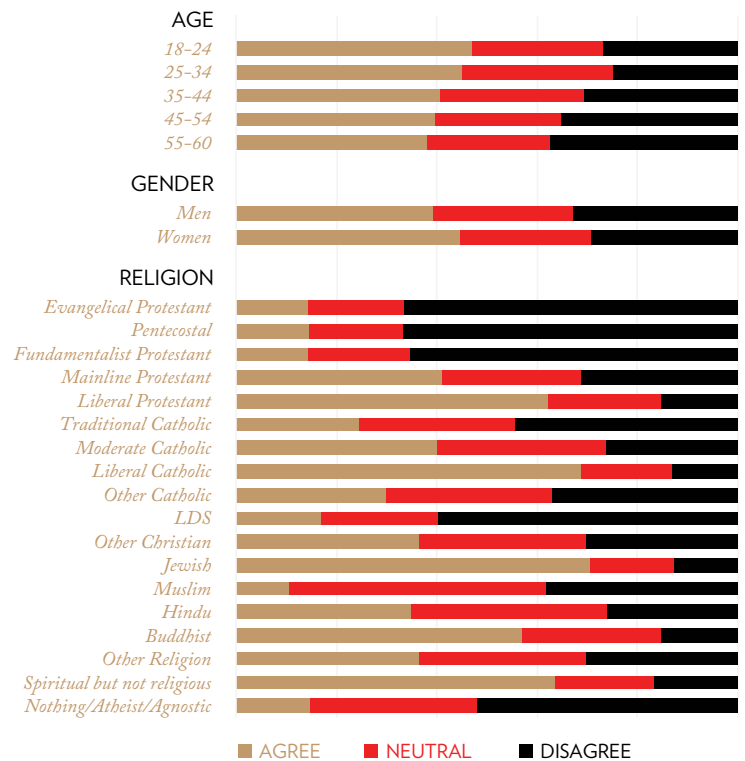
Thus while supporters outnumber opponents, supporters may not yet constitute a majority given the significant share of ambivalent Americans.

Millennials are slightly more likely to support legalizing same-sex marriage than their parents’ generation, and quite a bit less likely to express opposition.

Much of the opposition to same-sex marriage is perceived to come from religious groups. While adherents to most major religious faiths are less likely to support same-sex marriage than their unaffiliated peers, this does not mean that religious adherents are united in their opposition. Evangelicals largely oppose same-sex marriage with two-thirds of all Evangelicals saying they do not think it should be legal, and 74 percent of those who attend church regularly saying the same (See Appendix B). Pentecostals and Fundamentalist Protestants report similar opposition. But Catholics don’t appear quite as

Figure 24.1

It should be legal for gays and lesbians to marry in America



convinced. In fact, more Catholics support same-sex marriage than oppose it, including moderate and liberal Catholics who are regular attenders at worship services (See Figure 24.1B in Appendix B,) despite the official position of the Catholic Church’s magisterium that marriage is “a bond between a man and a woman.”⁶⁵ Buddhists and Jews are solid in their support, on average. Thus while opposition to same-sex marriage is strong among Protestants, Mormons, and other Christians, significant religious minorities support it, as do majorities in several faith traditions.

⁶⁴ “Gay Marriage.” Pew Research Center. February 23, 2014. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

⁶⁵ “Religious Groups’ Official Positions on Same-Sex Marriage.” (2012, December 7). Pew Research Centers Religion Public Life Project. December 7, 2012. Retrieved August 26, 2014.

Are Americans open to polyamory?

Polyamory is having a cultural moment. Popular television series like TLC's *Sister Wives*, Showtime's *Polyamory: Married and Dating*, and USA's *Satisfaction* all draw sizeable audiences as they follow polyamorous storylines (or real couples).

One can get the impression that polyamory is exploding in popularity, but so far it's only on television. Many

ONE CAN GET THE IMPRESSION THAT POLYAMORY IS EXPLODING IN POPULARITY, BUT SO FAR IT'S ONLY ON TELEVISION.

real-life polyamorous couples remain unwilling to talk about their relationships because of the stigma attached to polyamory. Indeed, most Americans still disapprove of polyamorous arrangements. Overall a slight majority (55 percent) of Americans outright disapproves of polyamorous arrangements, while only about 1 in 6 (17 percent) thinks a polyamorous lifestyle is acceptable.

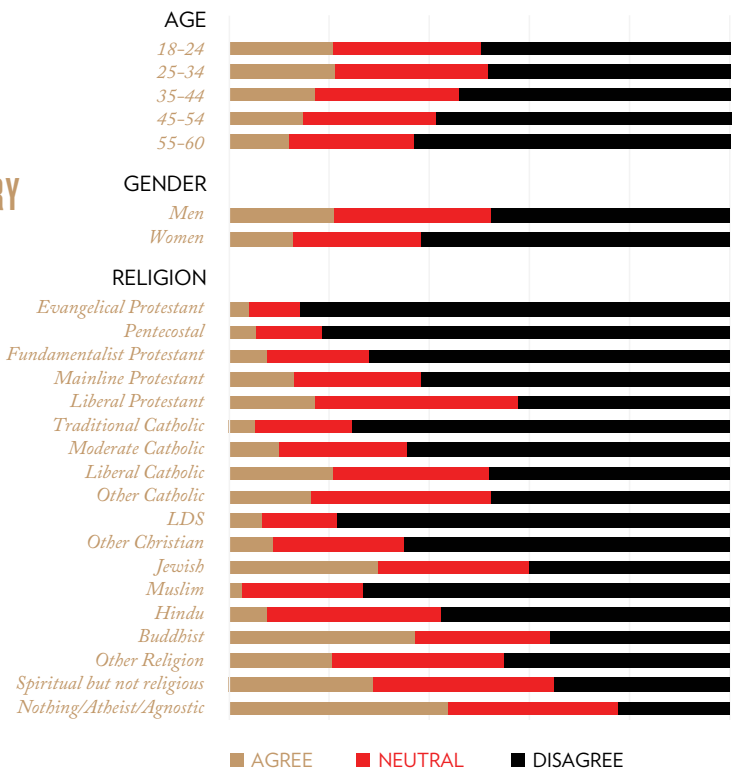
ONLY ABOUT 1 IN 6 (17 PERCENT) THINKS A POLYAMOROUS LIFESTYLE IS ACCEPTABLE.

Men are notably more apt to approve of polyamory than women (21 percent vs. 13 percent), and younger people are more likely to approve than their parents' generation. And yet solid majorities remain opposed.

Christians of all types and Hindus largely oppose polyamory, although substantial minorities among Mainline and Liberal Protestants as well as Liberal Catholics are accepting of polyamory. Regular churchgoers among them are less likely to be accepting of polyamory, but rates of acceptance still exceed those of more conservative Protestants and Traditional

Figure 25.1

Is it OK for three or more consenting adults to live together in a sexual/romantic relationship



Catholics (See Appendix B). Although polygamy (but not polyandry) is permissible under Islam, the vast majority of Muslims disapproved of romantic and sexual unions involving three or more consenting adults. Jews and Buddhists are split on the issue with substantial numbers on both sides, while those who report no religious affiliation are the most likely (at 44 percent) to think polyamorous relationships are OK.

Conclusion

For many Americans, healthy relationships are the foundations upon which they build happy and productive lives. Because of the central role that romantic relationships play in the lives of so many Americans, it is imperative that we undertake a systematic study of relationships to uncover those factors that make for thriving and flourishing relationships and families. We believe that flourishing families and relationships will lead to flourishing societies. On the other hand, faltering families and relationships have the potential to greatly deter personal and societal flourishing.

Although much more work needs to be done in this vitally important field, the Relationships in America project represents our attempt to paint an accurate portrait of American adults attitudes about religion, sexuality, and family life, as well as their behaviors in relationships, their experiences with abuse, and their desires for marriage and divorce. We looked at adults' usage of pornography, and examined how many people have overlapping sexual relationships. Certainly there are many more topics that could be covered, but we believe we have created a broad overview of American family and religious life to contextualize much of the important research being done in the areas of marriage, family, sexual behavior, and religious practice.

We invite comments and discussion of our work, and would love to hear from you. We plan to continue the study of these and other topics and invite the reader to sign up for our email updates.



Appendix A: Survey Methodology

The *Relationships in America* Survey is a nationally representative probability sample of 15,738 non-institutionalized adults between the ages of 18 and 60 residing in the United States. The survey was fielded in January and February 2014 by GfK Group, formerly known as Knowledge Networks, a company with a strong record of generating high quality, nationally representative surveys.

GfK recruited the first online research panel that is representative of the entire U.S. population. Panel members are randomly recruited through probability-based sampling, and households are provided with access to the Internet and hardware if needed.

GfK recruits panel members by using address-based sampling methods (formerly GfK relied on random-digit dialing methods). Once household members are recruited for the panel and assigned to a study sample, they are notified by email for survey-taking, or panelists can visit their online member page for survey-taking (instead of being contacted by telephone or postal mail). This allows surveys to be fielded quickly and economically. In addition, this approach reduces the burden placed on respondents, since email notification is less intrusive than telephone calls, and most respondents find answering internet questionnaires more interesting and engaging than being questioned by a telephone interviewer. Furthermore, respondents have the freedom to choose what time of day to complete their assigned survey.

The *Relationships in America* survey was conducted in both English and Spanish. Of those contacted, 62 percent completed the survey. To increase completion rates, GfK

contacted potential respondents three and six days after the survey was fielded to remind them to complete the survey.

In order to correct for biases that may be introduced by non-response, Knowledge Networks provides survey weights so that each sample is representative of the nation as a whole. Appropriate survey weights were used in every estimate in this report, unless otherwise indicated.

In each of the questions asked in the survey, some small fraction of respondents refused to answer the question, or skipped the question. Skip/refusal rates were generally quite low for most questions, and although slightly elevated for other questions, were still quite low for even sensitive questions. Questions about abortion were outliers, often garnering refusal rates above 10 percent. Most questions exhibited fewer than five percent refusals or skips. Such cases were eliminated from analyses of items for which they skipped or refused to answer, unless otherwise indicated.

For additional information about survey methodology, GfK, survey weighting, or to view a copy of the complete survey instrument in English or Spanish should visit the study's [website](#).

Appendix B: Opinion Poll Supplements

Opinion polls that identify only religious affiliation are inherently incomplete. Some religious groups have large numbers of members, but many of them do not attend frequently. Thus any analysis of sentiment on social issues based solely on religious affiliation is incomplete. Figures in Appendix B analyze sentiment on social issues by religious affiliation solely for those who report attending

religious services three times per month or more. This restriction significantly limits sample sizes of non-Christian groups making results for non-Christian groups unreliable. Therefore, results for worship service attenders are presented only for Christian groups, and should be compared to results presented in sections 19-25 of all those who affiliate with specific Christian groups.

Figure 19.2B

“Marriage is an outdated institution” (attend 3+ times per month)

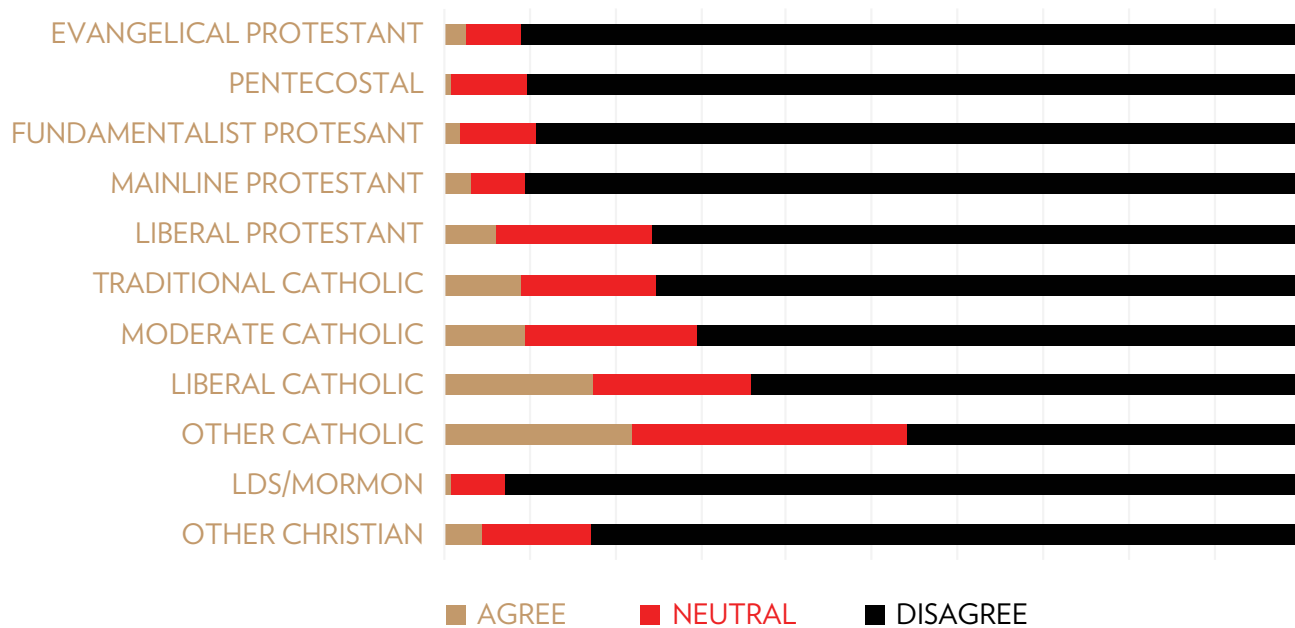


Figure 20.1B

"It is OK for two people to get together for sex and not expect anything further." (attend 3+ times per month)

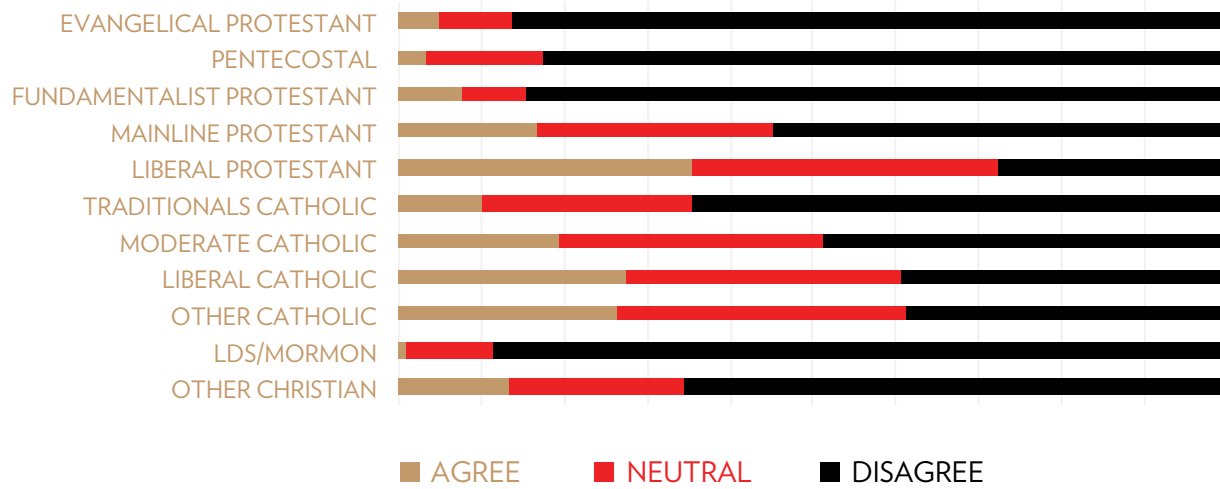


Figure 21.1B

Cohabitation is a good idea for couples considering marriage (attend 3+ times per month)

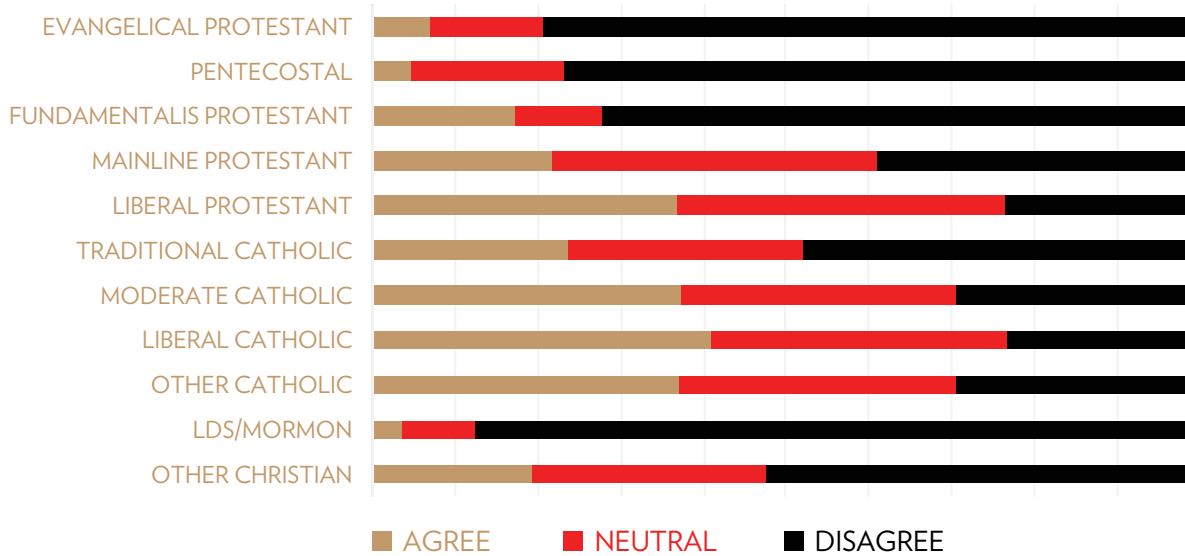


Figure 22.1B

Married couples with children should stay married (attend 3+ times per month)

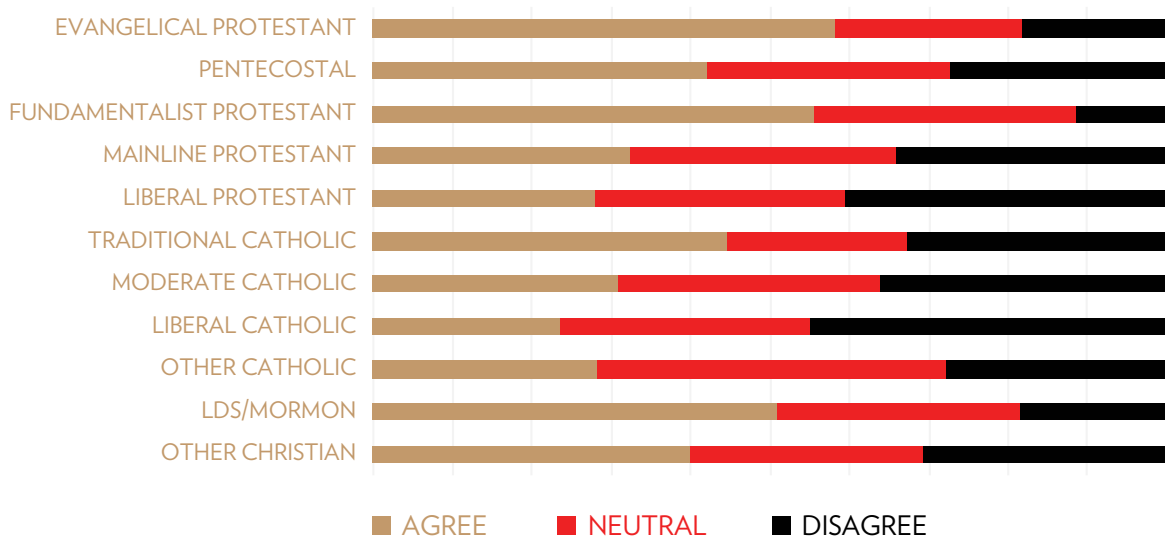


Figure 23.1B

It is sometimes permissible for a married person to have sex with someone other than his/her spouse (attend 3+ times per month)

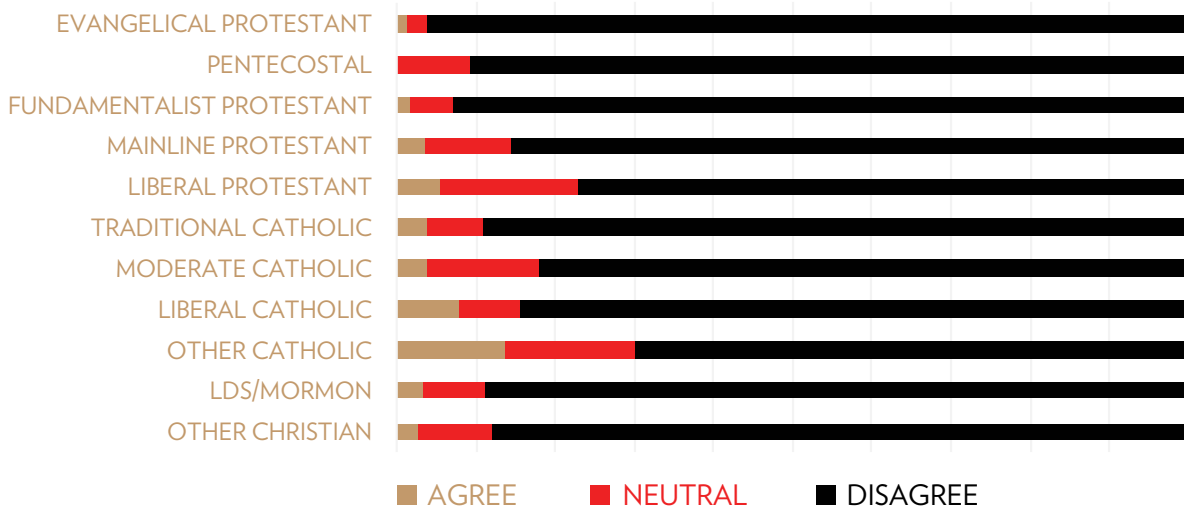


Figure 24.1B

“It should be legal for gays and lesbians to marry in America.” (attend 3+ times per month)

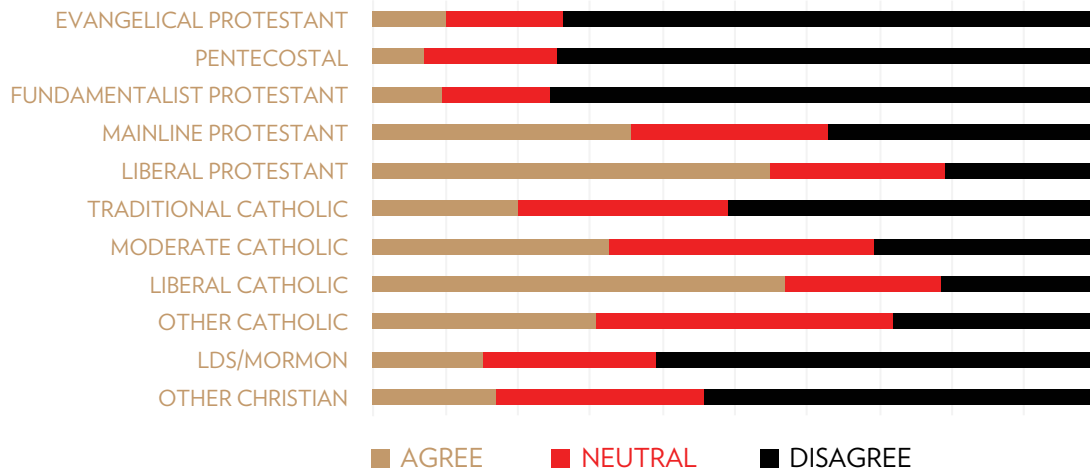


Figure 25.1B

“It is OK for three or more consenting adults to live together in a sexual/romantic relationship.” (attend 3+ times per month)

