

Domains Related to Single/Relationship Status Satisfaction for Sexual Minorities from  
Conservative Religious Backgrounds

### Abstract

Using a sample of 452 sexual minorities from conservative religious backgrounds matched on satisfaction across four single/relationship options, we used multivariate analyses of variance to examine which domains differentiated individuals satisfied in one option from those satisfied in the others. Individuals satisfied being celibate reported less eroticism, more homonegative beliefs, and stronger religiousness and conservative moral values. Sexual minorities satisfied being single but not celibate more often reported being same-sex oriented, valuing eroticism, having homopositive beliefs, being non-religious, and being morally liberal. Sexual minorities satisfied in other-sex (mixed orientation) relationships more often reported a bisexual orientation, homonegative beliefs, children being important, religiousness, and conservative moral values. Those satisfied in same-sex relationships reported being the most same-sex oriented and having more sex-positive and homopositive beliefs, being morally liberal, and placing less importance on religion. These findings suggest that not all people would be equally satisfied in all single/relationship options.

*Keywords:* mixed orientation relationship, celibacy, LGBTQ, sexuality, religion

*Public significance statement:* this study suggests that sexual minorities who are satisfied being celibate, single but not celibate, in other-sex relationships, and in same-sex relationships differ consistently in their sexuality, homopositivity/negativity, religiousness, and importance placed on family.

## Domains Related to Single/Relationship Status Satisfaction for Sexual Minorities from Conservative Religious Backgrounds

Sexual minorities with a conservative religious background often experience intense intrapsychic conflict in their attempts to navigate what they perceive to be competing identities (Crowell, Galliher, Dehlin, & Bradshaw, 2015; Dahl & Galliher 2009; Dehlin, Galliher, Bradshaw, & Crowell, 2015), leading many to seek therapy (Lefevor, Park, & Pedersen, 2018). We define sexual minorities to include individuals who experience some degree of same-sex attraction and identify with a range of labels—including lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB), same-sex attracted (SSA), and heterosexual—or who use no label at all. Counseling psychologists have long been at the forefront of endeavors to promote healthy attitudes toward same-sex sexuality (O’Shaughnessy, 2018; Rosik & Popper, 2014) and discourage ineffective or harmful practices (American Psychological Association [APA], 2009; Beckstead & Morrow, 2004; Bradshaw, Dehlin, Crowell, Galliher, & Bradshaw, 2015; Hancock, Gock & Haldeman, 2012).

When working with sexual minority clients with a conservative religious background, counseling psychologists must often help their clients navigate intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural conflicts between their religious and sexual identities to facilitate authenticity and well-being (Author citation). As sexual minorities from conservative religious backgrounds may have distinct experiences and values from other sexual minorities and religiously conservative individuals, counseling psychologists need to be attuned to the unique challenges, harms, and resilience experienced by these clients (Crenshaw, 1989). Due at least in part to their current or previous religious beliefs, sexual minorities from conservative religions often identify as same-sex attracted instead of LGB and pursue celibacy or other-sex relationships, reporting both satisfaction and health while doing so (Author citation). At the same time, the psychological

literature has largely supported the idea that many sexual minorities find satisfaction and health in challenging stigma, embracing an LGB identity, and engaging in same-sex relationships (Riggle, Rostosky, & Horne, 2010). It is important that counseling psychologists understand under which circumstances individuals are likely to report satisfaction in conservative single/relationship options (i.e., being celibate or in a mixed orientation relationship [MOR]; we use the term “single/relationship option” to denote individuals’ status of being single *or* in a relationship) so that they do not unwittingly perpetuate harms by advising sexual minorities to seek out single/relationship options that they have not made an informed choice to pursue (Beckstead & Morrow, 2004). Intersectional research that engages with sexual minorities from conservative religious backgrounds is needed to address these questions (Crenshaw, 1989).

To this end, we present data examining a sample of 452 sexual minority current or former members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) who reported satisfaction in living in one of four common single/relationship options. In the spirit of promoting client self-determination and avoiding harm, we ask, which domains reliably differentiate individuals satisfied in one single/relationship option from those satisfied in another?

#### **Four Common Single/Relationship Options**

Many conservative religious denominations have explicitly prohibited same-sex relationships and sexual intimacy (Herman, 2007). Although sexual minorities raised in conservative religions often leave their birth religion or congregation for one that affirms same-sex relationships (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2010) or leave religion altogether (Lefevor et al., 2018), some continue to engage with their conservative faith (Dehlin et al., 2015). Those who remain engaged with conservative religions report a variety of reasons for doing so, including maintaining family relationships or community membership, ideological commitment, belief in

the veracity of the religion's teachings, and the positive benefits of religious participation (Barnes & Meyer, 2012; Cranney, 2017).

Maintaining close ties to conservative faith may also lead sexual minorities to describe their sexuality differently and pursue sexual relationships differently than those who are not religiously affiliated (Author citation). There appear to be four common ways that sexual minorities raised in conservative religions pursue relationships: abstaining from sexual relationships (single and celibate), seeking out relationships open to the possibility of sexual activity (single, not celibate), engaging in an other-sex relationship (mixed orientation relationship), and engaging in a same-sex relationship. Although there are differences between groups in health and satisfaction (Dehlin, Galliher, Bradshaw, & Crowell, 2014), a substantial number of individuals report both health and satisfaction in each option (Author citation).

**Single and celibate (SC).** Psychological, spiritual, and social benefits and harms to celibacy vary based on the motivations and characteristics of the individual involved (Freeman-Coppadge, 2018). Some sexual minorities aspire to celibacy to reconcile conflict between their religion and sexuality. Celibacy can be an extremely difficult path, requiring enduring abnegation of sexual desire and may not be feasible for many people. It appears that although some people are able to achieve celibacy for some time, most people are unable to maintain lifelong celibacy (Sipe, 2003). Celibacy appears most commonly to be religiously motivated (Griffin, 2018; Sipe, 2008) and may be most likely to be undertaken successfully when celibate individuals are connected to several communities (including LGBT and conservative Christian communities) and see lust and desire as neutral (as opposed to sinful; Creek, 2013).

**Single and not celibate (SNC).** Other sexual minorities from a conservative religious background are single and seek same- or other- sex sexual experiences. Individuals may be

single and not celibate for a variety of reasons including seeking sexual experiences but not a committed relationship, pursuing but not finding a relationship, and compartmentalizing religious and sexual identities in a way that precludes relationships (Coyle & Rafalin, 2001).

**Mixed-orientation relationships (MOR).** Some sexual minorities from conservative religious backgrounds seek other-sex relationships (i.e., mixed-orientation relationships). At least 2 million people in the U.S. are or have been in mixed-orientation relationships (Buxton, 2001). Individuals report a variety of reasons for entering in MORs including attempts to change sexual orientation, religious observance, conformity to family pressure, and a desire for children (Higgins, 2002; Legerski et al., 2017) as well as a variety of ways of navigating disclosure of same-sex or bisexual orientation (Buxton, 2001; Swan & Benack, 2012; Yarhouse & Seymore, 2006). Both heterosexual and sexual minority partners in MORs have described difficulties in navigating such relationships including accepting their sexuality (for sexual minority partners), not feeling attractive or sexually desired (for heterosexual partners), and difficulty maintaining a fulfilling sexual relationship for both parties (Buxton, 2004; Legerski & Harker, 2017). These difficulties may negatively affect both health and satisfaction (Dehlin et al., 2014) and appear to lead many couples to divorce (Buxton, 2001).

Despite these challenges, there is also evidence that some individuals and couples report both satisfaction and health in MORs (Author citation; Buxton, 2004; Legerski & Harker, 2017). As many MORs are undertaken in the context of shared dedication to religious values, this shared vision may also be responsible for satisfaction and health (Author citation). MORs may be more likely to endure when the sexual minority partner is bisexual, when there are strong extramarital motivations for staying together (e.g., children, faith commitments, finances) and when couples engage in open communication (Hernandez, Schwenke, & Wilson, 2011).

**Same-sex relationships (SSR).** Many sexual minorities from religious backgrounds seek committed same-sex relationships with just over 10% of LGBT adults in the U.S. being married to a same-sex spouse and another 6.6% are living with a same-sex partner (Gallup, 2017). A multitude of studies have examined the mental, emotional and physical health benefits of being in a committed same-sex relationship (Dehlin et al., 2014; Williams, 2003). These studies largely find that a higher proportion of sexual minorities in same-sex relationships report greater health and happiness than individuals in any other single/relationship option. As many conservative religions prohibit same-sex relationships and encourage homonegative messaging (Barnes & Meyer, 2012), individuals in SSRs may be less likely to be religiously affiliated (Dehlin et al., 2014) or motivated by conservative values.

### **Domains to Consider**

Although we know that some people find health and satisfaction in each of these single/relationship options (Author citation), it is unclear what makes individuals more likely to find satisfaction in one option relative to another. In his grounded theory of sexual minorities with a conservative religious background, Beckstead (2001) identified several domains thought to differentiate satisfied individuals in each of these options. Drawing from this work, we identified four domains of potential differentiation: sexuality, homo-positivity/negativity, religious and moral values, and family, which can be represented by the acronym SHRF.

**Sexuality.** Individuals satisfied in the four options may differ in their experience of sexual orientation (i.e., attraction, aversion, identity), fluidity (i.e., experience and expectations of sexual orientation change), and eroticism (i.e., sex drive, importance of eroticism).

**Sexual orientation.** The degree to which individuals experience sexual attraction to women and men may affect their likelihood of being satisfied in a same- or other-sex

relationship (Legerski et al., 2017). Further, preference for male or female partners may be governed not only by individuals' sexual attraction but also by the presence or lack of sexual aversion (Beckstead, 2012). It is likely that sexual minorities who report satisfaction in MORs may display more other-sex attraction and less other-sex aversion than other sexual minorities.

**Fluidity.** Many sexual minorities within conservative religions initially desire to change their sexual orientation (Beckstead & Morrow, 2004). Although many later alter their views about their potential to experience fluidity in their sexual orientation, some maintain hope for future shifts. These hopes may be maintained by underlying views of same-sex attraction as environmental rather than biological in nature (Dehlin et al., 2014) and may be more common among individuals who do not pursue same-sex relationships due to religious convictions.

**Eroticism.** Sex drive and the importance of eroticism vary across individuals (Lippa, 2009). Where some are content with little or no erotic fantasy or contact, others report dissatisfaction and frustration in the absence of erotic stimulation. It is likely that individuals who are satisfied as single—particularly those satisfied being single and celibate—may have a lower sex drive or place less importance on eroticism. Similarly, mixed-orientation relationships may succeed because of one or both partner's diminished interest in eroticism or sex drive.

**Homo-positivity/negativity.** An individual's cognitions about their same-sex sexuality may affect their satisfaction in a variety of single/relationship options. In addition, bisexual individuals may have distinct, though related, cognitions around their bisexuality (Moscardini, Douglass, Conlin, & Duffy, 2018).

**External homo-positivity/negativity.** Developing one's sexuality within homonegative familial, religious, or social contexts may wield an effect on individuals' ability to be satisfied within sexual identity relationship options. Structural or external homonegativity may keep



sexual minorities from embracing a sexual minority identity and pursuing same-sex relationships (Hatzenbuehler, 2009). Sexual minorities with an insecure, anxious attachment to their parents are more likely to fear judgment based on their orientation and less likely to identify with or interact with others in the LGB community (Mohr & Fassinger, 2003).

***Internal homo-positivity/negativity.*** As the result of exposure to structural homonegativity, many sexual minorities internalize negative beliefs about same-sex sexuality (Meyer, 2003). The extent to which an individual has internalized positive or negative beliefs about their same-sex sexuality may affect their satisfaction, particularly in same-sex sexual encounters and relationships (Mohr & Fassinger, 2003). In addition, homo-positive/negative attitudes may reflect the degree to which individuals approve of same-sex relationships and encounters, which may vary across single/relationship options.

***Religious and moral values.*** An individual's value structure and relationship with religion may strongly influence both the single/relationship option chosen and the individual's satisfaction in that option (Dehlin et al., 2014).

***Religiousness.*** Religiousness refers to the search for the sacred undertaken in the context of established institutions (Pargament, Mahoney, Exline, Jones, & Shafranske, 2013). As sexual minorities from conservative religious backgrounds identify and embrace their experience of same-sex attraction, many step away from religion (Dehlin et al., 2015); however, others remain engaged (Author citation). Since those engaging in a mixed-orientation relationship and committing to a life of celibacy often do so because of strongly held religious belief, an individual's religiousness may be a particularly important factor in understanding how likely that individual is to be satisfied in a given single/relationship option.

***Moral values.*** Conservative—and by extension religiously conservative—individuals rely on a broader conceptualization of what morality entails in making decisions than liberal individuals (Haidt, 2012). Where liberal individuals assess the morality based primarily on issues related to harm/care and fairness/reciprocity, conservative individuals base their assessments on issues related to ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity in addition to harm/care and fairness/reciprocity (Haidt & Graham, 2007). Further, religious people tend to favor values promoting social order such as authority, tradition, conformity, and to dislike values promoting self-enhancement such as hedonism, achievement, and power (Saroglou, Delpierre, & Dernelle, 2003). Because many consider making decisions about single/relationship statuses to be morally relevant, it is likely that individuals who are satisfied in more conservative relationship options (SC, MOR) have a characteristically different profile of moral values than those satisfied in more liberal relationship options (SNC, SSR).

**Family.** Family ties and expectations within conservative religions can be strong and frequently value heteronormative conceptions of family (i.e., husband, wife, and children). The expectations placed on an individual by their family of origin and by their cultural norms, including the individual's desire for a heteronormative family, may lead individuals to be differentially satisfied in single/relationship options. The importance of family of creation may also be an important factor that distinguishes those satisfied in one status from another with those who desire to have children or be partnered may be less likely to be satisfied being single. Placing a stronger value on a child-centered family life may lead some individuals to avoid same-sex relationships due to additional barriers to having children in a same-sex relationship.

### **The Present Study**

Although domains have been suggested that may differentiate those who are satisfied in one single/relationship option from another, we are unaware of any work that has examined systematic differences in these domains between individuals satisfied in one option relative to another. The present study was motivated by our desire to understand (a) whether the characteristics of individuals satisfied with their single/relationship option differed by their option and if so, then (b) which domains differentiated those who are satisfied in one option from another. As counseling psychologists often work with sexual minorities who may be considering various single/relationship options, having a stronger understanding of the ways in which those who are satisfied in one option differ from those who are satisfied in another will enable counseling psychologists to provide accurate psychoeducation and support to their clients, which may help empower their clients to explore and make decisions that are best for them.

## **Method**

### **Survey Design**

A diverse research team was created with respect to political ideology, single/relationship status, religiousness, and gender. Initial versions of the survey were based on Beckstead's (2001) grounded theory and the research team's collective experience working with gender and sexual minorities from conservative religious backgrounds. To ensure comprehensiveness and coverage, 30 diverse scholars provided feedback on early versions of the survey and two pilot studies were conducted ( $N = 81$ ,  $N = 366$ ), both of which assessed the extent to which participants felt that the survey represented their experiences accurately. The final version of the survey consisted of 97 questions. Detailed information about the research team and development of the survey can be found in Author Citation. In total, 84% of the participants in our final sample reported that the survey represented well their viewpoints and direction in life.

## **Procedure**

Approval was obtained from the Idaho State Institutional Review Board prior to commencing the study. Participants also provided informed consent after reading a description of the risks and benefits of participation prior to participation. Participants were gathered over a 10-month period (September 2016 – June 2017) through announcements in a variety of forums including news outlets, affinity groups, community centers, and local mental health providers as well as through snowball sampling. To ensure we obtained a sample in a variety of single/relationship options, we deliberately oversampled in affinity groups comprised of individuals from conservative social environments. All announcements included direction to complete the survey through a website designed for the study, directing participants to the Survey Monkey platform. A more complete description of the various places sampled can be found in Author Citation. In total, 18.9% of participants reported hearing about the study from a news media outlet, 14.2% heard about the study from a mental health provider, 46.9% from an affinity organization or website, and 30.0% from a friend or family member.

## **Participants**

To be considered in analyses, participants must have (a) been at least 18 years of age; (b) experienced same-sex attractions at some point in life; (c) identified their single/relationship status as SC, SNC, MOR, or SSR; and (d) completed the survey. A total of 1782 participants met these criteria. Because we were interested in comparing those who were satisfied in their single/relationship option on a variety of variables, we selected a final sample for analysis from these 1782, matching participants on satisfaction between the various single/relationship options. Doing so yielded a final sample of 452 participants with 113 in each single/relationship option. Within each option, 21 reported being “slightly satisfied,” 71 being “satisfied,” and 21 being

“very satisfied.” Participant demographics mirrored the larger sample (see Author Citation) and are reported in *Table 1*. Overall, our sample was largely male (68.4%), White (90.0%), US-based (90.3%), urban/suburban (79.4%), religiously affiliated (78.8%) and educated (69.5% bachelor’s degree or higher) and were on average 39.22 ( $SD = 14.76$ ) years old.

## Measures

Given our interest in several domains, many of which inherently contain multiple indicators, we selected instruments that could best encapsulate the domain with the fewest number of questions possible, creating questions where necessary to maintain brevity.

Additionally, given that our sample had diverse ways of experiencing their sexuality (e.g., SSA vs. LGB), we created or adapted questions to best match our population.

**Sexual orientation.** Same- and other-sex sexual attraction and aversion were measured separately on a Likert scale from 1 (None, around 0%) to 7 (Very strong, around 100%). Kinsey position was measured using Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin’s (1948) Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale on a 7-point scale from “exclusively heterosexual” to “exclusively homosexual” with two additional non-scored options of “asexual” and “you don’t have an option that applies to me.” Participants were grouped on whether they reported an LGBQ (coded as 1) or another (e.g., heterosexual, same-sex attracted, ex-gay; coded as 0) identity.

**Possibility of fluidity.** We assessed beliefs about the etiology of same-sex attraction and expectations of fluidity through three questions, each measured on a 7-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree: “Experiencing same-sex attraction is biological in origin and not subject to change,” “Experiencing same-sex attraction is primarily environmental in origin, developed through childhood experiences with parents, peers, or other early relationships,” and “I believe I will experience in the future shifts/fluidity in my sexual attractions.”

**Eroticism.** We assessed eroticism through responses to four questions, each reported on a 7-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, adapted from Lippa (2009). Participants reported their feelings of neutrality toward eroticism, “I feel neutral about sexual intimacy. I can take it or leave it,” the acceptability of masturbation, “I feel it’s okay for me to masturbate,” their sex drive, “When I think of a very attractive person, I easily become sexually aroused,” and their disgust around sexuality, “I think sex, whether with a man or woman, is mostly dirty, scary, and/or disgusting.”

**External homo-positivity/negativity.** We assessed the degree to which individuals felt that their external environment affirmed or negated their sexuality through two items, each assessed on a 7-point scale from “Never (around 0% of the time)” to “Always (around 100% of the time)”: “I feel valued and supported for experiencing SSA/being LGBT+” and “The out/open-LGBT community has felt like a supportive community for me.”

**Internal homo-positivity/negativity.** We assessed the degree to which individuals internalized attitudes about their sexuality through a scale and three items. First, we used the three-item internalized homonegativity subscale from the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Scale (Mohr & Kendra, 2011). The authors report a test-retest reliability of .92 for the internalized homonegativity subscale with the Cronbach’s alpha for the present study being .89.

As internalized homonegativity may be subdivided into guilt and shame (Moradi, van den Berg, & Epting, 2009), we included the following questions, assessed on a 7-point Likert scale: “It is wrong for a person to have sex with someone of her or his same sex, regardless of the level of commitment” and “I experience self-acceptance about my same-sex attractions.”

**Religiousness.** Religiousness is a multidimensional construct that includes religious behaviors, beliefs, and traits (Hill & Edwards, 2013). We assessed these three indicators of

religiousness using commonly used assessments of religiousness as follows: participants reported their current church/religious activity on a 5-point scale from “stopped attending” to “engage in my religion’s activities/attend at my place of worship more than once a week.” They also reported their religious belief or orthodoxy by indicating whether their current viewpoint was theologically conservative (coded as 1) or not (0). Participants reported intrinsic religiosity through response to the statement adapted from Gorsuch and McPherson (1989): “My whole approach to life is based on my religion/spirituality,” on a 7-point Likert scale.

**Moral values.** Participants reported how much importance they placed on eight values on a 7-point scale from “none” to “very strong.” Haidt (2002) has demonstrated six of these values to hold relevance for conservative religious individuals: authority, fairness, kindness, liberty, loyalty, and sanctity (see also Saroglou et al., 2003). We also assessed two additional values believed to have relevance for this population: long-suffering and pleasure.

**Family.** Participants responded to five items assessing the importance they place on family, created for this study as we were not able to locate psychometrically sound appropriate alternative instruments. Participants indicated the importance they placed on having children and a child-centered family life on a 4-point Likert scale from “not important to me” to “very important to me” as well as the degree to which they desired a committed partnership with men or women in which “to bond emotionally and share the ups and downs of life” on a 7-point Likert scale from “strongly don’t want it” to “strongly want it.” Participants also indicated how appropriate they saw children being raised by same-sex parents on a 5-point Likert scale from “completely inappropriate” to “completely appropriate” and indicated their agreement with the statement, “I am afraid of disappointing my family for experiencing SSA/being LGBT+,” on a 7-point Likert scale from “never (around 0% of the time)” to “always (around 100%).”

### **Analysis Plan**

We conducted analyses in a three-step fashion to best answer our research questions. We first conducted multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) using single/relationship option as the independent variable and the various variables within each of the domains identified as dependent variables to see if there were significant differences within each domain by single/relationship option. We report Wilk's Lambda as our groups were of equal size. If significant differences were found, we then examined the ANOVAs for the main effects of each of the indicator variables in our domains to see if there was a significant main effect. Finally, when significant main effects were present, we calculated Cohen's *d* between single/relationship options to understand the magnitude and direction of differences. When calculating Cohen's *d*, we report either comparisons using composite means combining conservative (SC, MOR) and liberal (SNC, SSR) options or the range of values obtained from multiple comparisons found by comparing a single option (e.g., SC) with all other options (e.g., SNC, MOR, SSR) depending on whether group means were separate or clustered. We adopted a conservative significance value of  $p < .01$  to reduce the risk of a type-I error. Due to a flaw in survey design, not all participants provided data on all variables. Missing data was handled by listwise deletion from analyses involving the variable of interest as less than .1% of cells had missing values.

### **Results**

We first tested the relationship between demographic variables and single/relationship option to determine if there were covariates we needed to control for. We found that education ( $\chi^2(12) = 18.97, p = .09$ ), gender ( $\chi^2(9) = 5.27, p = .81$ ), ethnicity ( $\chi^2(24) = 22.60, p = .54$ ), state/country of residence ( $\chi^2(15) = 29.19, p = .02$ ), urbanicity ( $\chi^2(9) = 20.10, p = .02$ ), age ( $F(3, 448) = 3.06, p = .03$ ), and the degree to which participants felt they had resolved conflict



between their sexuality and religion ( $F(3, 448) = 1.24, p = .29$ ) did not differ by single/relationship option. We then tested relationships between our domains and single/relationship option. Of the 34 items examined, 20 evidenced medium or larger effect sizes (Cohen, 1988). *Table 2* displays group means, standard deviations, the results of hypothesis tests, and measures of effect size. These trends are displayed graphically in *Figure 1*.

Sexual orientation was significantly related to single/relationship option ( $F(18, 1160.14) = 14.27, p < .01$ , Wilk's  $\lambda = .57$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .172$ ) as were each of its indicator variables: same-sex attraction, same-sex aversion, other-sex attraction, other-sex aversion, Kinsey score, and LGBQ identity ( $p < .01$ ). The SC group reported more same-sex aversion ( $d = .30$  to  $.70$ ) and less same-sex attraction ( $d = .23$  to  $.82$ ) than any other group. We found that the MOR group evidenced more other-sex attraction ( $d = .25$  to  $.69$ ), less other sex aversion than any other group ( $d = .24$  to  $.50$ ), and a lower Kinsey position ( $d = .40$  to  $1.09$ ). The SNC and SSR groups reported more same-sex attraction ( $d = .59$ ), more other-sex aversion ( $d = .35$ ), less other-sex attraction, ( $d = .36$ ), less same-sex aversion ( $d = .46$ ), a higher Kinsey position ( $d = .66$ ), and more frequent LGBQ identification ( $d = 1.34$ ) than the SC and MOR groups.

The possibility of sexual fluidity was significantly related to single/relationship option ( $F(9,1085.60) = 14.46, p < .01$ , Wilk's  $\lambda = .76$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .088$ ) as were each of its indicators: seeing a biological basis for homosexuality, seeing an environmental basis for homosexuality, and expectations of sexual fluidity ( $p < .01$ ). The SC and MOR groups reported greater expectations for changes in their sexuality ( $d = .52$ ) and stronger beliefs that same-sex attraction is environmental ( $d = .74$ ) but weaker beliefs that same-sex attraction is biological in origin ( $d = .88$ ) than the SNC and SSR groups.

Eroticism was significantly related to single/relationship option ( $F(12,1177.65) = 19.60$ ,  $p < .01$ , Wilk's  $\lambda = .62$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .148$ ) as were each of its indicators: the importance of eroticism, the acceptability of masturbation, sex drive, and sexual disgust ( $p < .01$ ). The SC group reported feeling that eroticism was less important ( $d = .50$  to  $.63$ ), being less likely to see masturbation as acceptable ( $d = .55$  to  $1.83$ ), experiencing less sexual drive ( $d = .25$  to  $.49$ ), and seeing sex as disgusting ( $d = .57$  to  $.85$ ) than any other group. The SNC and SSR groups reported seeing masturbation as more acceptable ( $d = .1.31$ ) more than the SC or MOR groups.

External homo-positivity/negativity was significantly related to single/relationship option ( $F(6,794.00) = 20.93$ ,  $p < .01$ , Wilk's  $\lambda = .75$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .137$ ) as were each of its indicators: finding the LGBT community supportive and feeling valued as a sexual minority. The SSR and SNC groups reported feeling more valued for being LGBT+/SSA ( $d = .43$ ) and more like the LGBT community was supportive ( $d = 1.09$ ) than the MOR and SC groups.

Internal homo-positivity/negativity was significantly related to single/relationship option ( $F(9,1085.60) = 35.91$ ,  $p < .01$ , Wilk's  $\lambda = .53$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .191$ ) as were each of its indicators: internalized homonegativity, experiencing self-acceptance about same-sex attractions, and seeing same-sex sexuality as wrong ( $p < .01$ ). The SC and MOR groups had more internalized homonegativity ( $d = .79$ ), saw same-sex sexuality as more wrong ( $d = 1.69$ ), and experienced less acceptance about their same-sex attractions or LGBQ identity ( $d = .41$ ) than the SNC and SSR groups with the SC group seeing same-sex sexuality as more wrong ( $d = .53$  to  $2.34$ ) than any other group.

Religiousness was significantly related to single/relationship option ( $F(9,1012.59) = 32.20$ ,  $p < .01$ , Wilk's  $\lambda = .54$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .185$ ) as were each of its indicators: religious belief, religious practice, and intrinsic religiosity ( $p < .01$ ). The SC and MOR groups reported more

orthodox approaches to religion ( $d = 1.36$ ), much more frequent religious activity ( $d = 1.61$ ), and more intrinsic religiosity ( $d = .89$ ) than the SNC and SSR groups. Furthermore, the SC group was the most orthodox ( $d = .36$  to  $1.25$ ) and most intrinsically religious ( $d = .57$  to  $1.27$ ).

As a domain, moral values were significantly related to single/relationship option ( $F(24, 1265.13) = 7.85, p < .01$ , Wilk's  $\lambda = .67$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .126$ ) as were six of its indicators: authority, long-suffering, loyalty, pleasure, liberty, and sanctity ( $p < .01$ ). Fairness ( $F(3, 448) = 3.74, p = .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .025$ ) and kindness ( $F(3, 448) = 2.27, p = .08$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .015$ ) were equally valued across single/relationship option. The SNC and SSR groups placed similar amounts of importance on authority, long-suffering, loyalty, pleasure, liberty, and sanctity. The SC and MOR groups valued sanctity ( $d = .98$ ), long-suffering ( $d = .72$ ), and authority ( $d = .74$ ) much more and pleasure ( $d = .39$ ) much less than the SNC and SSR groups. Furthermore, the SC group valued sanctity ( $d = .68$  to  $1.45$ ), loyalty ( $d = .33$  to  $.52$ ), long-suffering ( $d = .40$  to  $.94$ ), and authority ( $d = .34$  to  $1.02$ ) much more and liberty ( $d = .24$  to  $.42$ ) much less than any other group.

Family was significantly related to single/relationship option ( $F(15, 1134.99) = 16.45, p < .01$ , Wilk's  $\lambda = .58$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .166$ ) as were each of its indicators: the importance participants placed on having children, the appropriateness of children for an SSR, fear of disappointing family, and the desire for same- or other-sex companionship ( $p < .01$ ). The MOR group valued children and a child-centered life ( $d = .88$  to  $1.08$ ) and reported more fears of disappointing family ( $d = .27$  to  $.44$ ) than any other group. The SC group desired other-sex companionship more than any other group ( $d = .29$  to  $.45$ ). The MOR and SC groups saw children to be less fit for SSRs ( $d = 1.17$ ) than did the SSR and SNC groups. Groups did not differ in their desire for same-sex companionship.

## Discussion

We found consistent differences in several domains between participants satisfied in various single/relationship options with an average of a medium-to-large effect size (average domain  $\eta^2 = .114$ ; Cohen, 1988). Nonetheless, participants reported similar satisfaction with their status and similar degrees of resolution of conflict between their sexuality and religion. Meeting needs for connection, intimacy, and mutual understanding has also been shown to be equally important across groups (Author citation). Understanding the unique profiles of those satisfied in each option may help counseling psychologists in assisting clients in making informed choices.

### **Single and Celibate**

Participants who were satisfied being celibate evidenced less sexual attraction to any gender, less interest in sex, and more sexual aversion to same-sex others than any other group. Though it is difficult to discern whether these feelings preceded or resulted from celibacy, it appears that experiencing diminished sexual attraction and eroticism may be conducive to satisfaction being celibate, presumably because it facilitates celibacy.

Celibate participants also reported more homonegativity than other groups. Some individuals may choose celibacy because they value other-sex relationships above same-sex relationships and do not feel capable of sustaining an other-sex relationship, in which case homonegativity may help maintain an individual's celibate status. Thus, those satisfied with celibacy may be more likely to experience both external and internal homonegativity. Celibate individuals also expressed the strongest beliefs that same-sex attraction was environmental in origin and expectations for future fluidity, which may reflect their unique sexual experiences different from the other groups or reflect their conservative religious attitudes or both.

Celibate sexual minorities were the most religious and morally conservative of all participant groups in our study, evidencing a conservative pattern of moral values (e.g., increased

importance for sanctity and authority coupled with an equal preference for kindness and fairness relative to others; Haidt & Graham, 2007). That celibate individuals tended to be more religious and conservative than those in MORs may be indicative of the need to have strong internal motivation to pursue celibacy (Sipe, 2008).

### **Single, not Celibate**

Although individuals who are SNC could engage in same- and other-sex sexual relationships, our sample of SNC individuals was comprised mostly of same-sex oriented individuals. SNC participants reported predominant same-sex attraction and were often LGBTQ identified. Overall, SNC individuals did not expect fluidity of their attractions and reported the strongest sex drive of any group. Given that sexuality is a distinguishing factor in being single and not celibate, it is unsurprising that they experienced more sexual desire than any other group. Nonetheless, our data provide tentative support for the idea that this high sex desire may play a role in SNC individuals' satisfaction with their status.

SNC participants reported generally homopositive views, including finding comfort and value within the LGBT community. Given that SNC individuals are open to sexual or romantic interactions, by definition, engagement with the LGBT community may provide both a source of social support and potential partners. Having more homopositive views may also facilitate sexual and romantic relationships, which may relate to satisfaction with one's status as SNC, particularly as SNC individuals reported similar desires for partnership to others in the sample.

Unlike celibate participants, SNC participants were unlikely to be religious and evidenced a liberal pattern of moral values (e.g., placing a higher relative value on kindness and fairness and less on authority, loyalty, or sanctity; Haidt & Graham, 2007). Given that all SNC individuals in our sample had a religiously conservative background, it is likely that many

participants shifted their religiousness and moral values since childhood. Our findings suggest that this shift, if necessary, may be conducive to satisfaction with being SNC.

### **Mixed Orientation Relationships**

Relative to other groups, those satisfied in MORs reported more bisexual patterns of attraction (i.e., more other-sex attraction, less other-sex aversion, and less same-sex attraction) and had expectations for future fluidity in their sexual orientation. Experiencing more other-sex attraction and less other-sex aversion may be particularly important for those in MORs, particularly as they report experiencing erotic desires similar to other groups but do not see masturbation as acceptable. Though it has been noted that sexual minority partners in MORs who endure frequently show bisexual patterns of attraction (Buxton, 2001), it is underemphasized in the larger social narrative around MORs.

Similar to those who are celibate, sexual minority partners in MORs evidenced more homonegative views and reporting feeling more distanced from the LGBT community. Homonegative views may function to distance sexual minorities in MORs from the possibility of same-sex relationships, which may reinforce their relationship choice and be conducive to satisfaction. Alternatively, being more bisexually oriented may enable those in MORs to avoid challenging homonegative views (i.e., if they feel able to sustain a heterosexual relationship, they may feel less compelled to explore their feelings about same-sex relationships).

Where all other groups reported equal priority on children and a child-centered family, those in MORs placed much more importance on this life goal. Individuals in MORs particularly reported fears about disappointing their families for being a sexual minority, likely because those in MORs are likely to have children (Author citation) and may fear disrupting their family structure. For many sexual minorities from conservative religions, being in an MOR is the most

direct and socially sanctioned route to having children. Given that our sample was Mormon and that the Mormon church places a strong emphasis on children and a heterosexual family, engagement with an MOR may be a way for participants to fulfill heteronormative expectations around partnership and family while being a sexual minority. Those satisfied in an MOR may place more value on these motivators.

Sexual minorities who were satisfied in MORs also reported being largely religious and morally conservative. Since many people enter MORs because of firmly held religious convictions (Hernandez et al., 2011; Legerski et al., 2017), engaging more strongly with their faith community may center them in their reasons for being in an MOR, leading to satisfaction. Further, holding morally conservative values such as sanctity and authority while placing less value on pleasure may make for greater satisfaction as being in an MOR may be more value-congruent and authentic than another option (APA, 2009).

### **Same-Sex Relationships**

Those satisfied in SSRs were the most same-sex oriented of all the groups, evidencing the least other-sex attraction, most other-sex aversion, and highest Kinsey scores. They also evidenced relatively little expectation for fluidity and held erotic desire to be important.

Individuals satisfied in SSRs reported predominantly homopositive views, both externally (e.g., being valued by others for being LGBT) and internally (e.g., seeing children as appropriate for an SSR). Given that all participants had a conservative religious background and likely initially held more homonegative views (Barnes & Meyer, 2012), it may be that those in SSRs developed more homopositive views, which may have facilitated their satisfaction in an SSR.

Of all the groups, individuals in SSRs tended to be the least religious and evidence morally liberal patterns of values. Given the opposition of many conservative religions to same-

sex relationships, this pattern is hardly surprising (Herman, 2007). Similar to homopositivity, these trends may reflect an adaptation to circumstance, potentially fueled by desire to engage with same-sex others. In perhaps a way opposite to that experience by individuals in an MOR, distance from religious belief and practice may reinforce sexual minorities' decisions to engage in an SSR, which may be conducive to satisfaction.

### **What Can and Cannot be Inferred from these Data**

We found distinct patterns in several domains across four single/relationship options that indicate that participants who are satisfied in one option are different from those satisfied in another. These findings suggest that not all people would be equally satisfied in all single/relationship options. This perspective is often neglected in the haste to compare group means on health outcomes but is important as it suggests that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach for single/relationship status for sexual minorities from conservative religious backgrounds. We encourage therapists to enquire with clients along the four domains we identified (sexuality, homo-positivity/negativity, religious/moral values, and family [SHRF]).

We aimed to provide therapists and clients with accurate information about those who are satisfied in a variety of single/relationship options; as such, we are not able to provide any conclusions about the relationship between each of the options and satisfaction (c.f., Author citation). We were also not able to identify *why* participants were satisfied in their respective options. Further, because our data were cross-sectional in nature, we are unable to tell whether individuals choose certain options because they evidence a certain profile across our domains or if engaging in an option changes an individual's profile across the domains. We were also unable to track the ways in which individuals change between options over time and the factors that may be responsible for those shifts.



**Limitations and Conclusion.**

In addition to these caveats, we acknowledge several limitations inherent in our dataset. Our participants were a particular “type” of sexual minority from a conservative religious background (largely White, male, and Mormon), and we acknowledge that the experiences of women of color, White evangelicals, and others are quite distinct from those we report; as such, we caution strongly against an application of our results outside of the context in which they were collected. Although great efforts were made to ensure a representative sample, particularly with respect to political ideology, we ultimately relied on a convenience sample that may have introduced bias into our data, particularly as individuals across all options may have been likely to present themselves in a positive light. Due to our unique population and space limitations in the survey, many of the measures we employed were developed for this study and lack established psychometric properties. Although we based many questions on valid instruments, it is unclear how the constructs and questions we created relate with those that they were based on.

Counseling psychologists who work with sexual minorities from conservative religious backgrounds may practice more ethically and therefore effectively as they become informed about the domains related to satisfaction within various single/relationship options. As counseling psychologists work with clients who are experiencing conflict between their religious and sexual identities, they may provide more nuanced psychoeducation to clients about the characteristics of those who are satisfied within each of these options. We encourage counselors and researchers alike to continue to rigorously pursue a deeper understanding of the way in which clients’ religious and sexual identities may impact their choices of single/relationship option and their satisfaction and health within those options.

*Table 1.* Sample demographics.

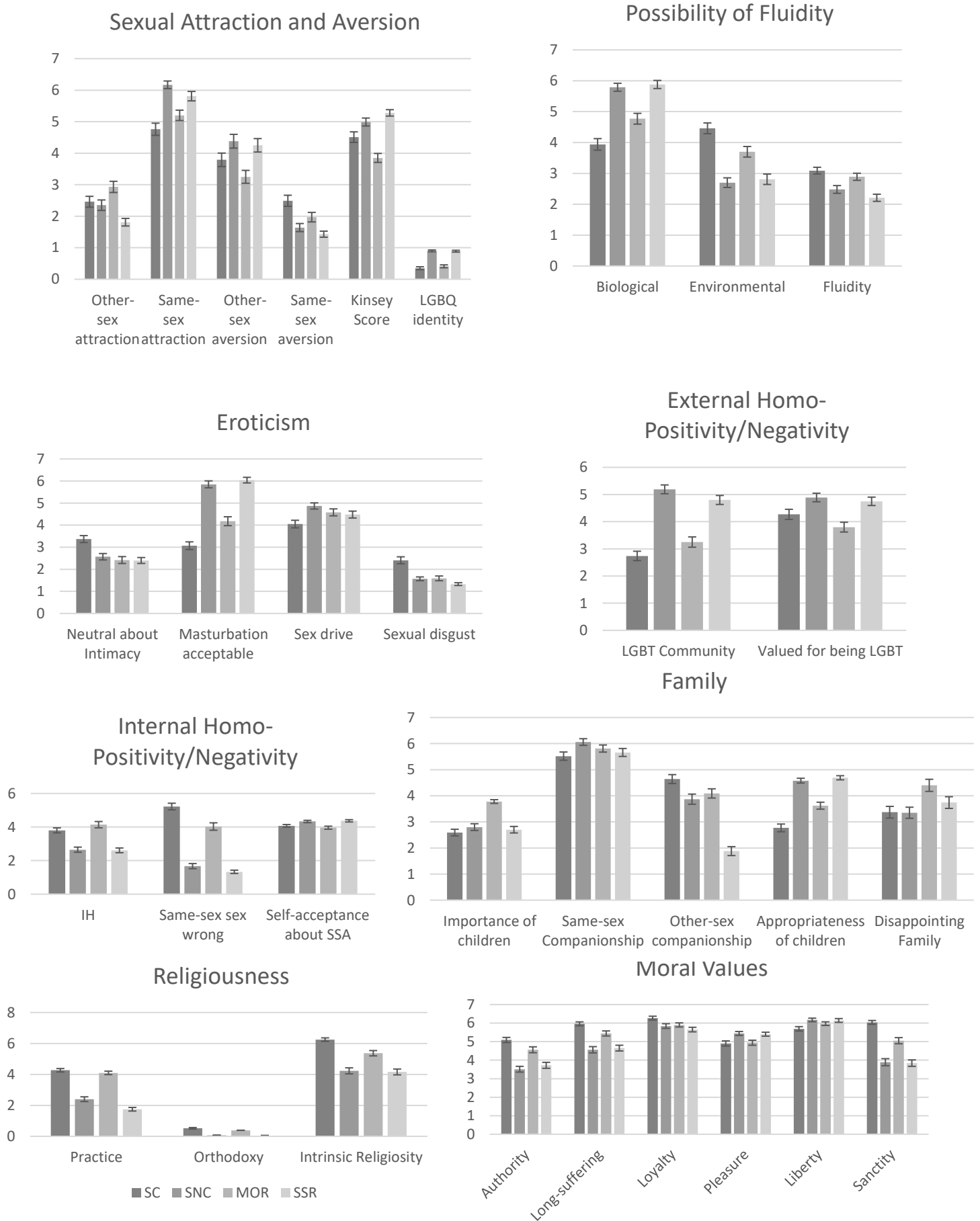
Sample Size	452
Female	26.3%
Male	68.4%
Transgender	1.7%
Other gender	3.1%
Race/ethnicity	
African American/Black	0.7%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.2%
Asian American/Asian	2.0%
Hispanic/Latino/a	2.4%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.9%
White	90.0%
Multi-ethnic/other	4.0%
State/Country of Residence	
Northeast	5.8%
Midwest	5.3%
South	13.7%
West	61.0%
Utah	43.1%
International	9.7%
Urbanicity	
Rural	8.6%
Urban	35.2%
Suburban	44.2%
Metropolitan	11.9%
Highest Level of Education	
Less than High School Diploma	0.4%
High School Diploma	23.9%
Associates Degree	6.2%
Bachelor's Degree	35.0%
Graduate Degree	34.5%
Current Religious Affiliation	
Catholic/Christian	15.5%
Latter-day Saint (Mormon)	50.2%
Exploring	2.9%
Multiple/Other	7.1%
None/unaffiliated	28.3%

Table 2. The relationship between single/relationship option and four domains.

	SC		SNC		MOR		SSR		F	$\eta^2$
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
<b>Sexuality</b>										
Sexual orientation									6.61	.059
Other-sex attraction	2.46	1.83	2.35	1.77	2.93	1.89	1.81	1.28	7.73	.052
Same-sex attraction	4.76	2.05	6.17	1.29	5.20	1.76	5.81	1.59	14.66	<b>.094</b>
Other-sex aversion	3.79	2.27	4.38	2.32	3.25	2.18	4.25	2.27	5.48	.037
Same-sex aversion	2.49	1.87	1.64	1.36	1.97	1.60	1.43	1.02	10.37	<b>.068</b>
Kinsey score	4.51	1.78	4.99	1.34	3.85	1.51	5.28	1.08	20.38	<b>.122</b>
LGB identity	0.35	0.48	0.90	0.30	0.41	0.49	0.89	0.31	63.07	<b>.297</b>
Possibility of fluidity									14.46	<b>.081</b>
Biological basis	3.94	1.98	5.79	1.37	4.77	1.86	5.88	1.40	34.05	<b>.186</b>
Environmental basis	4.46	1.86	2.70	1.66	3.70	1.82	2.81	1.80	24.32	<b>.140</b>
Expected fluidity	3.09	1.15	2.48	1.34	2.89	1.22	2.21	1.23	12.00	<b>.074</b>
Eroticism									19.60	<b>.148</b>
Neutral about intimacy	3.37	1.67	2.57	1.54	2.42	1.66	2.40	1.42	9.67	<b>.061</b>
Masturbation acceptable	3.07	1.85	5.85	1.66	4.18	2.14	6.04	1.35	72.38	<b>.326</b>
Sex drive	4.05	1.82	4.87	1.49	4.58	1.68	4.48	1.66	4.63	.030
Sexual disgust	2.41	1.67	1.57	0.91	1.59	1.14	1.33	0.67	18.75	<b>.112</b>
<b>Homo-positivity/negativity</b>										
External homo-positivity/negativity									20.94	<b>.137</b>
LGBT community supportive	2.74	1.84	5.19	1.73	3.25	2.01	4.80	1.76	41.96	<b>.240</b>
Valued for being LGBT	4.27	1.98	4.89	1.68	3.80	1.91	4.75	1.64	7.72	.053
Internal homo-positivity/negativity									35.91	<b>.191</b>
Internalized homonegativity	3.80	1.59	2.65	1.62	4.14	2.00	2.61	1.50	21.89	<b>.142</b>
Same-sex sex wrong	5.22	2.10	1.67	1.62	4.03	2.35	1.33	1.05	102.69	<b>.445</b>
Self-acceptance about SSA	4.07	0.83	4.33	0.74	3.96	0.96	4.37	0.72	6.80	.044
<b>Religious and Moral Values</b>										
Religiousness									32.20	<b>.185</b>
Orthodoxy	0.52	0.50	0.06	0.24	0.39	.049	0.04	0.21	43.48	<b>.216</b>
Religious practice	4.27	1.17	2.40	1.62	4.10	1.18	1.75	1.23	102.20	<b>.399</b>
Intrinsic Religiosity	6.25	1.20	4.23	2.08	5.37	1.82	4.16	2.00	33.09	<b>.192</b>
Moral values									7.85	<b>.126</b>
Authority	5.09	1.45	3.51	1.65	4.56	1.69	3.72	1.71	22.83	<b>.134</b>
Long-suffering	5.96	1.11	4.56	1.79	5.44	1.46	4.65	1.64	21.69	<b>.128</b>
Loyalty	6.27	1.07	5.84	1.34	5.90	1.18	5.65	1.31	4.96	.032
Pleasure	4.90	1.46	5.44	1.12	4.94	1.44	5.40	1.13	5.56	.036
Kindness	6.38	0.98	6.62	0.70	6.59	0.68	6.55	0.68	1.35	.015
Liberty	5.69	1.25	6.17	1.02	5.97	1.04	6.14	1.10	4.49	.030
Fairness	5.63	1.32	5.85	1.19	5.80	1.13	6.14	0.96	3.73	.025
Sanctity	6.04	1.06	3.89	2.01	5.05	1.76	3.84	1.86	42.42	.223
<b>Family</b>										
The importance of heteronormative family									16.45	<b>.167</b>
Importance of children	2.59	1.35	2.80	1.37	3.78	0.76	2.70	1.33	21.73	<b>.127</b>
Desire for other-sex companionship	4.64	1.82	3.87	2.07	4.09	1.88	3.82	1.82	4.12	.029
Desire for same-sex companionship	5.52	1.68	6.06	1.36	5.81	1.45	5.66	1.62	2.37	.017
Appropriateness of children	2.77	1.56	4.58	0.98	3.62	1.42	4.69	0.84	59.87	<b>.296</b>
Fear of disappointing family	3.37	2.38	3.35	2.26	4.40	2.47	3.74	2.38	4.78	.031

Note: all *F*-values significant,  $p < .01$ ; bolded values indicate medium or larger effect sizes (Cohen, 1988)

Figure 1. The relationship between single/relationship option and eight subdomains



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