

ABSTRACT

Race, Religion, and Homosexuality: Black Protestants and Homosexual Acceptance

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This paper explores the relationship between race, religion, and acceptance of homosexuality. Many question the disapproval of African Americans in the homosexual fight for gay rights, especially considering their activity in the civil rights movement (Douglas and Hopson, 2001). Here I look at the empirical relationship between race and religion, and how that relationship influences support of homosexuality. It is hypothesized Black Protestants will be less likely than all other religious groups to approve of homosexuality, and that this effect will be even greater for more religious African Americans. Using 2004 General Social Survey data, I find that Black Protestants do have a strong level of disapproval of homosexuality and that there is an interaction between more religious Black Protestants and their disapproval of homosexuality.

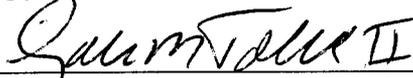
Race, Religion, and Homosexuality: Black Protestantism and Homosexual Acceptance

by

Jeniece Lewis-Williams

A Dissertation

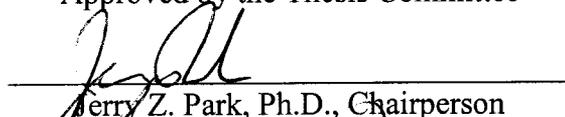
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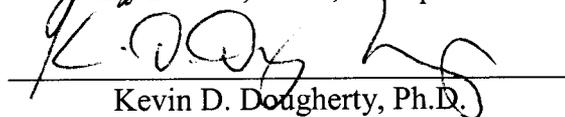
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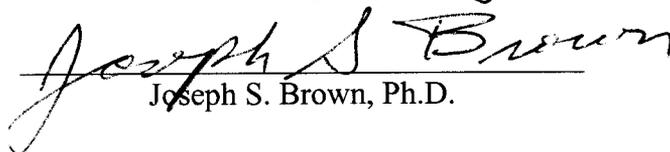
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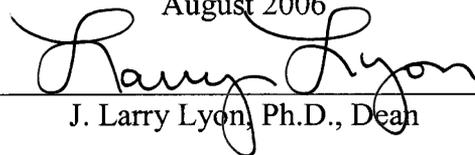
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
CHAPTER ONE	1
Review of Literature	
Introduction	
Race, Religion, and Homosexuality	
Black Protestants and Church	
Semi-Involuntary Institution Thesis	
Black Protestants and Homosexuality	
Black Protestants, Homosexuality, and Religious Effects	
CHAPTER TWO	
Methods and Analysis	12
Data	
Dependent Variables	
Independent Variables	
Method of Analysis	
Results	
CHAPTER THREE	17
Discussion and Conclusions	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	24

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Logistic Regression of Homosexual Acceptance	14
2	Logistic Regression of Homosexual Acceptance	15

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	Percentage of Each Religious Tradition Rejecting Homosexuality	18
2	Bible Interpretation by Religious Tradition	19
3	Attend Church 2-3 Times a Month or More by Religious Tradition	20

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CHAPTER ONE

Review of Literature

Introduction

Homosexuality is by far one of the most contentious and controversial topics in Western societies. In fact, matters involving homosexuality work their way into almost every facet of society, including law, policy, religion, and human rights. As American society changes we are asked to take sides in the debate over homosexuality. Those who choose to promote homosexual rights and liberties are seen as lacking family values and morality. Those who deem homosexuality as unacceptable are often described as bigots and prejudiced. However homosexuality is viewed, Americans are divided.

The major question is what influences the position one takes? Previous research provides different explanations; race, gender, socioeconomic status, religion and many other descriptive variables are utilized to explain one's outlook on homosexuality (Loftus, 2001). This paper builds on previous research on the effects of religion on one's likelihood to support or reject homosexuality, by exploring racial differences on these influences. Racial and religious theory will provide the background for this evaluation, along with statistical analysis.

The semi-involuntary institution thesis (Ellison & Sherkat, 1999) provides the theoretical basis for this analysis. The thesis describes the importance of the Black church as an institution in the African American community. The semi-involuntary institution thesis explains how opportunities that are given to African Americans in the

Black Church (such as leadership roles and social support) create an influential bond within the community.

Apart from the significance of religious affiliation, religious beliefs and behaviors also play an important role in understanding the impact of religion on views concerning homosexuality in the Black Church and social attitudes in general. Variables such as one's church attendance and one's interpretation of the Bible will provide information about the religious activities and commitments of the population. I expect that being affiliated with a denomination of the Black Protestant church will cause one to be more likely to reject homosexuality. Likewise, I hypothesize that those who attend church more often will be more likely to reject homosexuality, as well as those who have a more literal interpretation of the Bible.

I will look at the previous suppositions and theories on homosexual views in order to clarify the relationship between race, religion, and homosexuality, and also make suggestions for further research in this area. For example, the African American view on homosexuality may be able to shed some light on the homosexual ideologies of African Americans, as well as on African American views on human rights in general. These explorations will provide more insight on how homosexuality is viewed in society and what factors influence opinions. Religion is a popular influence in studies of homosexuality (Finlay and Walther, 2003; Loftus, 2001; Larsen et al, 1980), and recently differences by race have received more attention (Jacobson et al, 1990; Herek and Capitano, 1995; Hunt and Hunt, 2001; Lewis, 2003; Schulte and Battle, 2004). Presently, scholars should make efforts to research influences on homosexual attitudes while keeping in mind the effects of both religion and race.

Race, Religion, and Homosexuality

In order to understand the relationships between race, religion, and attitudes towards homosexuality, it is necessary to explore the surrounding body of literature. To begin, Loftus (2001) shows in a time series analysis covering years 1973-1998 that African Americans grew increasingly more conservative in their judgments of homosexuality from 1980 to 1988. Conversely, between years 1988 and 1991 both African Americans and Whites became increasingly liberal. Loftus (2001) suggests that the public's disassociation of AIDS from homosexuality may explain this change. This effect did not last long for African Americans, however; although Whites continued to grow increasingly more liberal in their attitudes towards homosexuality up to 1998, African Americans stopped liberalizing their views in 1991 (Loftus, 2001).

African American feelings toward homosexuality might be rooted in the sexual depictions of slaves in the antebellum period. For example, scholars state that during eras of slavery, African Americans were seen as highly sexual predators (Griffin, 2000; Douglas and Hopson, 1999).

Some may believe that resistance towards homosexuality may be a reaction to the threat that it imposes on the Black family unit, an institution experiencing great stress (Douglas and Hopson, 2001). Anthony Pinn (2002) describes the African American response to homosexuality as a protective and restorative strategy. Pinn (2002) claims that it has been difficult for the African American community to take a stand on sexuality for two reasons. One, the African American body and African American sexuality have long been ignored and rejected as a standard of beauty compared to the features of European Americans. Two, the negative images of African American sexuality as being

dissolute and promiscuous are condoned by American society (Pinn, 2002). The latter explains the African American resistance towards homosexuality. Homosexuality and the negative connotation attached to it serve as a further threat to the image of African American sexuality.

Religion and religiosity may be the key to uncovering the source of African American attitudes towards homosexuality. Overall, previous research indicates that African Americans are more heterosexist than Whites (Nyberg and Alston, 1977; Lewis, 2003; Schulte and Battle, 2004), while Herek and Capitanio (1995) argue against this relationship between race and homosexuality and suggest that religiosity serves as an exogenous variable that may cause African Americans to have a negative attitude to homosexuality. Although most religious groups consider homosexuality to be immoral, the African American denominations in particular seem to strongly oppose homosexuality (Griffin, 2000). To discourage African American participation in homosexuality, theologians and clergy alike indicate homosexuality as sexually perverse (Boykin, 1996). Religion serves as a catalyst for the pre-existing stigmas attached to homosexuality in the African American community.

Black Protestants and Church

The Black church is often described as one of the strongest and most stable institutions in society (Douglas and Hopson, 2001; Jacobson et al., 1990; Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990; Taylor et al., 1999). Presently, the church is a conglomeration of different churches, denominations, doctrines and worship styles, which vary, by origin, geography, and socioeconomic status. Despite all of these differences, the Black church is still a community of African American believers who share history, heritage, and a

common bond or identity. The church is composed of seven major denominations: African Methodist Episcopal Church; Christian Methodist Episcopal Church; National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc; National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated; Progressive National Baptist Convention; and the Church of God in Christ (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990), all of which are primarily composed of Black Protestant members.

A major purpose of the Black church is to serve as a social center. The Black church provides history, status and affirmation, as well as personal respect that African Americans find difficult to attain in a White dominated world. For example, in the Black church, an assembly line factory worker is able to hold a position on the Board of Trustees; here African Americans are given the power and appreciation that they may not receive outside of the church (Nelsen and Nelsen, 1975). Membership is automatic, depending only on whether one is both Christian and African American (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990). Within the Black church, African Americans are practically free from White domination, and are able to be autonomous. Indeed, the history of the Black Church denotes the resistance of African Americans to an “enslaving and dehumanizing White culture” (Douglas, 2001:23).

Black Protestantism has a large impact on its members not only through empowerment, but also in the political and other social arenas. This is very different from some mainline Protestant denominations and Catholicism, where official teaching and public views vary dramatically (Hoffman and Miller, 1997). When dealing with civil and social concerns, White denominations often deem involvement as a “Samaritan impulse”, or activities that are voluntary at one’s own discretion, while Black

Protestantism teaches that providing services in these areas is fundamental to the church's purpose and existence (Douglas and Hopson, 2001:98).

Most sectors of African American religion view homosexuality as a sin (Douglas and Hopson, 2001). As with other Christian religious traditions, it is viewed as detrimental to the soul to participate in or approve of homosexuality. As alluded to earlier, a more practical and hidden rationale is based on the view of the African American family unit. According to Douglas and Hopson (2001:106), Black Protestantism attempts to 'protect' the African American family from further 'damage' through its rejection of homosexuality. Therefore, Black Protestants are adamant about defining the homosexual relationship as "against God's plan" (Douglas and Hopson, 2001:106). In this regard, homosexuality serves as a threat to the livelihood of the African American family.

Semi-Involuntary Institution Thesis

The theoretical basis of this paper is derived from the semi-involuntary institution thesis of the involvement of African Americans in the church (Ellison and Sherkat, 1995; Ellison and Sherkat, 1999; Sherkat and Ellison, 1998; Hunt and Hunt, 2001). Hunt and Hunt describe the African American church as a uniquely different religious institution in the United States, which contributes greatly to the exclusiveness of African American culture. The thesis describes a regional variation of African American religiosity and involvement, stating that while African Americans will be more involved than Whites throughout the United States, African Americans residing in the traditional, rural South will be altogether more religiously involved than African Americans throughout the remainder of the country (Hunt and Hunt, 2001; Sherkat and Cunningham, 1998).

However, in the present study, the semi-involuntary institution thesis is applied to social attitudes and not tested directly in its geographical context.

The thesis provides two major motives for increased religious participation of African Americans, regardless of geographic residence. Although theorists credit the effects of the semi-involuntary institution to the rural Southern region of the nation (Hunt and Hunt, 2001), these motives exist regardless of region. The first major motive argues that the African American church fills the “structural absence” of secular institutions that provide adequate opportunities for leadership, achievement, and success for Whites (Hunt and Hunt, 2001:608). Black Protestant churches provide a subculture where equal opportunities for leadership are possible for African Americans. Also, the church provides an outlet for the voice of the African American community; where the concerns of African Americans are ignored in the secular White mainstream, they are affirmed and acknowledged within this religious setting.

Secondly, the “cultural presence” of the church in the African American community creates a source of both “material and social support” for African Americans (Hunt and Hunt, 2001:608). The African American church meets the moral, rational, and physical needs of the African American community. One of the most prevailing needs is unity. Despite Diaspora, segregation, and discrimination, the African American Church provides a site for African Americans to fill a desired need for wholeness. Here African Americans are able to organize and join in one accord, as opposed to secular society, where value is placed on autonomy and individuality. The church serves an integral role in the community, making it a great influence on the lives of religious African Americans.

Black Protestants and Homosexuality

With the understanding that Black Protestantism is deeply involved in and influential to the lives of African Americans, we can now explore the connection between this religious tradition and homosexual acceptance. Looking at the religious group is necessary, because the church is the strongest entity of the African American community that rejects homosexuality. The African American opinion on homosexuality is not influenced by race alone, but by religion as well, due to the role that religious institutions play in African American socialization (Wielhouwer, 2004). Historically, African American churches played the roles of safe havens, providing stability and support (Baer & Singer, 1988), and religious African Americans still view the church with this function.

This perspective is principally important because of the role that the church plays in the African American community. As mentioned before the church is an anchor in the community (Perry and Rodriguez, 2003). The church stands as a resource for social and civil reform, yet homosexual rights seem to be the exception to Black church activism. In the church homosexuality is not acknowledged and is often considered an abomination (2003). Scholar's wonder how Black Protestants can stand for racial justice and at the same time oppose homosexual rights and acceptance (Douglas and Hopson, 2001; Perry and Rodriguez, 2003). These authors conclude that there is a hypocritical nature to these diverging thoughts; where on the one hand Black Protestants encourage racial justice and empowerment, and on the other hand they discourage the comparison of the civil rights movement to the homosexual rights movement (Brandt, 1999).

At present the Black Protestant position towards homosexuality is one of harsh criticism. In one account collected by Keith Boykin (1996), an African American

Christian mother stated that God did not want homosexuals to enter His kingdom. According to some authors, churches avidly proclaim that they must hate the sin [homosexuality], but still love the sinner (Pinn, 2002; Douglas, 1999). The African Methodist Episcopal-Zion Church states its position loud and clear, with Bishop William Howard declaring that the church is “diametrically opposed to homosexuality...it is a sin” (Pinn, 2002:108). Black Protestantism places responsibility on homosexuals for their own victimization, stating that homosexuals have the power to change their sexual preference and “sinful” nature (Pinn, 2002:108).

Unsurprisingly, Black Protestants also condemn those who are openly gay or lesbian that may want to participate in the clergy. It is difficult for openly homosexual persons to obtain ordination in the Black church. The main reason is that according to the Black Protestant doctrine, homosexuality is “not consistent with Scripture and the church” (Pinn, 2002:109). In fact, African American homosexual ministers must deny their sexuality in order to survive in their churches. However, when the church has something to benefit from the participation of a homosexual, there is a subtle hypocrisy. For instance, a pastor may preach an entire sermon on social ills, focusing on sexual immorality and homosexuality, and then turn the service over to the openly gay choir director to minister with song and music (Pinn, 2002)¹.

Black Protestants, Homosexuality, and Religious Effects

Black clergy lean strongly on interpretations of scripture that support a more traditional or conservative view on sexuality. Black Protestants (as well as most others

¹However, most White mainline denominations promote tolerance of gay and lesbian members, although they may limit the ability of these members to hold authoritative offices within the church (Finlay and Walther, 2003).

that oppose homosexuality) finds its major support in the Hebrew scripture. For example, the Book of Genesis (Old Testament) states that God created man and woman and placed them in a sanctioned heterosexual marriage. Leviticus (Old Testament) states: “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable” (18:22; NIV), and “If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads” (20:13; NIV). Black Protestants are taught to use these scriptures to label homosexuality as a social ill (Griffin, 2000).

Beyond biblical interpretation, there are other religious factors that will influence one’s acceptance of homosexuality. African Americans are more involved in religious activities than Whites (Taylor et al, 1999). Likewise, African Americans are more likely to attend religious services than Whites (Taylor et al, 2001; Roof and McKinney, 1987). Previous studies claim a connection between frequency of church attendance and attitudes towards homosexuality, stating that with increased frequency of church attendance, homosexual acceptance decreases (Lewis, 2003). perhaps due to the messages that are received in doctrine and socialization. Therefore, church attendance may intensify negative views towards homosexuality.

Based on the previous literature, I hypothesize that:

H1: The likelihood of Black Protestants to reject homosexuality will be significantly higher than the likelihood of other religious traditions to reject homosexuality.

H2: Literal interpretation of the Bible will have a negative effect on the attitudes of Black Protestants towards homosexuality more than other religious traditions; that is, the more literal one’s interpretation of the Bible, the more likely one will be to reject homosexuality.

H3: Church attendance will have a negative effect on the attitudes of Black Protestants towards homosexuality more than other religious traditions.

CHAPTER TWO

Methods and Analysis

Data

The data for this study comes from the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS), provided by NORC. The full probability sample consisted of 2,812 adults, age 18 and older. Cases were lost due to missing data that eliminated some respondents. Only those respondents who were given the homosexual acceptance question were used, thus the sample size for this analysis is 685 (Davis & Smith, 2004).

Dependent Variables

Where necessary, the variables have been recoded to maximize their explanatory power. The dependent variable is a binary measure created from a scale of the respondents' acceptance of homosexuality, asking the respondent if s/he thinks that homosexuality is (1) always wrong, (2) almost always wrong, (3) wrong only sometimes, or (4) not wrong at all. The binary measure of the dependent variable codes a response of homosexuality being "always wrong" as 1 and all other responses as 0. Responses labeled as "other", "don't know", and "no answer" were are recoded as missing data.

Independent Variables

To measure the respondents' religious tradition, the "RELTRAD" religious classification scheme composed by Steensland et al (2000) is used. RELTRAD uses six nominal categories: mainline Protestant, evangelical (conservative) Protestant, Black Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and other (e.g. Mormon, Jehovah's Witness,

Muslim, Hindu, and Unitarian). Since I wanted to exclusively focus on Christian responses to homosexuality Jewish respondents and “other” respondents were added as missing cases. Next, I created a dichotomous variable for each of the remaining categories: evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, Black Protestant, Catholic, and non-affiliated¹. RELTRAD was chosen because other religious tradition models such as FUND (Smith, 1990) do not account for the distinct Black Protestant group.

The two measures of religiosity for this study are church attendance and view of the Bible. Church attendance utilizes an ordinal scale, which describes the frequency of one’s church attendance. The bible interpretation variable employs a categorical response set which asks the respondent how they view the Bible; as ‘actual word of God’, ‘inspired’ literature, or as an ‘ancient’ book; for this analysis each category of the variable was recoded into a dichotomous variable, where ‘ancient’ book is the excluded category.

The demographic control variables included in this analysis are education (Lewis, 2003; Herek and Capitanio, 1995), sex (Lewis, 2003; Herek and Capitanio, 1995), and region (Hunt and Hunt, 1999). Education is operationalized as the number of years that the respondent participated in formal education, such as grammar, middle, and high school and on through college. For example, someone who claims that they have 16 years of education is assumed to have at least some college background and most likely a four-year college degree. Sex is measured as a binary variable; a response of 1 denotes a male respondent, and 0 denotes a female respondent as determined by the interviewer. Region is also determined using a series of binary measures, where each response is

¹Note: the non-affiliated variable is not displayed in any of the models; this variable serves as the comparison variable for each of the religious traditions.

coded 1 for those who reside in one of the four major regions of the United States as determined by United States Census Bureau, and 0 for those who reside elsewhere.

Results

Model one of Table 1 shows that there are six significant variables; conservative Protestant, Black Protestant, biblical interpretation, church

TABLE 1
Logistic Regression of Homosexual Rejection on Selected Independent Variables

Independent Variable	Coefficient	Odds Ratios
Religious Traditions		
Mainline	0.422	1.525
Conservative	1.207***	3.345
Black Protestant	1.066*	2.903
Catholic	0.238	1.261
Religiosity		
Bible-Actual Word	1.002**	2.724
Bible-Inspired Book	0.267	1.306
Church Attendance	0.208***	1.232
Controls		
Years of education	-0.179***	0.836
Male	0.641***	1.899
Northeast	-0.313	0.731
West	-0.370	0.691
Midwest	-0.375	0.687
Intercept	0.932***	
N	685	
Degrees of Freedom	12	
Likelihood Ratio	212.86	
Pseudo R ²	0.267	

*p<0.05;**p<0.01;***p<0.001

attendance, education, and gender. Black Protestants are 3 times more likely than non-affiliates to reject homosexuality, while Conservatives are 3.3 times more likely to reject homosexuality. Compared to those who view the Bible as an ancient book, those who

view it as the “actual word of God” are nearly 3 times more likely to reject homosexuality.

TABLE 2
Logistic Regression of Homosexual Rejection on Selected Independent Variables

Independent Variable	Model 2		Model 3	
	Coefficient	Odds Ratios	Coefficient	Odds Ratios
Religious Traditions				
Mainline	0.435	1.527	0.453	1.573
Conservative	1.214***	3.366	1.258***	3.517
Black Protestant	0.866	2.376	0.955	2.599
Catholic	0.236	1.267	0.284	1.328
Religiosity				
Bible-Actual Word	0.966**	2.628	1.056**	2.874
Bible-Inspired Book	0.263	1.301	0.296	1.345
Church Attendance	0.209	1.233	0.188	1.207
Interaction Effects				
Black Prot. X Actual Word	0.352	1.422		
Black Prot. X Attendance			0.376†	1.456
Controls				
Years of education	-0.179***	0.836	-0.174***	0.840
Male	0.639***	1.895	0.668***	1.951
Northeast	-0.316	0.729	-0.269	0.764
West	-0.367	0.692	-0.341	0.711
Midwest	-0.372	0.689	-0.341	0.711
Intercept	1.817		1.797	
N	685		685	
Degrees of Freedom	13		13	
Likelihood Ratio	213.05		216.93	
Pseudo R ²	0.267		0.271	

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Model one of Table 1 also contains control variables for education, gender, and region. Here, the education and gender variables are significant. Education is negatively related to rejecting homosexuality. Those with higher education are less likely to see homosexuality as wrong. In fact, for each increase in education respondents are 1.2 times less likely to agree that homosexuality is always wrong. Men, however, are nearly twice as likely to reject homosexuality as women.

Models two and three in Table 2 (above) introduce two interaction variables. The first interaction is between being a Black Protestant and Biblical literalism, and the second is between being a Black Protestant and attending church. In these models being a Black Protestant is no longer significant. Again, those who view the Bible as the “actual word of God” are more likely to say that homosexuality is wrong than those who view the Bible as an ancient text. The effects for education and gender are similar to those in Table 1. The interaction effect for Black Protestant affiliation and literal interpretation is not significant and neither is the interaction effect for being a Black Protestant and church attendance¹.

In summary, Black Protestant affiliation significantly increases rejection of homosexuality. Further, Biblical literalism and increasing church attendance also increases the likelihood of rejecting homosexuality. However, the interaction between Black Protestant affiliation and these measures of affiliation have no additional effect. Note that the religious affiliation of Black Protestants affects their views of homosexuality differently than other religions (see Table 1). Compared to non-affiliates Black Protestants are more likely to reject homosexuality than mainline Protestants and share similar views to conservative Protestants. There is something about the religious experience of Black Protestants that places them near the conservative Protestant ideology.

¹However, there is a marginal effect for the Black Protestant by church attendance interaction where $p=.10$.

CHAPTER THREE

Discussion and Conclusions

The semi-involuntary thesis' claim is that due to the pervasive influence of the Black Church in the lives of many African Americans, Black Protestants will have a strong identity with their church, its teachings, and its attitudes. This religious identity will be more intense than other religious traditions, due to the holistic nature of the church in the lives of African Americans. Looking at the results, we see the effect of this strong religious identification on the attitudes of Black Protestants¹ towards homosexuality in comparison to the other religious traditions.

I found some support for the first hypothesis, that Black Protestants would be more likely than all other religious traditions to reject homosexuality. Model 1 of Table 1 shows that Black Protestants are significantly more likely than both Catholics and mainline Protestants, and fall second only to conservative Protestants. According to Aspostolidis (2001), conservative Protestants also hold strong attitudes against homosexuality, as they are called to help pull homosexuals out of their "sinful" behavior. However, the cross tabulation in Figure 1 shows that 83 percent of all Black Protestants claim that homosexuality is wrong, compared to 81 percent of all conservative Protestants.

The second hypothesis, that literal interpretation will have a significant effect in conjunction with Black Protestantism was not satisfied. It seems that there is no

¹The race variable alone is not significant in any of the models, whether paired with RELTRAD or not; thus the effect of Black Protestantism cannot be seen as strictly an effect of race.

difference in interpretation of the Bible for Black Protestants when compared to the other religious traditions. The same can be said for the final hypothesis, which states that church attendance will have a significant effect for Black Protestants. The interaction effect for this hypothesis is only marginally significant, where $\alpha=.10$. When those who

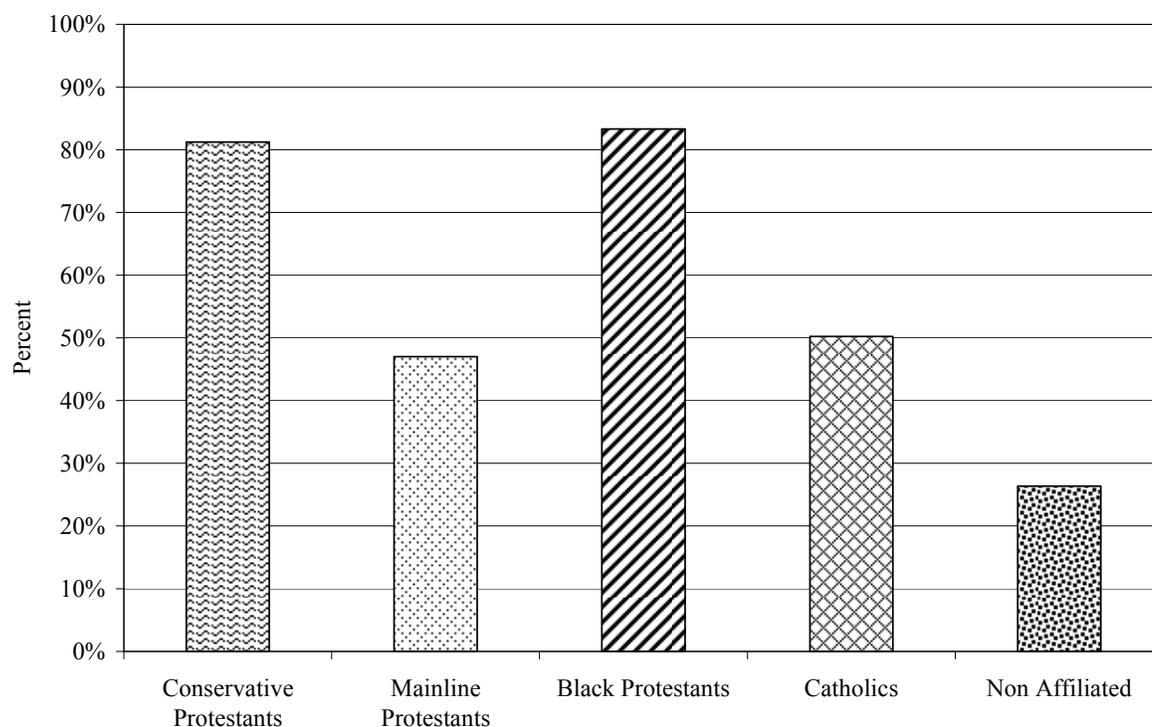


Figure 1 : Percentage of Each Religious Tradition Rejecting Homosexuality

claim to be Black Protestants do not attend church at all, they may become less likely than non-affiliates to believe that homosexuality is wrong.

The observations of the two latter hypotheses suggest that literalism and church attendance do not have a significant for Black Protestants. However, a quick look at Figure 1 and Figure 2 suggests an important alternative explanation for the ‘lack’ of effect. According to Figure 1 Black Protestants have more literal views of the Bible than the other Protestant religious traditions. Seventy-seven percent of Black Protestants interpret the Bible as actual word, compared to 67 percent of conservative Protestants and

27 percent of mainline Protestants. Figure 2 (page 20) shows that 68 percent of Black Protestants attend church 2-3 times a month or more, compared to 60 percent of conservative Protestants and 41 percent of mainline Protestants.

In fact literalism and being a Black Protestant go hand in hand; the same is true

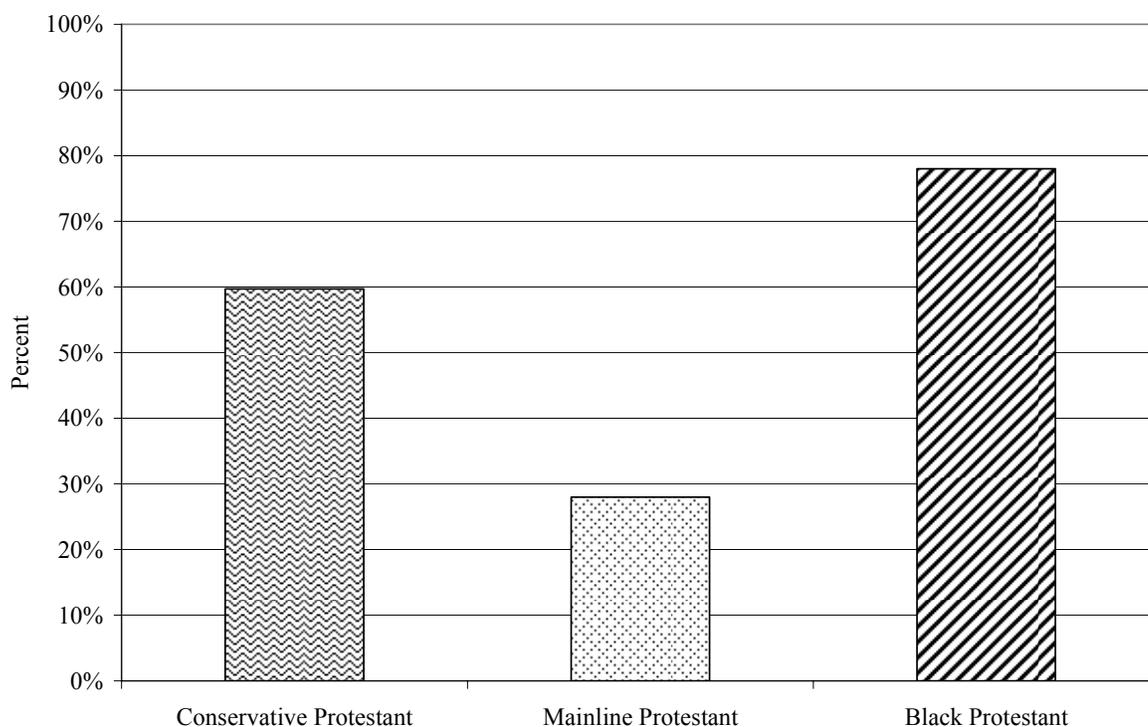


Figure 2 : Bible Interpretation by Religious Tradition

for church attendance and being a Black Protestant. It seems that merely affiliating with Black Protestantism implies strict observance of belief. This relates back to the semi-involuntary institution thesis, where Sherkat and Cunningham (1999:394) express that the religious nature of the Black church in the rural South is less “predictive”, because of the involuntary nature of participation in the church. One is expected to participate just because of his/her affiliation. Perhaps Black Protestants are expected to reject homosexuality based simply on their affiliation with the church. The findings given in this current study fit into the semi-involuntary thesis’ theoretical model, but do not

provide further light on specific elements of the Black Protestant experience that cause rejection of homosexuality. For future study, scholars should consider research on how Black Protestants react to the message from the pulpit. Perhaps the Black Church's attitude towards

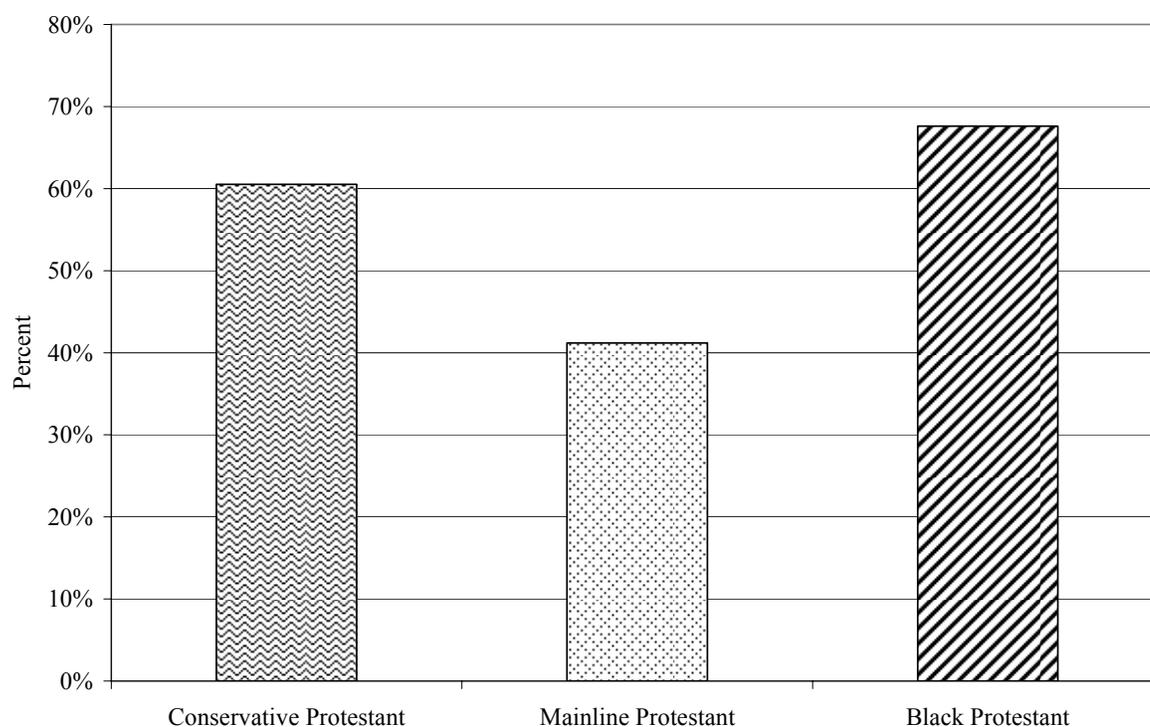


Figure 3 : Attend Church 2-3 Times a Month or More by Religious Tradition

homosexuality is delivered primarily to Black Protestant clergy, who in turn deliver the message to the congregation from the pulpit, which would suggest that it is not how one interprets the Bible that is important, but instead how one interprets the clergy. Black Protestant clergy have a strong influence on their members (Douglas and Hopson, 1999). Black Protestants consider their church leaders to be moral and spiritual role models. Further research should look at the impact of Black Protestant clergy on their constituents' beliefs and attitudes.

Also, redefining the church attendance effect (i.e., “how often do you attend religious services”) to include how often one participates in church activity (including meals, childcare activity, rehearsals) may capture a more complete relationship between attendance and the individual. Incorporating this type of item on the survey instrument would relate the study more towards the semi-involuntary thesis’ intentions: the impact of community. According to the semi-involuntary institution thesis, church means more than Sunday service, so a more accurate analysis a measure that incorporates the service and non-worship participation of the church. A survey question on this dimension might capture one’s church involvement and leadership, as well as one’s connectedness with the church. Also, survey questions on views of slavery and family might further assist in conceptualizing non-religious factors that influence homosexual rejection, by allowing the researching to measure internalization. For example, is it possible that African American families are stricter on family views, and, if so, how does that affect attitudes towards homosexuality? Do antebellum images of the hyper-sexual Black man or woman image still persist from slavery, and does that image affect Black Protestant views of homosexuality?

Future research might compare conservative Protestants and Black Protestants over a wide range of other social issues, such as abortion and women’s rights. Any differences in early childhood socialization for Black Protestants might also be measured. Also, a time series analysis would also create a fuller picture of the relationship between Black Protestants and homosexuality, as exemplified by Loftus’ (2001) study. A time series analysis would also increase the sample size and pool of those who consider themselves Black Protestants.

In conclusion, this paper extends the small body of research concerning African American attitudes towards homosexuality. It builds on research that discusses the differences between African American religion and other Christians. Previous studies have focused on affiliation as a control variable, or only on church attendance. Here, I look at the combination of religion as a tradition and a deeply rooted part of African American heritage. The results of this study might be used to further the research of those who wish to understand Black Protestantism more clearly.

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