

# Fundamentalism, Sex-differences, and Years of Conversion of Adult Active Church Members in Attitudes, Conducts and/or Beliefs Towards Homosexual People

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**Abstract Introduction:** Tolerant and benevolent personality traits are held as examples to follow in religious contexts due to pro- social values that Christians are supposed to demonstrated.. However, social scientists have observed that these are not applied unconditionally to everyone. Some denominations have inflexible rules and stances on what is acceptable, tolerated, and sinful which can facilitate negative attitudes as well as antisocial behavior towards a particular group. **Method:** This study is based on a dataset of 115 men and women from a previous research that attempted to create and validate a Scale of Attitudes, Conducts and Beliefs Towards Homosexuals in Christian Churches (EIACCPHI) created by Rodriguez-Gomez (2020). **Purpose:** Research in Puerto Rico implied that the levels of homonegativity (negative stigma towards gay and lesbians) were higher among participants that adhered to a religious protestant or evangelical denomination and participated more in religious activities than those who did not. This study attempted to determine if denomination membership, sex differences and years of conversion/participation are associated to negative attitudes, conducts and/or beliefs of church members towards homosexual people. The study consisted of active protestant/evangelical adult church members (n = 115). Comparisons between years of denomination membership, sex differences and years of conversion were significant using the EIACCPHI. **Results and Conclusions:** In each factor evaluated, all church groups showed a similar level of homonegativity. Therefore, none of the factors studied showed a particular /significant relationship with adult church member's view toward homosexual people. We conclude that further research is needed and should expand the sample to other parts of the island, other denominations, and further years of memberships to see if we can obtain more relevant information.

**Keywords** Homonegativity, Religious, Denominations, Sex-differences, Years of conversion, Puerto Rico

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## 1. Introduction

Religion has had a huge role in Puerto Rican culture throughout the years. According to data recollected in 2015 by The Association of Religion Data Archives, 91.2% of the population adheres to the Christian religious affiliation [1]. There are more than 48 thousand individuals that identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual living in Puerto Rico whose core values are grounded on religious attitudes that discourage non-heterosexual identities [2].

Attitudes toward homosexuals in Puerto Rico have been measured in different populations and contexts. According to the studies conducted, the results suggest that there are homonegative attitudes in undergraduate students [3-6], as well as in psychology graduate students [7]. Results obtained in levels of homonegativity have been associated

with factors such as exposure to LGBTQ+ individuals, adherence to a religious denomination, participation in religious practices, level of education, area of preparation or profession, and sex differences [6], to mention a few. Studies implied that the levels of homonegativity were higher among participants that adhered to a religious denomination and participated more in religious activities than those who did not [2,6]. In some studies, it indicated that men are more likely than women to hold more negative attitudes towards same-sex practices [2-4]. In another study on attitudes towards lesbians and gays, women showed negative attitudes and social distancing towards lesbians and men showed negative attitudes and social distancing towards gays. This can be in part explained as a result of the fear of being labeled as homosexual due to being in contact with gay or lesbian individuals that could be considered sinners [6].

At times, fundamentalists believe that a person has a choice over their sexual orientation, therefore, it is a conscious decision to be attracted to the same sex. As a result,

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the techniques used to attend sexual orientation have the objective to re-orient a person's sexual practices to the ones considered acceptable. In a study evaluating the attitudes of religious members from an Evangelical church, the majority thought it was sinful (92%), and that God and religious counseling were able to restore (98%) these individuals [8].

The most important reasons for such a restoration were that they needed emotional restoration and in need of God. Nevertheless, stances such as the ones offered above are an example of how discrimination has morphed towards individuals who identify as gay or lesbian.

## 2. Methods

This study pretends to determine basic factors associated to homonegative attitudes towards homosexuals in active Christian church members in Puerto Rico. Also, it serves as a means to identify relationships between denominations, sex-differences, and year of conversion with the level of homonegativity of active church members measured (EIACCPHI). Negative attitudes can have an impact on how a person behaves towards the target, which can lead to discrimination. In some cases, a church's take on homosexuality develops into an approach focused on treating the individual's sexual identity as a sin and guiding individuals to abandon their sexual practices. This resonates with conversion therapy, whose end goal is to treat homosexuality as a mental disorder and align sexual practices with heteronormativity. Assuming such a stance when homosexual believers are in search for spiritual guidance promotes the occurrence of religious abuse. For this reason, it is important to address the climate that Puerto Rican LGBT believers face in their religious context to provide awareness to mental health professionals of the attitudes encountered in possible exposures to religious contexts. This knowledge is also beneficial in providing valuable information for addressing homonegative attitudes in psychotherapy if the patient desires to incorporate into their psychotherapeutic session.

The original study conducted by Rodriguez-Gomez, Perez and Calvo (2020) was done with an exploratory/descriptive design [9]. In addition, a psychometric approach to validate the scale was done in the original study. The data set is comprised of theistic adults from the investigation of construction and validation of Attitudes, Conducts or Beliefs Towards Homosexuals in the Church Scale. The sample of the original study was a non-probabilistic relying on availability according to denominational members voluntary participation.

The researchers established the following inclusion criteria: (1) adults of 21 years or older, (2) self-identify as theists, (3) active member of a religious church and (4) must comprehend reading and writing in Spanish. Sixty-seven (52.8%) of the adults had been converted to their denomination.

## 3. Results

Analyzes were conducted using the computational statistical analysis program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 27 (IBM SPSS-X version 27). With this program, descriptive analyzes were performed to obtain sociodemographic characteristics of the 113 adults who completed the scale, Mann-Whitney and Kruskal Wallis tests to determine if there were any significant differences or not in denominations, gender, and years of conversion.

Using the Shapiro-Wilk test, it was found that the homonegativity scores in each level of denominations did not deviate significantly (Protestant  $W(10)=.959$ ,  $p=.780$ , Evangelists  $W(73)=.986$ ,  $p=.599$ , and Independent  $W(30)=.970$ ,  $p=.545$ ). This was also found in the scores on the samples of sex-differences (Masculine  $W(47)=.985$ ,  $p=.888$ , Feminine  $W(66)=.983$ ,  $p=.501$ ). The scores of homonegativity of years of conversion for the 0-3 years group ( $W(7)=.918$ ,  $p=.455$ ), 4-7 years group ( $W(8)=.881$ ,  $p=.193$ ), 8-10 years group ( $W(8)=.902$ ,  $p=.300$ ), 11-15 years group ( $W(15)=.921$ ,  $p=.196$ ) and the 21 or more group ( $W(58)=.983$ ,  $p=.612$ ) reflect a normal distribution. The 16-20 years group ( $W(15)=.864$ ,  $p=.027$ ), however, deviates significantly from normality.

Levene's test showed that the variances for denomination ( $F(2,110)=1.493$ ,  $p=.229$ ), sex-differences ( $F(1,111)=.784$ ,  $p=.378$ ), and for years of conversion were equal ( $F(5,105)=1.162$ ,  $p=.333$ ).

Did homonegativity scores vary between a denomination's level of fundamentalistic interpretation of the bible? A Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that the homonegativity scores were not significantly different across denominations,  $H(2) = 1.128$ ,  $p = .569$ . Contrary to what was predicted, this shows that adult's homonegative attitudes towards homosexual people is similar when evaluating members from Protestant, Evangelist, and Independent Group denominations.

Did men hold more homonegative attitudes than women? A Mann-Whitney test shows that there were no significant differences between men ( $Mdn=58.00$ ) and women ( $Mdn=58.00$ ),  $U = 1578.50$ ,  $z = .160$ ,  $p = .873$ ,  $r = .015$ . These results indicate that men and women have similar homonegative attitudes towards homosexual people in this sample.

Did more years of conversion into a denomination relate to higher scores in homonegativity? A Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that the homonegativity scores were not significantly different across the groups,  $H(5) = 4.175$ ,  $p = .525$ . This shows that the negative views towards homosexuals are similar in all 3 denominations studied.

## 4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine homo negative attitudes of adult church members towards homosexual

individuals in Puerto Rico using the EIACCPHI. Hypothesis that reflected our questions were tested. The results obtained in this investigation were not consistent with the reviewed and cited literature, suggesting a possible change in attitudes of church members on the island towards homosexuals. The data indicates that homonegative attitudes of church members were not associated with any of the basic factors considered for this study according to literature review.

**Denominations and homonegativity:** Contrary to the hypothesized relationship between denominations and homonegative attitudes towards homosexuals, the analysis shows that there is no correlation. This means that this fight the level of fundamentalist interpretations of the Bible the attitudes towards homosexual individuals were similar throughout Evangelist, Protestants and Independent. The results do not coincide with the literature reviewed incited. they contradict the claims of Whitley (2009), which suggested that fundamentalism fostered more homonegativity since they perceive homosexual behavior as a choice, therefore changeable [10].

A reason for this study's outcome could be a change in how homonegativity is manifested today. Recent investigations distinguish between all fashion and modern homonegativity this distinction was introduced by Morrison and Morrison (2002), suggesting that he has not subsided but rather it has morphed from "old fashioned" to "modern" [11]. Old fashioned anti-gay prejudice is based on religious and moral objections, meanwhile, modern antigay prejudice refers to a type of prejudice related to contemporary issues such as the view that gay people exaggerate the importance of their sexual orientation and questioning the existence of discrimination towards homosexual people in modern society.

**Sex-differences and homonegativity:** the results regarding sex differences suggest that there are no differences between men and women. This is inconsistent to what was contemplated; men did not reveal more negative attitudes toward homosexuals than women. In this study men and women had comparable levels of thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs towards gay people.

The results may suggest that men and women share the same level of attitudes towards gay people. However, studies conducted in Puerto Rico have shown that men are more likely than women to hold more negative views towards homosexuals [11,12]. A possible explanation for this is that the scale does not differentiate between a gay man and lesbian woman. the items use the word "homosexual". This is an important detail because studies have shown that men tend to show higher levels of homonegativity depending on the sex of the target. the reviewed literature has shown that men are more likely to be more judgmental towards gay men than towards lesbian women. in contrast women have similar views towards gays and lesbians equally.

**Years of conversion and homonegativity:** the study does not demonstrate a significant correlation between the number of years converted into a denomination an

homonegative attitudes. This is incongruent with what was expected; the more years a person was converted into a denomination the homonegative attitudes were going to be identified. However, this investigation suggests that the level of homonegative attitudes remains equivalent regardless of the number of years a church member has been converted.

Possible explanation for this result is that years of conversion does not imply the level of participation in religious service. Past research has shown that the more involved the person is, the more exposed they are to the attitudes, beliefs, and stances of their denomination. This exposure is essential to influence a person's attitude. Individuals with a higher participation are more likely to align their beliefs to the group that they form part of. This explanation is supported in a literature reviewed conducted by Esteban (2020), which highlighted the relationship of religious participation and anti-gay prejudice [13].

#### **Study limitations:**

This study has its methodological limitations that must be considered for future research in this theme. The generalizability of the results is limited by the recompilation of the sample; subjects selected all formed part of Judeo-Christian denominations in the metropolitan area of Puerto Rico. Therefore, tests executed did not include a comparison group of atheists and the findings are circumscribed to this sample since the metropolitan area tends to have more liberal views than other parts of the island. Another limitation was the participants' compliance to answer all the questions of the scale, which raises problems related to social desirability when completing questionnaires. Finally, the sample was collected in person, which excluded any other participants that were present during the time of administration of the scale.

## **5. Conclusions**

This study aimed to assess the possibility of correlation between denominations, sex-differences, and years of conversion with homonegative attitudes of adult church members. Findings suggested that our proposed speculations were not supported by the data used, contrary to what the cited and review literature shows. We suggest additional research with different samples to confirm these findings.

## **6. Recommendations**

According to the results obtained, further investigation is suggested in which other areas of the island is included were a distinction between rural and urban location is made. Future studies should consider adding comparison group of atheists/agnostics to see how certain belief may play a role in homonegativity level.

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