

Introduction

Introduction

Over the years, it has become a well known fact that religious affiliation plays a strong role in people's decision making. Religion is one of the many influences people use to form models for how they choose to live their lives. Depending on the strength of one's tie to religion, this model may be very concrete or it may be formed by other factors, like family or society in general. Particularly, religion has been known to be a deciding factor in decisions about sexual relations, especially that of premarital sex. It seems that over the past 50 years or so there has been an ongoing trend moving away from the idea of "saving" one's self until one's wedding day. Older generations still seem to hold this value close to their hearts and younger generations believe in the freedom of sexuality. I would like to examine the relationship between strength of religious affiliation that one claims and one's beliefs about premarital sexual relations. Then, I would like to look at the age of respondents to see if there is a relationship between different generations. I believe that older generations will be more likely to have a stronger religious affiliation and therefore will be more likely to believe that premarital sex is always wrong. I think that younger generations will claim a weaker religious affiliation and therefore will be more accepting of premarital sex.

Literature Review

The results of reviewing literature have proved to be very interesting and indeed similar to what I am studying. One study, entitled "Sexual Behavior, Church Attendance,

and Permissive Beliefs Among Unmarried Young Men and Women”, asks how religion interacts with permissiveness in influencing premarital sexual behavior. The sample was college-aged students between the ages of 17 and 25. The researchers used a snowball sampling method to select their participants. They asked students in a family relations class at the University of Wisconsin-Stout to administer this survey to 10 other acquaintances. The dependent variable is frequency of intercourse and the 5 independent variables are sex, age, state you live in, church attendance, and beliefs about premarital sex (Jensen, Newell, & Holman, 1990). The key findings that I looked at from this study were that the highest frequency of sexual intercourse occurs for both permissive and nonpermissive subjects who attend church a few times a year. Those who attended church every week tended to believe that premarital sex with affection is immoral and also had the lowest frequency of sexual intercourse. Those who attend church weekly and believe that premarital sex with affection is moral had one of the highest frequencies of sexual intercourse. The findings suggest that those who believe premarital sex is immoral are more likely to have premarital sex infrequently and those who believe premarital sex is moral may have higher frequencies of premarital sex.

Another study entitled, “Age, Religious Beliefs, and Sexual Attitudes” is very similar to what I am planning on studying. Le Gall, Mullet, and Shafiqhi (2002) used a sample of 800 French adults aged 18 to 87. I thought this would be an interesting study to examine to see if there were any cross cultural effects, that is if French and American people are noticing a similar trend with sexual attitudes. The dependent variable was religious beliefs. The independent variables were sexual attitudes and age. The substantial finding was that religious beliefs’ effect on permissiveness was stronger

among older than younger participants. Older people tended to place more weight on their religious beliefs when talking about sexual attitudes. I believe that this finding will be similar in my study

Theory and Hypothesis

For those who have religion in their lives, whether it is by choice, by chance, or by force, religion plays an influential role in decision making and a person's belief system. The strength of one's affiliation with a religion will affect their views on premarital sex. The stronger one is affiliated with their religion, the more likely he or she is to believe that premarital sex is wrong. The hypothesized relationship is a positive one, in that a strong religious affiliation should increase disagreement with premarital sex. I think these variables correlate because most religions place a strong emphasis on waiting to have sex until you are married. It therefore makes sense that if a person truly believes in their religion and the values it instills, then they are more likely to believe that premarital sex is wrong. The dependent variable is opinion on premarital sex, the independent variable is strength of religious affiliation, and the test variable will be age. I chose age because I believe there will be a relationship between a person's age, their religious affiliation, and their opinion on premarital sex. Formally, I am hypothesizing that older people will be more likely to affiliate themselves strongly with a religion and therefore believe that premarital sex is wrong and that younger people will not be as likely to affiliate themselves strongly with a religion and therefore will not be opposed to premarital sex.

Methods

Data were collected from the 2000 data of the General Social Survey (GSS), a representative sample of the United States population.

Conceptualization

The dependent variable, from the GSS, is titled sex before marriage. It is conceptualized as whether or not the respondent believes that premarital sex is wrong based on the ever changing attitudes about moral issues such as this. The independent variable, which is strength of religious affiliation, is conceptualized as one's place among a continuum from strong affiliation to no religion at all. The test variable is age, which is conceptualized as age of the respondent at the time of measurement.

Operationalization

The dependent variable is operationalized by asking respondents the following question, "There's been a lot of discussion about the way morals and attitudes about sex are changing in this country. If a man and a woman have sexual relations before marriage, do you think it is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?" This can be found in the GSS under the indicator "premarsx". The attributes are as follows: not wrong at all (recoded 1), sometimes wrong (recoded 2), almost always wrong (recoded 3), always wrong (recoded 4). Attributes were recoded to represent a continuum from not wrong at all to always wrong.

The independent variable is operationalized by asking respondents the following question, "Would you call yourself a strong (PREFERENCE NAMED IN Q. 104 OR 104-A) or a not very strong (PREFERENCE NAMED IN Q. 104 OR 104-A)"? The question that is referred to, which is question 104, asks the respondents their religious

preference. The attributes for question 104 are as follows: Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, None, Other (specify), Buddhism, Hinduism, Other Eastern, Moslem/Islam, Orthodox-Christian, Native American, Internondenominational. I include this only to show that the independent variable I am looking at is based on answers that are referenced in question 104 and therefore are necessary to include. The attributes for the independent variable, which has the indicator of “reliten”, are as follows: no religion (recoded 1), not very strong (recoded 2), somewhat strong (recoded 3), and strong (recoded 4). Both the dependent and independent variables were recoded in order to form a continuum which correlated with one another in order to be easily comparable. This is based on the assumption that those with no religion will be compared with those who believe premarital sex is wrong and those who strong believe in religion will strongly disapprove of premarital sex.

Lastly, the test variable is operationalized by asking the respondent their age at the time of the measurement, with the age range being from 18-89 years old. The indicator for age on the GSS is conveniently titled “age”. I recoded age into 4 categories to appropriate groups based on generations. They are as follows: 18-28 (recoded 1), 29-45 (recoded 2), 46-65 (recoded 3), 66-89 (recoded 4). The categories of “Don’t Know” and “Not Available” were dismissed for all variables.

Analysis

Univariate Statistics

According to Figure 1, approximately 16% of the respondents claimed they had no religion while 36% claimed that they had a strong religious affiliation. 11% had a somewhat strong religious affiliation while 37% had a not very strong religious

affiliation. Figure 2 shows that 42% of respondents thought premarital sex was not wrong at all while 28% thought it was always wrong. Only 9% of respondents thought it was almost always wrong and 21% thought that it was sometimes wrong. Figure 3 shows that 17% of the sample falls between the ages of 18 and 28, 39% of the sample falls between the ages of 29 and 45, 29% fall between the ages of 46 and 65, and 17% fall between the ages of 66 and 89.

Bivariate Statistics

The data in Table 1 show that there is a significant relationship between religious affiliation and people's attitudes about premarital sex. Those who are more religious are more likely to believe that premarital sex is always wrong. It follows that those with no religion are more likely to believe that premarital sex is permissible. The findings are very substantial and very distinct. 46% of the respondents with a strong religious affiliation thought that premarital sex was always wrong compared with 11% who had no religion and thought premarital sex was always wrong. About 68% of those with no religion thought that premarital sex was not wrong at all versus 27% with a strong religious affiliation.

Trivariate Statistics

The data in Table 2 show a significant relationship between religious affiliation, attitudes towards premarital sex, and age. In categories of the test variable, the original relationship was replicated, in that as religiosity increased, belief in premarital sex decreased. In looking at the test variable of age, younger generations, like those in the 18-28 category, are more likely than older generations, like the 66-89 category, to believe

that premarital sex is permissible, for both no religion and strong religious affiliation. For 18-28 year olds with no religion, 72% think that premarital sex is not wrong at all versus only 50% of 66-89 year olds who claim to have no religion. For those who claim to have a strong religious affiliation, 35% of 18-28 year olds believe premarital sex is not wrong at all versus only 14% of 66-89 year olds. One reason for this finding is that younger generations are not as influenced by their religions, or lack of religion, as older generations are. Also, younger generations may be influenced by other factors which lead them to be more accepting of premarital sex.

The inverse is true in that older generations are more likely than younger generations to think that premarital sex is always wrong, for both no religion and strong religious affiliation. For 66-89 year olds who claim to have a strong religious affiliation, 55% believe that premarital sex is always wrong versus 39% of 18-28 year olds who have a strong religious affiliation. For those who claim to have no religious affiliation, 29% of 66-89 year olds believe that premarital sex is always wrong versus only 11% of 18-28 year olds.

I did not compare the statistics for the middle ages, 29-45 and 46-65, rather I did the extremes because that showed the biggest differences. I would just like to point out that as age increased, so did the percentages in each category of the test variable for those who had a strong religion and thought that premarital sex was always wrong. Also, as age increased, the percentages made a steady decrease in all categories of the test variable for those who had no religion and thought that premarital sex was not wrong at all. This means that each category of the test variable demonstrated a monotonic relationship

Conclusion

Conclusion

There is no doubt that religion plays an influential role in the opinions people have about premarital sex. This was shown in the original relationship that was tested and can be seen again in Table 1. It is clear that our society has strong opinions of both religion and also of premarital sex. Because religion has emphasized the banning of premarital sex, it is not surprising that people are influenced by this belief and in turn make it a practice and a value. Premarital sex is considered a sin by most religions which has some serious consequences, like being disowned by family or church. These threats are very serious for most individuals. But over the years, this threat has been decreasing.

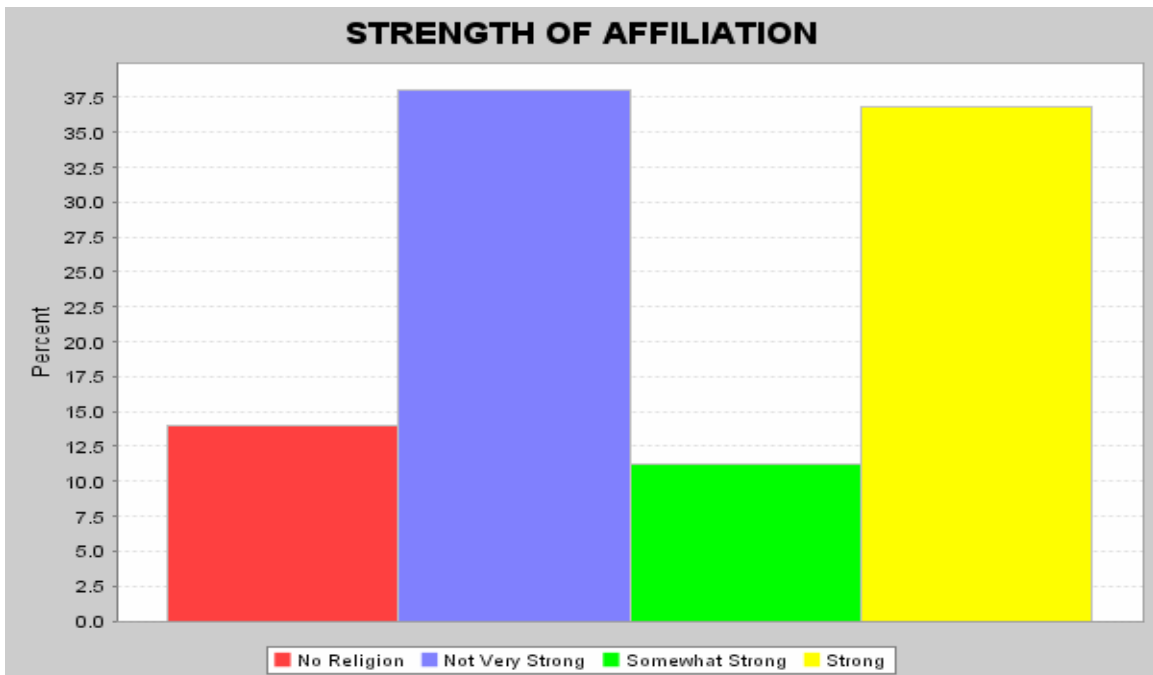
In Table 2, I introduce age as the test variable. I found out that regardless of religious affiliation, as age increased so did the opinion that premarital sex was wrong. Yes, it is true that religion still makes a difference in people's opinions about premarital sex, but what is more significant is the difference in the age groups. I believe that this change has come about for a multitude of reasons including sexual liberation and freedom, the availability of contraception including birth control pills and condoms, and the general "laxness" of the society in which we live in. Media no longer restricts sexual content on television. Sex scenes with no nudity can be seen on most cable networks if they choose to do so. Sex is no longer something that people keep in their closets. It is talked about, practiced, and becoming acceptable, whether we like it or not. The older generations cling to their views that premarital sex is wrong and that those who participate will be punished. The reality among younger generations is not that which older generations have experienced. Younger generations are educated about sex in schools, learn from their friends about it, and tend to experience sexual relations at a

much younger age. Younger people are no longer scared of religion and its repercussions for not following the rules. We also live in a time where people are getting married much later in life, younger men and women are more career oriented, rather than rushing to start a family. Most people will not wait until they are almost 30 to lose their virginity. It is just not the culture we live in, and as sociologists, we all know that our culture can be extremely influential.

Further Research

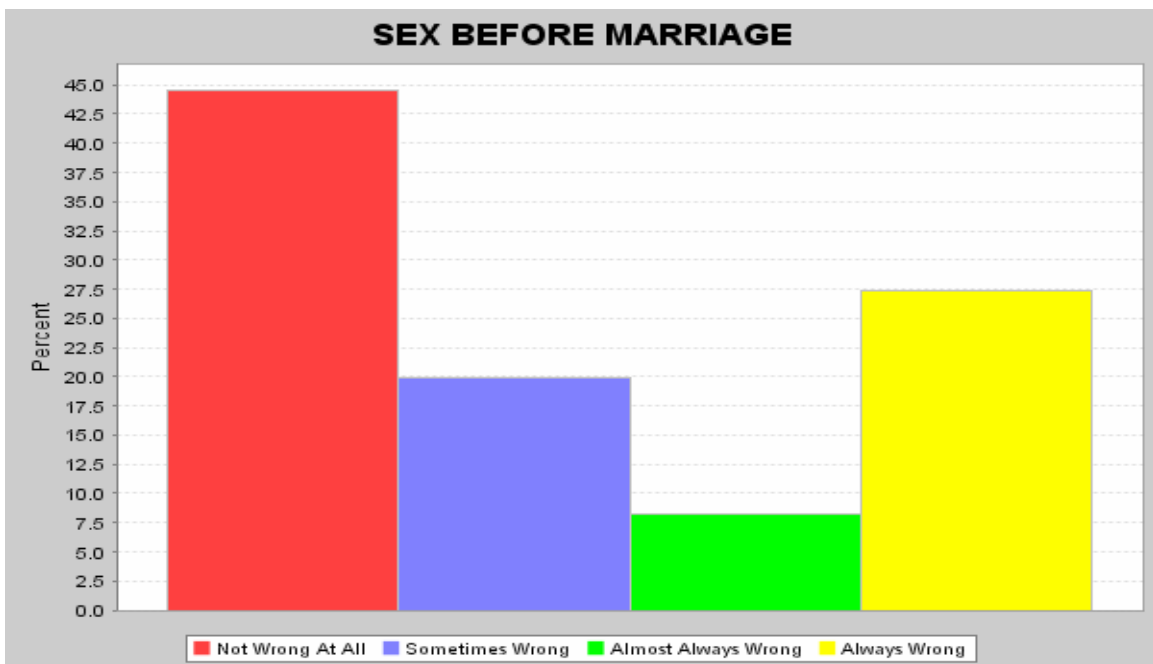
Some research that could further this study would take into account media effects, marriage trends, and also study religious influence on a population. Maybe sex on television has similar effects to violence on television. Also, it is common knowledge that the divorce rate is climbing and that a good number of people do not commit themselves to only one person. Often marriages fall apart, people commit adultery, and a lot of relationships just do not work. Further research should examine these trends and how it has affected younger and older generations. Maybe older generations are still under the assumption that marriage lasts whereas younger generations have a glum outlook on marriage and therefore do not think that premarital sex is a big deal. Also, researchers could examine church influences on people in more detail. Do people go to church because they are forced? Was religion always in people's lives or did they convert? Why did they convert? There are many angles which researchers can take to uncover some of the interesting social trends we have seen over the years concerning premarital sex.

Figure 1 – Percentage Distribution for Religious Affiliation



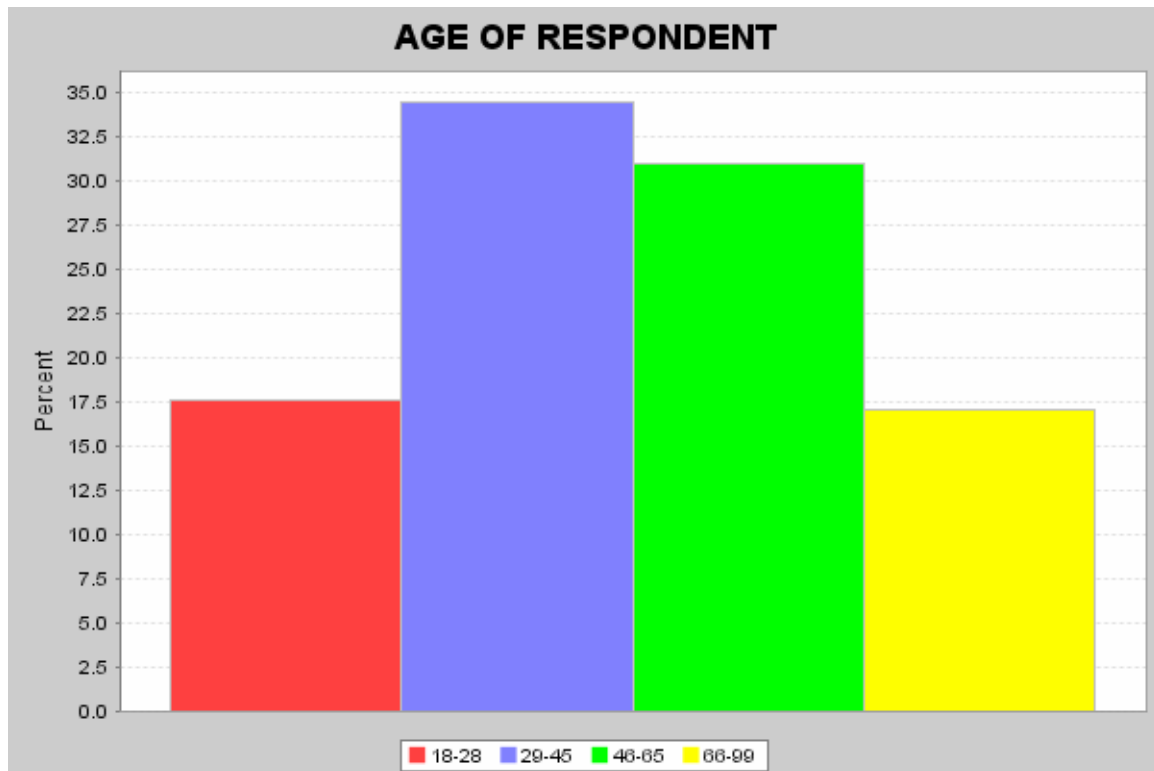
Source: General Social Survey (2000)

Figure 2 – Percentage Distribution on Attitudes about Premarital Sex



Source: General Social Survey (2000)

Figure 3 – Percentage Distribution for Age of Respondent



Source: General Social Survey (2000)

Table 1 - Percentage of Opinions on Premarital Sex by Religious Affiliation

Opinion on Premarital Sex	Religious Affiliation			
	No Religion	Not Very Strong	Somewhat Strong	Strong
Not Wrong at All	67.8	48.2	35.8	26.5
Sometimes Wrong	17.8	27.0	24.5	17.2
Almost Always Wrong	3.8	7.9	3.8	10.0
Always Wrong	10.6	16.9	25.8	46.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	264	608	159	600

Chisq = 241.83 x²: p = 0.00

Source: General Social Survey (2000)

Table 2 - Percentage of Opinions on Premarital Sex by Religious Affiliation by Age

Age of Respondent																
	18-28				29-45				46-65				66-89			
Opinion on Premarital Sex	No Religion	Not Very Strong	Some What Strong	Strong	No Religion	Not Very Strong	Some What Strong	Strong	No Religion	Not Very Strong	Some what Strong	Strong	No Religion	Not Very Strong	Some What Strong	Strong
Not Wrong At All	72.3	58.3	42.9	34.6	68.9	49.6	39.2	34.2	65.2	49.4	36.6	25.1	50.0	26.7	17.4	13.7
Some Times Wrong	13.8	29.1	38.1	19.2	18.5	28.7	18.9	14.4	21.2	27.3	24.4	18.0	14.3	17.3	30.4	19.0
Almost Always Wrong	3.1	1.9	19.0	7.7	1.7	9.3	10.8	9.9	7.6	6.4	14.6	9.0	7.1	14.7	17.4	12.4
Always Wrong	10.8	10.7	0.0	38.5	10.9	12.4	31.1	41.6	6.1	16.9	24.4	47.9	28.6	41.3	34.8	54.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	65	103	21	78	119	258	74	202	66	172	41	167	14	75	23	153

18-28: Chisq = 55.07 x²: p=0.00
 29-45: Chisq = 92.05 x²: p=0.00
 46-65: Chisq = 72.18 x²: p=0.00
 66-89: Chisq = 18.12 x²: p=0.03

Source: General Social Survey (2000)

References

- Jensen, L., & Newell Flea J., & Holman, T. 1990. Sexual Behavior, Church Attendance, and Permissive Beliefs Among Unmarried Young Men and Women. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 29(1): 113-118.
- Le Gall, A., & Mullet, E., & Shafighi, S.R. 2002. Age, Religious Beliefs, and Sexual Attitudes. *Journal of Sex Research*. 39(3): 207-217.