



# Exploring the Relationship Between Adolescent Religiosity and Adulthood Anal Sex Experience



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## Introduction

- Religion affects virtually all populations in the United States, with 79% of people identifying with a particular religious group and 78% consider religion a very or fairly important part of their life (Gallup Poll, 2015-2016).
- Sexuality is also a fundamental constituent of identity that is highly dependent on adolescent experiences and attitudes (Hanna-Walker et al., 2023).
- The most prevalent sects of Christianity in the US (Evangelical Protestant, 25.4%, Catholic, 20.8%, and Mainline Protestant, 14.7%) have theological guidelines about sexuality and sexual behavior, based on interpretations and applications of religious scripture (NW et al., 2014, Kellogg Spadt et al., 2014).

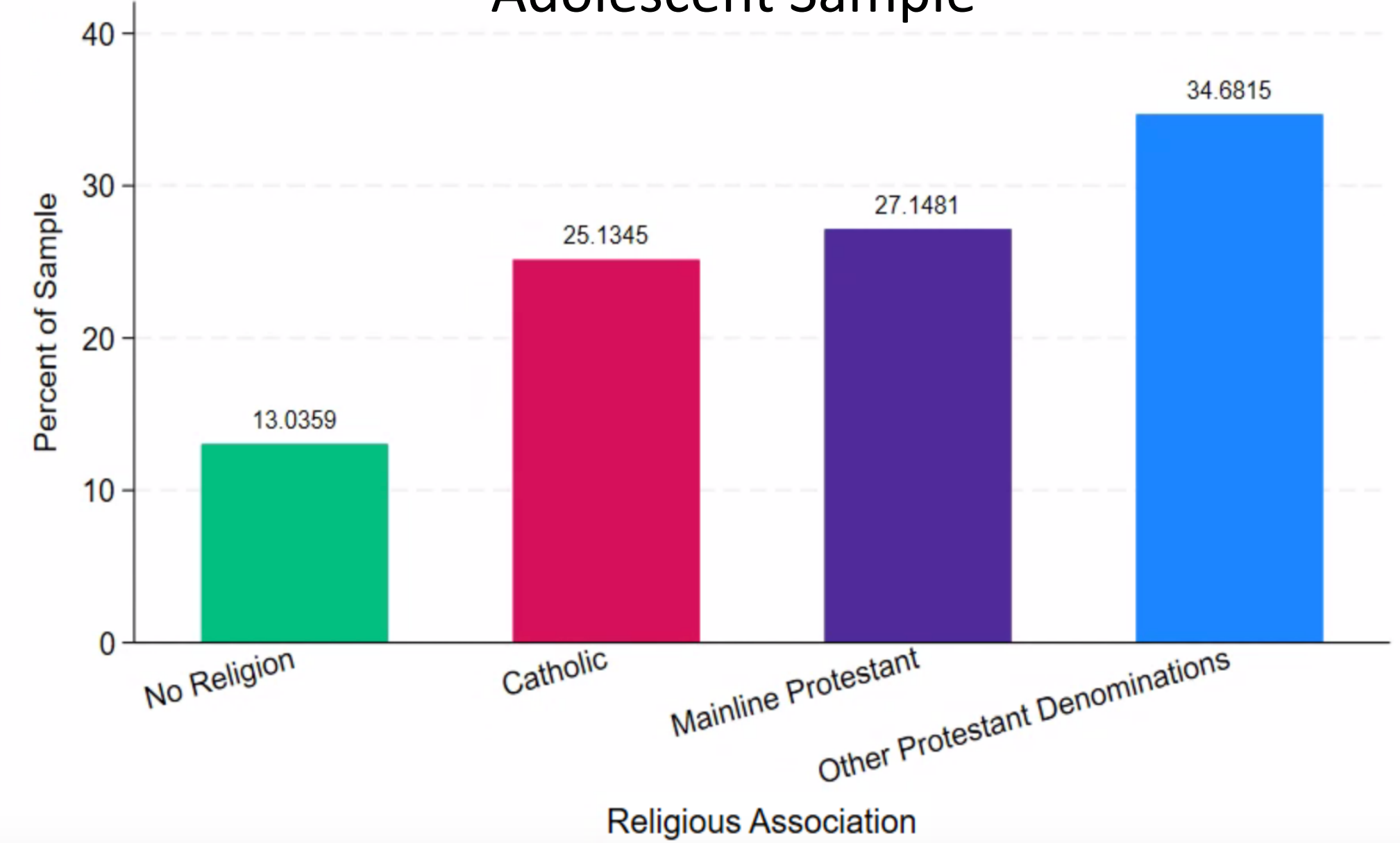
## Research Questions

- Is there a correlation between adolescent religiosity and adulthood anal sex experience?
- Does adolescent religiosity influence sexual behavior and experiences in adulthood?

## Results

### Univariate

Figure 1: Distribution of Religious Associations in Adolescent Sample



- A total of 13.04% of the adolescent sample recorded having no religious affiliation (Figure 1).
- The majority of the participants recorded affiliation with Protestant denominations that were not "Mainline" (34.68%) (Figure 1).
- The adult participants were almost evenly distributed in terms of having had (53.42%) or not having had anal sex (47.58%) (Figure 2).

### Bivariate

- Chi-Square analysis showed that **adolescents who agreed with their religious scripture were significantly less likely to engage in anal sex in adulthood** (44.76%) than those without religious affiliation or scripture (53.76%) and those who disagreed with the scripture (53.49%),  $\chi^2=27.81$ ,  $p<.001$  (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Percent of Adults with Anal Sex Experience over Adolescent Belief in Religious Scripture

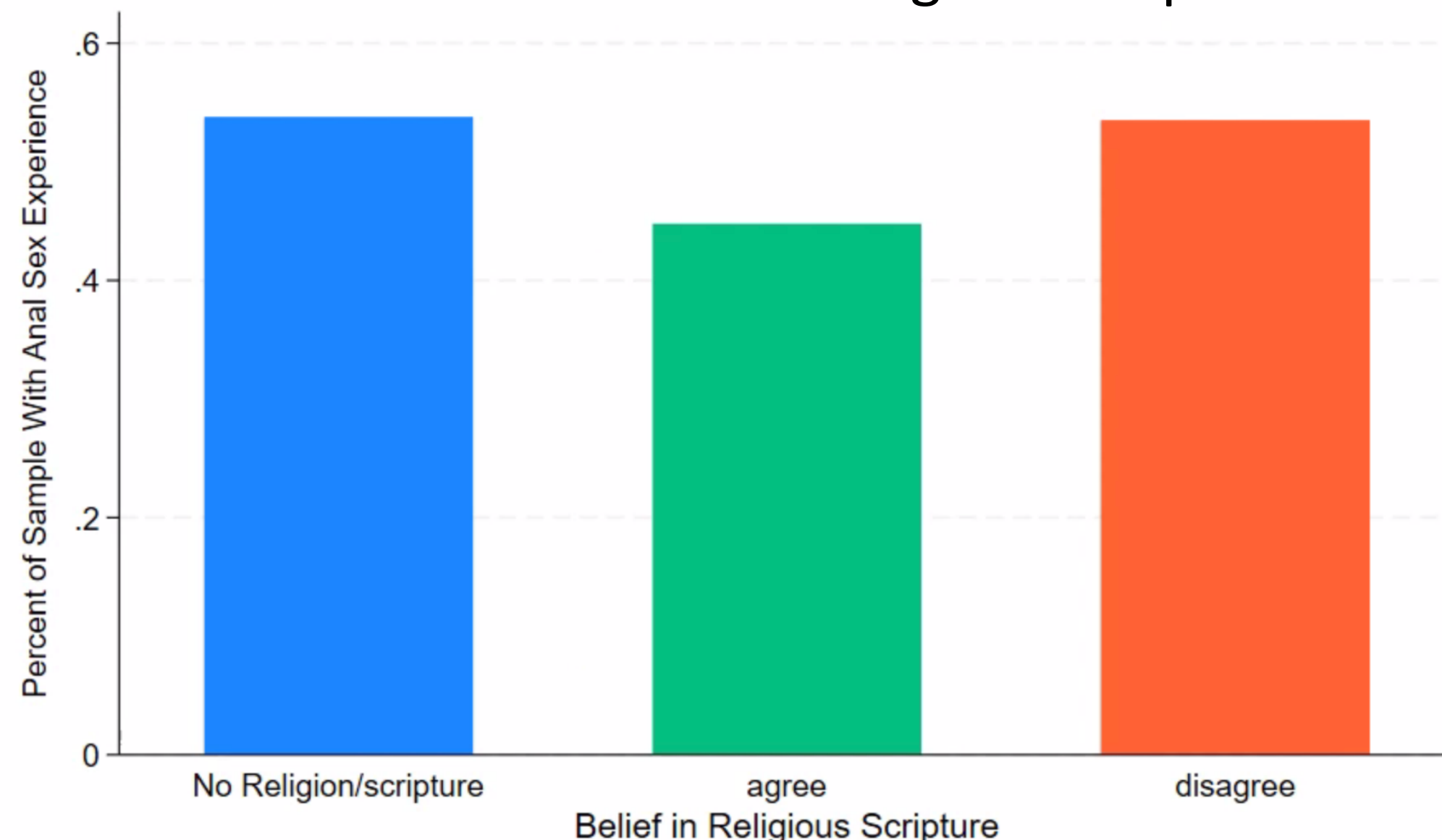
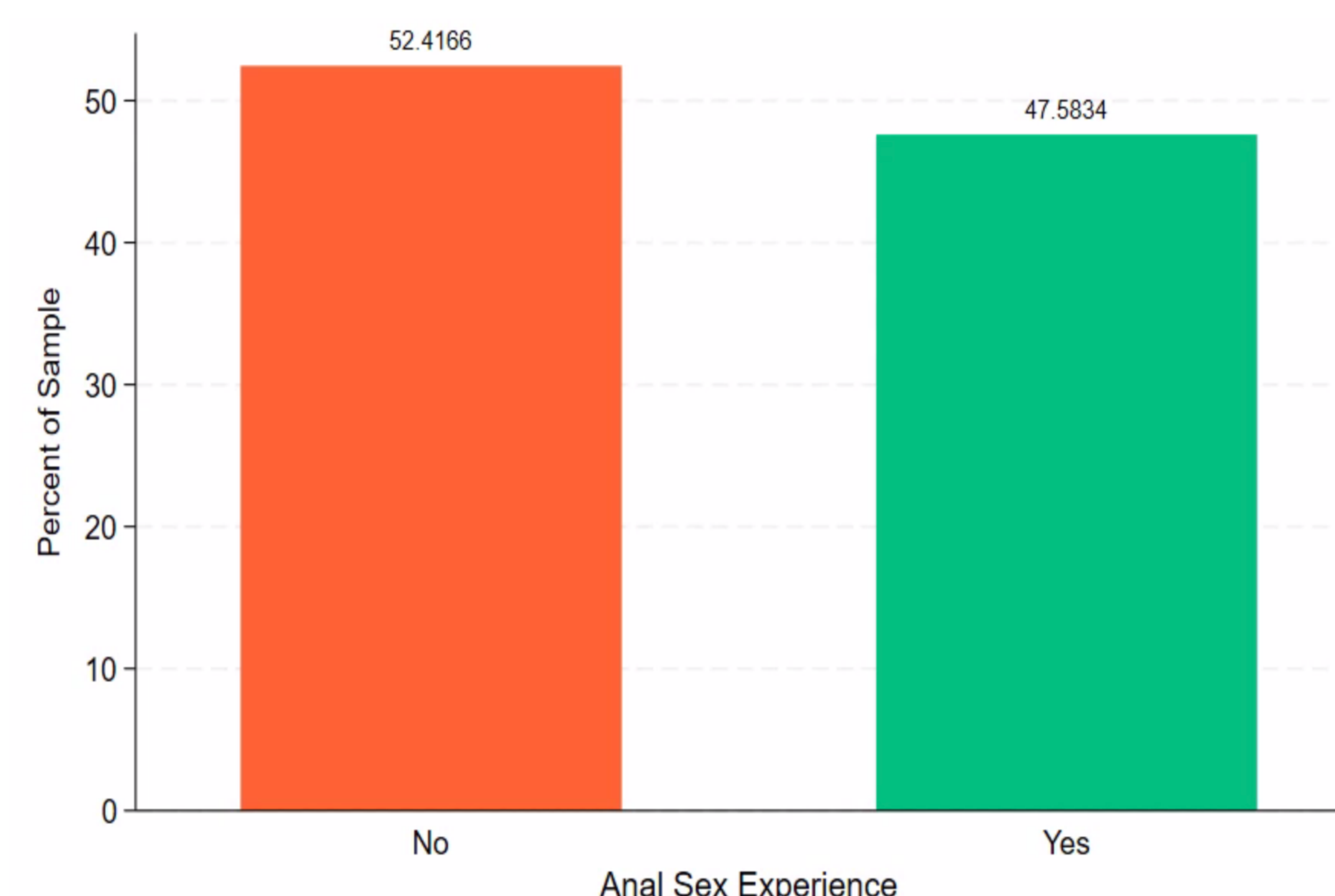
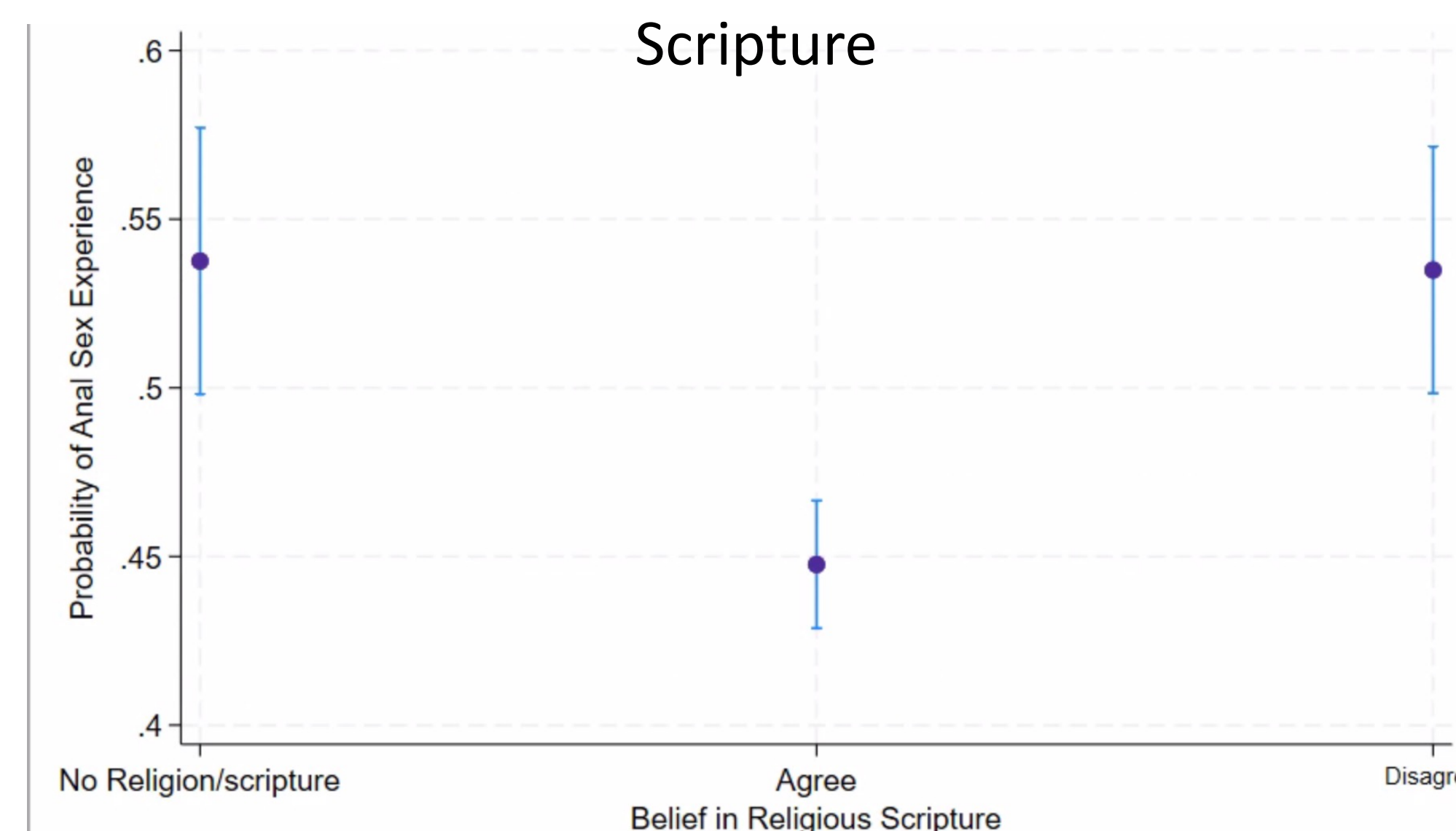


Figure 2: Distribution of Anal Sex Experience in Adult Sample



### Multivariate

Figure 4: Probability of Adulthood Anal Sex Experience Based on Adolescent Belief in Religious Scripture



- Logistic regression analysis revealed that those with no religious affiliation or no religious scripture and those who disagree with their religious scripture are significantly more likely to have anal sex than those who agree ( $p<.001$ ) (Figure 4).
- When controlling for biological sex, this relationship remained significant.
- However, adding variables measuring religious importance and service attendance results in collinearity, altering the significance of the relationship between belief in religious scripture and anal sex experience.

## Methods

### Sample

- Respondents from Wave I ( $n=5,761$ ) and V ( $n=4,138$ ) were selected from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (ADDHEALTH). Data from Wave I was taken from adolescents (grades 7-12) in 1994-95 and Wave V used the same participants at ages 32-42.
- The sample was further subset by religious affiliation, with the most prevalent religions (Catholic, Mainline Protestant, Other Protestant Branches) and those without religious affiliations selected.

### Measures

- Adolescent religiosity was primarily measured by the belief in religious scripture with the question, "Do you agree or disagree that the sacred scriptures of your religion are the word of God and completely without any mistakes?"
- Explanatory variables measuring religious association, religious service attendance (never, infrequently, frequently), and religious importance from 0 (not important) to 4 (very important) were also considered.
- Adulthood anal sex experience was measured with the question, "Have you ever had anal sex?".

## Discussion

- There is a significant relationship between adolescent religiosity and adulthood experience in anal sex with adolescents who reported belief in their religious scripture being less likely to record anal sex experience in adulthood.
- The collinearity observed between explanatory variables measuring frequency of religious service attendance, importance of religion in one's life, and belief in religious scripture shows the similarity between these variables.
- Limitations to the legitimacy of this study include only analyzing data from the most prevalent religious affiliations in the US (which are all Christian denominations) and only using anal sex experience (not other sexual practices).
- Additionally, religious affiliations were only used to visualize the distribution of the adolescent sample, but were not analyzed in tandem with belief in religious scripture.
- While biological sex does not confound or moderate the data, future studies could account for variables relating to sexual orientation, adulthood religiosity and premarital sex.
- The statistical significance of this relationship could provide evidence that adolescent religiosity influences adulthood sexual experiences. This would have crucial implications for understanding the intersection between religion and sexuality.

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