Learning from the Religious Experiences of Bi+ Trans People

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This article builds upon emerging studies of bi+ and trans populations to explore the importance of expanding studies of religion and non-religion beyond an almost entirely cisgender and monosexual focus. Specifically, we utilize the largest qualitative sample of bi+ trans people (n = 249) in sociology to date to explore the ways people in both these populations experience religion. We find that while some bi+ trans people note exceptional positive experiences in religious contexts, they almost entirely experience religion as a source of damnation and trauma. Our analysis speaks to sociologies of (1) gender and (non)religion, (2) sexualities and (non)religion, and (3) (non)religious bi+ and/or trans experience. Our conclusion outlines implications for developing bi+ and trans inclusive studies of religion and nonreligion.
Keywords: religion, bisexual, transgender, gender, sexualities, inequality

Across the social sciences, emerging lines of research are directing attention to the experiences of and variations within bi+ (i.e., genital-and/or-gender-non-specific sexualities) and trans (i.e., people who do not conform to the sex/gender assigned to them by society) populations (e.g., Monro, Hines, and Osborne 2017; Schilt and Lagos 2017). While bi+ and trans (see Table 1 for terms and definitions) populations have been part of society throughout recorded history (Eisner 2013; Stryker 2008), they have received much less methodological, theoretical, and empirical consideration than most other sexual and gender populations. Attention to the experiences of such

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people expands many areas of sociology while revealing multiple unanswered questions. Further, emerging analyses show that bi+ and trans people are more negatively evaluated by religious *and* nonreligious others than other social groups (e.g., Cragun and Sumerau 2015, 2017; Worthen 2013), and are less likely to be engaged in religion as adults despite relatively high levels of spirituality (Rodriguez, Lytle, and Vaughan 2013). While these emerging lines of scholarship are shedding light on neglected topics, they raise many questions for our fields.

As others have suggested (e.g., Barringer, Sumerau, and Gay 2017; Mathers 2017a), the current situation somewhat mirrors similar revelations related to lesbian and gay populations in the 1980s and 1990s. In that case, the following years led to dramatic expansions of our fields, and to a wide variety of interactionist discussions and insights as gay and lesbian people, issues, and experiences found more voice, attention, and analyses. One of the many places this occurred was and continues to be in interactionist studies of religion (for reviews, see Barton 2012; Thomas and Olson 2012; Wilcox 2009). As early studies (e.g., Mahaffy 1996; Thumma 1991; Yip 1997) broadened the field beyond heterosexual experiences then, here we join others doing the same type of expansion beyond cisgender and monosexual limitations today. To this end, our article offers the first interactionist analyses of religious experiences of people who are both bi+ and trans, and draws attention to unanswered questions in at least three areas of sociological studies of religion and nonreligion.

We utilize a mixed-methodological survey focused on transgender experience — one specifically designed to also capture many religious and nonreligious dynamics — to explore the ways 249 bi+ transgender people experience religion.[1] In so doing, our analysis synthesizes and extends interactionist and other sociological scholarship on (1) gender and (non)religion, (2) sexualities and (non)religion, and (3) (non)religious experiences of bi+ and/or trans people. It is not our intention, however, to generalize these findings to broader populations of bi+ people, trans people, bi+ trans people, cisgender and/or monosexual (non)religious people, or other populations. Rather, we use the insights gleaned from this case to demonstrate the importance of further incorporating bi+, transgender, and bi+ transgender experiences into sociology, and suggest new pathways for future studies.

GENDER AND (NON)RELIGION

While relatively unexplored in emerging nonreligious studies to date (see, e.g., Cragun and Sumerau 2017; Dunn and Creek 2015; Smith 2013), there is a robust literature on relationships between gender and religion (for reviews, see Avishai, Jafar, and Rinaldo 2015; Burke 2012; Bush 2010). Implications of this body of work include that people generally must "do gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987) as part of "doing religion" (Avishai 2008), since most religions have specific conceptualizations of what and how "gender is supposed to be" in relation to the supernatural and their theologies (Sumerau, Cragun, and Mathers 2016a). Studies also suggest the vast majority

TABLE 1. Definitions and Terms

Term	Definition[a]
Gender Binary	The social and biological classification of sex and gender into two distinct oppositional forms of masculine and feminine selfhood.
Trans	A Latin prefix meaning "on the other side of." Often used as a prefix before "man" and/or "woman," or as a prefix before the word "gender" to signify a person who does not identify with their sex assigned at birth. An abbreviation used to refer to Transgender people as a whole regardless of individual gender identities and/or Transgender as an umbrella term for gender nonconformity.
Cis	A Latin prefix meaning "on the same side as." Often used as a prefix before man or woman to refer to someone whose current gender identity/expression align with their sex assigned at birth.
Transgender[b]	An umbrella term referring to all people living within, between and/or beyond the gender binary, which may also be used to denote an individual gender identity.
Cisgender	An umbrella term referring to people who conform to the gender binary by interpreting their gender identity as congruent with the sex they were assigned by society.
Cissexism	An ideology that assumes cisgender identities are superior to and more authentic than transgender identities.
Cisnormativity	An ideology that assumes and expects that all people are and should be cisgender by disallowing transgender experience and enforcing cissexism in belief and practice.
Ze, Zir, Hir, Zirself They, Them, Themself(ves)	Gender neutral pronouns that allow one to refer to people without assuming their gender and/or gendering them in the process.
Trans man	An identity referring to people socially assigned female at birth who transition (socially, biologically, or both) to living as men/male.
Trans woman	An identity referring to people socially assigned male at birth who transition (socially, biologically, or both) to living as women/female.
Intersex	An identity referring to people whose biological credentials do not fit within binary conceptions of gendered and sexed bodies.
Gender Queer/Fluid/ Variant	An identity referring to people who reject gender labels, and live as women, men, neither, and/or both in varied situations over the life course.
Agender	An identity referring to people who reject gender labels because they do not feel or believe that they have a gender in the socially constructed system suggesting all people should conform to gendered systems.
Bigender	An identity referring to people who live as both women and men, but shift their self-presentation and identity in relation to various contexts or feelings over the life course.
Gender Binary	The social and biological classification of sex and gender into two distinct oppositional forms of masculine and feminine selfhood.
Bi	A Latin prefix meaning "two." Often used in front of the word "sexual" to refer to people who experience attraction to people with multiple gender and sex identities (i.e., my body type and others or my gender and others). While anti-bi groups have sought to redefine the two to conform to the gender binary (i.e., a form of biphobia and monosexism), bi people, activists, and history have sought to refute such claims throughout the past few decades and consistently defined it in the above manner since before the origins of modern science or society.[c]
Pan	A prefix derived from Greek meaning "all" or "across." Sometimes placed in front of the word "sexual" to refer to someone who experiences attraction to people across a variety of genital configurations and/or gender identities and/or with little regard to gender at all.

TABLE 1. Continued

Term	Definition[a]
Poly	A prefix derived from Greek meaning "many." Often placed in front of the word "amorous" to refer to people who have the potential to engage in relationships with multiple people at the same time.
Mono	A Latin prefix meaning "one," "only," or "single." Sometimes used before the words "sexual" or "amorous" to refer, respectively, to (1) person who experiences attraction to only one sex or gender and/or (2) a person who engages in relationships with only one person at a time.
Bisexual	A term referring to people who experience attraction to people with genders or bodies that are like their own and different from their own to varying degrees over the life course.[d]
Pansexual	A term referring to people who experience attraction with little consideration of gender and/or varied sex organs.
Sexually Fluid/ Queer/ Variant	An identity referring to people who reject sexuality labels and live as monosexual, bisexual, neither, and/or both in varied situations over the life course
Bi+	An umbrella term referring to anyone who does not experience monosexual patterns of desire and attraction.[e]
Monosexual	An umbrella term referring to people who experience attraction to only one sex or gender.
Polyamorous	A relationship structure where a given person may have multiple partners at one time.
Monogamous	A relationship structure where a given person has only one partner at a time.
Monosexism	A system of inequality that assumes monosexual identities (heterosexual, gay, lesbian) are superior to and more authentic than bi+ identities.[f]
Mononormativity	An ideology that assumes and expects that all people are and should be monosexual and monogamous by disallowing bi+ and polyamorous experience and enforcing monosexism and compulsory monogamy in belief and practice.

This Table contains terms relevant to the current discussion but is by no means exhaustive. further, it is important to note that the meaning of any term may shift over time and between contexts.

[a] For further discussion of these terms and definitions, see, for example, Serano (2007), Schilt and Westbrook (2009), Stryker (2008), Westbrook and Schilt (2014). The definitions for the prefixes cis and trans are drawn from and/or expanded from the definitions presented by Yavorsky (2016).

[b] While we focus on gender in this table and the paper, each of these terms has a corollary in relation to "sex" labels.

[c] See Holthaus (2015) for an expanded conversation on the ways bisexual activists and individuals have resisted the binary "man/woman" definition of bisexuality over the past 20+ years.

[d] See Ochs (2005) for more on the definition of bisexual.

[e] See Eisner (2013) for more on bi+ communities and definitions.

[f] See Eisner (2013) for more on monosexism.

of conservative religions have more patriarchal, hierarchical conceptions of gender dating back at least to transformations in the 1800s (Burke 2016; Sumerau and Cragun 2015a). Further, such scholarship reveals religious people may (consciously and unconsciously) conform to, reject, and/or partially conform and partially reject the official gender norms of their faith in a wide variety of ways (Bartkowski and Read 2003; Gerber 2015; Sumerau 2012), and that such official gender norms change over time (McQueeney 2009; Robinson and Spivey 2007; Sumerau and Cragun 2015b). Rather than clean-cut relationships, the combination of these insights reveal complex ways people do gender as part of doing religion in a wide variety of settings and forms (Avishai 2016).

What these studies almost entirely have in common, however, is that they focus on only cisgender people (people who conform to the sex and gender assigned to them by society) without much, if any, discussion of transgender or other gender nonconforming identities between cis and trans ends of the spectrum (see, e.g., Mathers 2017b; Sumerau and Cragun 2015c; Sumerau, Cragun, and Mathers 2016a). When social scientists of religion — interactionist or otherwise — have explored noncisgender issues, such studies have found that religious and nonreligious people have more negative attitudes toward transgender people than any other social group (Cragun and Sumerau 2015, 2017; Worthen 2013). At the same time, however, scholars have revealed that trans people are active in various religions (James et al. 2016; Sumerau, Cragun, and Mathers 2016a; Wilcox 2009). For instance, the largest survey of transgender Americans to date (James et al. 2016) reveals that even if they are not open about their religious identities, 40% of trans respondents identified as religious. Additionally, many other transgender people (58%) are members of nonreligious populations (James et al. 2016). What might we be missing from understandings of religion and nonreligion due to the almost entirely cisgender focus of the field to date?

SEXUALITIES AND (NON)RELIGION

As Kolysh (2017) notes, sexualities literature is another place where nonreligious studies have rarely ventured thus far (see also Dunn and Creek 2015; Smith 2013; Sumerau 2016). Once again, however, there is a massive literature — growing increasingly since the 1990s — concerning relationships between religion and sexualities (for reviews, see Barton 2012; Sherkat 2016; Wilcox 2009). Researchers in this vein have found that almost every religion has moral and institutional regulations and assumptions tied to "proper" sexual activity (Wolkomir 2006), relationships (O'Brien 2004), forms (Elliott 2012), practices (Burke 2016), and identities (Sumerau 2017). These studies also trace and reveal antagonism (Fetner 2008), innovation (Wilcox 2003), compromise (Thomas and Olson 2012), affirmation (Moon and Tobin 2018), rejection (Erzen 2006), and complex maneuvering throughout society and in specific religious populations (Barrett-Fox 2016) in relation to tensions (Sumerau, Grollman, and Cragun 2018) and, at times and in some cases, collaborations (McQueeney 2009) between cisgender religious, nonreligious, heterosexual, lesbian, and gay people over

the past 40 years. Such studies also show many ways people — individually or more outwardly in groups — may accept and conform to or reject and oppose official religious teachings about sexualities (Moon 2004; Pitt 2010; Sumerau, Padavic, and Schrock 2015). Overall, interactionists document many ways sexualities and religion intertwine in many religious, sexual, and/or religious-sexual populations.

Once again, however, most of these studies have at least one thing in common: an almost complete focus upon and limitation to monosexuality (i.e., people with genital-and-or-gender-specific-sexualities) with only occasional mentions and often no analyses of bisexualities. Especially considering the bi+ population is over twice the size of *either* lesbian or gay populations and just larger than the *combined* LG population (Gates 2011), this tendency seems especially striking. Further, emerging studies of religious and nonreligious attitudes toward bi+ people reveal that only transgender people are viewed in a less favorable light by both religious and nonreligious groups (Cragun and Sumerau 2015, 2017; Sumerau and Grollman 2018), and that some Christians mobilize negative stereotypes of lesbian/gay people to attack bisexualities (and trans people) today (Sumerau, Grollman, and Cragun 2018). Again we ask: What might we be missing in studies of religion and nonreligion due to the almost entirely monosexual focus to date?

BI+ AND/OR TRANS (NON)RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

As suggested in the two previous sections, analyses of bi+ and/or trans nonreligious and religious experiences, as well as the ways religious and nonreligious people make sense of bi+ and trans people, are in their infancy at present. While sociologists within and beyond interactionist traditions have often utilized the LGBT acronym in the past couple decades, they almost entirely focus on only the LG (see also Rodriguez, Lytle, and Vaughan 2013; Schilt and Lagos 2017). Likewise, similar to attention to LG people prior to the 1990s, the absence of BT people in past research is not completely total as some studies do mention, contain very small numbers of, or suggest nonmonosexual and/or non-cisgender possibilities (Sherkat 2016; Sumerau, Padavic, and Schrock 2015; Wilcox 2009; for more examples, see also discussions in theological fields and works in *Journal of Bisexuality* and *Journal of Transgenderism*). It seems as if our empirical efforts have been (likely unintentionally) mostly conforming to monosexual and cisgender social norms to date.

There is no way to empirically ascertain the source of this pattern. However, it is interesting that — despite much discussion of differences between the meanings claimed by the two (Cimino and Smith 2014) — negative attitudes toward bi+ and trans populations (i.e., biphobia and transphobia) may be two things shared by contemporary religious and nonreligious movements (Cragun and Sumerau 2017) even though these attitudes are even more negative among the religious (see also Worthen 2013). It is equally interesting that (as Sherkat 2016 notes) bisexual members of the bi+ population[2] may be the least likely adults to maintain religious involvement. Likewise, it is intriguing that emerging studies show that rhetoric

directed at LG people throughout the last few decades (Fetner 2005) is now finding more use specifically against BT people — even among religious people who claim to support LG rights — as movements for the rights of each group rise into mainstream recognition like LG efforts did in the 1980s and 1990s (Sumerau and Cragun 2018; Sumerau, Grollman, and Cragun 2018). As interactionists, what are we to make of these patterns?

At the very least, we suggest it is long past time to more fully incorporate bi+ and trans experiences, populations, questions, concerns, and issues into our analyses. In this article, we join others in this effort by providing (1) the largest sample of bi+ and trans religious experiences qualitatively explored in social science to date; (2) the first interactionist analyses of the religious experiences of bi+ trans people (i.e., people who are members of both populations at the same time); (3) extensions of two of the more varied and robust literatures in social scientific studies of religion and interactionism in the past two decades; and (4) future pathways to expand our efforts to examine the empirical diversity of sexual and gender populations in contemporary society. In so doing, we outline the common, generic, or regularly-occurring experiences that bi+ trans people report with religious others, as well as some ways their experiences reveal many unanswered questions in existing studies. Rather than attempting to generalize our findings to a larger population, we — following principles of analytic induction (Blumer 1969; Kleinman 2007) — show patterns of activity bi+ trans people experience in religions that may be examined in a wide variety of contexts, settings, and situations throughout society and in the coming years.

DATA AND METHODS

Data for this study derive from a mixed-methodological survey of transgender experience, which (though unintentionally) roughly approximates the religious demographics of the largest survey of transgender people in the United States to date (James et al. 2016). We utilized this type of survey in order to capture a broader diversity of transgender populations and experience than would currently be possible with other methods (Magliozzi, Saperstein, and Westbrook 2016; Nowakowski, Sumerau, and Mathers 2016). The survey was constructed by the first and second authors with another colleague while utilizing insights from interactions with other trans people occupying a wide variety of social locations. Data collection took place in 2016. A snowball method was employed, wherein the survey was advertised by trans organizations online and through mailing lists. At the end of the survey, the software generated a unique URL participants could share with others. To take the survey, respondents had to be 18 years old and self-identify as a member of the broader transgender population. This approach resulted in a sample of 469 transgender people, which we utilize elsewhere. Here, we focus on the 249 participants who identified as both bi+ and trans, utilizing varied identities within these umbrellas (see Table 2 for demographics of the sample). Of these 249 respondents, most are white, have at least some college education, and make less than $20,000 per year.

TABLE 2. Demographics of the Sample

	Religiously Affiliated (%; *n* = 90)	Not Religiously Affiliated (%; *n* = 125)	Full Sample (%; *n* = 249)
Sexual identity			
Bisexual	22.4	12.0	16.5
Pansexual	25.5	31.6	28.1
Queer	49.0	50.4	50.6
Fluid	3.1	6.0	4.8
Gender			
Transgender	12.2	14.4	12.9
Transsexual	3.1	2.6	3.6
Gender fluid	6.1	8.5	7.6
Gender queer	23.5	12.0	17.3
Nonbinary	12.2	18.8	16.5
Intersex	2.0	0.0	1.2
Agender	6.1	10.3	8.4
Gender neutral	3.1	2.6	2.4
Bi gender	1.0	0.9	1.2
Cross dresser	1.0	0.0	0.4
Transman	15.3	17.9	16.1
Transwoman	14.3	12.0	12.4
Race/Ethnicity			
Non-Hispanic White	78.7	86.6	82.4
Non-Hispanic Black	5.3	1.8	3.9
Hispanic	6.4	3.6	4.6
Asian	2.1	1.8	2.5
Native American	4.3	2.7	3.3
Mixed	3.2	3.5	3.3
Social class			
Lower	36.8	38.4	37.3
Middle	60.0	61.6	61.4
Upper	3.2	0.0	1.3
Educational Attainment			
Less than high school	2.1	3.5	2.9
High school	8.1	15.7	17.7
Some college	28.9	18.3	26.5
College graduate	42.3	33.0	35.3
Master's	8.2	21.7	14.7
Professional (JD/MD)	5.2	2.6	2.9
PhD	5.2	5.2	0.0
Income			
Less than $20,000	51.2	45.5	49.5
$20,001–$40,000	26.2	31.8	28.4
$40,001–$60,000	11.9	9.1	10.8
$60,001–$80,000	3.5	8.2	5.9
$80,001–$100,000	6.0	1.8	3.1
Greater than $100,000	1.2	3.6	2.3
	Mean	Mean	Mean
Age	30.7	30.4	30.8
Political views (1 = conservative; 10 = progressive)	8.8	9.0	8.9

Note: Thirty-four participants did not report their religious affiliation. Those individuals are included in the full sample column, but not in either of the other two columns.

Unlike conventional social science surveys (like the GSS to date) and following guidelines for best practices when seeking to move beyond the sex, gender, and sexual limitations of existing surveys, respondents were not forced into or assigned binary sex/gender categories (Magliozzi, Saperstein, and Westbrook 2016; Sumerau et al. 2017; Westbrook and Saperstein 2015). Rather, demographics all come from the self-identification of respondents. Respondents were able to identify in terms of sex, gender, sexualities, race, class, and other demographics by selecting from a broad array of options and/or writing in their own responses. Respondents were also able to answer five open-ended questions at the end of the survey which asked about experiences with healthcare; religion; LGBTQIAP groups; cisgender people; and nonreligious, non-LGBTQIAP groups. The length of responses to these open-ended questions varied from one sentence to multiple paragraphs. While we explore other aspects of trans experience elsewhere, here we focus on open ended responses participants offered (writing as much or as little as they chose) about "positive and negative experiences with religious" traditions that represent experiences from locations all over the United States.

We approached our data analysis in an inductive fashion (Kleinman 2007) more similar to ethnography than conventional survey practices. This was because the responses we coded emerged from broad, open-ended, questions that allowed respondents to say whatever they wanted, and as a result, we had no way of knowing ahead of time what they might offer (i.e., positive, negative, or somewhere between). We thus began this analysis by open coding the entire qualitative portion of the data set, and sorting populations and themes into categories and patterns. While working on other analyses involving this dataset, we were cognizant of and kept up with emerging studies of bi+ and trans experiences and demographics throughout the social sciences, physical sciences, and humanities, and noticed that almost all the focus was either on (1) only either bi+ or trans experience, (2) trans experience without any discussion of sexual variation in the population, (3) bi+ experience with almost entirely cisgender-only samples and measurement techniques, or (4) small specific case studies or attempts to estimate populations. These studies are incredibly important, but we wondered about how the 50% of trans people who identify as sexually fluid or bi+ in some way interpret their religious experiences. Thus, we created separate data sets to explore these dynamics.

Once we had the data set outlined in Table 2, we — with the help of the third author — again went through the entirety of the qualitative data exploring recurring patterns (Kleinman 2007). In so doing, we developed insights in relation to other social institutions and forces we write about elsewhere while outlining patterns in religious experience repeated throughout the data set here. We turned our attention specifically to the most explicit religious question because (1) we can only share so much data in one article, and (2) while religion and nonreligion came up in some of the other open-ended questions that did not specifically ask about religion, these reports matched the overall pattern in the explicitly religious qualitative question. Thus, we focused on the overall pattern of reported religious experiences

to ascertain how respondents recounted interactions with religious leaders (what the question asked specifically) and religious others (what they added in responses to the question).

In the analysis that follows, we outline the most common experiences with religion reported by respondents. As other interactionist studies of religious and nonreligious experience regularly note, the pattern is not completely uniform (i.e., the overall experience is negative, but there are positive "exceptions" — as respondents call them). We present these nuances as potential levers for future study. Further, we only use the most common examples from the data as our focus is on the overall patterns (Kleinman 2007).

BI+ TRANS RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

The following analyses consists of three parts. First, we examine the most common experience reported in the data set (all but four respondents noted at least one thing that fits in this category), which concerns experiencing damnation in religions as a result of being bi+ and/or trans. Then, we explore the second most common experience reported by respondents (about 75% noted examples), which involves religious people — and especially leaders — acting in inconsistent ways. Finally, we present what some respondents (35%) noted as "exceptions" to the other two patterns, which reveal efforts of some religious people to be trans and/or bi+ inclusive; these occurred in religions generally defined as liberal or moderate.

While we treat each of these patterns of experience separately for the purposes of analytical clarity, the first two overlap in most participants' narratives, and even the third one overlaps in reports of the first two for those who report exceptions. Further, we intentionally utilize different respondents for each illustration (i.e., even when the same one made a similar point) for the purposes of sharing the voices of bi+ trans people missing in existing social science to date. We also identify each respondent in terms of their current, self-reported, (non)religious, sexual, and gender identity (e.g., Jewish, bisexual transman) to highlight the (non)religious, sexual, and gender intersections and diversity of populations interactionists could begin systematically studying with adjustments to conventional methods and sampling norms.

Damnation

Emerging studies of intersections between religion, nonreligion, bi+ experience, and trans experience suggest even as some religions have become less oppositional to gay and lesbian people and rights in some cases — offering tolerance (Thomas and Olson 2012), sympathy (Cragun, Sumerau, and Williams 2015), conditional acceptance (Sumerau, Grollman, and Cragun 2018), or even full affirmation (Moon and Tobin 2018) — damnation specifically targeted at bi+ and trans people has intensified (Mathers 2017b; Mathers, Sumerau, and Cragun 2018; Sumerau and Cragun 2018). Such studies also show bi+ and trans people are evaluated much more negatively by

religious people than LG or nonreligious people (Cragun and Sumerau 2017). It is not surprising that almost all respondents reported primarily negative experiences with religion.

In many cases, respondents reported blanket experiences of damnation in religious traditions of their youth. A Christian, pansexual transman noted: "There was nothing good to report, it was just negative responses growing up in Baptist and Pentecostal churches." A queer, genderfluid person who did not report a current religious or nonreligious identity added: "It is hard to even think about, just serious issues with Christians growing up that left me too scarred from all the hell talk." A nonreligious, queer agender person offered an example similar to many others (about 32%) in the data set:

> As a teenager, my youth pastor told me if I didn't repent for any non-heterosexual feelings I was going to hell. He said this while another minister poured fake blood on a large wooden cross in a room where all the lights had been changed to red light bulbs. I never entered the church again, there was no way, I only ever went inside one other church and that was because someone close to me really wanted me to go.

A Christian, bisexual transwoman added: "I attended a very queer and trans phobic church as a child, and had a hard time hearing how all the non-heterosexuals were going to hell." A nonreligious, bisexual agender person's statement about pastors echoed almost 30% of the sample and many prior studies of LG religious socialization (see, e.g., Thumma 1991; Wolkomir 2006; Wilcox 2009): "Every pastor I have ever met — or had the misfortune of meeting, I should say — told me I will burn in hell, that I was possessed and all kind of other stuff not in the Bible." Rather than religion, 22 different respondents suggested Christian churches were more like "prisons" or "cages" and echoed statements religious people in varied traditions have recently made about bi+ and/or trans people in interviews (Sumerau, Grollman, and Cragun 2018) and media (Fetner 2016). As discussed in the next section more fully, these respondents also noted (as in the last quote) that trans and bi phobia are not directly supported in most scripture in any explicit way (see also Moon and Tobin 2018). Interviews with cisgender, monsexual Christians reveal the same assessment of scripture (Sumerau and Cragun 2018).

Respondents also reported explicitly transphobic and biphobic examples from religious people occupying positions of power in society and/or specific traditions. As a nonreligious, pansexual agender person put it: "The Pope compared trans people to nuclear weapons, so I think it is pretty clear how many of them feel about us." Referencing the same speech, as did others in the data set (about 11%), a Pagan, queer transgender person stated: "The Pope says people like me are as dangerous as nuclear weapons, and I didn't hear any big outcry from other religious people about it." According to a nonreligious, pansexual nonbinary person: "My dad ran the men's group in church, and he completely disowned me when I came out at 16, which led to the same with the rest." In line with the pattern reflected by the responses above,

a nonreligious, pansexual transgender person recounts the following example from their youth:

> I tried to be the very picture of conservative Christian everyone wanted me to be, but I was taken aside by elders and told I wasn't trying hard enough and my mental illness was no excuse. I was shunned by everyone, and when I went to leaders higher up in the church I was told the others were right to shun me.

Whether local or national, respondents flesh out the hostility captured in prior surveys (Cragun and Sumerau 2017) and interviews (Mathers, Sumerau, and Cragun 2018; Sumerau, Grollman, and Cragun 2018): many contemporary religious people display strong antipathy toward anything nonmonosexual and/or noncisgender (and often still directed at LG people by some; see Moon and Tobin 2018). As others note (Avishai 2016; Avishai, Jafar, and Rinaldo 2015; Bush 2010), this suggests religion may often be more about normative understandings of gender and sexualities than anything related to a higher power, morality, love or care for others, or anything otherwise explicitly religious (see also Burke 2016). Through their recollections of their experiences, respondents also demonstrate that such efforts have real consequences for sexual and gender minorities (see also Barton 2012; Moon and Tobin 2018; Wilcox 2009).

There are many other patterns in this portion of the data we could discuss. One particularly striking pattern is that many bi+ trans people (about one third of the sample) reported religious traditions as sites of abuse, which in and of itself likely contributes to lower likelihood of remaining in or joining religions in adulthood. A Pagan, pansexual agender person explained:

> My experience with Christianity involved mostly abuse until I disappeared without a trace from my entire family and community. They were emotionally and psychologically abusive as well as neglectful and dangerous for my health. I know many people who had similar experiences, and had to work for years afterward on them. The religion ruined any relationship with my parents because it made them homophobic, transphobic, biphobic, and racist to the point of even keeping me away from doctors when I needed help. What scares me is my experience wasn't the worst I have seen.

In another illustrative example, a Pagan, pansexual transwoman told a poignant and revealing story about the abuse she experienced in religious settings:

> My parents surrendered their rights to the minister and membership board of the local church. I was fostered over the next two years by members of the church and then in a Christian home. It was not accredited or monitored, and it was abusive (mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually) and designed to break us of individuality and indoctrinate us into the religion. I mean, I have had many positive experiences with spiritual leaders, but I have not yet had a positive experience with a religious leader.

Other respondents also spoke of excommunication, banishment, exorcisms, and other methods whereby religious others sought to coerce them into their own beliefs

about gender and sexualities no matter how much they believed in their higher power or practiced their religion (see also Sumerau, Cragun, and Mathers 2016a). They reported concerted efforts to make religion about specific gender and sexual norms regardless of any faith, belief, or other explicitly religious facet. As the quotes above reveal, such coercion often became abusive, and left lasting scars mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually for bi+ trans people.

Like many nonreligious (Sumerau and Cragun 2016) and gay and lesbian (Pitt 2010) people, respondents also elaborated on often avoiding disclosure to religious people as a result of these experiences.[3] As a Muslim, queer, intersex trans person illustrates: "There is so much stigma so I keep my identity pretty quiet in religious spaces." A Buddhist, queer nonbinary person took a similar approach: "It is too hard. I generally don't discuss my identities with religious people anymore." A nonreligious, queer nonbinary person added: "I don't spend much time around them just in case. Of course, I still see the news stories." Similarly, a nonreligious, queer agender person said: "I am often reserved or guarded now when around Christians because of everything I've seen and heard about LGBT people and rights from them." These responses mirror what other scholars have found about the ways many LGBT people remain quiet some or all the time to protect themselves in the United States (Adams 2011; Barringer, Sumerau, and Gay 2017). However, the findings do suggest — much like emerging studies of LG religious intersections two decades ago — that there may be many more BT people in religions than we have any way of knowing at present. As the responses in this section show, better ascertaining the size and experiences of bi+ trans religious (or formerly religious) individuals could be an important dynamic to further explore as B, T, and BT movements gain more recognition in the mainstream.

Inconsistency

In their work on the social construction of sin, Sumerau, Mathers, and Cragun (2016b) demonstrate how sin or immorality can mean anything. They further show how such meaning often comes from whatever people have been taught to view as sinful, immoral, godly, or moral by others (see also Sumerau, Nowakowski, and Cragun 2016). These findings fit with existing interactionist scholarship that has long mapped the ways religious norms, morals, traditions, beliefs, and other rituals and traditions shift and change over time and in relation to broader social norms and physical circumstances (Burke 2016; Bush 2010; Gallagher and Smith 1999). Even in relation to LGBT people, for example, history reveals that people within and between many different religions have demonstrated varied beliefs at different times and in different cultures — beliefs that all were said to come from this or that same higher power (see also Cragun, Sumerau, and Williams 2015; Sherkat 2016; Thomas and Olson 2012; Wilcox 2003, 2009).

The fact that religions change and often target new groups they may have ignored or even previously accepted is not news to religious scholars. Still, many people — religious and nonreligious — often expect religious traditions to

be consistent in their meanings. Many (especially conservative) religions argue they are, in fact, the same as they have always been (Sumerau and Cragun 2014; Avishai 2008; Weber [1922] 1978). People who are damned by a given religion at a given time may notice inconsistencies more easily than others do (Moon and Tobin 2018; Thumma 1991; Wolkomir 2006), and our respondents reflected this tendency. Here, we outline their observations about inconsistencies among religious people. Much like LG (Barton 2012) and nonreligious (Cimino and Smith 2014) movements have in recent years and continue to do, bi+ and trans movements may well use these inconsistencies to push religions to change and/or become active in nonreligious movements (if they find support there) in coming years.

Like Christians in interviews in prior studies (Moon and Tobin 2018; Sumerau and Cragun 2018), respondents knew there were no "explicit condemnations" of bi+ or trans experience in most religious scriptures. As a Muslim, queer transwoman said:

> The Bible doesn't even mention us, so when they say we follow the good book and then they also say I am a sin, they're just making that up because it doesn't fit, they're not getting that from my Bible.

Like many respondents, a Christian, pansexual transman offered a similar observation: "They say we believe in love, but they only really mean that if you fit in the way they want you to." Many of our respondents, like the nonreligious, queer transgender person quoted next, were also well aware of the empirical fact that bi and trans people existed in societies when scriptures were initially written and/or "handed down" by a higher power: "We have always been here, in the world, living among other people, even before Jesus."

After noting these things, many respondents — like the nonreligious, queer nonbinary person quoted next — argued religious condemnations of bi+ and trans people were just "Usually cis dudes who like to hear themselves talk" rather than anything consistent with religious scriptures. A nonreligious, bisexual transwoman points out: "They make stuff up like we all do. They interpret stuff the same way anyone can. The only difference is when they do it people with the same prejudice are going to listen, that's it." In these and other comments, bi+ trans people both pointed out inconsistencies in what religious others said versus what they did, and made sense of such inconsistency by interpreting them as examples of religious people "leaving behind" the lessons of the supernatural to "make up what fits their own personal beliefs."

Comments about the inconsistency of religious others were almost always followed by suggestions that such inconsistency facilitated departures from churches, religious traditions, and once cherished beliefs. For example, respondents offered examples wherein the inconsistencies of religious others diminished their faith in important ways (see also Sumerau, Padavic, and Schrock 2015 for similar observations from other minority groups). As a nonreligious, pansexual gender fluid person put it: "The majority of the time, it seems like even cis, straight religious people that 'claim to support' LGBT communities are only doing it because it brings in more

followers, and that often becomes more obvious soon after the new followers get there." A pagan, agender queer added: "Many of them abuse their power and use it to oppress people. Religion itself — believing in something — is not a problem at all, but religions as 'institutions' are often responsible for extensive oppression." A pagan, pansexual cross dresser, after mentioning damnation of their sexual and gender identities, explained: "The leaders tend to be very diplomatic about things and try to gently sway or 'correct' people, but it's the congregation that you have to worry about." Rather than role models for morality, honesty, or other virtues often promoted — at least officially — in many religions, respondents followed their observations of inconsistency on the part of religious others by discussing the ways such actions revealed more "politics," "bias," and "judgment" than anything else in their experience.

Exceptions

One of the more fascinating aspects of the past 50 years of U.S. culture involves the development (beginning in the late 1960s) of explicitly LGBT[4] religions (see, e.g., Loseke and Cavendish 2001; Wilcox 2003; Wolkomir 2006) and the expansion of some more traditional religions (most of which, of course, always had LGBT people in them before and after explicit condemnation of such groups became normal in the United States) toward explicit acceptance or at least tolerance of LGBT people (Moon 2004; Thomas and Olson 2012; Wilcox 2009). While many religions have remained explicitly or implicitly oppositional to LGBT people (Barrett-Fox 2016; Barton 2012; Sumerau and Cragun 2014), LGBT friendly, tolerant, and/or inclusive religions represent exceptions that may reveal future possibilities throughout the religious landscape (Moon and Tobin 2018). At the same time, interactionists have shown that even when religions allow LGBT people, they may also reproduce interlocking systems of racial, class, sex, gender, sexual, religious, and other inequalities (e.g., Mathers, Sumerau, and Cragun 2018; Sumerau and Cragun 2018; Sumerau, Grollman, and Cragun 2018). While little is known about the experiences of bi+ and/or trans people in any religions at present, a minority of respondents reported positive "exceptions" to overall patterns of damnation and inconsistency within some religious spaces.

Very few things ever examined in nature or societies take only one, clear-cut path. Yet, as interactionists often note, exceptions themselves serve a valuable purpose in demonstrating the broader rule, norm, law, or expectation in a given situation (Goffman 1959). It is also fitting that, like LG people, bi+ and trans people have always been in religious and nonreligious populations, organizations, communities, and other gatherings of people despite historic scientific and religious attempts to remove them (Eisner 2013; Stryker 2008). This is further suggested by the almost half of our respondents — and similar numbers on larger surveys of bi+ and trans experience (Flores et al. 2016; James et al. 2016) — who remain affiliated, openly or without disclosing their sexual and gender identities, in religions now. It stands to

reason, especially considering the patterns of the last 50 years and advances for some LG (and even less, but still some BTIA and poly people), that bi+ and trans people have a wide variety of experiences with religion.

Here, we share some of the examples of positive experiences with religion that 35% of respondents reported. For example, a queer, transman who did not report a current religion noted:

> I am the exception. I have been fortunate to have primarily positive experiences with religion, as an adult anyway. The most positive experiences were when I had been working at a Presbyterian Church as a pianist for about 3 months before my transition. Although I thought the pastors (a cis heterosexual married couple) would be okay with me, I was ready to be let go when I asked to meet with them to talk about it. In that meeting, they were overjoyed for me, and promised to do whatever they could to make the transition on the job as smooth as possible. They kept that promise. They made me feel not just accepted, but celebrated.

A Christian, queer transwoman also shared her positive experience in a religious context: "The historic heart of American Quakerism hosted the Philadelphia Trans Health Conference for several years, and my Quaker school was broadly supportive even if a little ignorant on specifics." After stating they wanted to "note an exception," a nonreligious, fluid gender neutral person explained: "The Jewish faith is really attractive. I feel like their leaders always appear very grounded and aware of their role."

Likewise, a Christian, bisexual transwoman followed examples of damnation she faced with a more optimistic account: "I have also had some positive experiences with some priests in my current denomination, and the priest that married me and my wife was a very healing experience for me with regard to religion." Respondents also noted very positive experiences with LGBT religious leaders and groups. Echoing Moon and Tobin's (2018) respondents with similar experiences, another queer, transman (who did not report a current religious identity) said: "I've had really positive experiences with various religious people who were queer and/or trans. They saw their role as integrally connected to social justice."

While these cases represent exceptions, they demonstrate that religious people do not have to be, as a Pagan, pansexual agender person put it, "trans and queer phobic"; rather, as a nonreligious, pansexual transwoman noted, they could instead even become the "best friend" of a bi+ and/or trans person if they sought to — and thereby, as a nonreligious, pansexual genderqueer suggested, "live rather than claim a moral life." These examples point to an interesting unanswered theoretical and empirical question. What factors lead some religious (and nonreligious) people to embrace transphobia and/or biphobia, and what other factors lead people within the same and different traditions to do the opposite? While only further systematic empirical research could answer such a question, the question itself suggests the potential for a whole new line of scholarship in interactionist and broader social sciences of religion and nonreligion.

CONCLUSIONS

Most studies of religion and nonreligion focus on the experiences, identities, lives, beliefs, and practices of cisgender heterosexual, lesbian, and/or gay people (Rodriguez, Lytle, and Vaughan 2013; Sumerau, Cragun, and Mathers 2016a). Such research has developed — theoretically and empirically — into a massive collection of insights, discussions, findings, and nuances at the intersections of religion, nonreligion, and gender; religion, nonreligion, and sexualities; and religion, nonreligion, gender, and sexualities. However, most scholarship leaves noncisgender and non-monosexual religious and nonreligious experience almost completely unexplored. While emerging studies importantly show how some bi+ (Barringer, Sumerau, and Gay 2017; Rodriguez, Lytle, and Vaughan 2013; Sherkat 2016) *or* trans (Mathers 2017b; Sumerau and Cragun 2015c; Sumerau, Cragun, and Mathers 2016a) people negotiate various aspects of religion and nonreligion, they leave unexplored bi+ trans people, and represent only a few exceptions in the overall literature.

We have drawn upon the largest qualitative dataset of bi+ trans people, of bi+ people alone, and of trans people alone in the social sciences to date in order to outline the ways bi+ trans people (and likely many bi+ or trans people alone) experience religion. Our dataset is based on open-ended responses to a single survey question regarding "positive and negative experiences with religion." Nevertheless, we find some interesting patterns. We find that bi+ trans people almost entirely experience religion as a source of damnation and trauma. We further demonstrate that 75% of respondents also report issues with religious inconsistency that facilitate negative opinions of and departures from religion in nonreligious (Sumerau and Cragun 2016) and gay/lesbian cases (Wolkomir 2006). At the same time, we find there are exceptions illustrated in moderate-to-liberal religions affirming that biphobia and transphobia are not necessary components of religion. While researchers have noted that bi+ and trans people are least likely to be religious in adulthood, these findings provide insights into how such results come to pass in the negotiation of lived experience. Further, alongside studies showing religious people's more negative attitudes toward bi+ and trans people, these findings begin to shed light on how such religious people *enact* biphobic and transphobic beliefs in their encounters with bi+ and trans people (see also Mathers, Sumerau, and Cragun 2018). Thus, this paper begins the process of pushing other interactionist, sexualities, gender, and religious scholars toward more deeply interrogating the dynamics we start to outline here.

Future scholars could follow up on our study by employing different methods than the ones we utilized, such as in-depth interviews or ethnography, to gather rich data on not only the reports that bi+ trans people provide about their experiences in religious contexts — which we have thoroughly highlighted — but also how they navigate these dynamics in their day to day lives. Furthermore, our sample is relatively homogenous in terms of race and class, with most respondents being white and lower-working class. Future scholars could attend to incorporating bi+ trans people from more diverse racial and class backgrounds to continue the line of research we

initiate in this article. Additionally, many of the respondents in this sample came from Christian backgrounds. Future researchers should conduct more comparative analyses of how various religious backgrounds may shape both the experiences bi+ trans people have in religious contexts as well as how they negotiate the ups and downs of those experiences.

Our analyses have implications for developing interactionist studies of religion and nonreligion beyond monosexual and cisgender limitations. While the inclusion of more religious and nonreligious traditions as well as of lesbian/gay religious experience dramatically expanded the boundaries of religious and nonreligious scholarship in the past, our findings suggest a similar possibility is likely if researchers more meaningfully incorporate of bi+ and trans experiences into their studies. For example, we contend there is much to learn about the factors that lead some religious and nonreligious people to conform to societal patterns of biphobia and transphobia while others do not. We interpret our findings to mean there may be important insights from trans and bi+ people about the reasons people leave and enter religious and nonreligious traditions over the life course. As was the case when lesbian/gay movements initially began to rise to greater mainstream recognition in the 1980s and 1990s (Mahaffy 1996; Thumma 1991; Yip 1997), however, it appears interactionists, as well as social scientists more broadly, studying religion and nonreligion currently have little to say to and about emerging mainstream recognition of bi+ and trans movements today. As was the case before, this problem lies not in our inability to understand and explore bi+ and trans experiences, but rather, in the absence of such attention in the vast majority of our endeavors to date.

We can look to the findings presented here for at least two — likely massive — lines of potential scholarship that may bring studies more in line with the empirical sexual and gender diversity of contemporary society. Interactionists could, for example, begin mapping the myriad of ways bi+ and trans people experience religion in varied traditions; at different times; in religious families or with religious friends, spouses, parents, children; and the ways monosexual and/or cisgender religious people make sense of bi+ and trans others. Further, interactionists could explore the ways atheist movements dedicated to science respond to scientific histories and patterns of biphobia and transphobia, and the myriad of ways nonreligious bi+ and trans people make sense of agnostic, atheist, and other nonreligious communities. Finally, interactionists could engage with both of these sets of unanswered questions while also watching to see which (or what portions), if either, of these populations and movements will embrace and/or challenge emerging global bi+ and trans movements.

Although there is no way to know right now, we wonder what studies of religion and nonreligion (and more broadly) might look like if they included systematic analyses of the entirety of sexual and gender populations. As emerging bi+ (Monro, Hines, and Osborne 2017) and trans (Schilt and Lagos 2017) inclusive scholarship in other fields suggests, the answers may be beyond anything we can effectively hypothesize at present. As such, here we have argued for and demonstrated the importance of expanding our existing methods, theories, and assumptions to explore

what intersections of religion, nonreligion, gender, and sexualities might become with greater focus upon the bi+ and trans populations so far left out of our mostly cisgender and monosexual based understandings individuals and society.

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NOTES

1. This sample is also larger than the quantitative sample utilized by Rodriguez et al. (2013; $n = 120$) to explore bisexual religious experience, and almost as large as the entirety of GSS data Sherkat (2016) used to explore religion among people who identify as bisexual (i.e., GSS N since allowing such identification 2008–2014 = 385). It is also larger than the few interactionist studies of transgender religious (Sumerau, Cragun, and Mathers 2016a) and nonreligious (Mathers 2017b) experiences to date.
2. The GSS is a perfect example of (1) the invisibility of bi+ and trans people and (2) limitations in the social sciences historically and at present (Sumerau et al. 2017). For example, the GSS only contains "bisexual" as an option (since 2008) with no way to ascertain variation in bi+ communities, and offers no way to study trans people at present (Westbrook and Saperstein 2015).
3. (see also Barringer, Sumerau, and Gay 2017 for cases where some bi+ cisgender people may become *more likely* to disclose to religious others while others share this pattern of silence).
4. We use LGBT here because it is most often used in both the social science literature and marketing for such organizations at present. However, we recognize that such spaces are often only or primarily LG in practice (Sumerau, Padavic, and Schrock 2015), often become gay male man dominated over time (Wilcox 2003), and vary greatly on whether or not any (or even officially all) bi+, trans, intersex, poly, asexual, or otherwise queer populations are welcome or included in the practical efforts of the organizations (see also Moon and Tobin 2018).

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