

To Be of One Mind?: Integrating an LGBT Orientation with Evangelical Beliefs

Abstract:

While there are many identities that individuals associate themselves with, none may be more powerful than sexual orientation and religious beliefs. Previous scholar has described how LGBT individuals try to reconcile their sexual orientation with their evangelical theology using the framework of cognitive dissonance, yet these LGBT evangelicals have never been assessed in a randomly sampled survey. Using the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study this research describes how LGBT evangelical grapple with the cognitive dissonance that occurs in many facets of their lives. In addition, this work attempts to understand how these two cross cutting cleavages reconcile themselves when an LGBT evangelical engages in the political process. This analysis describes a group that is neither entirely LGBT nor evangelical in their demographic characteristics and political partisanship.

Introduction

In 2015, the website *Vox* published a story entitled, “All Politics is Identity Politics,” an often repeated phrase by both pundits and political scientists to describe the concept that voters mentally identify with a specific social group which then shapes the way they view the political world (Wiarda 2014; Yglesias 2015). There are many identities that can have influence over an individual’s partisan identification including occupation, race, ethnicity, or geography. Some have argued that the election of Donald Trump was due in no small part to his ability to activate white identity politics, allowing him to sway many moderate working classes voters who had previously voted for Democratic candidates (Eberstadt 2017). Oftentimes these identities can reinforce each other, as in the previously mentioned combination of white working-class voters, but there are instances when these identities can clash and have significant social and political implications.

Take, for instance, the powerful identities of sexual orientation and religious affiliation. More specifically, consider the case of an individual who believes in a conservative form of American Christianity, while also struggles with their identity as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT). While both these identities can be held by a single individual, they must be held with a great degree of tension. There is a tremendous amount of social science research that indicates that evangelical Christians are one of the strongest voting blocs to oppose extending civil rights protections to LGBT individuals (Bernstein 1997; Fetner 2001; Linneman 2003; Soule 2004; Lax and Phillips 2009; Brewer 2014), yet there are hundreds of thousands of Americans who identify as LGBT evangelicals in the United States.

These conflicting identities must be navigated in a number of aspects of an LGBT evangelical’s life but none may be more difficult or more consequential than the voting booth. On one hand, if the LGBT identity takes precedent, then an individual may feel compelled to vote for the Democratic party’s candidates, which has often expressed a desire to extend rights such as

marriage and adoption to the LGBT community (Wood and Bartkowski 2004). On the other, no religious group in the United States has a stronger alliance with the Republican Party in the last several decades than evangelical Protestants (Smith and Martinez 2016). To date, social science has been unable to provide empirical evidence from a random sample to begin the process of understanding how LGBT evangelicals navigate the choices afforded to them by the American political process. Using the 2016 version of the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), this paper will begin to understand how partisanship and vote choice are arrived at when individuals express two diametrically opposed identities.

Literature Review

The earliest work done by social scientists in the study of LGBT evangelicals began in the mid-1980's and was focused primarily on a qualitative exploration of groups of that had emerged to support these individuals. The foundational example of this work comes from Scott Thumma's exploration of Good News, an evangelical parachurch organization with a mailing list of several hundred (1991). Thumma's participant observations were concerned with gaining an understanding of how the members of Good News reconciled their two contradictory identities. Thumma describes a strategy that Good News' employs which included: convincing members that it is acceptable to change one's religious beliefs; presenting alternative doctrines that could justify a homosexual orientation; and concluding with an attempt to come to terms with the "new gay Christian identity" (Thumma 1991, 342). Thumma notes that many of the individuals who fully complete this transformation process become more pious and orthodox as a result. Thumma grounds this exploration in the larger context of cognitive dissonance (Prus 1976).

Cognitive dissonance, the psychological process through which an individual tries to reconcile inconsistent beliefs, has been well studied in the field of psychology beginning with the canonical work of Festinger (1962) and has been extended to a number of fields including

economics (Adam and Rosenbaum 1964; Akerlof and Dickens 1982) and the sociology of religion (Burris, Harmon-Jones, and Tarpley 1997). There are a number reasons why cognitive dissonance would be most acute among LGBT evangelicals, these include the reality that evangelicals are the most likely religious group to label homosexuality as immoral (Hunter 1983; Wolff et al. 2012) and a strong desire among evangelicals to maintain the traditional familial structure (Ammerman 1987; Ellison and Sherkat 1993). But a direct explanation from the creator of the term is instructive. Festinger notes that "if two elements are dissonant with one another, the magnitude of the dissonance will be a function of the importance of the elements" (1962, 16). It would be difficult to find two more important elements of an individual's life than their religious beliefs and their sexual orientation. The desire to reduce this dissonance could compel LGBT evangelicals to pursue a number of remedies including joining groups like the aforementioned Good News to help reconcile their theology and their lifestyle or to enroll in gay conversion therapy as a means to eliminate the behavior which generates the dissonance (Haldeman 1994; Nicolosi, Byrd, and Potts 2000).

Subsequent empirical analysis has followed largely in the footsteps of Thumma in its utilization of interviews and participant observations of churches or religious groups that are welcoming to those living the LGBT lifestyle. For example, work by Wilcox (2002) included site visits and interviews with five congregations in California that ministered primarily to the LGBT community. A similar methodology was employed by Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) who interviewed forty participants in a gay-positive church in New York City. Both studies largely corroborate the original findings described by Thumma (1991). For clergy in both settings, one of the primary tasks was to integrate conflictual religious and sexual identities. Ministers in the California congregation opted for an identity integration approach by espousing a belief that an LGBT orientation is an immutable part of each congregant's existence and therefore cannot be sinful. For those in the New York City congregation, many began to integrate the two identities by

becoming involved in the ministry activities of the church body which was not limited to just bible study but also community service activities (Rodriguez and Ouellette 2000). In this way, conflicted church members were helped along in their own process of identity integration through the process of helping others reduce their cognitive dissonance (Maclean, Walker, and Matsuba 2004).

Other analysis has found similar yet unique patterns in racial minority congregations as well. For example, a qualitative analysis of 34 African-American gay men who regularly attended traditionally black churches found these individuals come to terms with this cognitive dissonance through dissonance reduction, but that they often take the approach of delegitimizing leaders who preach anti-gay messages (Pitt 2010). Many of these African Americans contend that since the church was unable to effective voices during the era of segregation, then their voices are not valid on the issue of gay rights. One scholar calls this strategy “attacking the stigmatizer” (Yip 1997). More recent research that included gay men and lesbian women found largely the same strategy: integrating religious beliefs with sexual orientation by either finding alternative interpretations of biblical passages or minimizing the importance of one’s own sexual orientation as a means to alleviate the dissonance (McQueeney 2009).

However, while these studies of homosexuality and religious belonging have done a great deal to shed light on the process of cognitive dissonance reduction by painting rich and nuanced portraits of how these individuals navigate these two conflictual identities, they have yet to turn that empirical lens on another crucial identity: political ideology. Undoubtedly, both these identities can be reconciled in a number of ways that have been described in detail by previous scholarship. One area where this reconciliation is impossible, though, is the politically charged issue of gay marriage. Before the *Obergefell v. Hodges* Supreme Court decision in 2015 (Liptak 2015), the culture wars were a centerpiece of American politics with clear partisan lines being drawn on the issues social issues (Hunter 1992; Layman 2001). While many LGBT evangelicals could simply ignore anti-gay rhetoric

from Christian leaders, it is not a conflict that is easily ignored when one casts a vote on election day.

Political science has long understood that voters are pulled in a number of directions when they weigh their choice during an election season. There are a variety of terms for this phenomenon including "cross-pressured voters" who are pulled in multiple directions or "cross-cutting electoral cleavages" that divide an individual's political loyalties. Some of the earliest work in voting behavior recognizes this fact. For example, *The People's Choice* notes that voters are subject to "competing pressures" that can arise from, "social status, class identification, or voting traditions." (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944, 60). The authors of *The American Voter* notes that these "cross-pressured" individuals will vote with less enthusiasm than those who have consistent partisan feelings (Angus et al. 1960). While subsequent analysis of survey data cast serious doubts on the reality of the cross-pressured voter (Pool, Abelson, and Popkin 1965), there has been somewhat of a renaissance in the field in the past decade.

In the last several years, political science has taken a careful look the social networks that are ubiquitous in American political life. Beginning with work by Diana Mutz (2002), scholars began to take note of the real impact that an individual's close circle of friends have on their political predispositions and voting behavior. Mutz finds that individuals who are enmeshed in networks that involve higher levels of political disagreement (which could lead them to feel cross pressured) are less likely to be active in the political process (Mutz 2002, 2006). Subsequent analysis using this network approach have largely reinforced this initial finding (McClurg 2003; Campbell 2006; McClurg 2006). Extending this theory of cross-cutting messages to the study of the media (Goldman and Mutz 2011) as well as online social networks (Bakshy, Messing, and Adamic 2015) have concluded that individuals actively seek out information that reinforces their political outlooks, therefore, reducing their feelings of being cross-pressured or suffering from cognitive dissonance.

There have been a few instances in modern American politics when the two major political parties have actively sought to emphasize electoral cleavages. The most relevant to this discussion is an effort undertaken by the Republican Party during the re-election of President George W. Bush to emphasize state-level referendums that would have constitutionally prohibited same-sex marriage (Dao 2004). This coordinated effort was done as part of a larger strategy to drive up evangelical Protestants turnout, especially in places like Ohio, where they would go to the polls to vote in favor of the constitutional amendment but also cast their vote for the Republican candidate (Craig et al. 2005; Lewis 2005; Olson, Cadge, and Harrison 2006; Camp 2008). How was an LGBT evangelical to navigate the reality of the 2004 and subsequent presidential elections? On one hand, Republican candidates have consistently espoused a strong opposition to abortion and a desire to protect religious freedom which is central to an evangelical identity, yet were opposed to extending civil rights to LGBT individuals. On the other hand, the Democrat party while being in favor of abortion rights, has also been more willing to extend rights to same-sex couples. When faced with these enormous pressures from their two conflictual identities, how do LGBT evangelicals reconcile these differences in the ballot box?

Data

While previous work has illuminated a great deal about the tension felt by LGBT evangelicals, these conclusions have been arrived at through the primary method of participant observations and/or interviews of a small number of subjects. Most of these studies use a small sample size of one to five churches to provide an in-depth portrait of the LGBT evangelical community (Thumma 1991; Rodriguez and Ouellette 2000; McQueeney 2009). However, there have been two exceptions to this methodological approach that use survey methods in addition to a qualitative approach. For example, work by Pitt (2010) included some summary statistics about 34 African American gay men, but the sample size was much too small to draw statistical conclusions.

The largest effort to quantitatively assess LGBT evangelicals comes from a survey of religiously active lesbian women which was conducted in 1996. The methodological draw is that this sample was not collected randomly but instead was a convenience sample of 148 individuals who were recruited by the snowball method. While this approach managed to increase the statistical power, the results are not representative of LGBT evangelicals in general because a disproportionate percentage of respondents came from women that lived in Massachusetts and New Hampshire (Mahaffy 1996, 394).

The reason that scholars have been unable to generate a truly random sample of LGBT evangelicals is one of practicality. According to the best estimates, approximately 4% of Americans identify as LGBT on surveys (Black et al. 2000; Gates 2017). In order to collect a sample of sufficient statistical power to conduct statistical analysis of LGBT individuals would require a total survey population of nearly 10,000 individual respondents, a prospect that is financially unviable for the vast majority of researchers. This reality is made exponentially more difficult when considering the reality that evangelicals make up only 20% of the population themselves. (Lewis and Burge 2017).

However, a recently available survey has overcome many of these obstacles faced by social scientists. The Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), which has been conducted bi-annually beginning in 2008, included a number of questions about gender identification and sexual orientation in the 2016 wave. The sheer size of the 2016 CCES population (64,600 respondents) allows researchers unprecedented access to a truly random sample of LGBT evangelicals that are navigating the political environment in 2016.

Measures

The two central concepts of this inquiry (LGBT orientation and evangelical affiliation) need to be carefully measured to ensure that each group is accurately represented in the data. There has

been a long debate in the scholarly literature about the most appropriate way to measure the concept of evangelical Protestant (Stouffer 1955; Smith 1990; Green 1996). The most widely used is the RELTRAD scheme which places individuals into the evangelical category if they affiliate with churches that are traditionally considered to be part of the conservative Protestant movement (Steenland et al. 2000; Woodberry et al. 2012; Stetzer and Burge 2016). Using the general guidelines of RELTRAD, respondents in the CCES were sorted into a dichotomous measure of evangelical Protestantism, which resulted in 11,999 or 18.6% of respondents receiving this label.¹

To correctly classify LGBT individuals two questions were used. The first asked respondents, "Which group do you most closely identify?" with the response options of "lesbian/gay woman", "gay man", "bisexual", and "other" included as LGB. Another question asked respondents "Have you ever undergone any part of a process (including any thought or action) to change your gender/perceived gender from the one you were assigned at birth?"² Those who responded affirmatively were also added to those previously identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual to create a comprehensive LGBT measure. In total the 2016 CCES contained 5,563 LGBT individuals (8.6% of the total survey population). The LGBT evangelical measure consists of those who are classified affirmatively by both measures and makeup 770 respondents or 1.2% of all individuals in the CCES.³

Summary Statistics

In order to understand how distinct these groups are from each other and the general population, summary statistics were computed for a number of basic demographic variables with the

¹ Full coding syntax is available on the author's Github page: BLINDED

² Full question wording: "Have you ever undergone any part of a process (including any thought or action) to change your gender / perceived gender from the one you were assigned at birth? This may include steps such as changing the type of clothes you wear, name you are known by or undergoing surgery."

³ All statistics are calculated by using weights supplied by the authors of the CCES for use in an analysis that includes questions that include sexuality. These weights will be included (where appropriate) throughout the remainder of the analysis.

results being displayed in Table 1. It is clear from these findings that LGBT evangelicals look distinct both from the evangelical sample as well as those who identify as LGBT. For example, the mean age for LGBT evangelicals is over five years lower than LGBT individuals and a substantial 14.5 years lower than evangelicals. These differences persist across several other factors, as well. The most educated group, as well as the group with the highest mean income, is LGBT evangelicals. This finding is even more surprising when considered in light of the previously described differences in age. Typically, income and education rise as individuals become older, yet these results indicate that LGBT evangelicals are truly unique from the two groups that make up a significant part of their identity.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

One final descriptive result provides significant insight into how LGBT evangelicals deal with the cognitive dissonance that is a significant part of their identity. A number of previous scholars have noted that one of the primary causes of tension among LGBT evangelicals arises from the fact that their lifestyle stands in opposition to the traditional family structure that is pervasive in evangelicalism (Ammerman 1987; Mahaffy 1996; McQueeney 2009). These results indicate that LGBT evangelicals have made extraordinary efforts to make marriage a central part of their identity. According to these statistics, members of the LGBT evangelical population are nearly twice as likely to be married as the rest of the LGBT population, but LGBT evangelicals are actually more likely to be married than their evangelical counterparts, as well. Additionally, LGBT evangelicals evince lower divorce rates and higher shares of single respondents, but these could merely be artifacts of a lower mean age than the other two groups.⁴ One key caveat is that the survey merely asked respondents

⁴ The CCES does give respondents the ability to respond that they are in a "domestic partnership" although very few choose this option. Just 2.9% of evangelicals and 2.1% of LGBT evangelicals indicate that this is their marital situation. 8.7% of LGBT individuals indicate that they are in a domestic partnership but even adding this to the percentage of those who are married still leaves LGBT rates at 44%.

their marital status and not whether they were in a same-sex marriage. There is a possibility that many evangelicals who indicated that they are LGBT are in a heterosexual marriage, this is not possible to discern from the current data. However, despite this important caution, this finding provides support for the finding that LGBT evangelicals are easing cognitive dissonance by choosing to participate in the institution of marriage, which is central to the evangelical identity but seems less crucial for those in the LGBT community.

These results regarding marital status look similar to a comparison of church attendance patterns across the three groups. The evidence clearly indicates that LGBT individuals attend church at low rates. In fact, LGBT attendance is lower (2.44) than the general population of the CCES (2.91). Compared to this baseline, both evangelicals and LGBT evangelicals attend church at much higher rates than the average American. Yet, these data provide support for assertion that the cognitive dissonance that occurs among LGBT evangelicals does not drive them away from church, but instead the opposite. While the difference in attendance between these groups is relatively small (about 5% higher attendance for LGBT evangelicals) it is statistically significant at the .05 level. It is crucial to note that there is some evidence that as education increases so does church attendance which may be the case here for LGBT evangelicals as they are the most educated of the three sub-groups being analyzed (Burge 2017).

There is some other scholarly evidence that seems to provide some insight into this finding regarding church attendance. For instance, several studies have concluded that females in conservative religious environments express higher levels of biblical literalism than their male counterparts. It has been hypothesized that this is a means for women to compensate for their lack of access to leadership positions in the church (Bartkowski and Hempel 2009; Village 2012). It seems likely that LGBT evangelicals feel the need to overcome their lack of access to a traditional familial structure by attending church at a greater rate than their heterosexual counterparts.

Importance of the Two Identities

To get a general sense of how important the issues of religion and sexual orientation are to LGBT evangelicals, I analyzed the responses to two questions that were contained in the CCES that tapped these concepts. First, the CCES asks, “How important is religion in your life?” with response options ranging from “Not at all important” (1) to “Very Important” (4). The primary result is that large numbers of individuals of all groups indicate that religion plays a significant role in their lives. However, there is some noteworthy variation specifically among LGBT individuals. While nearly 70% of evangelicals say religion is “very important,” and 62% of LGBT evangelicals express the same sentiment, only 42.8% of LGBT individuals report similar feelings. From this perspective, LGBT evangelicals look much more similar to their evangelical counterparts than those from the LGBT community. This is particularly apparent among those who say that religion is “not at all important”, where LGBT members are five times as likely to choose this option than those who are both LGBT and evangelical. In light of this result, it appears that if LGBT evangelicals have drifted away from their religious identity, that drift is quite subtle and that they still hold their religious belief in high esteem.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

In a similar fashion, the CCES asked respondents, "How important (is gay marriage) to you?" with responses ranging from "no importance at all" (1) to "very high importance" (5). The distribution of these responses for each of the three groups being investigated is displayed in Figure 2. Looking at the "very high importance" response percentages is instructive. While only 18.5% of evangelicals indicate that gay marriage is of high importance, the percentage among LGBT respondents is double (37.9%). But, those who are LGBT evangelicals are somewhat caught between these two groups with 30.6% saying that gay marriage is of very high importance. However, what is even more noteworthy are those who indicated that gay marriage has "no importance at all."

For those who are LGBT and evangelical, this is the second most popular response choice at 25.3%. This percentage is much closer to the 28.9% of evangelicals who indicated that gay marriage was not important at all than the 37.9% of LGBT respondents who chose this response item.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

It seems that the approach to easing cognitive dissonance for LGBT evangelicals takes on two entirely different approaches when considering the importance of gay marriage. For nearly a third of this population, they continue to emphasize the necessity of marriage for same-sex couples, but on the other hand, one quarter of LGBT evangelicals take the complete opposite approach and say that gay marriage is of no importance at all. If one collapses these response items into "high importance" and "low importance" categories, 46.1% of LGBT evangelicals think gay marriage is of high importance, compared to 57.3% of LGBT respondents and 34.4% of evangelicals. It seems that LGBT evangelicals exist, in the aggregate, at the midpoint between the other two identities.

INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

To take this analysis a step further: what is the interaction between these two variables? A simple linear relationship was specified between the gay marriage importance question (on the X-axis) and the importance of religion (on the Y-axis) for each of the three groups, with the results being found in Figure 3. The trend line is displayed along with 95% confidence intervals in the darkened areas. While evangelicals clearly express the strongest levels of religious importance, there is no statistically significant relationship between these two variables for evangelical Protestants. Said another way, whether an evangelical thinks gay marriage is of no importance at all or of very high importance, they still indicate religious importance at the same relative level. The same is not true for LGBT individuals, though. For those who indicate that they are LGBT, there is a negative relationship between religious importance and gay marriage importance, which is statistically significant. The results for LGBT evangelicals provide a mixed-bag. Because the sample size is

relatively small, the confidence intervals for this group remain large enough that the relationship is not statistically significant, however, the general trend is in the positive direction which is opposite of those in the LGBT group. Looking from left to right (or moving from less importance of gay marriage to greater importance) finds that as LGBT evangelicals begin to place a greater emphasis on gay marriage they also place a greater emphasis on the importance of religion, this is exactly the opposite of the findings related to those who are LGBT.

Cross-Cutting Cleavages in the Political World

While LGBT evangelicals have to deal with reality that they are being pulled in two different directions in multiple arenas, none is more acute than in the world of politics which has become increasingly polarized in recent years (Westfall et al. 2015; Achenbach and Clement 2016). These LGBT evangelicals likely feel a tremendous amount of cross pressures in their political lives as their evangelical affiliation draws them toward a Republican affiliation, while LGBT evangelical who place a greater emphasis on the same sex marriage might be persuaded to align themselves with the Democrat party. Figure 3 is a histogram visualizing the distribution of a seven-point party identification question posed to all respondents in the CCES. If one observes the far-left group of those who identify as “Strong Democrats,” the results indicate that LGBT evangelicals look much more similar to their LGBT counterparts than their evangelical brethren. However, moving to the next two categories of “not very strong Democrat” and “lean Democrat” the LGBT evangelical group looks more similar to evangelicals than those in the LGBT sample. When one moves to the Republican side of the histogram, an intriguing pattern emerges for LGBT evangelicals. For each step to the right, the percentage of LGBT evangelicals rises. The distribution of party identification is largely bi-modal with the most LGBT evangelicals indicating that they are strong Democrats, but the second most frequent response is strong Republicans, with independents being the third most popular category. Looked at broadly, LGBT evangelicals are not as Republican as evangelicals, but

not as Democrat as the LGBT community. This bears out when observing the mean of the three groups. While the mean party identification for evangelicals is 4.6 on a seven-point scale, the mean for 3.2 for LGBT evangelicals, and 2.8 for LGBT individuals.

INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

While in some areas like the aforementioned church attendance measure and party identification, the cognitive dissonance of being an LGBT evangelical can be lessened by moving one or two points on a larger scale, American politics does not afford the same levels of response options as the ballot box is realistically a binary choice. Figure 5 indicates the vote choice for the three groups under examination. Here, the differences between LGBT and evangelical voters is stark. In fact, the gap between the two candidates was nearly the same for these two groups but in the opposite direction, a 41-point spread in favor of Clinton for LGBT voters, a 37-point spread in favor of Trump for evangelicals. The votes among LGBT evangelicals were much more evenly split with Clinton receiving 50.8% of the vote, compared to Trump's 46.2% share, however this difference is not statistically significant. The cross pressured pattern that emerged when describing the party identification of the three groups continues here when looking at vote choice. The LGBT evangelical vote was more strongly for Clinton than their evangelical counterparts, but support for Trump was much stronger than those in the LGBT community. It appears that LGBT evangelicals stand in the middle ground between their two identities, with some voters responding more to the pressure of their sexual orientation, while others are more persuaded by their evangelical affiliation.

INSERT FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE

It seems like a worthwhile endeavor to look at vote choice through the lens of the importance of gay marriage, as this may give some insight into how this specific cross pressure alters vote choice among LGBT evangelicals. The results of this analysis are displayed in Figure 6. For those LGBT evangelicals who believe that gay marriage is of high importance, Hillary Clinton

received a higher proportion of the vote, but the difference is not statistically significant. On the other hand, those who believed that gay marriage was of low importance, Trump received over two thirds of votes cast by LGBT evangelicals, with his advantage being statistically significant. This result seems to provide some support for the cross pressured theory insofar as when gay marriage is seen as a vital issue, LGBT evangelicals are more likely to vote in a similar fashion to other LGBT votes, yet when gay marriage is seen as a low priority issue then the evangelical identity comes to fore and these individuals act more like traditional evangelicals in the voting booth.⁵

INSERT FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE

Multivariate Analysis

The most rigorous approach to understanding how each of these cross pressures interact at the ballot box is a regression analysis. To that end a logit model was estimated with a vote for Hillary Clinton coded as 1, and votes for any other candidate coded to zero. In addition, a number of previously mentioned control variables were included such as: age, income, church attendance, gender, education, the importance of gay marriage, and the importance of religion. A model was specified for each of the three groups and the results are displayed in a coefficient plot in Figure 7. The interpretation of this plot is straightforward, if one of the horizontal lines (representing the 95% confidence intervals) intersects with the vertical darkened line on 0, then the variable is statistically insignificant. However, if there is no intersection and it is to the right of the black line, that indicates more support for Hillary Clinton, if it is to the left of the black line it means less support. In order to aid interpretation, each of the variables was scaled from zero to one and therefore the estimates being show indicate a movement from the lowest value to the highest value for each.⁶

INSERT FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE

⁵ The same analysis was done using religious importance to sort LGBT evangelicals but there was no statistical difference in voting patterns.

⁶ Full variable coding is available in the Appendix, along with a traditional regression output table.

Beginning with the demographic controls, there are a few notable findings. First, age is not a statistically significant predictor for LGBT or LGBT evangelicals, but it is for evangelicals. Income is significant and negatively signed for LGBTs and evangelicals, but income is not significant for LGBT evangelicals. However, education does reach statistical significance in the positive direction for each of the three groups, but there is no statistically significant difference between the three regarding magnitude of that effect. The results for gender are somewhat surprising. While an LGBT male or an LGBT evangelical male is no more or less likely to have voted for Clinton in 2016, there is a gender gap among evangelicals. According to this result, an evangelical male was 12.6% less likely to vote for the Democrat in 2016 than their female evangelical counterparts. Race is also instructive. While for each of the three groups, Caucasian respondents were less likely to vote for Hillary Clinton than the rest of the sample, the magnitude of the effect is worth considering. For both evangelicals and LGBT evangelicals, a white racial identity drove down the likelihood of a Hillary Clinton vote (by 43% and 42% respectively) the magnitude of this effect for LGBT voters was just 8%.

Moving on to variables that are more directly related to religion, there is some evidence of cross pressures influencing LGBT evangelicals in both political directions. For example, the results for church attendance indicate that LGBT evangelicals are influenced in the same way that evangelicals are by church attendance: the more one attends the less likely they are to cast a vote for Clinton, but there is no relationship between attendance and casting a Clinton vote for LGBT respondents. Moving on to religion's importance, it's notable that for LGBT evangelicals there is no statistically significant relationship, while LGBT voters look statistically indistinguishable from the evangelical group on this measure. One has to consider why there is no relationship here for LGBT evangelical voters, especially considering the fact that over 60% of these individuals rate religion as very important. This may be evidence of cognitive dissonance, so instead of religion driving voters

either toward or away from the Democrat party, for LGBT evangelicals it does neither. Finally, consider the variable that asks about the importance of gay marriage. For each of the three group there is a positive relationship between the two variables, meaning greater emphasis on gay marriage drives voters toward Hillary Clinton. However, the magnitude of this effect is drastically different with both LGBTs and LGBT evangelicals being much more likely to vote for Clinton because of gay marriage than evangelical voters. In fact, for LGBT evangelicals, those who rated gay marriage as being of very high importance were 77.5% more likely to vote for Hillary Clinton than LGBT evangelicals who said it was of no importance at all. This effect is three times larger than for evangelicals and provides some evidence that the LGBT identity can provide a great amount of influence when an LGBT evangelical steps into the voting booth.

Discussion

To return to the framework of cognitive dissonance, the originator of the term, Leon Festinger, believed that when an individual is confronted with this psychological inconsistency there are three coping strategies that are employed to reduce these conflictual feelings (1962). The first is to find new ways to think about the ideas that are in conflict. There is evidence of this in the results reported here, specifically in regards to how important many LGBT evangelicals feel about the issue of gay marriage. The reality that there are nearly as many LGBT evangelicals who think that gay marriage is of no importance at all as those who think it is of very high importance seems to indicate that a significant number of evangelicals have managed to reconcile their cognitive dissonance by minimizing the importance of a key identity in their lives. However the same pattern is not evident when considering their religious identity, as LGBT evangelicals are much less likely than their LGBT contemporaries to rate the importance of religion as very low. Yet when looking at the interaction between religion's importance and the importance of gay marriage the pattern for LGBT evangelicals does not look like the pattern for either of the other two groups. It appears that, on the

whole, LGBT evangelicals have forged their own unique cognitive path toward resolving these two identities.

Another technique that Festinger suggests is to change some behavior that causes the dissonance. Here, the data indicates that this is not occurring when viewed through the lens of church attendance, in fact the opposite is occurring. There has been a great deal of scholarship that indicates that the conservative turn in American evangelicalism has driven moderate individuals away from the church entirely (Hout and Fischer 2002; Patrikios 2008; Djupe, Neiheisel, and Sokhey 2017). One could easily assume that this trend would be evident in the lives of those evangelicals who abandoned religion when they realized that their sexual orientation was not going to be affirmed by their evangelical congregation (Huckfeldt, Plutzer, and Sprague 1993). Yet, in fact, these data indicate the exact opposite. Not only are LGBT evangelicals not abandoning religion, they are attending at rates that exceed the rest of their evangelical tradition. As mentioned previously, this could be a way to compensate for feelings of guilt or a realization that they will never be able to participate in all aspects of the evangelical culture (i.e. the traditional familial structure). There could be another methodological reason to consider: many LGBT evangelicals have left the fold over time and those who remain are the truly devoted. It is impossible to explore this possibility without the benefit of a large panel study. Nonetheless, this finding indicates that LGBT evangelicals are not overcoming their dissonance by staying away from the church.

A final means to cope with cognitive dissonance, according to Festinger (1962) is to change the social environment that reinforces that dissonance. The demographic differences do find this occurring in a number of arenas. For example, while LGBT evangelicals are attending church at a tremendous frequency, they do not look like the others in the congregation in terms of education, income, and age. As previously noted, LGBT evangelicals are much more educated and have much higher incomes than the others, while at the same time having a mean age that is significantly lower

than both comparison groups. All these factors have the making of a strongly urban or suburban population, which are (generally speaking) more educated and earn higher incomes than those that live in rural areas. Unfortunately, the CCES does not ask respondents the size of the city in which they currently live, but it does ask how long they have lived in their current location. The data indicates that LGBT evangelicals have lived in their current location for four years less than evangelicals but just a few months less than LGBT individuals. While, not explicitly reinforced by data, it seems possible that many LGBT evangelicals grew up in a rural community where evangelical Christianity played a central role. When they transitioned into adulthood they moved to a more densely populated environment but did not shed their religious affiliation. By doing this, they still affiliate with an evangelical church but this urban evangelical church may be much more permissive of the LGBT lifestyle than their rural childhood church. Previous scholar has indicated that there is tremendous variation in religious theology and practice across the urban/rural divide (Chalfant and Heller 1991).

Turning the discussion toward the results of the political partisanship and vote choice, the reality of cross cutting cleavages come in to full view. The results from the 2016 Presidential vote choice reveal that LGBT evangelicals do not cast their ballots like either evangelicals or members of the LGBT community. While evangelicals voted overwhelmingly in favor of Donald Trump, and LGBT voters were even stronger for Hillary Clinton, LGBT evangelicals evenly split their votes among the two candidates. These results, on their face, indicate that some LGBT evangelicals feels stronger pressure from their LGBT identity, while some are more influenced by their evangelical affiliation. This comes into clearer view when observing vote choice through the lens of issue importance.

For those LGBT evangelical voters who believe that gay marriage is of a great importance, which would indicate the pressure being felt from their LGBT identity, their votes shifted more

towards Hillary Clinton. While those who think that gay marriage is not that important, cast two thirds of their ballots for Donald Trump. There are other issues where these cross pressures become apparent. For example, less than 10% of LGBT evangelicals who thought immigration was of low importance voted for Donald Trump compared to Trump's 70% vote share among those who thought it was of high importance. This is an issue where the political connection between the GOP and evangelicals seem to be more influential. However, one would believe that dividing LGBT evangelicals into high importance vs. low importance on the issue of abortion would lead to vast differences in vote choice, yet this is not the case in this data. In fact, there is no statistical difference in vote choice between those who think abortion is important and those who think it is of less importance.⁷

However, in the multivariate analysis some patterns emerge that indicate that these cross pressured often are made manifest by different explanatory variables. For example, in regard to gender, both LGBT and LGBT evangelical men were no more or less likely to vote for Hillary Clinton in 2016, while evangelical men were less likely to vote for the Democrat. In this instance, the LGBT identity seems to have tamped down the influence of evangelicalism on a gendered vote choice. Yet when it comes to race, LGBT evangelicals who are white have the same likelihood of not voting for Hillary Clinton than evangelical Christians, but race plays a much smaller role for those in the LGBT community. Looking at these two results it becomes apparent that basic demography does not act in the same way for LGBT evangelicals as it does for the other two groups and that some aspects of their lives activate their evangelical identity, while other factors tap into their LGBT orientation.

Yet, the religiously influenced variables offer a curious pattern that, again, straddles the line between the LGBT group and the evangelical group. The religious attendance results create a puzzle

⁷ Both the immigration and abortion charts are available in the appendix.

in that the data indicates that LGBT evangelicals attend church at higher rates than the other groups, but in the aggregate the LGBT evangelical vote was fairly evenly split between the two candidates. When taking a closer look, the reason for this comes into focus: the baseline of support for Hillary Clinton was completely different among LGBT evangelicals than evangelicals generally. Even among weekly attenders, Clinton received 49.6% of the LGBT evangelical vote, which is down from the 63.9% support she received from LGBT evangelicals who attend less than weekly, but is still a plurality of votes cast. In comparison that spread for evangelicals is much different with Clinton receiving 23.2% of votes cast by weekly attenders, but that vote share rose to only 31.7% of those evangelicals who attended less frequently.

The variable that tapped the importance of religion was statistically insignificant but that could be indicative of a number of factors, many of them statistical in nature. For example, the lack of significance could be due simply to the fact that the number of LGBT evangelicals is relatively small. Another reason could be due to the lack of variation in response to the question with 90% of LGBT evangelicals saying that religion was either very important or somewhat important. However, the impact of viewing political choices through the lens of gay marriage importance is clear for LGBT evangelicals. In this regard, it is apparent that the pressure felt from their LGBT orientation is much stronger than the influence that they feel from their evangelical church community. In fact, LGBT evangelicals are just as impacted by the importance of gay marriage than the rest of the LGBT community and maybe even more so when looking at these results.

While these results provide a nuanced view of how LGBT evangelicals orient their world around both religious and political concerns, one has to wonder how all these political opinions will shift as the United States moves further away from the *Obergefell* decision. It is clear from this data that many LGBT and LGBT evangelicals feel strongly about the issue, but as public support continues to swiftly toward more acceptance of gay marriage, the need for candidates and parties to

highlight the same sex marriage will begin to diminish. Will that shift the voting calculus for LGBT evangelicals, with their religious identity taking precedence and their LGBT orientation taking a backseat? Hopefully social scientists can continue to explore these questions in the future.

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Table 1 – Descriptive Statistics of Evangelicals, LGBT, and LGBT Evangelicals

Variable	Evangelicals	LGBT	LGBT Evangelicals	Notes
Age	51.8	42.6	37.3	Sig. at .05
Race	75.7% White 14.3% Black 5.5% Hispanic	69.9% White 9.7% Black 11.8% Hispanic	70.8% White 14.1% Black 10.4% Hispanic	
Education (Mean)	3.46	3.81	4.03	Scaled from 1 (No HS) to 6 (Grad Degree)
Income (Mean)	5.93	6.23	7.31	Scaled from 1 (<10k) to 16 (150k +)
Gender	45.4% Male	59% Male	60% Male	
Marital Status	58.3% Married 10.8% Divorced 19.8% Single	35.6% Married 5.9% Divorced 45.9% Single	64.5% Married 4.1% Divorced 25.9% Single	
Church Attendance (Mean)	4.06	2.44	4.23	Scaled from 1 (Never Attend) to 6 (Attend more than Weekly)

Figure 1 – Distribution of Religious Importance Question

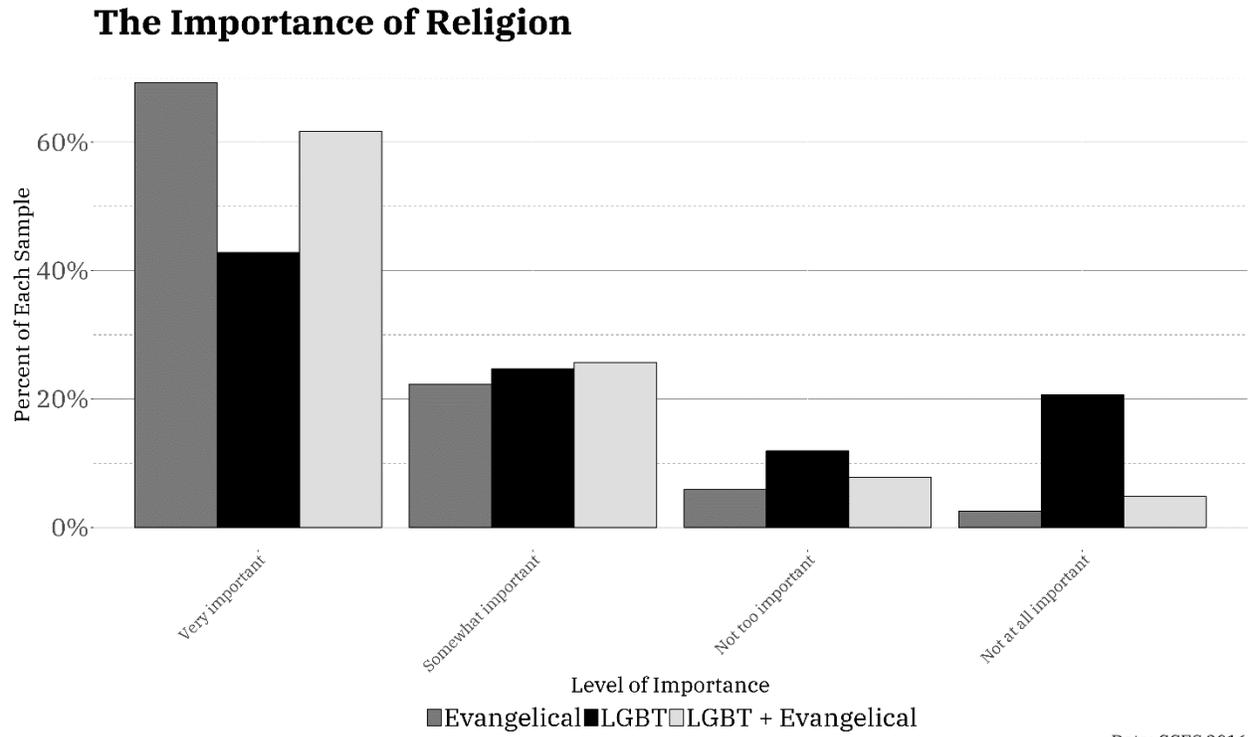
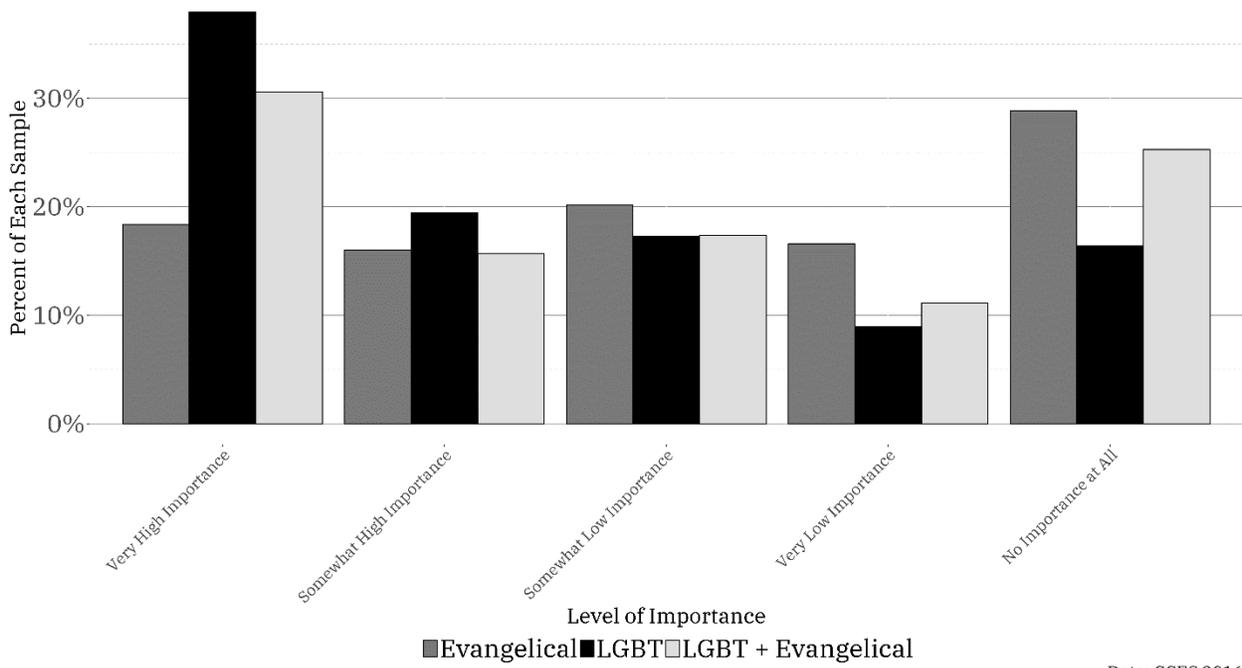


Figure 2 – Distribution of Gay Marriage Importance Question

The Importance of Gay Marriage



Data: CCES 2016

Figure 3 – Relationship between Religion’s Importance and Gay Marriage Importance

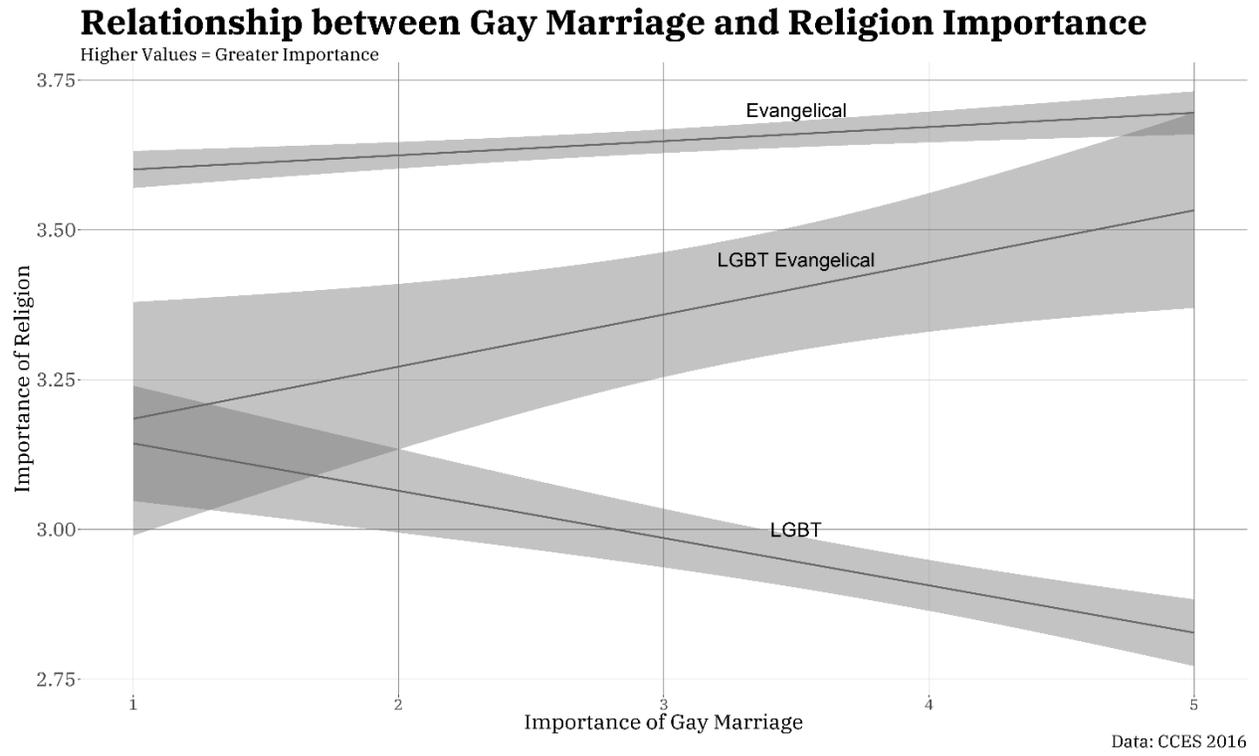


Figure 4 - Distribution Party Identification Question

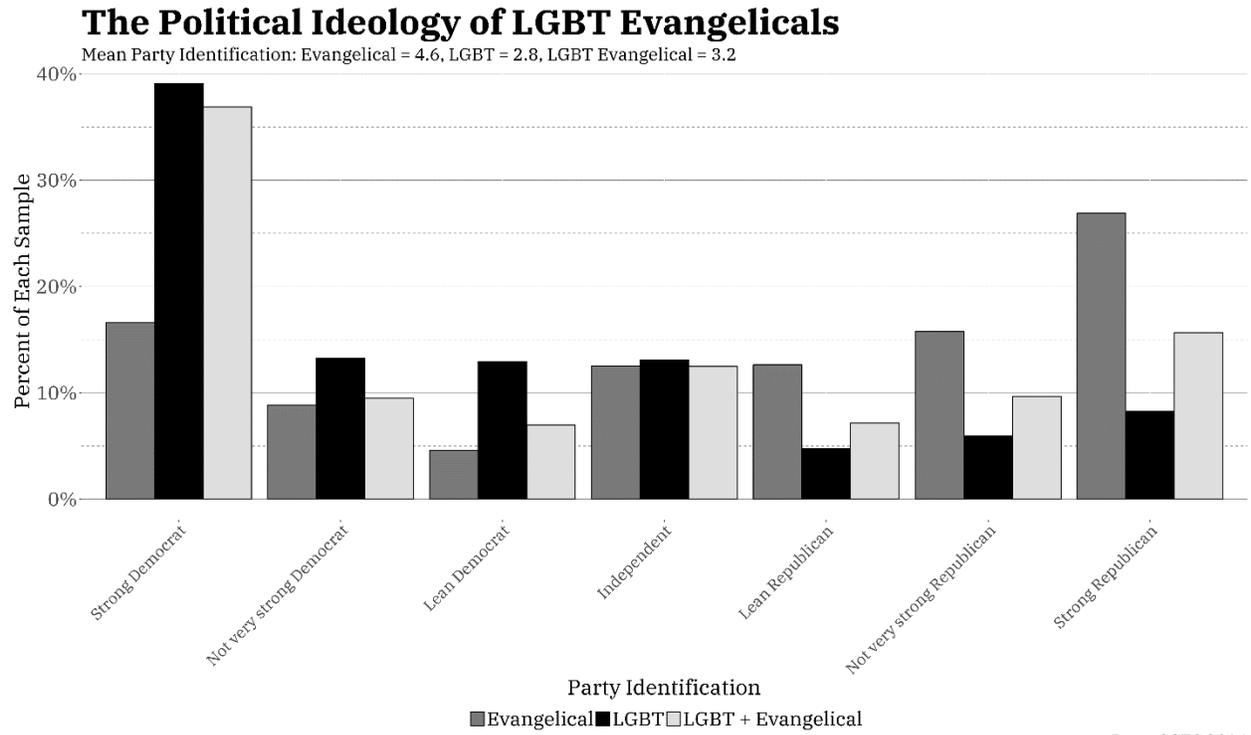


Figure 5 – Vote Choice in the 2016 Presidential Election

Vote Choice in 2016 by LGBT Evangelicals

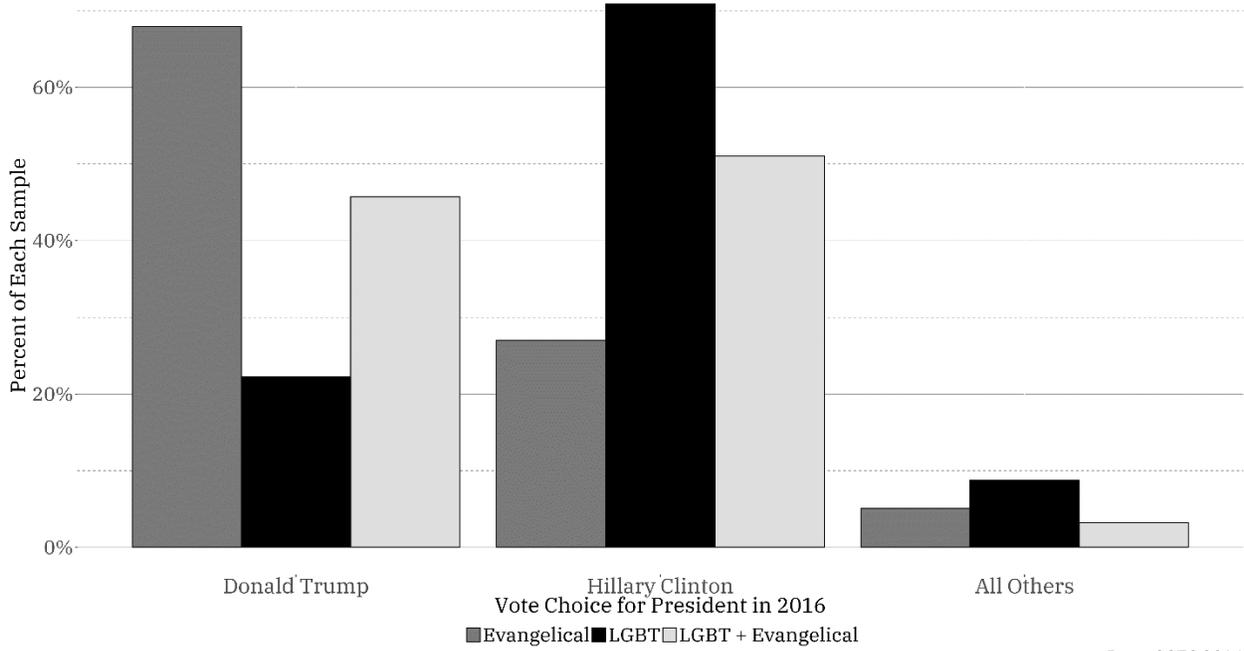


Figure 6 – Vote in the 2016 Presidential by LGBT evangelicals Separated by Importance of Gay Marriage

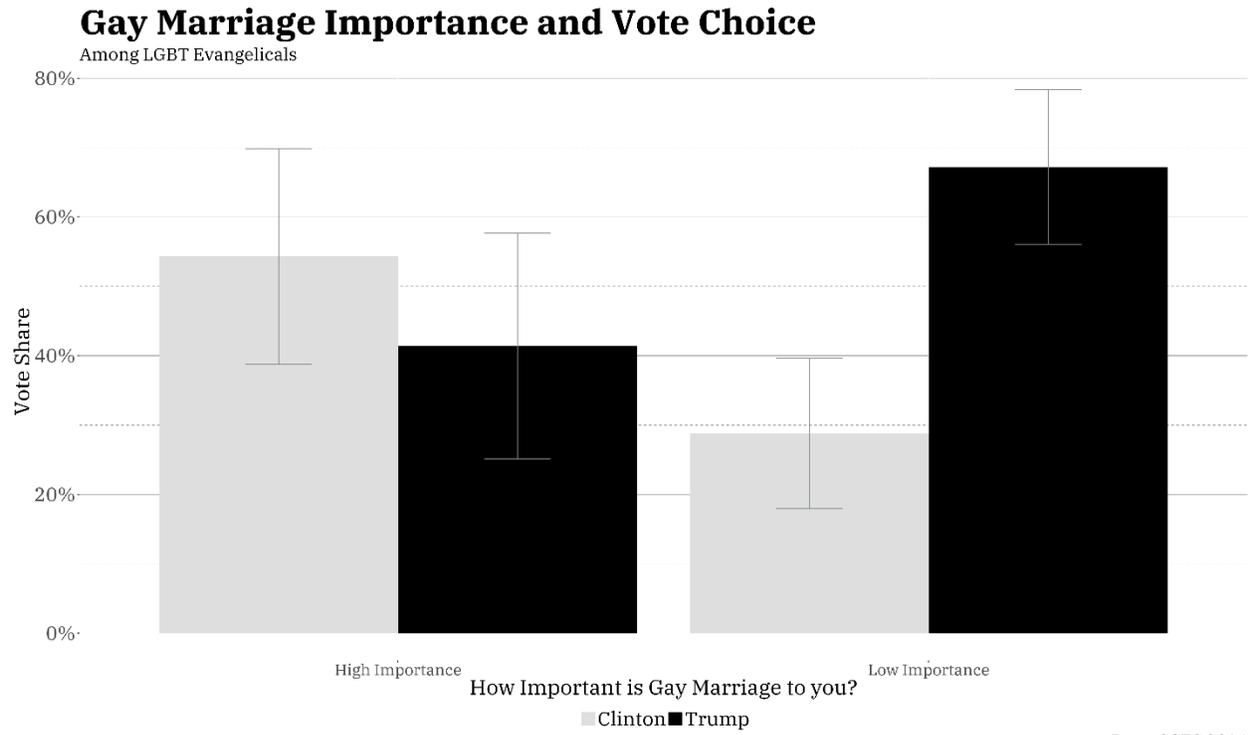


Figure 7 – Logit Regression Analysis Predicting a Vote for Hillary Clinton in 2016

