

# Sensations: Religion, Sex, Substance Use, Tattoos, and Religious Tattoos

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**Thank you!**

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## Basic Research Questions

- What is the relationship between religion, tattoos, and sensation-seeking?
- Who seeks sensations?
- Who drinks more, has more sex, and is more likely to use marijuana?

## Comparing and Contrasting

- Tattooed? Non-Tattooed? Actively religious?
- Tattooed with religion?

# Who is Tattooed?

- Baby Boomers – 13%
- Gen-X – 36%
- Millennials – Slightly < 50%

# Our Respondents

Total N = 3525

82% Aged 18-20

67 % Anglo

61% Female

- No tattoos: 2966 (84%)
- Tattooed: 559 (16%)
  - Secular tattooed: 418 (12%)
  - Religious tattooed: 141 (4%)

The percentage of tattooed respondents in our college samples under-represents the tattooed in their generational group.

# Tattoo Research - Background

## Behavioral correlates

- 4+ for legal trouble and hard drug use.
- Tattooed are more sensual: Drinking, sex, marijuana.
- Tattoos and Religion = Ambiguous – stay tuned.

## Meaning

- Detailed ethnographies and deep emotion.
- Gender and Power – particularly among women.

## Ideology, Identity, Transformation

- Need for Uniqueness – though a paradox. “I want (the tattoo) to be unique – just like ... .
- Well-being and Healing – Breast cancer and suicide.

# Theory: Sensations, Emotions, and Concurrent Experiences

# Tattoos and Sensations

Tattoos involve significant commitment, pain, perseverance, adornment, sensuality and attraction.

There is an elevated association with tattoos and drinking, premarital sex, and marijuana use.

We expect our tattooed respondents to report higher levels of sensation-seeking, drinking, sex, and marijuana use.



# Religion and Sensations

Religion involves significant levels of ritual, music, art, incense, Holy Communion, “Kiss” of peace, laying on of hands.

There is a diminished association with religious belief/practice and drinking, premarital sex, and marijuana use.

We expect our religious respondents to report lower levels of sensation-seeking, drinking, premarital sex, and marijuana use.

# Religion and Tattoos

Generally tattoos are negatively associated with higher levels of religious belief and practice.

This negative association is more prominent among the more heavily tattooed.

Tattoos are associated with “need for uniqueness.”

Religion is more “communal” than “unique.”

We expect diminished religiosity among those with tattoos.

# Religious Tattoos

# Research

- Miller, Donald E., Lori Jensen, and Richard W. Flory. 2000. "Marked for Jesus: Sacred Tattooing Among Evangelical GenXers," in Generation X Religion, edited by Richard W. Flory and Donald E. Miller (Routledge), pp. 15-30.
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- Koch, Jerome R., and Alden E. Roberts. (2012). The Protestant Ethic and the Religious Tattoo. *The Social Science Journal* 49(2): 210-213.
- Maloney, Patricia, and Jerome R. Koch. (Forthcoming). The College Student's Religious Tattoo: Respect, Reverence, Remembrance. *Sociological Focus*.
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# Religious Tattoos: Motivation and Manifestation

Motivations are similar for tattoo acquisition in general, though connected more directly to religion:

Respect, Reverence, Remembrance

Affiliation, Identity, Transformation

And now:

The Religion of the Religiously Tattooed ...  
(We kind of expect the unexpected.)

## Distribution of Religious Tattoos in our Sample

- Public schools: 17% had 1+ tattoo.
- 63% of religious tattoos came from Public schools
- Average of 9 religious tattoos/school (n=6)
  
- Secular Private schools: 15% had 1+ tattoo
- 8% of religious tattoos came from Secular Private schools.
- Average of 3 religious tattoos/school (n=3)
  
- Religious Universities: 14% had 1+ tattoo
- 29% of religious tattoos came from Religious schools
- Average of 8 religious tattoos/school (n=3)

*Some Comparisons:*

# *Tattoos and Sensations*

Those with tattoos are more likely than the non-tattooed respondents to be:

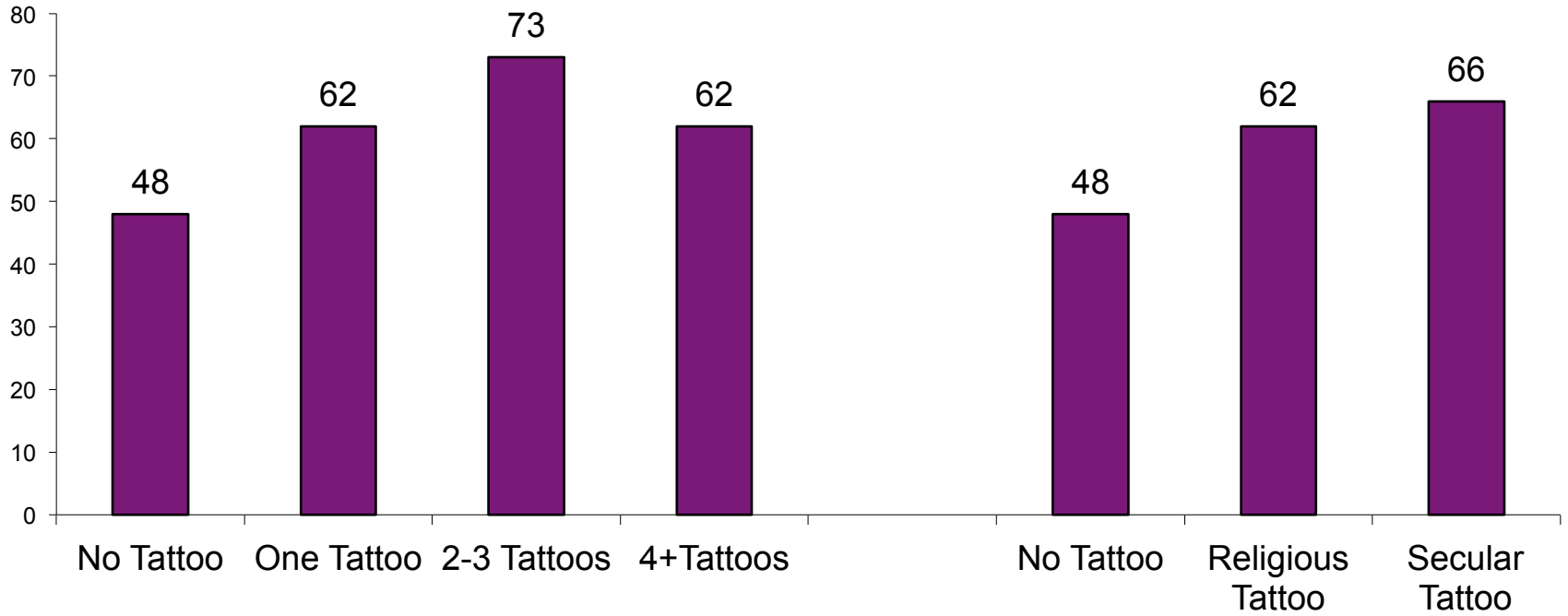
- Sensation-Seekers in General (though this drops among the most heavily tattooed)
- Current Binge Drinkers
- Current Marijuana users
- Have multiple sex partners

These comparisons become somewhat more pronounced as the number of tattoos increases.



Figure 1

### Tattoos and Sensation Seeking



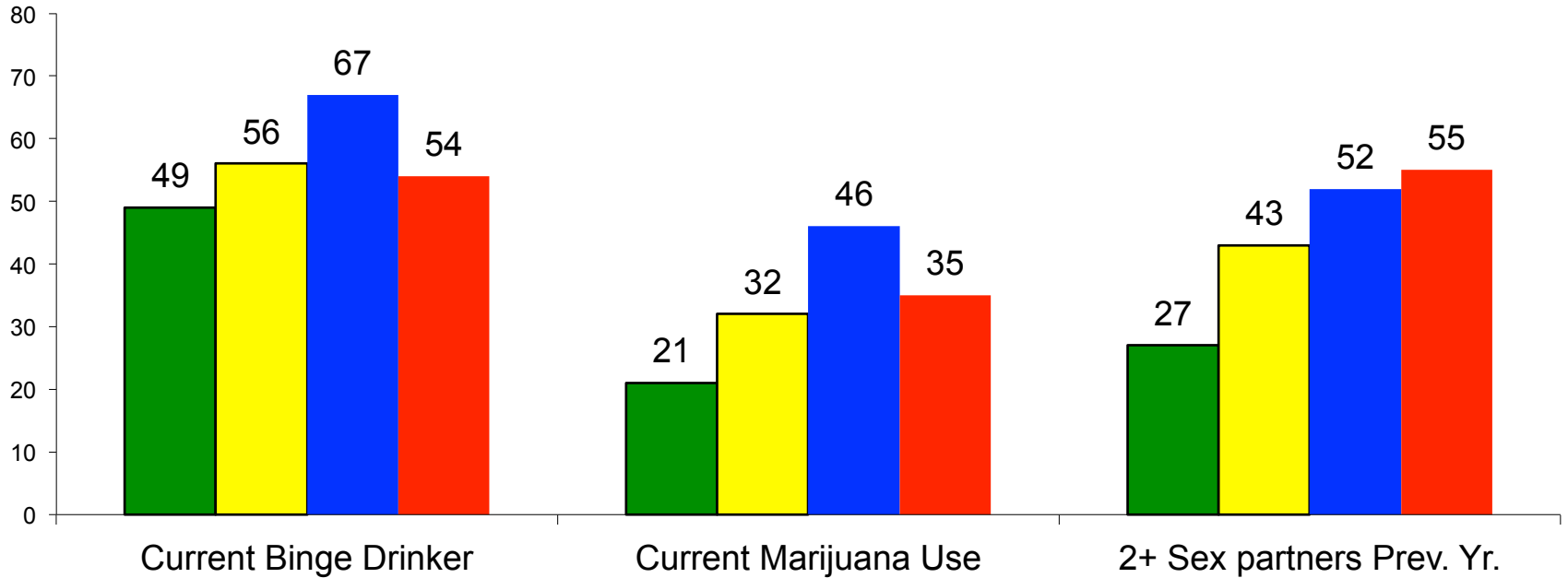
"I seek new and exciting experiences and sensations even if they are a little unconventional."

Agree or Strongly Agree -- Comparative Percentages  
 $p < .05$

■ Sensation Seeking

Figure 2

### Tattoos and Sensory/Sensual Behavior



Comparative Percentages  
 $p < .05$

■ No Tattoo

■ One Tattoo

■ 2-3 Tattoos

■ 4+ Tattoos

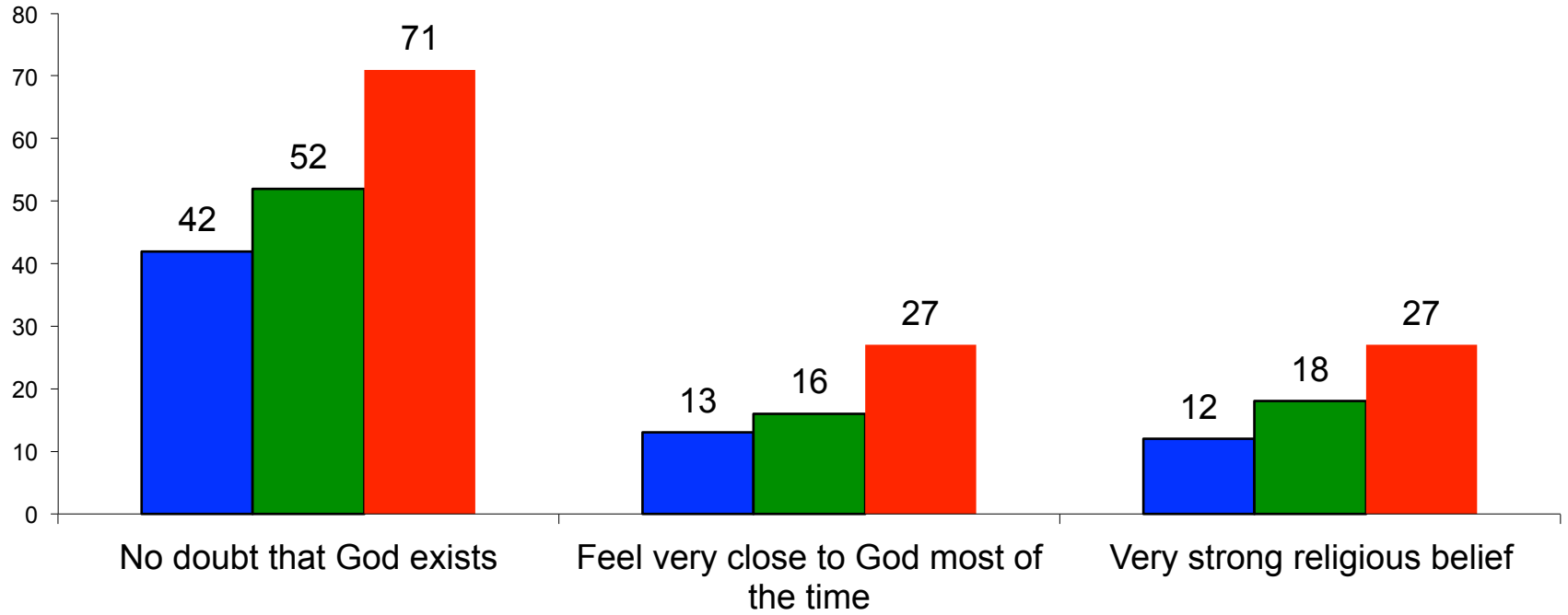
*Some Comparisons:  
Tattoos, Religious Tattoos and  
Religion.*

Those with religious tattoos are the most religious of any sub-group – belief and practice.

The secular tattooed are the least religious.

Figure 3

### Religious Salience by Tattoo Behavior



Comparative Percentages  
 $p < .05$

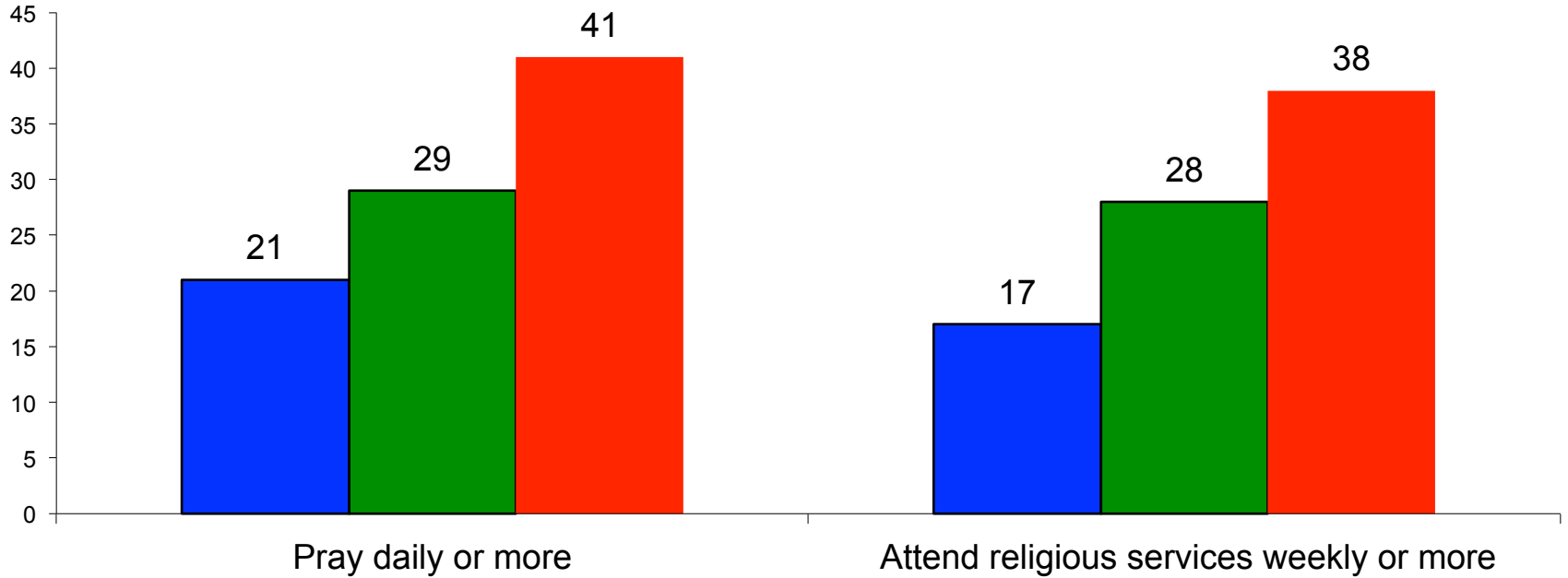
■ Secular Tattoo

■ No Tattoo

■ Religious Tattoo

Figure 4

### Religious Behavior by Tattoo Type



Comparative Percentages  
 $p < .05$

■ Secular Tattoo

■ No Tattoo

■ Religious Tattoo

## *Some Comparisons: Religion, Tattoos, Religious Tattoos, and Sensations*

Sensation-seeking rises as strength of religious faith increases, until it doesn't.

All tattooed respondents report higher levels of general sensation-seeking than non-tattooed

Those with religious tattoos are more like the non-tattooed regarding alcohol and marijuana use than they are like the secular tattooed.

Those with religious tattoos are more like the secular tattooed with regard to sex.

Both tattooed groups are markedly different than the non-tattooed.

Figure 5

### Strength of Religious Faith and and Sensation Seeking

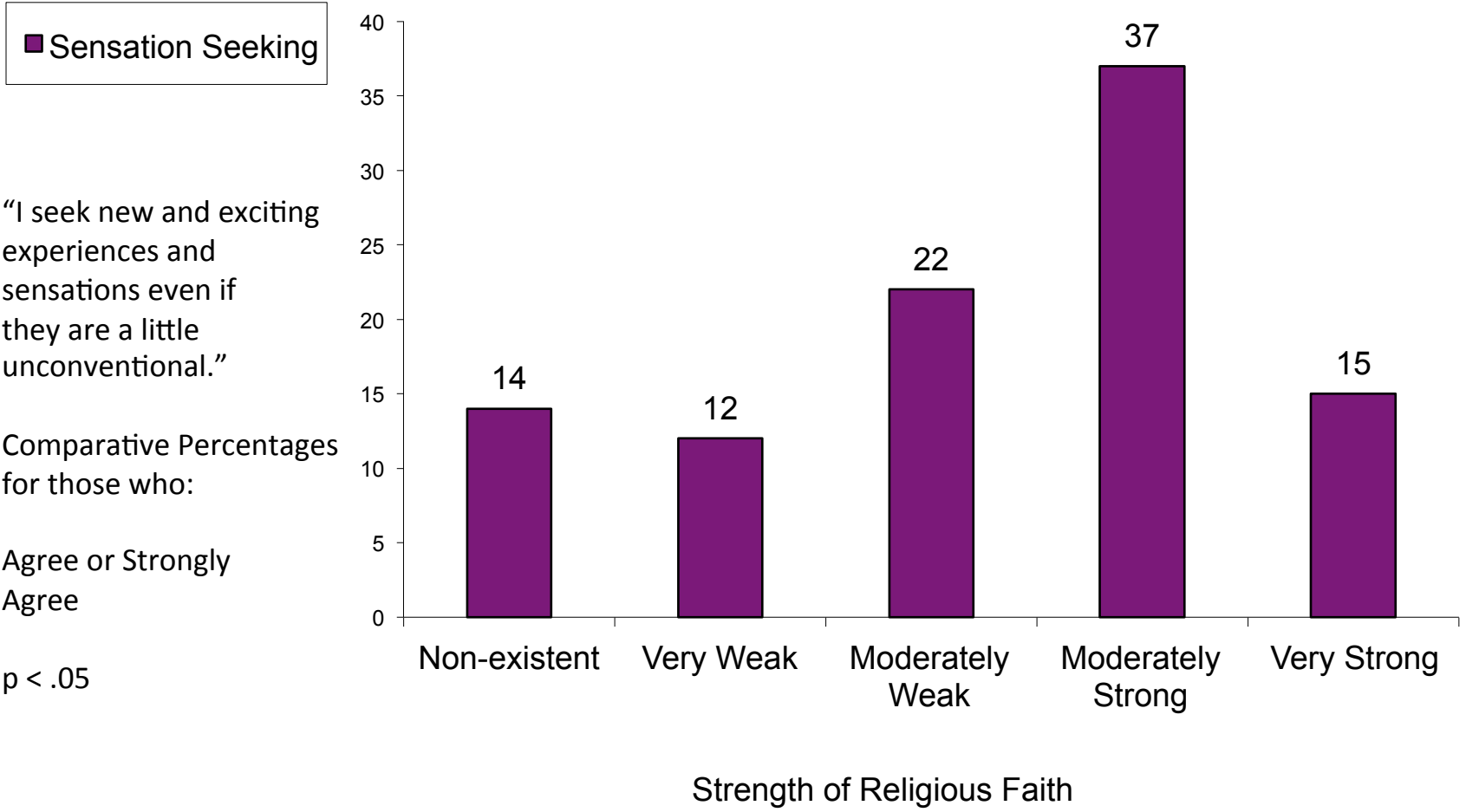
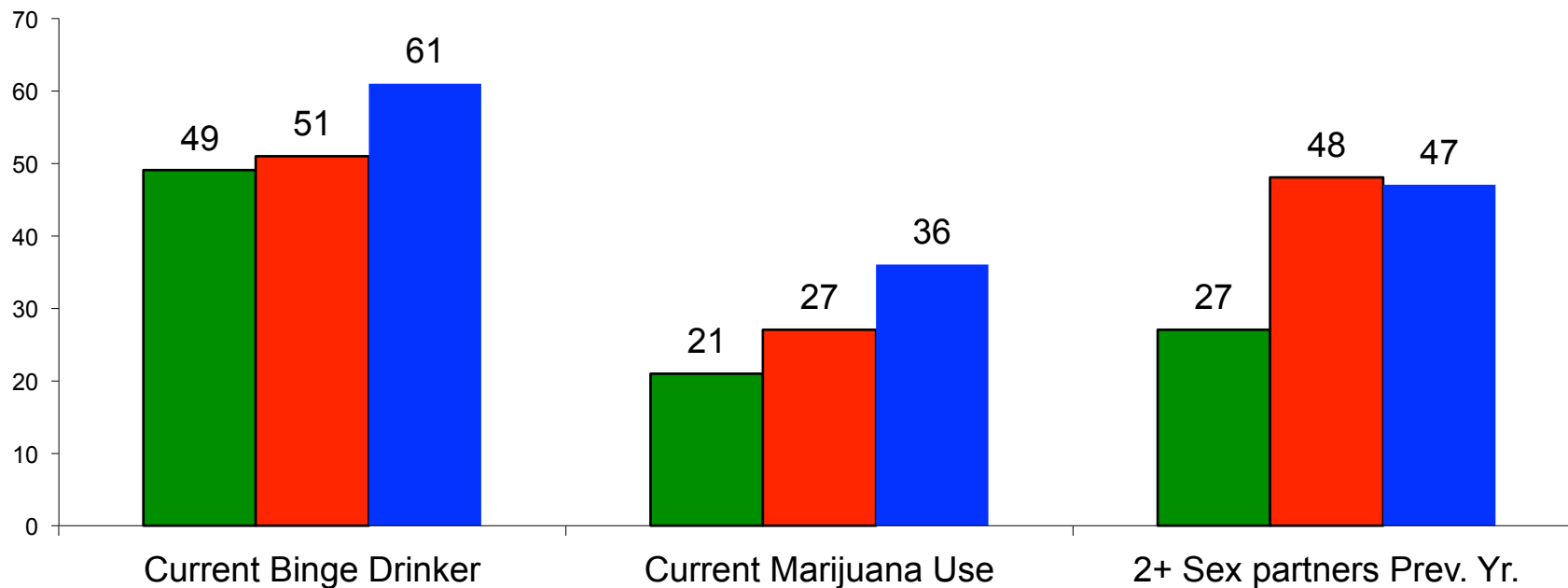


Figure 6

### Religious and Secular Tattoos and Sensory Behavior



Comparative Percentages  
 $p < .05$

■ No Tattoo

■ Religious Tattoo

■ Secular Tattoo



# Take-Aways

- Generalized sensation seeking increases with moderate faith, and drops off precipitously with the most devoted. Sex and substances? Rapture?
- Generalized sensation-seeking increases with number of tattoos, but drops off among the most heavily tattooed.
- Religious “sensation” is highest among those with religious tattoos. Salience, behavior, adornment.
- Those with secular tattoos are the most “sensual” with regard to substance use.
- Those with religious tattoos seem to be the most religiously “sensory” and nearly as “sensual” as those with secular tattoos. And very slightly more so with regard to sex.

# And next?

- What's up with the drop off in general sensation-seeking among the most religiously devoted AND the most heavily tattooed?
- What's up with the religiously tattooed being the most sexual?
- In what ways is religious experience specifically “sensational?”
- Your thoughts?