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A Shocking Tie Between Religiosity, Conservatism...and Pornography?

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Oct. 7, 2014 1:01pm Billy Hallowell

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A new study published in the Archives of Sexual Behavior claims to have found associations between higher state-wide levels of religiosity and conservatism and increased Google searches for sexual content, creating questions over whether conservative and religious people are more likely to view adult content.

In an article titled, "Do American States with More Religious or Conservative Populations Search More for Sexual Content on Google?," psychologists Dr. Gordon Hodson and Dr. Cara C. MacInnis of Brock University in Ontario, Canada, unveiled some intriguing findings.

Hodson and MacInnis explored state-wide levels of religiosity and conservatism, juxtaposing these data points against Google Trends search information from 2011 and 2012.

They looked at terms that included "sex," "gay sex," "porn" "xxx," "free porn and "gay porn," according to Real Clear Science.



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After exploring the terms and their prevalence, the authors turned to a 2011 Gallup study to explore state-wide levels of religiosity and conservatism and to see what the association might be.

Hodson and MacInnis considered “religiosity” to be the proportion of residents **who were “very religious”** within a specific state, while conservatism was measured by looking at those who called themselves conservatives in the Gallup poll.

“Across two separate years, and controlling for demographic variables, we observed moderate-to-large positive associations between: (1) greater proportions of state-level religiosity and general web searching for sexual content and (2) greater proportions of state-level conservatism and image-specific searching for sex,” read **the study's abstract**.

What this could indicate, according to Hodson and MacInnis, is that “a greater preponderance of right-leaning ideologies is associated with greater preoccupation with sexual content in private Internet activity.”

While some might take this to mean that conservatives are more rampant consumers of porn, there could be another explanation, as the study's authors highlight the notion that liberals in these states could also be driving the data.

Since non-traditional sex isn't a societal norm in these locations, it's possible that some left-of-center individuals choose to turn to private Internet activity to more covertly engage in certain sexual interests.

“It is possible that liberal citizens living in states higher in religiosity or conservatism search more for sexual content due to living in a more sexually-restricted environment,” the authors **wrote**.



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Also, as **Real Clear Science noted**, it's worth qualifying what happened with at least a few of these adult search terms when certain demographics were taken into account. The outlet explained:

Initially, MacInnis and Hodson found a strong link between a state's level of religiosity and the search volume for "gay sex," "gay porn," and "sex." But after controlling for demographic variables like GDP and the rate of individuals below the poverty line, the associations for "gay sex" and "gay porn" evaporated. However, the link with the search term "sex" remained. Overall, the strongest and most persistent link was between conservatism and a Google Image search for "sex."

According to **Mic**, the study's results are in line with past studies finding that conservative states also purchase the most pornography. While those who **fall to the right of the political spectrum** are blamed for increased porn purchases, the same dynamic surrounding liberals could also be at play in these states.

MacInnis and Hodson concluded by noting that, **regardless of who is searching** for these terms, there does appear to be an association between Internet search data and states with higher levels of religiosity and conservatism.

(H/T: **Mic**)

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