

# Religious transit and multiple religious belonging among sexual minorities in Brazil: a mixed-method study

Trânsito religioso e múltipla pertença religiosa entre minorias sexuais no Brasil: um estudo de método misto

Matheus Fernando Felix Ribeiro<sup>1</sup>  
Fabrini Gomes Dolenga<sup>2</sup>  
Renato Soleiman Franco<sup>3</sup>

## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationships between religious identity and gender/sexual orientation among sexual minorities in Brazil, focusing on religious transit and multiple religious belonging. A total of 151 participants answered questionnaires about their previous and current religious identities, the reasons for switching, and the impact of their sexuality. The results suggest significant differences in religious transit according to identity. Qualitative analysis revealed three central categories: rupture and redefinition of spirituality, ambivalence in religious spaces, and suffering and conflict with religious morality. Approximately one third of the sample reported multiple religious belonging, a proportion three times higher than the national average. There was a trend toward disaffiliation from religion altogether and from traditional Christian denominations, with increased affiliation to Afro-Brazilian, Buddhist, Indigenous, and esoteric religions. Religious transit emerged as a strategy for maintaining mental health, and religious identity was understood as a continuous rather than a dichotomous variable.

**Keywords:** sexual minorities; religiosity; mental health; multiple belonging; religious transit.

## RESUMO

Investigou-se as relações entre identidade religiosa e de gênero/orientação sexual entre minorias sexuais no Brasil com foco no trânsito religioso e múltipla pertença. Participaram 151 pessoas, que responderam questionários sobre suas identidades religiosas prévias e atuais, os motivos do trânsito e impacto de sua sexualidade. Os resultados sugerem diferenças significativas conforme a identidade no trânsito religioso. A análise qualitativa revelou três categorias centrais: a ruptura e a redefinição da espiritualidade, a ambivalência em espaços religiosos e sofrimento e conflito com a moral religiosa. Aproximadamente um terço da amostra apresentou múltipla pertença, proporção três vezes maior que a média populacional. Observou-se uma tendência ao alheamento das religiões por completo e também das cristãs tradicionais, com um acréscimo de

<sup>1</sup> PhD through the Graduate Program in Behavioral Sciences (area: Cognition and Neurosciences) at the University of Brasília (UnB). Specialist in the Science of Religion from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP). Specialist in Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy from the Institute of Psychology and Stress Control (IPCS). Faculty member and clinical supervisor at the University of Uberaba (Uniube).

<sup>2</sup> Clinical Psychologist (CRP 08/35699), master's student in the Graduate Program in Bioethics at the Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná (PUCPR). Member of the Study and Research Group in Cognitive Psychology of Religion.

<sup>3</sup> Master's degree in Health Technologies from PUCPR. Former recipient of a CAPES "Science Without Borders" scholarship, with doctoral training at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Porto, Portugal. Professor at the PUCPR School of Medicine and in the Master's Program in Bioethics at PUCPR. Coordinator of the Psychiatry Medical Residency Program of the Municipal Government of Curitiba.

vínculo com as religiões afro-brasileiras, budistas, indígenas e esotéricas. O trânsito religioso apareceu como uma estratégia para a manutenção da saúde mental e a identidade religiosa como variável contínua e não dicotômica.

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**Palavras-chave:** minorias sexuais; religiosidade; saúde mental; múltipla pertença; trânsito religioso.

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## Introduction

In the health field, religion and spirituality, due to the biopsychosocial model, have been the subject of national and international studies. In the late 1970s, psychiatrist George L. Engel proposed a new model for understanding illness, disease, and health, known as the biopsychosocial model. By questioning the limitations of the traditional biomedical model, which focused predominantly on biology and the physical causes of diseases, Engel argued that health professionals and researchers should consider the patient in an integral way, including not only biological aspects but also psychological, social, and cultural dimensions that influence the experience of health and illness (Hatala, 2013).

Subsequently, in the 1990s, the World Health Organization (WHO) formally included Spirituality and Religiosity as complementary and fundamental dimensions for a comprehensive understanding of health, expanding the biopsychosocial model to include these dimensions (World Health Organization, 1998). Several studies link Spirituality/Religiosity to better quality of life, acting as a protective factor for health and being relevant for coping with stressful situations, through emotional support, strengthening resilience, and developing strategies to deal with feelings of anger, fear, frustration, and anxiety (Calvetti; Muller; Nunes, 2007; Panzini; Bandeira, 2007; Moreira-Almeida; Lotufo Neto; Koenig, 2006).

Every effort aimed at adapting individuals to adverse situations is termed “coping strategies.” These strategies have been the focus of three generations of researchers, continuously developing at theoretical and methodological levels (Antoniazzi *et al.*, 1998). Lazarus and Folkman (1980) define these strategies as cognitive and behavioral efforts used to deal with threatening and stressful daily situations. Based on the coping concept proposed by Lazarus and Folkman, Panzini and Bandeira (2007) defined the use of Religious/Spiritual strategies to cope with daily stress or crises throughout life as Religious/Spiritual Coping (RSC).

Concerned with the outcomes of these strategies, Pargament (1997) classified Coping as positive and negative. Positive Religious/Spiritual strategies include seeking spiritual support or comfort in religious rituals, while negative strategies may involve spiritual discontent or a sense of punishment by a higher being. Several studies have established that negative mechanisms of Spiritual/Religious coping correlate with increased psychological distress, including higher depressive and anxiety symptoms (Ano; Vasconcelles, 2005).

Brazil is often described as a multireligious country, possessing one of the most diverse cultures in Latin America regarding ethnic and religious expressions (Almeida; Montero, 2001). However, national research reveals a less diverse society. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2022) 56.7% of Brazil's populace identifies as Roman Catholic, 26.9% as Evangelical, and 1.8% as Spiritist. Around 1.0% of individuals claim allegiance to Afro-Brazilian faiths, such as Umbanda and Candomblé, while 4.0% adhere to other religious practices. Those who consider themselves non-religious

account for 9.3%. Religions rooted in Indigenous traditions make up 0.1% of the total responses. The number of people belonging to Christian religions evidences hegemony in the country.

This apparently dichotomous scenario, in which Brazil is described as multireligious but presents a reality marked by Christian hegemony, has been studied by several researchers (Birman; Leite, 2000; Dawson, 2007; Morello, 2019). These authors argue that understanding such contradiction requires new research on phenomena such as: (I) Religious syncretism and multiple religious belongings; (II) Religious transit among Christians; and (III) The growth in the number of people who identify as non-religious or without institutional affiliations (Maraldi; Dias, 2019).

The phenomenon of multiple religious belonging, characterized by adherence or attendance to more than one religious tradition, is particularly significant in the Brazilian context (Almeida; Monteiro, 2001). According to the 2010 IBGE Census, about 13% of the Brazilian population claims to have more than one religion, with the most common combinations being Catholicism and Umbanda, or Catholicism and Spiritism (IBGE, 2010). However, this percentage may be underestimated due to various factors: many people do not reveal their religious affiliations, especially members of African-based religions; also, attendees of spiritualist or esoteric religions often identify as “spiritual” rather than “religious,” making formal identification of multiple belonging difficult (Maraldi; Dias, 2019).

The phenomenon of multiple religious belonging is vastly understudied in literature on religious identity, which often evaluates belonging as a dichotomous rather than a continuous variable. To better understand how multiple belonging organizes religious identity, Berghuijs (2016) analyzed this phenomenon in Dutch society in an empirical study, in which 23% of Dutch society can be classified as having multiple belonging. The author developed a theory called modalities of belonging, inspired by the dimensions of religiosity proposed by Glock and Stark (1968) to understand her findings. According to her, the modes of belonging are ways in which people relate to a particular religion and can be classified into nine categories. The first is affinity, which refers to a connection with the rituals, aesthetics, or values promoted by a religion. The second is practice or material culture, which involves prayer, celebration, and meditation. The third is ideology, referring to the actual beliefs. The fourth is narrative, which encompasses sacred stories and their characters. The fifth is origin, referring to a connection based on the history of that religion. The sixth is through experiences provided by the religion. The seventh is ethics, the eighth is community affiliation, and the ninth is identification as a member or follower of a particular religion.

Given this scenario, it is essential to analyze how religious experience occurs among groups that have historically occupied marginalized positions, such as sexual and gender minorities. Various studies indicate that sexual and gender minorities are more exposed to risk factors for psychological distress, such as social rejection, family exclusion, and institutional discrimination. These experiences are associated with high rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and non-suicidal self-injury (Branquinho; Benedito; Ciasca, 2021). The mental health of this population has been studied and compared with that of cisheterosexual people, especially regarding depression. Studies indicate a prevalence of 35% depression in cisgender bisexual women, compared to 16% among cisgender heterosexual women. Among cisgender homosexual men, lifetime depression is about 20%, almost 2.4 times higher compared to cisgender heterosexual men (Chaudhry; Reisner, 2019).

Lassiter *et al.* (2019) found that the relationship between spirituality and religion

among gay and bisexual men was significantly associated with various mental health variables. The authors found that those with higher levels of spirituality or religiosity had better mental health levels.

Religiosity, in the context of this study, is defined as adherence to practices related to a church or organized religious institution (Koenig; McCullough; Larson, 2001). This involves participation in prayers, worship services, and masses, and may encompass ethical-moral beliefs, practices, and values associated with a specific religion (Esperandio, 2020). In contrast, spirituality is understood as the human dimension that deals with existential questions (Pargament, 1997). In this sense, both Religiosity and Spirituality are related to the search for meaning and purpose in life, justifying the use of the binomial Spirituality/Religiosity (S/R) in this research.

The term cisheteronormativity is characterized as a set of norms that presupposes people are cisgender (those who identify with the gender assigned at birth, i.e., girl or boy) and heterosexual (people who are attracted to another person of a different gender), considering this as the natural outcome of human subjectivity (Sá; Szylit, 2021). Sexual minorities, on the other hand, are a group whose identity, orientation, or sexual practices differ from social expectations. Sexual minorities include Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transvestite, Transsexual, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) people; however, the term "sexual minorities" is more inclusive than the acronym "LGBTQIA+," as it is open to any group stigmatized and/or marginalized due to affective-sexual orientation, gender identity, or affective-sexual behavior that deviates from social expectations, that is, differing from the cisheteronormative standard (Donnelly, 2019).

In this context, Spirituality/Religiosity can also play a significant role. There are religions in which the acceptance of sexual and gender diversity is unrestricted; however, a large part of the Brazilian population is linked to religions in which cisheteronormativity is the rule, which can render sexual minorities invisible, marginalized, and blamed (Aguar *et al.*, 2021). Thus, the role of religion in some people's lives can be paradoxical, as it can serve as a source of support and emotional and existential comfort, but it can also function as an additional source of suffering, stigmatization, conflict, and exclusion (Silva; Esperandio, 2022).

Toniol (2015) observes that research tends to conceptualize Spirituality/Religiosity as a universally positive dimension for health. When invoked as a universal principal, Spirituality/Religiosity ceases to be an object of investigation and becomes instead a recommendation in the field of care. This perspective warrants critical examination when applied to sexual minority research, as it may overlook the complex and contradictory experiences this population encounters within the realm of Spirituality/Religiosity.

When there is conflict between personal identity and religious values, a specific type of Spiritual/Religious conflict may develop, characterized by feelings of shame, guilt, and even rupture with one's own faith (Exline *et al.*, 2014). Religious conflicts, combined with greater vulnerability to psychological illness, can significantly contribute to the development of depressive conditions among sexual minorities, as well as serve as predictors for increased depressive symptoms (Park; Brooks; Sussman, 2009; Pirutinsky; Rosmarin; Pargament; Midlarsky, 2011), negative health rehabilitation outcomes (Fitchett, Rybarczyk; Demarco; Nicholas, 1999), and higher mortality in illness contexts (Pargament; Koenig; Tarakeshwar; Hahn, 2001).

According to Lehmann (2012), Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches are those growing most rapidly in Brazil, Africa, and other Latin American countries. According to the author, this is due to certain contemporary factors, where religions are no longer a matter of inheritance and tradition, but rather a way of coping to overcome suffering and to have hope; thus, the search for well-being and health is one of the most influential factors in the adoption of a new religion (Nunes; Mariz; Faerstein, 2016).

This change in the social and religious aspect of society is marked by the phenomenon known as Religious transit, defined by Ciscon-Evangelista and Menandro (2011) as the abandonment of one religion to affiliate with another or with none. According to Ribeiro (2018), religious transit is not limited to the formal migration from one religion to another, but involves a symbolic and cultural recomposition among different belief systems. This mobility can manifest in various ways: (I) people who, although identifying with a specific religious tradition, allow themselves to experience other expressions of faith; (II) those who, for personal or social reasons, declare adherence to one religion but practice another in daily life; (III) individuals who manage to integrate elements from different religious traditions; (IV) people who choose not to affiliate with an institutionalized religion, freely moving among various spiritual practices; and (V) those who maintain their main religious affiliation while incorporating rituals and symbols from other beliefs (Ribeiro, 2018).

Despite the recurrence of this phenomenon in Brazil, there is still a lack of research evaluating the factors that influence religious transit (Maraldi; Dias, 2019), especially among sexual minorities. Considering that Brazilian religious identity is shaped by syncretism, religious change, conversion, and deconversion, it is essential to assess how sexual and gender identity are constructed in this context. In this sense, religious transit may act as an important protective factor, enabling sexual minorities to migrate to religions that do not condemn issues of gender or sexuality (Ciscon-Evangelista; Menandro, 2011).

By articulating Spirituality, Religiosity, and sexual minorities, this study aims to analyze religious transit and multiple religious belonging among Brazilian sexual minorities. Specifically, it seeks to investigate the spiritual and religious trajectories of individuals within these minorities, examining their experiences of remaining, migrating, or distancing themselves from religious beliefs and institutions. It also aims to understand how factors such as sexual orientation and gender identity influence religious choices, as well as to explore the meanings attributed to spirituality and religiosity in contexts of institutional acceptance or rejection. Finally, the study seeks to analyze the subjective and social implications of religious transit and multiple religious belonging for the construction of meaning, belonging, and mental health.

## 1. Methods

This is a mixed-methods study, both qualitative and quantitative, with an exploratory and descriptive design. The combination of these two approaches can contribute to a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the studied phenomena (Minayo, 1997). The research was conducted through an online survey hosted on the Qualtrics platform, and data collection occurred between December 2022 and February 2023. The average response time was approximately 20 minutes. Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling strategy, with the questionnaire shared in LGBTQIA+ communities across social media

platforms, including Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. All research participants were volunteers, Brazilian, over 18 years old, and consented to participate by signing the Informed Consent Form (ICF). This research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná, under Certificate of Ethical Appreciation Presentation number 40225920.6.0000.0020

## 2. Sample

The initial sample consisted of 257 participants. Data from participants who did not complete the survey were excluded. The final sample consisted of 151 participants. Inclusion criteria were: self-identification as a sexual minority and being of legal age (at least eighteen years old). The average age of the sample was 27 years (SD 7.33).

In terms of biological sex, 53 participants identified as male (37.7%), 93 as female (61.6%), and 1 person as intersex (0.7%). Regarding gender identity, 50 participants identified as cisgender men (33.1%), 84 as cisgender women (55.6%), 5 as transgender men (3.3%), 3 as transgender women (2%), and 8 as non-binary/queer (5.3%).

Regarding sexual orientation, 62 participants (41.1%) identified as homosexual, 62 as bisexual (41.1%), 22 as pansexual (14.6%), 1 as asexual (0.7%), 2 as heterosexual (1.3%), and 2 as other orientations (1.3%). As for participation in sexual minority collectives, 24 (15.9%) reported participating.

In terms of marital status, 110 participants declared themselves single (72.8%), 31 married (20.5%), 8 in a stable union (5.6%), 1 separated (0.7%), and 1 widowed (0.7%).

Regarding monthly income, 13 participants declared earning less than one Brazilian minimum wage (8.6%), 62 between 1 and 3 minimum wages (41.1%), 48 between 4 and 8 minimum wages (31.8%), 23 more than 8 minimum wages (15.2%), and 5 preferred not to disclose their income (3.3%).

Regarding education level, 40 (26.5%) had completed postgraduate studies, 38 had completed higher education (25.2%), 52 had not completed higher education (34.4%), 19 had completed high school (12.6%), and 1 had completed elementary school (0.7%).

In terms of race, 114 participants self-identified as white (75.5%), 25 as brown (16%), 9 as black (6%), 1 as yellow (0.7%), and 2 as indigenous Brazilian (1.4%).

## 3. Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. A normality analysis was performed for all variables using the Shapiro-Wilk test. For non-parametric distributions, Pearson correlations were performed to explore bivariate relationships between variables.

To investigate differences between participants, independent samples t-tests or analyses of variance (ANOVA) were performed. In the case of significant results, Games-

Howell post hoc tests were conducted for heterogeneous variances. Effect size analyses were also performed for significant results.

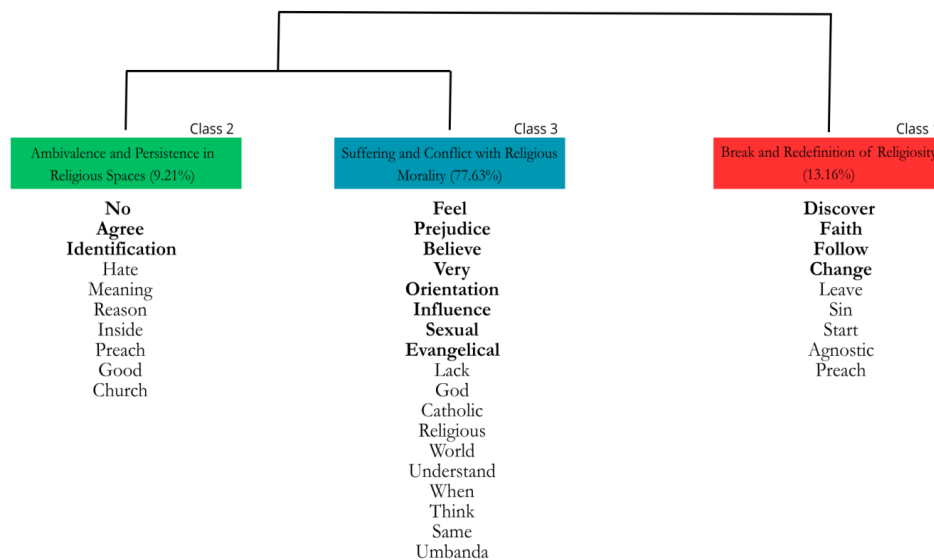
For lexicometric analysis, the Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires (IRaMuTeQ) was used. This consists of a probabilistic textual data analysis through lemmatization (Faiaid *et al.*, 2021). Specifically, descending hierarchical classification analysis was used to identify emerging classes, considering that the higher the  $\chi^2$ , the more the word is associated with the class. Words with  $\chi^2 < 3.80$  ( $p < 0.05$ ) were disregarded (Camargo; Justo, 2013).

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The corpus for textual analysis consisted of 97 texts, segmented into 100 context units (ST), with a total of 1,406 occurrences (words, forms, or terms), 541 distinct occurrences, and 372 unique ones. The necessary parameters described by Faiaid, Rodrigues and Lima (2021) were followed for building the database for lexicometric analyses.

The analyzed content was categorized into three classes: Rupture and Redefinition of Religiosity (13.16% of text segments [STs]); Ambivalence and Permanence in Religious Spaces (9.21% of STs); Suffering and Conflict with Religious Morality (77.63% of STs).

**Figure 1:** Dendrogram of the Descending Hierarchical Classification (DHC) generated by IRaMuTeQ - Source: Prepared by the authors (2025)



Class 1 groups discourses related to breaking with religion and seeking new paths. Words such as “change,” “leave,” “sin,” and “agnostic” indicate processes of criticism and distancing from stressful religious discourses, especially regarding sexuality and gender. For example, participant 41, cis woman, bisexual: "Evangelicals preach that anything outside of the cis-hetero norm is a sin, but today I understand that this has nothing to do with Christianity itself, which is why I decided to follow another path" (sic), accompanied by the statement of Participant 95, a cisgender lesbian woman: "When your own sexual orientation is considered a sin and damnation, it's hard to maintain faith" (sic). The terms "discover,"

"follow," and "begin" suggest a movement of reconstruction, pointing to the development of new perspectives and a reconfiguration between Spirituality/Religiosity and sexuality/gender identity. This process is exemplified in the statement of Participant 53, a non-binary bisexual person: "Discovering my origins and following who I am" (sic).

Class 2 includes statements from individuals who, despite being in religious contexts, express ambivalence or resistance toward institutional dogmas and practices. Words such as "agree," "not," "hatred," and "identification" suggest internal conflicts with doctrines or religious leaders, as illustrated by the accounts of some participants. Participant 25, a cisgender lesbian woman, states: "I do not agree with what the Catholic Church preaches regarding homosexuality, bisexuality, intolerance, and the culture of hatred and propaganda within churches" (sic). Similarly, Participant 16, a cisgender homosexual man, reported a "lack of identification with values and precepts" (sic).

Class 3, in turn, gathers reports related to the suffering experienced by sexual minorities in religious contexts, especially within Christian traditions. Terms such as "prejudice," "sexual," "evangelical," "Catholic," "lack," and "God" point to experiences marked by rejection, exclusion, and moral judgment, as illustrated by the participants' statements. Participant 88, a cisgender bisexual man, reported: "After hearing several times that homosexuals go to hell, I changed religions I didn't feel represented, much less comfortable with the rituals involved" (sic). Similarly, Participant 40, a cisgender bisexual woman, stated: "The pressure for a 'normal' life within the Catholic Church is very strong and made me feel bad about being present in the community" (sic). In addition, Participant 48, a cisgender bisexual man, shared: "Because of my sexual orientation, I never felt welcomed by my church. I believe the Catholic Church, in general, is quite contradictory" (sic).

However, the verbs "to think," "to feel," and "to believe" also appear in Class 3, indicating an attempt at internal reconciliation between faith and sexual and/or gender identity. This is expressed, for example, in the statement of Participant 10, a cisgender homosexual man: "(...) I believe in a welcoming and loving God who does not punish." A similar perspective is shared by Participant 45, a transgender pansexual man, who stated: "(...) I understood that there were other options where it was not necessary to deny part of who I am to participate in religion."

Finally, the term *Umbanda* is usually seen as a place of acceptance and inclusion, where issues related to gender and sexuality are not condemned. This transition is exemplified by Participant 97, a cisgender lesbian woman: "After understanding myself as a lesbian woman, I didn't feel comfortable in the church considering what society says, nor with my relationship with God, as I felt a judgment that I now understand was human and not His. But after being introduced to Umbanda by my mother, I was able to strengthen my faith again in a free way, without feeling invisible or judged for being who I am" (sic). Similarly, Participant 35, a cisgender lesbian woman, stated: "Umbanda accepts the LGBT community, Kardecist Spiritism does not" (sic), which aligns with the words of Participant 75, also a cisgender lesbian woman: "I came to believe that God is greater than what is described in the Bible — for me, God is love, nature, does not blame or condemn. In a class from an Academic League, I learned about Umbanda and identified with it because I previously had prejudice, but it was merely due to a lack of knowledge about the religion" (sic).

The data from the analyzed categories suggest that participants sometimes report identity conflicts between their sexual orientation/identity and their religious identities,



expressed as affective ambivalence. This leads many participants to abandon their traditional religions, migrate to others, or engage in multiple religious belonging. To better understand this dynamic between religious identity, current or previous religious affiliation was analyzed in order to examine possible relationships between sexual and religious identity/orientation. In this regard, a table was created, shown below, which presents the results for current religious belonging that is, participants who currently identify, to some degree, with that religious identity followed by previous religious belonging, indicating participants who previously identified with a given religion but, for some reason, no longer do so.

**Table 1:** Religious identity and previous and current religious belonging

Religious Identity	Religious Belonging	Participants
Roman Catholic	Current	8
	Previous	66
Brazilian Catholic	Current	5
	Previous	24
Orthodox Catholic	Current	0
	Previous	0
Buddhism	Current	16
	Previous	8
Kardecist Spiritism	Current	28
	Previous	25
Spiritualist	Current	16
	Previous	6
Evangelical	Current	6
	Previous	46
Pentecostal	Current	0
	Previous	7
Hinduism	Current	1
	Previous	1
Islam	Current	1
	Previous	0
Judaism	Current	1
	Previous	0
Umbanda	Current	41
	Previous	12
Candomblé	Current	12
	Previous	4
Esoteric	Current	11
	Previous	0
Indigenous	Current	4
	Previous	0
Agnostic	Current	28

	Previous	14
No religion	Current	56
	Previous	9
Other	Current	15
	Previous	6

Source: research data (2025)

With regard to the pattern of religious transit in the sample, as described above, it was possible to observe a certain tendency toward disaffiliation from historical religious traditions. Both Roman and Brazilian Catholicism experienced significant disaffiliation, with notable losses in membership: the former decreased from sixty-six participants to eight, and the latter from twenty-four to five. Additionally, there was also a reduction among Evangelicals and Pentecostals. The number of Evangelicals dropped from forty-six participants initially to just six, while Pentecostals declined from seven to none. Combined, these Christian traditions lost a total of one hundred and ninety members.

There was a low representation of participants affiliated with Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam, which may be related to cultural and institutional barriers present in these religious traditions. Social norms and the stigma associated with sexual diversity may hinder the participation of these individuals in research on sexual minorities. Furthermore, this underrepresentation may also indicate lower adherence to or distancing from these religious traditions by sexual minorities.

The data also show a significant increase in agnostic participants, whose number doubled from fourteen initially to twenty-eight who currently identify as such. Participants who declared having no religion grew from nine to fifty-six, which can also be considered a significant increase. This phenomenon may reflect the search for spaces that offer greater acceptance of sexual diversity, especially in light of traditional religious contexts that often present restrictions or less inclusive attitudes. Adopting non-religious identities may, therefore, represent a coping strategy for the suffering caused by the stigma imposed by some institutions.

In terms of increased religious belonging, it was possible to observe a rise in Afro-Brazilian religions, with participants in Umbanda increasing from twelve to forty-one and in Candomblé from four to twelve. There was also a notable increase among Spiritualists, from six to sixteen, and among Esoteric traditions, from zero to eleven participants. It is also noteworthy that the number of participants identifying with Indigenous traditions increased from zero to four. Additionally, there was an increase in participants identifying with Buddhism, rising from eight to sixteen participants.

These patterns of choice can be better understood through the statements of the participants themselves. Participant 164, single, man, non-binary, bisexual, states: “Umbanda is welcoming and universalist.” Participant 37, woman, married, homosexual, describes her experience with religious transit: “I was born in an Evangelical home. I had to choose between my orientation or religion. The oppressive gaze is always noticeable.” Participant 39, woman, married, bisexual, attests: “The religion I previously attended [Catholicism], even though it claimed to welcome and understand my sexuality, often condemned it. In the Umbanda temple, I felt much more welcomed and part of the environment, since historically it is a discriminated religion, and therefore ends up welcoming all those who, for some reason, may be on the margins of society.”

To gain a clearer understanding of the current dynamics of religious belonging among sexual minorities, the variable of participants' religious identity was analyzed. In this variable, participants could select one or more religions as applicable. They were subsequently classified as having single religious belonging if they selected only one religion, or multiple belonging if they selected more than one.

We also analyzed previous and current religious belonging. For the former, 104 participants (68.9%) described themselves as belonging to a single religion, while 47 (31.1%) described themselves as belonging to more than one. Regarding current religious identity, 59 participants (39.1%) indicated single belonging, 50 (33.1%) indicated multiple belonging, and 42 (27.8%) indicated having no religion.

These data demonstrate a substantial increase in participants with no religion, as previously discussed. It is also noteworthy that there was no substantial change in the number of participants identifying with more than one religion — previously 47, currently 50 — but rather a significant decline in single belonging, dropping from 104 participants previously to 59 currently.

Considering this scenario, a second table was created that specifically addresses the occurrence of multiple religious belonging among the research participants.

**Table 2:** Religious identity and belonging

Religious identity	Religious belonging	Participants
Roman Catholic	Single	3
	Multiple	5
Brazilian Catholic	Single	1
	Multiple	4
Orthodox Catholic	Single	0
	Multiple	0
Buddhism	Single	5
	Multiple	11
Kardecist Spiritism	Single	5
	Multiple	23
Spiritualist	Single	2
	Multiple	14
Evangelical	Single	3
	Multiple	3
Pentecostal	Single	0
	Multiple	0
Hinduism	Single	0
	Multiple	1
Islam	Single	0
	Multiple	1
Umbanda	Single	13
	Multiple	28
Candomblé	Single	1
	Multiple	11

Esoteric	Single	1
	Multiple	10
Indigenous	Single	0
	Multiple	4
Agnostic	Single	17
	Multiple	11
Other	Single	6
	Multiple	9
Judaism	Single	1
	Multiple	0

Source: research data (2025)

Regarding multiple religious belonging among the research participants, a strong presence of simultaneous ties with different religious traditions was observed, especially those of Afro-Brazilian and spiritualist nature. Umbanda stood out as the religious tradition with the highest number of multiple ties, with 28 participants, even surpassing the number of unique affiliations (13). A similar situation is present in Kardecist Spiritism, with twenty-three participants in multiple ties versus five in exclusive affiliation; in Spiritualism, fourteen multiple affiliations versus two unique belongings; and in Candomblé, eleven multiple ties versus one exclusive single belonging, evidencing a pattern in these traditions, which are often associated with a more syncretic religiosity.

Buddhism also showed a large number of participants with multiple religious belonging, with eleven people compared to five with exclusive affiliation, which may indicate a more open appropriation of its practices and teachings in the Brazilian context. Esoteric and Indigenous traditions have, respectively, ten and four multiple ties, compared to only one and no exclusive affiliation.

Some religious traditions show a more balanced distribution between multiple religious belongings and single ties, as in the case of Roman Apostolic Catholicism, in which three people reported single belonging while five indicated multiple belonging. Similarly, three evangelical participants reported single belonging and three multiple belongings. Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam had low participation, with only one or no affiliation, predominantly single affiliation. Pentecostalism and Orthodox Catholicism had no participants linked.

In terms of religious transit — that is, those participants who have migrated from one religion at least once in their lives — 148 of them (98%) reported having changed, while three (2%) reported not having changed. Regarding the influence of gender identity or sexual orientation on switching, 38 participants (25.2%) reported no influence and 97 (64.2%) reported influence; six participants stated they did not know (4%) and ten people had never thought about the subject (6.6%). To better measure this variable, the impact of identity issues on religious transit was investigated using a five-point Likert scale. The Shapiro-Wilk test was initially performed to verify the assumption of data normality. The result was below  $p < 0.001$ , suggesting a violation of the normality assumption. Next, a Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to assess differences in the variable “influence of sexuality on religious transit” among the groups 'Influenced', 'Not influenced', 'Don't know', and 'Never thought about it'. The results indicated a statistically significant difference between the groups ( $X^2 = 84.9$ ;  $df = 3$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

Given the observed significance, multiple comparisons were performed using the Dwass-Steel-Critchlow-Fligner test. The analyses revealed that the significant difference occurred between the groups 'Yes' and 'No' ( $p < 0.001$ ), 'Yes' and 'Don't know' ( $p < 0.001$ ), and 'Yes' and 'Never thought about it' ( $p < 0.001$ ), while the other comparisons did not show statistical significance ( $p > 0.05$ ).

To better understand these quantitative data, some participant statements illustrate the influence of sexuality/gender identity on religious transit. Participant 30, single, homosexual woman, highlights: "When one's own sexual orientation is considered a sin and condemnation, it is difficult to maintain faith." Participant 91, bisexual woman, single, said: "I never felt accepted and belonging to the Catholic Church since I understood my orientation." Participant 210, homosexual man, single, in turn, said: "I suffered an attempt at sexual orientation reversal."

To identify factors associated with the perception of whether sexual orientation/gender influenced religious transit, a multinomial logistic regression was performed, with the dependent variable being the response to the question "Did your sexual orientation/gender influence your religious transit?" (categories: Yes, No, Don't know, Never thought about it). The independent variables included in the model were: religiosity, education, race, participation in LGBTQIA+ collectives, marital status, occupation, income, biological sex, gender, and sexual orientation. To identify factors associated with the perception of whether sexual orientation/gender influenced religious transit, a multinomial logistic regression was performed, with the dependent variable being the response to the question "Did your sexual orientation/gender influence your religious transit?" (categories: Yes, No, Don't know, Never thought about it). The independent variables included in the model were: religiosity, education, race, participation in LGBTQIA+ collectives, marital status, occupation, income, biological sex, gender, and sexual orientation.

The results indicated that education was a significant predictor for differentiating the "No" group from the "Yes" group ( $B = 0.41$ ; standard error = 0.20; OR = 1.51; 95% CI: 1.03–2.21;  $p = 0.037$ ). This suggests that participants with higher education were 51% more likely to report that their sexual orientation/gender did not influence their religious transit, compared to those who indicated it did.

For the comparison between the "Never thought about it" group and the "Yes" group, sexual orientation was a significant predictor ( $B = 0.87$ ; standard error = 0.32; OR = 2.39; 95% CI: 1.28–4.47;  $p = 0.006$ ), indicating that certain sexual orientation groups were 2.4 times more likely to have never considered the influence of orientation on religious transit, compared to those who reported such influence. The other variables (religiosity, race, participation in collectives, marital status, occupation, income, biological sex, gender) did not show statistically significant associations in any of the comparisons ( $p > 0.05$ ).

## Final considerations

This research aimed to understand the dynamics of religious transit and multiple religious belonging in a sample of sexual minorities in Brazil using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Significant differences were found among those who reported that gender identity or sexual orientation influenced their religious transit. Furthermore, lexical categories were created that summarized the religious experience of sexual minorities,

highlighting rupture and redefinition of spirituality, ambivalence in religious spaces, and suffering and conflict with religious morality.

In terms of the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging — understood as adherence to or attendance at more than one religious tradition — this is especially significant in the Brazilian context (Almeida; Monteiro, 2001), particularly for the sample studied. According to the IBGE Census, about 13% of the Brazilian population claims to have more than one religion, with the most common combinations being Catholicism and Umbanda, or Catholicism and Spiritism (IBGE, 2010)<sup>4</sup>.

More recent data investigated by Ribeiro (2024) corroborate these previous census findings, as his research found around 10% of participants self-declared as having more than one religious identity. In research conducted by Berghuis (2016) in the Netherlands, the author attests that about 23% of Dutch society can be classified as having multiple belonging. In the present study, the results for people self-declared as having multiple religious belonging were about 33%, approximately three times higher than the national average. This result suggests that sexual minorities tend to have a more fluid, less formal relationship with religions.

Moreover, our research also demonstrated that this sample tends to abandon traditional Christian religions or abandon religion altogether, adopting a non-religious or even agnostic identity. There was a significant increase in affiliation with Afro-Brazilian, Buddhist, Indigenous, and esoteric religions. Possible explanations for this phenomenon are related to the understanding of sin, institutional suffering, prejudice, and non-acceptance of their identity as a sexual minority within Christian traditions, as made explicit by various participants' statements. Furthermore, the reason for switching to other religions was justified by these being more inclusive and tolerant environments. The abandonment of religions can be understood as resulting from the difficulty in reconciling religious/spiritual identity with gender identity, which may worsen mental health conditions. In this sense, religious transit can be understood as a strategy for maintaining mental health.

The modalities of belonging, as proposed by Berghuis (2016), help to understand the religious/spiritual identity of participant 8, a cisgender, bisexual woman, who previously identified as Assemblian but currently identifies as Spiritualist, Umbanda, Wicca, and non-religious. When asked why she changed religion, she stated: "Catholic by upbringing, evangelical by choice and familiarity, Umbanda by interest and to break down religious prejudices, Wicca for its principles, but not a practitioner." By understanding that religious identity is not a dichotomous variable but a continuous one, it is possible to better characterize the phenomenon of multiple belonging, through which this participant has transitioned throughout her life. Ultimately, the religious experience appears to be porous and traversed by multiple realities, rather than a monolithic experience.

Future research could investigate the religious cognition of phenomena related to multiple belonging, as done by Ribeiro (2024), both in adults and children. Additionally, research in the fields of morality, agency, and mental health is within the scope for a better understanding of the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging.

As for the limitations of this research, it is noteworthy that a large proportion of participants are white and middle-class, and that the number of respondents identified as

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<sup>4</sup> The 2022 Census data do not provide information on multiple religious affiliations.

transgender individuals is low. Additionally, one limitation of this study lies in the absence of updated data on multiple religious affiliations, as the 2022 Census did not provide detailed information on this variable. Therefore, analyses regarding this aspect rely on data from the 2010 Census. Future studies could address these limitations by developing strategies to increase the inclusion of individuals from diverse racial, socioeconomic, and gender identity backgrounds, in order to better understand the role of multiple belonging and religious transit of this population.

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