

## The Impact of Regional Norms on LGBTQ+ Experiences and Self-Perception in the U.S. South

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### Introduction

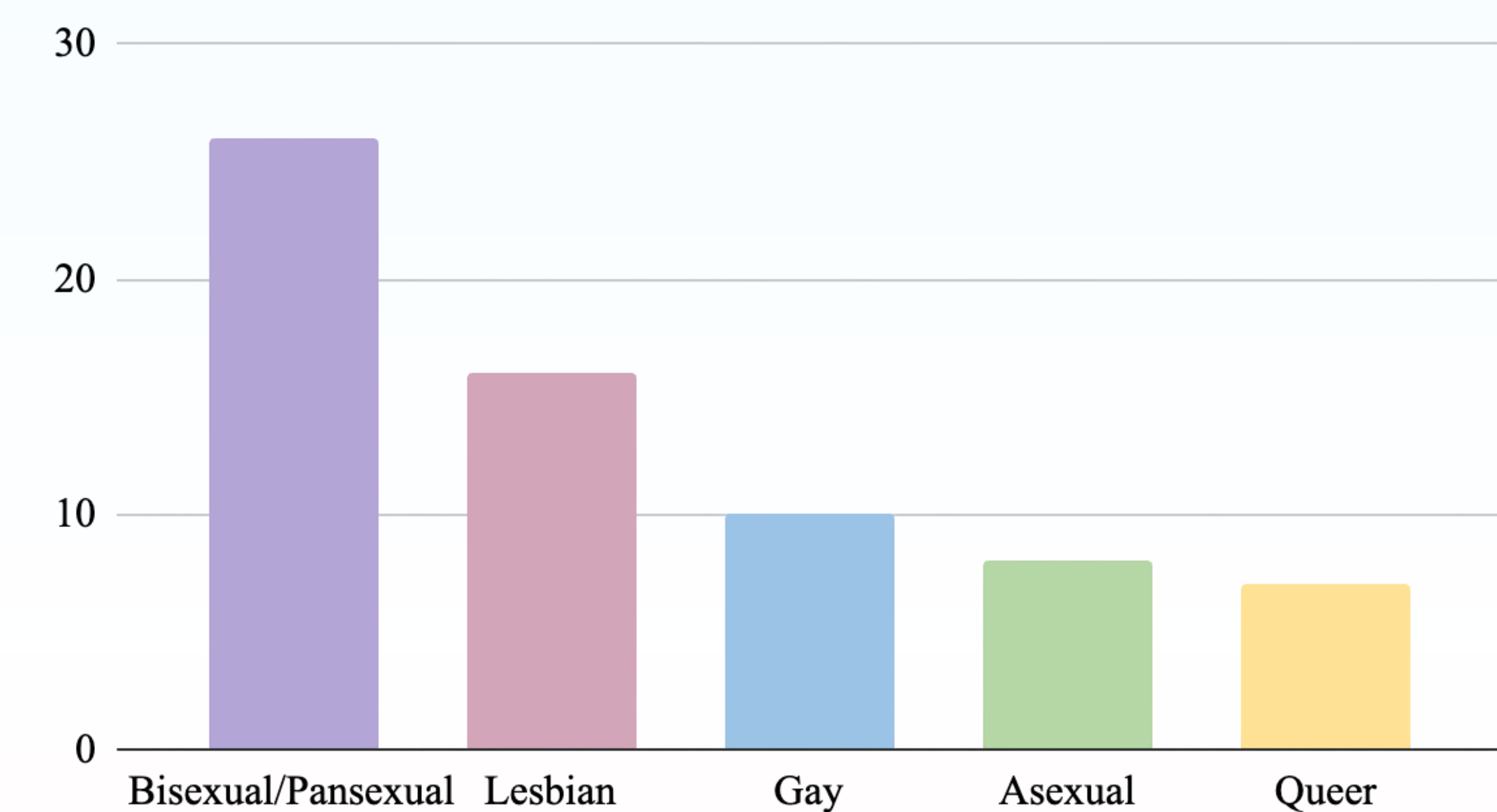
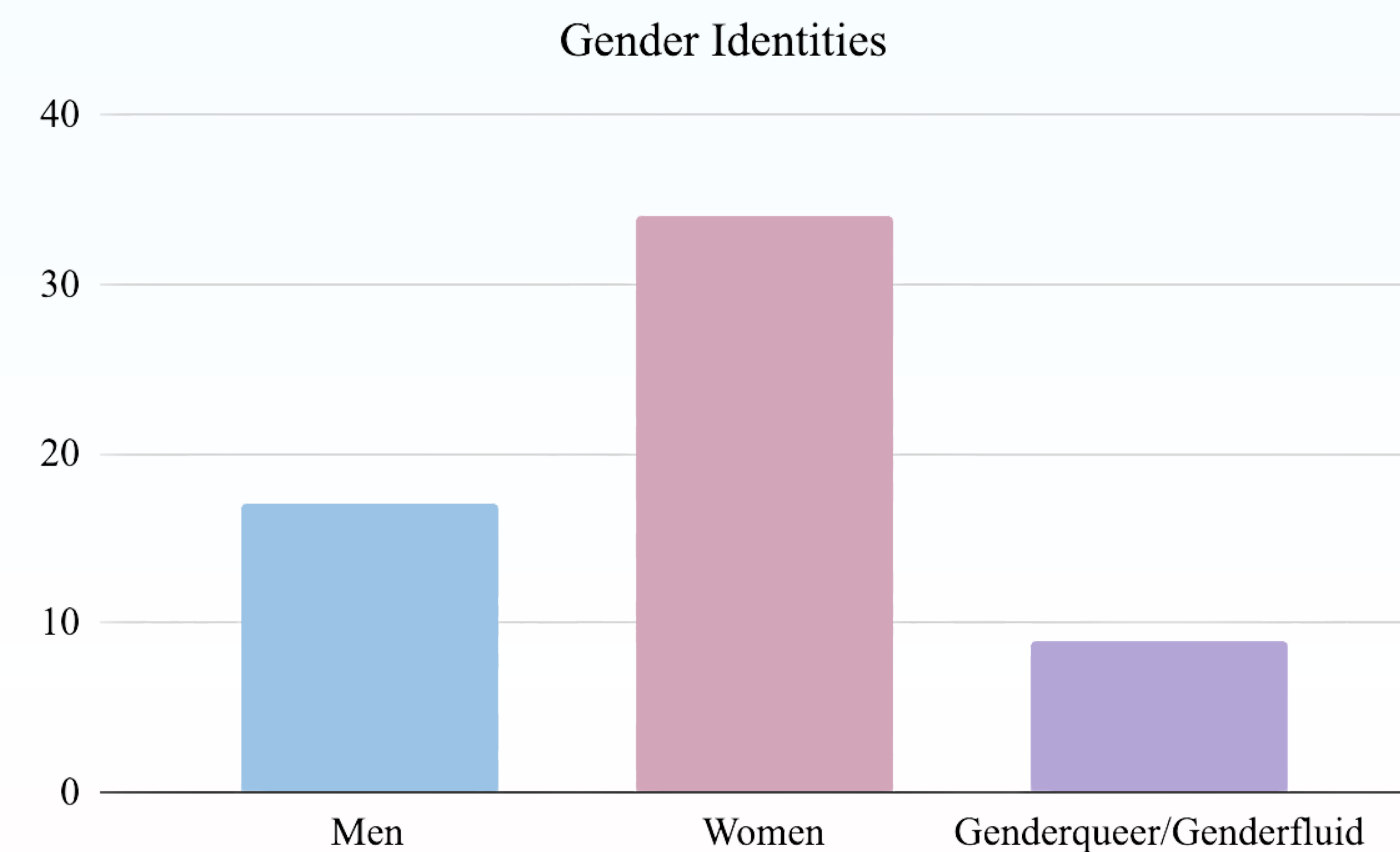
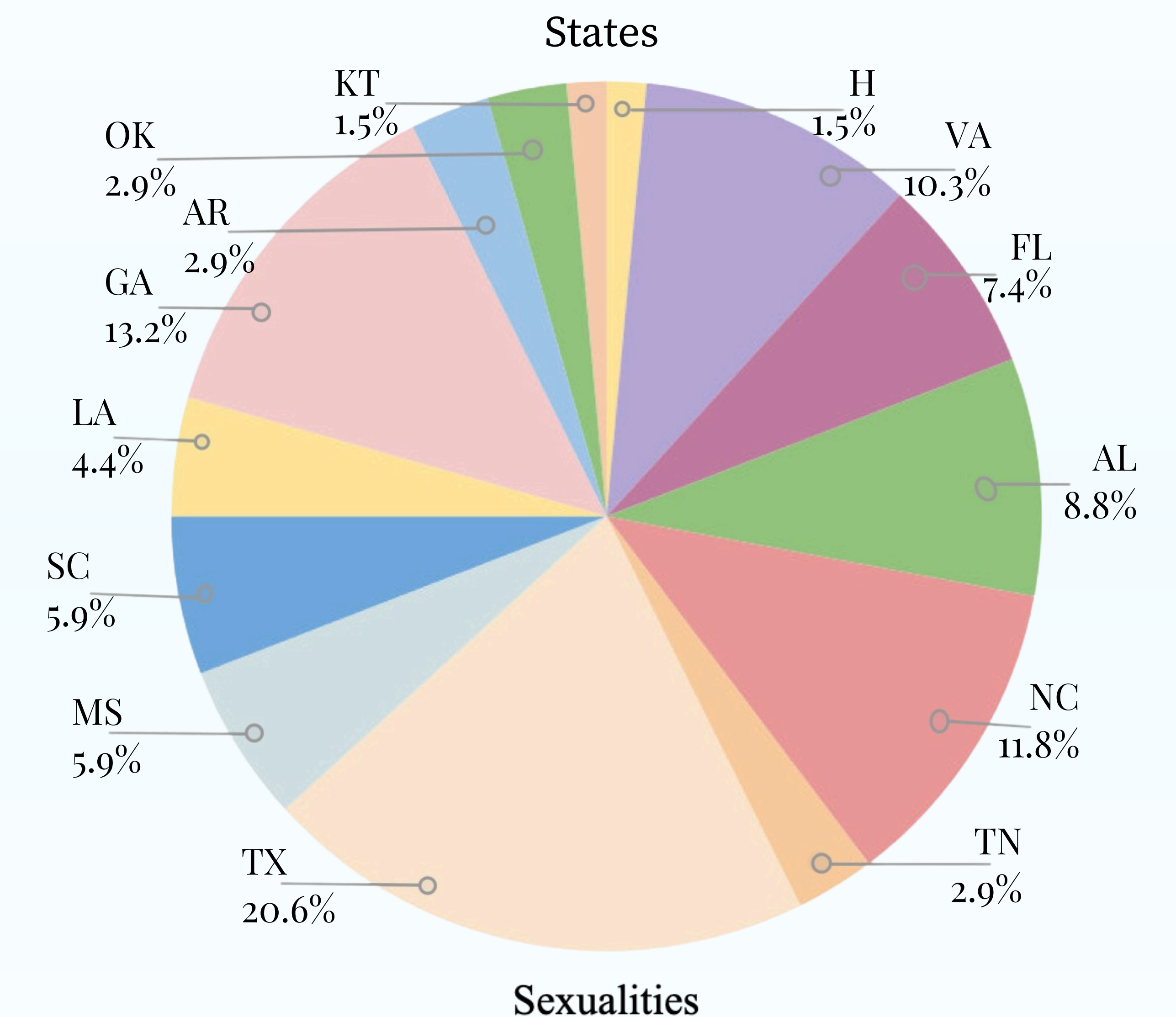
- There are a multitude of impacts of where one resides and its influence on one's views regarding one's individuality. However, due to lack of research in non-urban areas, there isn't a true ability to generalize nationally because of regional differences in gender and relationship norms.
- This research focuses on the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals who reside in the Southern region of the United States and aims to determine how this impacted how they view themselves.

### Methods

- This research project, which received IRB approval, utilized in depth, qualitative interviews to gain insight on each participant's experiences growing up in the South.
- The participants (n=68) included LGBTQ+ individuals aged from 22-48 who have resided in the South for a majority of their lives. Snowball sampling was used to gather the initial participants, followed by any individuals who demonstrated interest after viewing the flyer posted to Twitter/X. Due to the increased amount of interest, Calendly was employed to keep the interviews organized and facilitate the sign-up process.
- This project primarily relied on semi-structured Zoom interviews in which an audio-recording device was used for later transcription.
- These interviews were created to provide a safe space for an individual to share their experiences in as much detail as they desire, including different questions regarding how they learned about the community and society's impacts on their perspectives throughout their lives in the South. Some general questions asked include "Do you recall the first time you learned about what being gay or trans was?" and "Did people in your life ever discuss LGBTQ+ identity?"

### Results

- Gender identities consisted of women (n=34), men (n=17), and nonbinary or genderqueer/genderfluid (n=17). Among the men and women, nine were transgender.
- Sexual orientation included bisexual or pansexual (n=27), lesbian (n=16), gay (n=10), queer (n=7), and asexual/aromantic (n=8).
- Participants were primarily white (n=55), although five Black, three South Asian, two Native American, and nine Hispanic/Latinx people participated. Most were in their 20's or 30's (n=51).
- It's important to note that some participants relocated to different states resulting in double counts.



### Discussion

- While this research has not yet concluded, the findings so far suggest that living in the South has had some impact on one's views on themselves as LGBTQ+ members and their community. Many individuals have experiences aligning with Southern stereotypes, including experiencing judgement for not conforming to societal standards.
- Many individuals turned to online spaces or groups around them to build a sense of community. This is a good indication of how useful online spaces can be for those residing in a less accepting community.
- Further research could focus more on these online spaces and delve into what ways they help foster a sense of community. It would also be beneficial to have a control group of LGBTQ+ individuals from other regions of the US to determine if there truly is a clear distinction between the South and other parts of the US.

### References

