

# **Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR) 2018 Survey Report**

## **Executive Summary**

*February 2021*

**Prepared by:**

Laura Luchies, PhD

Neil Carlson, PhD

Calvin University Center for Social Research



**CENTER FOR  
SOCIAL RESEARCH**

*a center of Calvin University*

## Background and Purpose

“The Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR) is an interdisciplinary academic association that stimulates, promotes, and communicates social scientific research about religious institutions and experiences” (SSSR website, accessed May 23, 2018). SSSR has more than one thousand members from many fields, including economics, gender studies, international studies, psychology, religious studies, and sociology. In addition to SSSR’s members, many other scholars read, cite, and publish in SSSR’s signature publication, the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (JSSR).

SSSR partnered with the Calvin University Center for Social Research (CSR) to conduct a survey of SSSR members and other people on SSSR’s mailing list in the spring of 2018. The survey was focused on diversity and inclusion, with goals of gauging the current diversity climate of SSSR and identifying ways to promote diversity and improve the experience of all SSSR members and affiliates.

## Survey Distribution and Recruitment

We used SSSR’s mailing list to identify potential survey respondents. Personalized email invitations and reminders were sent to 2,057 potential respondents. Six hundred people completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 29.2%.

## Closed-Ended Questions

### Membership

Three-quarters of respondents were current SSSR members, and more than half indicated that they read JSSR articles regularly, have cited JSSR content, have attended an annual meeting of SSSR in the last five years, and have presented at an annual meeting of SSSR in the last five years. At least 20% of respondents indicated membership in three associations: the Association for the Study of Religions (ASR; 37%), the American Sociological Association (ASA; 32%), and the Religious Research Association (RRA; 23%).

Although most respondents had little or no interest in holding a leadership position in SSSR, over 100 survey respondents were very or extremely interested in doing so. Respondents of color were especially likely to express interest in holding a leadership position, although they were also more likely to indicate that there were barriers to doing so. The most commonly mentioned barriers were lack of time and institutional support; being unaware of how to indicate interest in or nominate someone for a leadership position; and the perception that SSSR is focused on a North American context, is disproportionately White and male, and that SSSR leaders are expected to be both Christian and Sociologists.

## Meetings

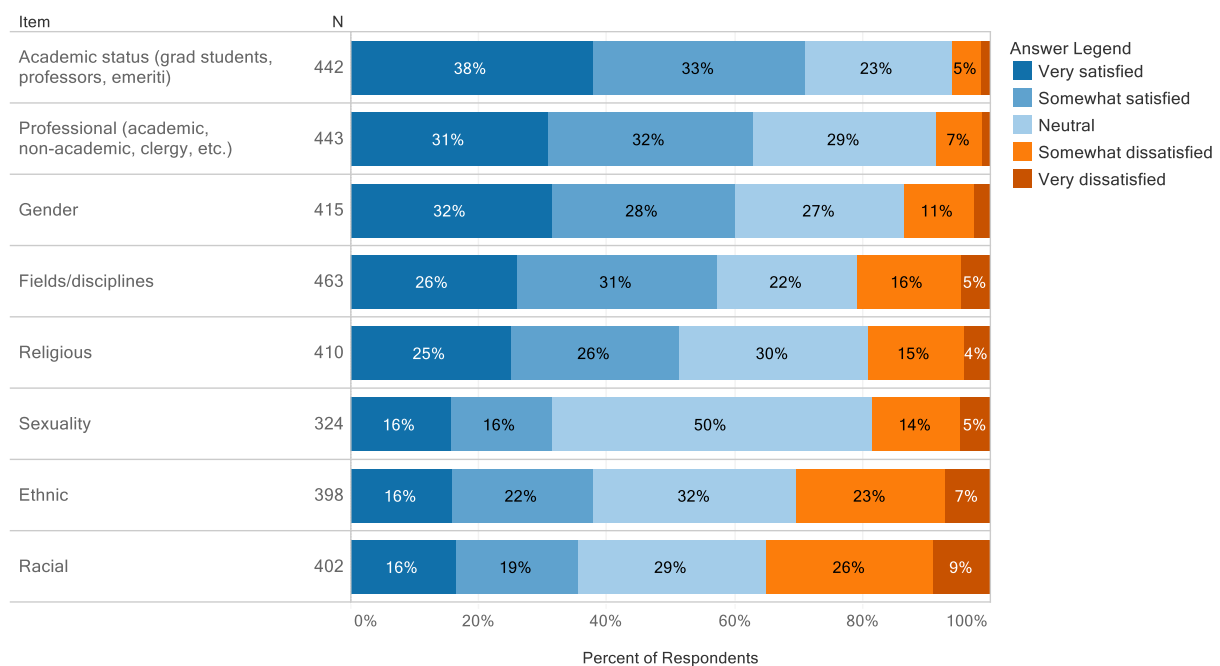
Respondents were asked to identify the three factors that are most influential in their decision to attend the annual meeting of any professional association of scholars. More than half of respondents indicated that the cost of travel and lodging is among the three most influential factors. Other influential factors include meeting location, whether or not the respondent is presenting research, and meeting dates.

## Satisfaction

Respondents rated their satisfaction with a variety of kinds of diversity at SSSR annual meetings, including professional, gender, religious, and racial diversity. As shown in **Figure 1**, respondents were most satisfied with academic status and professional diversity; they were least satisfied with ethnic and racial diversity. Generally, respondents who were part of a minority group were less satisfied with diversity than were majority group members; this was especially true for the type of diversity in which the respondent was a minority member. For example, people of color were less satisfied with ethnic and racial diversity than were white respondents, and respondents who were not Sociologists were less satisfied with diversity of fields and disciplines than were Sociologists.

**Figure 1** Satisfaction with diversity at SSSR meetings

How satisfied are you with the following kinds of diversity at SSSR meetings?

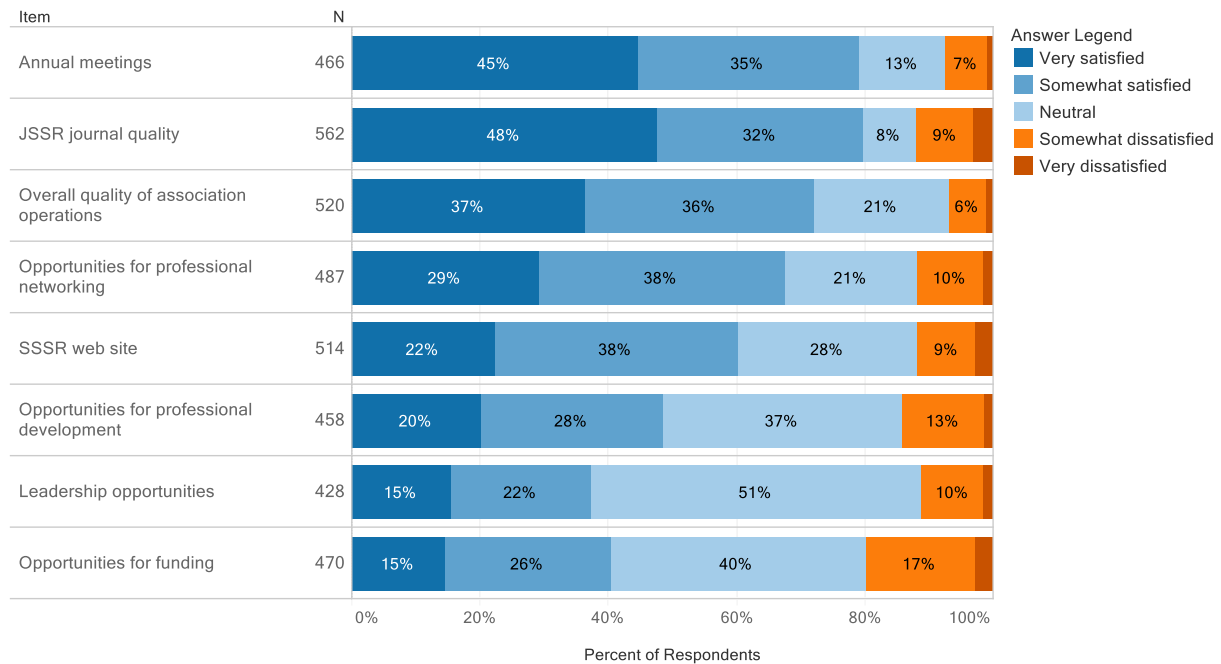


Respondents also rated their satisfaction with SSSR in several areas. As shown in **Figure 2**, respondents were most satisfied with SSSR’s annual meetings and JSSR journal quality;

they were least satisfied with leadership opportunities and opportunities for funding. Overall, Sociologists tended to be more satisfied with SSSR’s areas of work than were those who are not Sociologists.

**Figure 2** Satisfaction with SSSR

How satisfied are you with SSSR in the following areas?



Respondents provided an overall 0 to 10 rating of SSSR. This question is used to calculate a Net Promoter Score (NPS), a widely-used metric developed by the consulting firm Bain & Company. People who give an organization, product, or service a rating of 9 or 10 are “promoters,” those who give a rating of 7 or 8 are “passive,” and those who give a rating of 0-6 are “detractors.”

An NPS score is calculated by subtracting the percent of detractors from the percent of promoters. According to Bain & Company’s guidelines, an NPS score that is positive (more promoters than detractors) is considered good. An NPS score of +50 is considered excellent. In this survey, 34% of respondents were promoters, 38% were passive, and 28% were detractors, yielding an NPS score of +6.

## Open-Ended Questions

### Ideas to promote diversity and inclusion

Respondents offered several ideas to promote diversity and inclusion. These ideas included active recruitment of people from underrepresented groups, inviting specific

people to participate in panels or author papers from underrepresented perspectives, increasing funding and awards for research from underrepresented perspectives, hosting conferences or gatherings outside the U.S., and establishing a mentoring program that pairs people from underrepresented groups with established scholars.

### Professional needs and challenges

Respondents identified several types of professional challenges, some of which SSSR could help address. These included organizing sessions about employment and/or a job list to help people find jobs, increasing opportunities for mentoring and networking to help people connect with others, offering more professional development workshops to help members keep up with research methods, increasing funding opportunities to help people pay for membership dues and conference costs, and expediting JSSR's review and publication process to help people publish more quickly.

### Barriers to membership and participation in SSSR

Respondents noted barriers to SSSR membership, attending annual meetings, and submitting articles to JSSR. These included conference travel costs, annual meeting locations, annual meeting timing, competing conferences and professional associations, lack of communication from SSSR, perceptions of an "in group," perceptions of declining quality of JSSR, and perceptions by others that religion is not a legitimate topic of study.