



January 2014

Does Religion Affect Attitudes Towards Same-Sex Marriage?

Marc Anthony Franczak

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DOES RELIGION AFFECT ATTITUDES TOWARDS SAME-SEX MARRIAGE?

by

Marc Anthony Franczak

Bachelors of Arts, University of North Dakota, 2014

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

In partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

December

2014

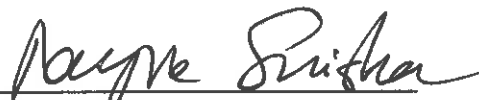
This thesis, submitted by Marc Anthony Franczak in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and hereby approved.


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Dr. Wayne Swisher
Dean of the Graduate School


12/03/2014

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Marc A. Franczak
12-03-2014

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Elizabeth Legerski and Dr. Justin Berg for all of their guidance and support while serving on my committee. I would especially like to thank Dr. Krista Lynn Minnotte for all the time and effort spent as the Chair of my committee, I am very grateful to her for all the dedication and support she showed to my thesis and academic development. I would also like to thank my mother, Donata Besner for all her encouragement, inspiration, and support, without you I would not have been able to achieve what I have in my life. Love you always.

ABSTRACT

Previous scholarship suggests that religion tends to play a role in people's attitudes towards same-sex marriage. The purpose of this study is to examine whether four aspects of religion (church attendance, church affiliation, religiosity, and conflict between religious beliefs and homosexuality) play a role in shaping attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Data from the Pew Research Centers 2013 Political Survey were utilized ($N = 1504$), and OLS regressions were used to test the hypotheses. The results indicated that conflict between religious beliefs and homosexuality was the strongest predictor of unfavorable attitudes towards same-sex marriage. It was also found that compared to non-religious, Catholics and Jews tend to have more favorable attitudes towards same sex marriage, whereas other Christians were found to have less favorable attitudes. The results of this thesis suggest that religion does play a significant role in attitudes towards same-sex marriage, especially conflict between religious beliefs and homosexuality.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

This study examines whether four different aspects of religion (church attendance, church affiliation, religiosity, and conflict between religious beliefs and homosexuality) play a role in shaping attitudes towards same-sex marriage. In this chapter I will introduce the reader to the topic of this thesis, including the goals and contributions of this thesis. I will also give a brief overview of the next four chapters.

Background to the Problem

Most people take for granted the rights and privileges that accompany a legal marriage. Once legally married, couples are offered many rights and tax benefits, such as medical benefits, death benefits, family benefits, and housing benefits (Gerstmann, 1999). But what if your marriage is not considered legal? These are some of the concerns that plague most gay couples in the United States. Gay rights issues have been debated since the Gay Right's Movement in the 1960's, with gay marriage being one of the most debated and publicized issues to date (Schwartz, 2010). Currently, 35 of the 50 states have legalized same-sex marriage, and in many cases this legalization occurred only in the past three years. Despite this progress, only 70% of states have legalized same-sex marriage, which leads to the question of why more progress has not been made. One factor that may come into play are the attitudes people hold towards same-sex marriage.

Religion is at the forefront of debates about same-sex marriage. For instance, many religious people will argue that homosexuality is a sin and that the Bible forbids it. Therefore, many religious people may oppose legalizing same-sex marriage. Because church and religion play such large roles in many Americans' lives, they may shape people's beliefs, which may result in negative attitudes towards legalization of same-sex marriage.

Much research has been conducted on attitudes towards same-sex marriage and what factors contribute to unfavorable feelings towards allowing gays and lesbians to legally marry. At the forefront of many studies is the religious nature of people's views. Religious views, especially views that are taken from the Bible, tend to be the strongest indicator of whether a person may or may not agree with the legal union of same-sex couples (Kettell, 2013). Further, Herek (1987) found that people who were more religious, in general, possessed more negative attitudes towards both gays and lesbians.

Religious affiliation may also have a strong impact on people's views of same-sex marriage. Religions, such as Judaism and liberal Protestantism, have less negative attitudes towards same-sex marriage because their religious traditions have not condemned homosexuality (Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006). Similarly, those who are not religiously affiliated are also less likely to hold negative attitudes towards same-sex marriage (Olson et al., 2006). Church attendance also predicts attitudes, with people who attend church on a regular basis being more likely to have negative feelings towards same-sex marriage (Olson et al., 2006).

This study brings a broader approach to examining how religion affects attitudes towards same-sex marriage by highlighting how four different aspects of religion (religiosity, church affiliation, views of one's religion regarding homosexuality, and church attendance) relate to people's attitudes. Studies that examine all of these facets together are rare, which means this thesis explores religion in a more in-depth manner than is typical in the larger literature. The recent data also gives us the opportunity to examine current attitudes towards same-sex marriage and how religion may affect people's views.

Purpose of the Study

Given the salience of religion in many people's lives in the US, this study will examine four main aspects of religion and whether they shape attitudes towards same-sex marriage. The research question I propose is: Do church affiliation, religiosity, church attendance, and views of one's religion regarding homosexuality influence attitudes towards same-sex marriage? The study will examine data from the Pew Research National Political Survey from 2013 ($N = 1,504$). I will use Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression to examine these relationships, while controlling for age, gender, race, and education.

Overview of Thesis

In the following Chapter, I will look at previous literature that examines religion and attitudes towards same-sex marriage. I will give a brief overview of past research and connect their findings to the present study. I will also introduce the hypotheses for each aspect of religion and the theoretical perspective that will

guide this study. Chapter Three will describe the method used to address the research question. In Chapter Four I will detail the findings for each of the hypotheses. Finally, in Chapter Five, I will present both the limitations of this study and suggestions for scholars conducting future research on this topic.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze how religion affects attitudes towards same-sex marriage. I will examine four aspects of religion: religiosity, church affiliation, one's religion's view of homosexuality, and church attendance. In this chapter I will describe the theoretical orientation of this thesis and the previous literature on the topic. Based on the theory and literature review, I will then propose four hypotheses, one for each aspect of religion.

History of Same-Sex Marriage

Marriage is one of the oldest social institutions (Lewis & Rogers, 1999). Marriage has not been a static institution, but rather it has changed over the course of history in response to changing religious beliefs, social values, technology, and demographics (Pierson, 2004). Similarly, variation exists today in marital behaviors, attitudes, and laws in different countries. Marriage is not only about romantic notions, but it is also about the ability to provide financially for one's partner and family. Social justice advocates argue that marriage should not be withheld from same-sex couples. However, the US has yet to legally recognize same-sex marriage at the federal level.

The United States is lagging behind many other countries in legalizing same-sex marriage. Indeed, the US is distinctive when compared to other democratic

countries because of Americans' relatively conservative views of gender roles and sexuality (Sherkat, Powell-Williams, Maddox, & Mattias de Vries, 2010). Denmark led the way in equality by being the first country to legalize same-sex partnerships in 1989. Later, other European countries followed including Norway (1993), Sweden (1995), Hungary (1995), and the Netherlands (1998) (Lubbers, Jaspers, & Ultee, 2009). Within five years, other prominent countries joined, such as Belgium (2003), Spain (2005), Canada (2005), and South Africa (2006) (Lubbers et al., 2009). These countries have legalized same-sex marriage, yet many other countries have not, including the US. In the US legalization varies from state to state.

As of 2014, the 35 states where same same-sex marriage is legal are Alaska (2014), Arizona (2014), California (2013), Colorado (2014), Connecticut (2008), Delaware (2013), Hawaii (2013), Idaho (2014), Indiana (2014), Illinois (2014), Iowa (2009), Kansas (2014), Maine (2012), Maryland (2013), Massachusetts (2003), Minnesota (2013), Montana (2014), Nevada (2014), New Hampshire (2010), New Jersey (2013), New Mexico (2013), New York (2011), North Carolina (2014), Oklahoma (2014), Oregon (2014), Pennsylvania (2014), Rhode Island (2013), South Carolina (2014), Utah (2014), Vermont (2010), Virginia (2014), Washington (2012), West Virginia (2014), Wisconsin (2014), and Wyoming (2014) (ProCon.org, 2014). Clearly, many of these states have only recently legalized same-sex marriage, which leads to the question: Why is the US lagging behind so many other countries when it comes to legalizing same-sex marriage? Some believe religion plays a central role, especially in terms of how it shapes attitudes towards same-sex marriage.

A great deal of research has been done on the relationship between religion and opinions about homosexuality. Previous studies indicate that religion plays a significant role in shaping attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Most of the literature examines how only one or two aspects of religion affect attitudes towards same-sex marriage, and limited research has looked at several aspects together. This thesis examines multiple facets of religion, including religiosity, church affiliation, one's religion's views of homosexuality, and church attendance and their effects on attitudes towards same-sex marriage. I also consider which facet has the strongest impact on attitudes towards same-sex marriage. This study will help fill in the gaps of previous research by examining these four aspects together to see how they shape attitudes towards same-sex marriage.

Theoretical Framework

I use Reference Group Theory to help explain why attitudes towards same-sex marriage are affected by religion. This theory proposes that people's behaviors and attitudes are directly shaped by the people and the groups that they closely associate with (Cochran & Beeghley, 1991). Cochran and Beeghley stated that individuals cannot be part of a group without having attitudes, beliefs, and status attributes that coincide with the group's beliefs. This theory can be used to explain why people who are highly religious and attend church regularly are unlikely to favor same-sex marriage. Many religious groups consistently condemn homosexuality and same-sex marriage, and being a part of such a religion may impact attitudes towards same-sex marriage.

Linkages between each of the four aspects of religion and attitudes can be explained by Reference Group Theory. First, religiosity, which refers to how much importance someone places on their religion, may shape attitudes (Kettell, 2013). Many Americans place great importance on religion and it plays a substantial role in their lives, and because of this many Americans' beliefs are shaped by their religion. According to Reference Group Theory, if the group you belong to is important to you, then your beliefs, values, and opinions will start to reflect the groups' beliefs, values, and opinions (Cochran & Beeghley, 1991). Reference Group Theory hypothesizes that the group that you are most associated with helps foster a collaboration of shared attitudes among the group members (Cochran & Beeghley, 1991). Therefore, level of religiosity may play a role in shaping attitudes towards same-sex marriage.

Church affiliation can influence attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Reference Group Theory would address the issue of church affiliation by examining the groups someone is associated with. Using this theory, we would expect to find someone's beliefs and attitudes will align with the church they belong to. Therefore, a person's attitudes towards same-sex marriage may be influenced by church affiliation.

In regards to one's religion's view of homosexuality, Reference Group Theory would state that attitudes towards same-sex marriage would be affected by the beliefs of one's religion. If the church an individual is tied to teaches homosexuality is a sin, then his or her attitudes may be negatively shaped. However, if a church has

positive views about homosexuality, this may lead to favorable attitudes towards same-sex marriage, and homosexuals in general.

Reference Group Theory would argue that the groups people participate in more frequently are more likely to influence their attitudes. This may be the same for church attendance; if a person attends church on a regular basis, then it is likely his or her attitudes would be more negative towards same-sex marriage. Research shows that church attendance does play a role in affecting attitudes towards homosexuality and same-sex marriage. For example, Olson and colleagues (2006) found that people who are highly involved, deeply tied, and attend church on a regular basis tend to be less accepting of homosexuality.

Review of Literature

Religiosity and Attitudes

Religiosity is generally viewed as a strong predictor of prejudice towards homosexuality; research continually shows a negative association between religiosity and tolerance of homosexuality (Hooghe & Meeusen, 2013; Olson et al., 2006; Perry, 2013). Many religious people are willing to tolerate homosexuality, but they are not willing to support same-sex marriage. Religiosity may help increase prejudicial attitudes towards homosexuals, but Herek (2006) found that attitudes towards same-sex marriage are much more polarized than attitudes regarding homosexuality.

Hypothesis 1: Religiosity is negatively associated with favorable attitudes towards same-sex marriage.

Church Affiliation and Attitudes

Church affiliation can also shape attitudes towards same-sex marriage (Perry, 2013). Different religions and denominations have varying beliefs and teachings in regards to homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Empirical data indicate that belonging to a particular religion can affect attitudes towards same-sex marriage (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Perry, 2013). As such, the church a person is affiliated with can impact attitudes towards homosexuality. Religious denominations contrast greatly when responding to the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered community (Sherkat et al., 2010). Olson and colleagues (2006) found that Jews, Liberal Protestants, and people who are religiously unaffiliated have the most favorable and liberal views because their denominations have not condemned homosexual behavior. Catholics and moderate Protestants generally have more tolerant attitudes towards homosexuals, whereas Evangelical Protestants have the most conservative attitudes. (Olson et al., 2006).

Previous research has shown that people belonging to a sectarian Protestant denomination tend to believe that homosexuality is morally wrong, and are considerably less supportive of civil rights for persons who have same-sex relations compared to mainline Protestants, Jews, and the unaffiliated (Sherkat et al., 2010). Non-Protestants are more likely to support same-sex marriage, while Protestants and people who hold rigid conservative views on morality are less supportive of same-sex marriage (Kettel, 2013; Lubbers et al., 2009; Olson et al., 2006; Sherkat et

al., 2010; Walhof, 2013). Therefore, the church a person belongs to may impact attitudes towards same-sex marriage, leading to Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 2: Attitudes towards same-sex marriage will vary by church affiliation.

Religion's View on Homosexuality

Some religions are against homosexuality. For example, The Free Presbyterian Church claims that same-sex marriage is subversive of Christian morality and forbidden by the law of God (Kettell, 2013). Similarly, Charity Christian Watch also views homosexuality as “sinfulness and perversion” (p. 248) and they have declared “No Bible believing God fearing Christian would allow practicing homosexuals in their fellowship” (p. 248). Previous research indicates that some religions believe that homosexuality is a choice rather than being genetic. The believed cause of sexual orientation plays a role in the levels of sexual prejudice; the more a person believes that it is a choice, the more negatively his or her attitudes tend to be (Smith, Zanotti, Axelton, & Saucier, 2011).

Attitudes about homosexuality are strongly associated with past religious theological concerns. For example, “Christianity and Islam place a strong emphasis on moral issues, such as sexual practice, which tend to treat homosexuality as sinful and morally debased” (Kettell, 2013, p. 248). These teachings help increase negative attitudes about homosexuality. Kettell (2013) also found that religious teachings about homosexuals are reflected in attitudes towards same-sex marriage. When a religion or a certain denomination teaches homosexuality is a sin and goes against the word of God, the idea of same-sex marriage is usually considered worse and

more blasphemous. Accordingly, Lannutti and Lachlan (2007) found that negative attitudes towards same-sex marriage decrease when there are members of the church that are gay or lesbian; this interaction leads to less prejudice and discrimination about homosexuality. The opportunity to interact with church members who are gay or lesbian will likely shape attitudes towards homosexuality in a favorable way. Overall, the teachings of a denomination regarding homosexuality can shape attitudes towards same-sex marriage.

Hypothesis 3: Conflict between religious beliefs and homosexuality will be negatively associated with favorable attitudes towards same-sex marriage.

Church Attendance

A person's church attendance may help solidify attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Studies show that people who attend services frequently have more conservative attitudes, thereby fostering negative views regarding homosexuality (Olson et al., 2006). Frequent church attendance tends to predict higher levels of intolerance to any non-traditional romantic or family relationship (Olson et al., 2006; Perry, 2013; Walhof, 2013), including same-sex marriage. Church attendance also seems to be one of the strongest predictors of attitudes towards same-sex marriage; studies consistently show that the more frequently people attend church the less favorable their attitudes are towards same-sex marriage (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Olson et al., 2006; Perry, 2013; Rostosky, Horne, Denton, & Huellemeier, 2008; Sherkat et al., 2010; Whitehead, 2010). Given these findings, I propose that

people who attend church more frequently will be less supportive of same-sex marriage.

Hypothesis 4: Church attendance will be negatively associated with favorable attitudes towards same-sex marriage.

I also hypothesize church attendance will be the best predictor of negative attitudes towards same-sex marriage when comparing all other aspects in this study (religiosity, church affiliation, conflict between religious beliefs and homosexuality). Frequent church attendance tends to predict higher levels of unfavorable attitudes towards same-sex marriage (Olson et al., 2006; Perry, 2013; Rostosky et al., 2008; Sherkat et al., 2010). Empirical data states the more often one attends church the more likely they are to view same-sex marriage as immoral and as a choice (Perry, 2013). Similarly, studies found that people who are closely aligned and deeply tied to religion tend to be less accepting of homosexuality (Beatty & Walter, 1984; Cochran & Beeghley, 1991; Fisher, Derison, Polly, Cadman, & Johnson, 1994; Herek & Glunt, 1993).

Hypothesis 5: Church attendance will be the most predictive of negative attitudes towards same-sex marriage.

Control Variables

The control variables for this study are education, gender, age, income, and race. Strand (1998) and Ohlander and colleagues (2006) found that higher levels of education foster openness to new ideas. Typically, this openness is learned through

the diversity found in most secondary institutions, which lead to more interaction with people of different races, ethnicities, and sexual orientations that can foster positive attitudes towards others. Gender also may influence attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Previous studies have found that men tend to have more negative feelings towards gay men and lesbians compared to women (Lannutti & Lachlan, 2008). Given the difference found in the overall attitudes towards gay men and lesbian women, women are likely to have more positive attitudes towards same-sex marriage than men. Therefore, gender will be controlled for.

Age also plays a role in attitudes towards homosexuals. As society changes so do beliefs and attitudes of people in society (Fleischmann & Moyer, 2009). In the past two decades the movement for equal rights for gays has been quite prominent, compared to what was seen in older generations. This results in less favorable views of homosexuals among those who are older. Indeed, Whitehead's (2010) study revealed age was negatively related to attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Whitehead (2010) also found that as income increased the likelihood of supporting same-sex marriage increased, which leads this study to control for income. Race is the last variable controlled for in this study. Perry's (2013) research found that race tends to be a strong indicator of attitudes towards homosexuality, with Blacks and Latinos being more likely to have negative attitudes towards homosexuality than Whites and Asians.

Summary

In Chapter Two, I reviewed literature on how religion affects attitudes towards same-sex marriage. I presented the hypotheses for each of the four

religious aspects this thesis is exploring and introduced Reference Group Theory as the theoretical orientation of this thesis. In the next chapter, I will explain the method, including the measurement of the variables and the analytical technique, used to address the research question.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of religion on attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Specifically, I will examine four main aspects of religion, including religiosity, church affiliation, one's religion's view on homosexuality, and church attendance. I will use a secondary data set to explore the research question and the hypotheses of this thesis. In this chapter, I will introduce the methodology that will be used. I will describe the data set, and give an explanation of the measurements of the independent, dependent, and control variables. At the end of this chapter, I will describe the analytic strategy used to explore the hypotheses.

Data and Sample

The data for this thesis were taken from the Pew Research National Political Survey, which was conducted in early May of 2013 by the Pew Research Center. This survey had a total of 1,504 adult respondents. It was conducted through random dialing of landlines and cellphones in all 50 states of the United States, with approximately 40% of the interviews conducted by landline and 60% by cell phone. The response rate for this survey was about 55%. The survey asked questions on a variety of topics, including political affiliation, support for or against Barack Obama and his job as the President, gun control, the healthcare system, attitudes towards homosexuals and same-sex marriage, and immigration.

Measures

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is attitudes towards same-sex marriage. The question asked by the Pew Research Center was “Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose allowing gays and lesbians to enter into legal agreements with each other that would give them many of the same rights as married couples?” The response categories were as follows: strongly favor (4), favor (3), oppose (2), and strongly oppose (1). It is important to acknowledge the phrasing of the question can affect how people respond to the question. Using the words favor or oppose compared to using illegal or legal influences people’s answers (Pew Research Center, 2013). Studies show that more people will answer positively to legal than to favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry, with over a ten percent difference (Pew Research Center, 2013).

Independent Variables

The independent variables for this thesis are religiosity, church affiliation, one’s religion’s view of homosexuality, and church attendance. To measure religiosity respondents were asked “How important is religion in your life?” The response categories were as follows: very important (4), important (3), not too important (2), and not at all important (1). To measure church affiliation the respondents were asked what church they were associated with, and the survey asked the respondents to select from one of fourteen different religious groups given. The religious groups were Protestant (Baptist, Methodist, Non-denominational, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Reformed,

Church of Christ, etc.), Roman Catholic (Catholic), Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saint/LDS), Orthodox (Greek, Russian, or some other orthodox church), Jewish (Judaism), Muslim (Islam), Buddhist, Hindu, Atheist (do not believe in God), Agnostic (not sure if there is a God), something else, nothing in particular, Christian, and Unitarian (Universalist). For this analysis, religion was recoded as a series of dummy variables. These dummy variables are Protestant (Baptist, Methodist, Non-denominational, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Reformed, Church of Christ etc.), Roman Catholic (Catholic), other Christian (something else, Mormon, Orthodox, etc.), Judaism, Middle Eastern religions (Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu) and not religious (atheist/no religion, nothing in particular). In each case respondents were coded as a 1 if they belonged to the specific religious group and a 0 otherwise. Not religious is used as the comparison group.

To measure one's religious view of homosexuality, respondents were asked, "And thinking about your own religious beliefs, do you personally feel that there is a conflict between your religious beliefs and homosexuality, or not?" The response categories were: "yes, a lot of conflict" (3), "yes, a little conflict" (2), and "no, no conflict" (1). To measure church attendance the survey asked, "Aside from wedding and funerals, how often do you attend religious service?" The response categories were as follows: more than once a week (5), once a week (4), once or twice a month (3), a few times a year (2), or seldom or never (1).

Control Variables

This study also takes into account several control variables, which are age, education, gender, income, and race. Age was measured in years. Education was measured at the ordinal level with (1) indicating less than high school (Grades 1-8 or no formal schooling), (2) indicating high school incomplete (Grades 9-11 or Grade 12 with no diploma), (3) indicating high school graduate (Grade 12 with diploma or GED certificate), (4) indicating [Some college, no degree (includes community college)], (5) indicating a two year degree from a college or university, (6) indicating four year college or university degree/Bachelor's degree (e.g. BS, BA, AB), (7) indicating some postgraduate or professional schooling, no post graduate degree (e.g. some graduate school), and (8) indicating postgraduate or professional degree, including master's, doctorate, medical or law degree (e.g. MA, MS, PhD, MD, JD, graduate school). Gender is coded such that (1) indicates males and (0) indicates females. Income (household) was measured with (1) indicating less than \$10,000, (2) indicating \$10,000 to under \$19,999, (3) indicating \$20,000 to under \$29,999, (4) indicating \$30,000 to under \$39,999, (5) indicating \$40,000 to under \$49,999, (6) indicating \$50,000 to under \$74,999, (7) indicating \$75,000 to \$99,999, (8) indicating \$100,000 to \$149,999, and (9) indicating \$150,000 or more. Race was measured with (1) indicating white and (0) indicating a race other than white.

Analytic Strategy

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the impact of different facets of religion on attitudes towards same-sex marriage. I will present descriptive statistics and ordinary least squares regression (OLS) and nested models to address this research question. I used nested models in this study to examine the impact of the

independent variables and the control variables. Descriptive statistics will be used to look at the distribution of the individual variables. OLS regression will be used to predict variation in the dependent variable (attitudes towards same-sex marriage) given the independent variables (religiosity, church affiliation, one's religious view of homosexuality, and church attendance) and taking into account the control variables.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the methodology used in this thesis, which included an explanation of the data set. I then introduced and described the dependent, independent, and control variables in this present study. I also included a description of the analytic strategy that will be used. In Chapter Four, I will provide the results of this thesis. In Chapter Five, I will discuss the results of the study in comparison to previous research. Then, I will describe the limitations of the study and ideas for future researchers.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of different aspects of religion on attitudes towards same-sex marriage. The data for this project are taken from the Pew Research Center, Political Survey conducted in May of 2013. This chapter will outline the results of the descriptive statistics and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression.

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1. Looking at the dependent variable, on average, respondents held fairly favorable attitudes towards same-sex marriage, with a mean of 2.56 ($SD = 1.06$). The frequency distribution for attitudes reveals that 21 percent strongly oppose, 24 percent oppose, 32 percent favor, and 23 percent strongly favor allowing same-sex marriage. For the variable religiosity, the mean is 3.30 ($SD = .98$), which indicates that on average respondents felt religion was important to them. Looking at conflict between religious views and homosexuality the mean was 1.98 ($SD = .77$), indicating that the typical respondent feels a little conflict between their own personal views and their religious beliefs. For church attendance, the mean was 3.66 ($SD = 1.61$), which suggests on average respondents attend church about once or twice a month.

For church affiliation, roughly 41 percent of respondents were Protestant and 21 percent were catholic. Other Christian accounted for 12 percent, Jewish accounted for 2 percent, Middle Eastern Religions accounted for 2 percent, and no religion accounted for 18 percent of the sample.

The five control variables for this analysis were age, education, gender, income, and race. For age, the mean was 52 years of age ($SD = 18.72$). The mean for education was 4.79 ($SD = 1.92$), which indicates the typical respondent had some college. Males accounted for 49 percent of the respondents and females were 51 percent ($SD = .50$). For income, the mean was 5.17 ($SD = 2.52$), which indicates the average income was between \$40,000 and \$50,000. For race, the mean was .70 ($SD = .45$), which indicates that 71 percent of respondents were white.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (*N*= 1504)

Variables	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Attitudes towards same-sex marriage ^a	1-4	2.56	1.06
Religiosity	1-4	3.30	.98
Church attendance	1-5	3.66	1.61
Conflict between religion and homosexuality	1-3	1.98	.77
Protestant	1,0	.41	--
Catholic	1,0	.21	--
Other Christian	1,0	.12	--
Jewish	1,0	.02	--
Middle Eastern Religion	1,0	.02	--
No Religion (atheist, nothing in particular)	1,0	.18	--
Age	18-99	52.08	18.72
Education	1-8	4.79	1.92
Sex ^b	1,0	.49	--
Income	1-9	5.17	--
Race ^c	1,0	.70	--

^a Liberal scores are higher. ^b was coded as a dummy variable with males as a 1 and females as 0. ^c was measured as a dummy variable with white respondents coded as 1 and all other races coded as 0.

Table 2. OLS Regression for the effects of religiosity, church attendance, conflict between religion and homosexuality and church affiliation on attitudes ($N = 1504$)

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	β	SE B	B	β	SE B	B
Age	-.209***	.002	-.012	-.147***	.001	-.009
Education	.157***	.018	.087	.111***	.015	.071
Sex	-.162***	.014	-.342	-.162***	.052	-.314
Income	.061	.062	.026	.052	.012	.048
Race	.040	.071	.093	.017	.060	.055
Religiosity	-	-	-	-.096***	.036	-.104
Church attendance	-	-	-	-.173***	.020	-.115
Conflict between religion and homosexuality	-	-	-	-.344***	.030	-.392
Protestant	-	-	-	-.071	.086	-.152
Catholic	-	-	-	.107***	.090	.269
Other Christian	-	-	-	-.079*	.103	-.252
Jewish	-	-	-	.053*	.171	.359
Middle Eastern	-	-	-			
Religion	-	-	-	.002	.190	.012
R ²	.081	-	-	.367	-	-
Change in R ²	-	-	-	.290	-	-
F for Model	21.097***	-	-	51.984***	-	-
F for Change in R ²	-	-	-	65.316***	-	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Regression Results

Model 1: Results

Model 1 explores the relationships that exist between the control variables and attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Income and race were not significant in the model. However, age was negatively related to attitudes towards same-sex marriage, therefore older respondents held less positive attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Sex also had a negative relationship with attitudes towards same-sex marriage, which indicates males had more negative attitudes towards same-sex marriage compared to females. Education had a positive relationship, therefore those with higher levels of education held more positive attitudes towards same-sex marriage than those with lower levels.

Model 2: Results

Model 2 does differ from model 1 because the key independent variables were added to see if they were significant. The results for the control variables in Model 2 are similar to those from Model 1. Hypothesis 1 stated that religiosity would be negatively associated with attitudes towards same-sex marriage. This hypothesis was supported as there was a negative and significant relationship between the variables ($\beta = -.096, p < .001$). Hypothesis 2 stated attitudes towards same-sex marriage will vary by church affiliation. This hypothesis was partially supported. The only religions that were significant were Catholicism, Judaism, and other Christians. Both Catholics and Jews had more favorable attitudes and other Christians had more unfavorable attitudes towards same-sex marriages when compared with those in the non-religious group. Hypothesis 3 stated conflict

between religious beliefs and homosexuality will be negatively associated with attitudes towards same-sex marriage. This hypothesis was supported as there was a negative and significant relationship, indicating that these feelings increased conflict between their religion and homosexuality ($\beta = -.344, p < .001$). Hypothesis 4 stated church attendance will be negatively associated with attitudes towards same-sex marriage. This hypothesis was supported, as there was a significant and negative relationship ($\beta = -.173, p < .001$) between the variables. Hypothesis 5 stated church attendance would be the most predictive of attitudes towards same-sex marriage. This hypothesis was not supported. Conflict between religious beliefs and one's own personal beliefs had the strongest relationship with the independent variable. Nested models were used to examine the importance of the independent variables. Results for Model 2 indicated a significant increase in the percentage of variance explained with the addition of the independent variables. The R^2 increased from .081 to .367. Additional analyses (not shown) were run on each independent variable separately with the control variables, in order to see which resulted in the highest R^2 . The religious variable with the highest R^2 was the amount of conflict between religious beliefs and homosexuality with an $R^2 = .28$, compared with church attendance ($R^2 = .20$), religiosity ($R^2 = .22$), and religious affiliation ($R^2 = .20$).

Summary

This chapter presented the descriptive statistics and the results from the OLS regression nested models. Age, sex, education, church attendance, church affiliation, religiosity, and religions views on homosexuality were all significant predictors of

the dependent variable. Chapter Five will provide additional discussion of the results, as well as connect the results back to the reference group theory and the previous literature. The next chapter will also discuss the implications of the results and the limitations of this thesis. Additionally, ideas for future research will be proposed.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze how religion affects attitudes towards same-sex marriage. I have examined four aspects of religion: religiosity, church affiliation, one's religion's view of homosexuality, and church attendance. To address these aspects of religion, I used data from the Pew Research Center's Political Survey conducted in May 2013. In this chapter I will review and discuss the findings of this thesis. I will tie the results back to the theoretical orientation and previous literature that guided this thesis. Implications of the findings and the limitations will then be discussed. Finally, I will discuss future avenues for research and provide a brief conclusion that summarizes the results of the thesis.

Discussions of Results

First, I will discuss the results for the control variables, then I will discuss the four variables of religion that were examined in this study. The results suggested age, education, and sex were significant control variables when predicting attitudes towards same-sex marriage. This was not surprising considering the existing literature. For example, previous research indicates age plays a role in attitudes

towards homosexuals. Research has found that older generations have less favorable attitudes towards same-sex marriage, when compared to their younger counterparts (Fleischmann & Moyer, 2009). Whitehead's (2010) study revealed age was negatively related to attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Similarly, I found older respondents held less positive attitudes towards same-sex marriage. This can be explained as a result of the younger generations being more tolerant of differences in sexuality, while older generations tend to be less tolerant (Keleher & Smith, 2012). Overall, older generations tend to be less likely to have favorable attitudes towards both homosexuals and same-sex marriage.

Level of education is also a predictor of whether attitudes towards same-sex marriage are favorable or not. Strand (1998) and Ohlander and colleagues (2006) found that higher levels of education foster openness to new ideas. Typically, this openness is learned through the diversity found in most secondary institutions, which leads to more interaction with people of different races, ethnicities, and sexual orientations that can foster positive attitudes towards others. Similarly, I found that those with higher levels of education held more favorable attitudes.

Sex also plays a role in attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Previous studies have found that women tend to have more positive feelings towards homosexuality than men (Lannutti & Lachlan, 2008). Therefore, women are more

likely to have more positive attitudes towards same-sex marriage than men.

Similarly, this study found that males had more negative attitudes towards same-sex marriage compared to females.

This thesis focused on how religious factors impact attitudes on same-sex marriage. Past literature has found that how religious one is can affect attitudes towards homosexuality and same-sex marriage (Schulte & Battle, 2004). Religiosity is generally viewed as a strong predictor of prejudice towards homosexuality and research continually shows a negative association between religiosity and tolerance of homosexuality (Hooghe & Meeusen, 2013; Olson et al., 2006; Perry, 2013). Therefore, how religious someone is may negatively impact attitudes towards same-sex marriage. This is consistent with the findings of this study, which showed that religiosity was a significant and negative predictor of attitudes towards same-sex marriage.

Past research typically points to religion as one of the strongest predictors of attitudes towards same-sex marriage (Burdette, Ellison, & Hill, 2005; Olson et al., 2006; Rowatt et al., 2006; Schulte & Battle, 2004). Different religions and denominations have varying beliefs and teachings in regards to homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Empirical data indicate that belonging to a particular religion can affect attitudes towards same-sex marriage (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Perry, 2013). As such, the church a person is affiliated with can impact attitudes towards homosexuality. Similarly, this study found that church affiliation can impact attitudes towards same-sex marriage. The findings indicated that people with no

religion (Atheist, nothing in particular) held less favorable attitudes than Catholics, which is contrary to previous literature. Sherkat and colleagues (2010) found that the religiously unaffiliated tend to have more favorable attitudes towards homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Olson and colleagues (2006) also found that people who did not attend church services regularly and were not religious tended to be more open to same-sex marriage.

Olson and colleagues (2006) found that Jews, Liberal Protestants, and people who are religiously unaffiliated have the most favorable and liberal views because their denominations have not condemned homosexual behavior. Catholics and moderate Protestants generally have more tolerant attitudes towards homosexuals, whereas Evangelical Protestants have the most conservative attitudes (Olson et al., 2006). The data from this thesis indicate that Catholics, Jews, and Other Christians are more supportive of same-sex marriage, compared to the control group atheist/no religion, nothing in particular. Overall, the findings regarding Jews do correspond with previous research. However, the findings regarding Catholics and favorable attitudes towards same-sex marriage is in contrast to previous research. Past research indicated that non-Protestants are more likely to support same-sex marriage, while Protestants and people who hold rigid conservative views on morality are less supportive of same-sex marriage (Kettell, 2013; Lubbers et al., 2009; Olson et al., 2006; Sherkat et al., 2010; Walhof, 2013). The findings in this study might be explained by some Catholic churches being less negative towards homosexuality in recent years. Also, the innovative approach of the new Pope Francis, who holds more modern views, may be helping sway the church to think

differently about homosexuality and same-sex marriages (Sherkat et al., 2010). As for the category of Other Christians, previous research does indicate that Mormon and Orthodox religions tend to more likely to hold negative attitudes towards homosexuality, which parallels the findings in this thesis.

Conflict between religious beliefs and homosexuality was negatively associated with attitudes towards same-sex marriage. This was the strongest predictor of attitudes towards same-sex marriage when compared to all other independent variables. Certain religions are against homosexuality. For example, The Free Presbyterian Church claims that same-sex marriage is subversive of Christian morality and forbidden by the law of God (Kettell, 2013). One's church plays a significant role in how people view homosexuality. Many churches teach that homosexuality is a choice, which tends to solidify negative beliefs and attitudes towards people who do not follow the socially constructed heteronormativity in our society (Sherkat et al., 2010). Therefore, it was not surprising to see that conflict between someone's religious beliefs and homosexuality was as strongly correlated with negative attitudes towards same-sex marriage. This study contributes to the literature by examining the role of one's religious beliefs on attitudes towards same-sex marriage, which is understudied.

Studies show that people who attend services frequently have more conservative attitudes, thereby fostering negative views regarding homosexuality (Olson et al., 2006). Frequent church attendance tends to predict higher levels of intolerance to any non-traditional romantic or family relationship (Olson et al., 2006; Perry, 2013; Walhof, 2013), including same-sex marriage. The finding in this

thesis indicated a significant and negative correlation between church attendance and attitudes towards same-sex marriage, which supports previous research.

It was expected that church attendance would be the most predictive variable of attitudes towards same-sex marriage. However, conflict between religious beliefs and homosexuality had the strongest relationship with the independent variable. Because this variable has been so rarely studied, it is hard to connect this finding to the larger literature. Past research has examined religions and their attitudes towards homosexuality; however, no known study has looked directly at conflict between religious beliefs and homosexuality. This relationship should be examined in more depth. The findings from this study found that people are more likely to have unfavorable attitudes towards same-sex marriage, if they feel there is a conflict between their religious beliefs and their own personal beliefs about homosexuality. This suggests that if the church they belong to teaches homosexuality is a sin, they may have conflicting attitudes about supporting same-sex marriages.

Implications

Previous studies indicate that religion plays a significant role in shaping attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Most of the literature examines how only one or two aspects of religion affect attitudes towards same-sex marriage, and limited research has looked at several aspects together. This study was conducted to explore the influences of four aspects of religion on attitudes towards same-sex marriage. The four aspects examined were religiosity, church affiliation, one's religions view on homosexuality, and church attendance. This study looked at the US

because 15 states do not allow same-sex marriage, which is a far cry from many other countries that have legalized same-sex and same-sex unions. The US is also very centered on religion and religiosity, which can help shape attitudes about homosexuality and same-sex marriage. As the findings show a conflict between religion and homosexuality beliefs has a greater effect on attitudes towards same-sex marriage than other variables. These findings suggest that we may need to recondition the way we think about the relationship between religion and non-heteronormative groups. We need to take into account how religion asserts that heterosexuality is norm. It is this view that tends to be taught in churches, and therefore, will cause conflict with personal beliefs and religious teachings. This ties back to Reference Group Theory. This theory proposes that people's behaviors and attitudes are directly shaped by the people and the groups that they closely associate with (Cochran & Beeghley, 1991). This relates to this thesis because the findings suggest that if your religion believes homosexuality is a sin, then it is likely you will hold less favorable attitudes towards same-sex marriage.

Knowing what aspects of religion are significant in shaping negative attitudes towards same-sex marriage can lead to a better understanding of how to eradicate opposition to same-sex marriage. This study offers insight into what particular aspects of religion play significant roles in shaping unfavorable attitudes towards same-sex marriage.

The findings did indicate that both Catholics and Jews were more in favorable attitudes towards same-sex marriages when compared with those in the non-religious group. These findings supported previous data regarding Jews and

favorable attitudes, but contradicted findings about Catholics attitudes. Olson and colleagues (2006) found that Jews, Liberal Protestants, and people who are religiously unaffiliated have the most favorable and liberal views because their denominations have not condemned homosexual behavior. Some research does indicate that Catholicism is becoming more tolerant of homosexuality due to its current Pope (ProCon.org, 2014). Whereas, other studies found that those who attend racially diverse congregations are more likely to support same-sex marriage (Perry, 2013). Therefore, in order to bring about change to the way we conceptualize marriage, we should examine these two religions accordingly. We should address their teachings and how these may prevent unfavorable attitudes towards same-sex marriage. This would allow researchers to designate the differences in religions and religious teachings, and therefore help illuminate such a contrast in religious views on homosexuality and same-sex marriage.

The implications of this study brought new light to how four core aspects of religion shape attitudes towards same-sex marriage. This research can be used to help benefit the proactive groups who are fighting for equality and the right to marry. Currently fifteen states in the US do not allow same-sex marriage, rendering millions of people without the rights and privileges that accompany a legal marriage. This study found that religiosity, church affiliation, one's religions view of homosexuality, and church attendance all play a role in shaping attitudes towards same-sex marriage. The findings from this thesis can inform campaigns for change by enlightening people about the significance of religion and how religion tends to portray homosexuality. By using Catholicism and Judaism as an example of churches

that foster favorable attitudes, researchers can specify how some religions and religious teachings are directed at heteronormativity and discount other sexual orientations. Educators can use this information to focus on using religion in a positive way and to inform leaders of certain churches that homosexuality is not wrong or immoral.

Limitations

There are a few limitations that should be mentioned. First, this study had a limited number of respondents that were categorized in some religious affiliation categories. Because of this, certain religious affiliations were grouped together into different categories. For example, Muslim (Islam), Buddhist, Hindu were grouped together as Middle Eastern Religions, and Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saint/LDS), Orthodox (Greek, Russian, or some other orthodox church) were grouped as Other Christian, and so forth. This categorization could have affected the final analysis of attitudes towards same-sex marriage when comparing church affiliations. Another limitation of this study was the use of a one item measure of same-sex marriage attitudes for the dependent variable. It could have been more reliable if a multiple item scale was used.

Another limitation to this study was the wording of the question used to collect the data on attitudes. The Pew Research Centers question asks: "Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose lesbians and gays to marry legally?" Whereas studies have shown that using a question like: "Do you think it should be legal or illegal for gay and lesbian couples to get married?" have consistently higher rates of approval (Pew Research Center, 2014). Therefore, the

wording of this particular question could have led to less favorable responses from respondents.

Directions for Future Research

This thesis explored the relationship between four aspects of religion and their effects on attitudes towards same-sex marriages, with results indicating religiosity, church affiliation, one's own religion's view of homosexuality, and church attendance did impact attitudes towards same-sex marriage. As for church affiliation, this thesis found Catholics and Judaism to have more favorable attitudes towards same-sex marriage than atheist/no religion, nothing in particular. For this reason, it may be beneficial to research different religions in depth to find out reasons for this. Even though, most religions tend to be less likely to have favorable attitudes towards same-sex marriage, finding out why some religions in particular are more likely to have favorable attitudes could be interesting. It would also be beneficial to collect data from different denominations of one particular religion and explore the differences, if any, between their attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Although quantitative data is useful for making generalizations, it would also be helpful to approach this topic qualitatively. Face to face interviews would allow researchers to explore why the majority of attitudes towards same-sex marriage tend to be unfavorable within a given religious group. Another direction for future research is to examine conflict between one's own religious beliefs and homosexuality. This was the most significant variable in the study, therefore, more research should address this conflict.

Conclusion

This thesis examined the impacts of four aspects of religion on attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Because US society tends to be highly religious, it is important to study the relationship between religion and attitudes towards same-sex marriage. This thesis supports existing literature on religion and attitudes towards same-sex marriage. This thesis also contributes to the literature because it examined four different aspects of religion that have rarely been studied in conjunction with each other. This is a contribution because this thesis found both Catholics and Jews tend to have more favorable attitudes towards same-sex marriage when compared to other religions, which is in contrast to some research findings. Overall, the results of this thesis have social implications for the outcomes of religion on attitudes towards same-sex marriage.

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