



Journal of Religion & Society

The Kripke Center

Volume 12 (2010)

Hell Hath No Fury

A Gender-Dichotomized Analysis Predicting Pro-Life/Pro-Death Penalty Attitudes

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Abstract

People who are strongly pro-life rely on the argument that life is sacred and the willful taking of it is wrong, yet some of these same people also endorse capital punishment as a penalty for murder. This presents a seeming ideological conflict because the assumption that life is sacred applies in one context, but, apparently, not in the other. The current study uses a religious framework to examine the people who simultaneously take a strongly pro-life stance, but who also support the death penalty (i.e., are pro-death penalty). The consistent finding from past literature that women tend to be more religious than men necessitates dividing the sample by gender to determine if and how gender interacts with religion in the formation of pro-life/pro-death penalty attitudes. Finally, the reference group theory of religious affiliation is the proposed theoretical mechanism by which religious fundamentalism translates into the holding of these attitudes. Results support the hypothesis that reference group theory explains Christian fundamentalists' membership in the pro-life/pro-death penalty group and that this relationship is likely applicable to women more so than to men. Implications for the study of religion and public policy are made.

Introduction

[1] There is no shortage of evidence regarding people's desire to be consistent in their beliefs and actions (see, for a small example of a large body of social psychological literature, Gawronski, Walther, and Blank; Eise; Lane, Mitchell, and Banaji; Osgood; see also the discussion by McEwen and Maiman). In many facets of life and society, people can be seen

constantly shuffling their beliefs around to make them fit together in a coherent, unified fashion. One instance that requires shuffling is that in which two views regarding the sanctity of life collide. This instance mandates that the individual make a choice regarding whether and under what circumstances a human being is unquestionably sacred or irreversibly polluted and undeserving of life. This is the instance of the intersection of pro-life and pro-death penalty attitudes.¹

[2] Little is known about the people who must mentally overcome – consciously or unconsciously – the discrepancy between sanctity-of-life arguments that condemn abortion and retributive arguments that make an exception in the assumption of sanctity for those who have taken the life of another. It is easy enough to assume that there is not actually a contradiction here; that is, that abortion is the killing of an innocent person while capital punishment is the killing of a person who himself is awash in the blood of another. This explanation, however, proves too simplistic an account of what is, at its heart, a highly controversial issue laced with deep disagreement. The true meaning of the sanctity of life, the Bible's mixed messages exalting both revenge and forgiveness, and humans' right to pass God's judgment and exact God's revenge against one another are all controversies that undermine the superficial dichotomy between the innocent and the tainted.

[3] In addition to the patchy knowledge regarding the pro-life/pro-death penalty orientation, another issue in the study of religion that needs attention in this regard is gender. Women score higher on measures of religiosity than men do (e.g., Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi; Bryant; Maselko and Kubzansky; Ozorak; Roth and Kroll; Smith, Denton, Faris, and Regnerus) and scholars would, therefore, be remiss to ignore gender in an analysis of religion and attitudes. While the gender difference in religiosity is strong and consistent empirically, it has yet to be elucidated theoretically. Several theories have been proposed, yet few have been put to the test. An abundance of theories that is not accompanied by systematic empirical testing of those theories does more to obscure truths than to uncover them (Hay). More work is clearly needed to link theory to the empirical observations concerning gender differences.

[4] One theory that has been proposed to explain religiosity in general is reference group theory. Originally derived from social psychology (e.g., Sherif and Sherif 1964), reference group theory has been put forth by some researchers to explain why people become attached to and adopt the tenets of the Christian religion. It is thought that a people's religious sect acts as the reference group and that people, desiring to be accepted by the group, take on the beliefs of the sect. Reference group theory is a compelling explanation for religiosity, but it has been subjected to minimal empirical testing and has yet to be proposed as a possible explanation for gender differences in religiosity, despite its firm theoretical grounding not just in religious studies but in other disciplines as well.

¹ There are, of course, people who are opposed to both abortion and capital punishment, so an anti-abortion position is not deterministic of a pro-death penalty attitude. The present study uses the term "pro-life/pro-death penalty" to symbolize the group of people who are both opposed to abortion and strongly supportive of capital punishment; it is in no way meant to imply that being pro-life automatically qualifies a person as simultaneously pro-death penalty.

[5] We thus do three things in this paper. First, we tackle the question about the relationship between religiosity and pro-life/pro-death penalty attitudes in an attempt to further the field's knowledge about the people who hold these seemingly contradictory attitudes. Second, we use the established gender difference in religiosity to explain how the religion-attitude relationship might vary across women and men. Finally, we ground this analysis in the reference group theory of religiosity in order to better understand the validity of reference group theory in the context of religious effects on public opinion and whether that validity is dependent upon gender.

Theoretical Framework

Public Opinion about Abortion and about the Death Penalty

[6] *Abortion.* The morality of abortion is one of the most widely contested topics in the United States. Some state legislatures and the U.S. Congress have attempted since *Roe v. Wade* to whittle away at the legality and availability of some types of abortions. The culmination of these efforts was evident in events, such as in 2006, when the governor of South Dakota enacted a nearly complete ban on abortion (see, e.g., CNN; Holusha). The more recent Montana initiative to declare unequivocally that life begins at conception would make abortion illegal de facto, including in cases of rape or incest, and could even threaten the legality of birth control (Duganz; NARAL Pro-Choice Montana). Twenty-five years after *Roe*, the abortion debate is as rancorous as ever.

[7] Positions on abortion are generally classified as either pro-choice or pro-life, though there may be more overlap between the two positions than this dichotomization implies. Those who hold pro-choice views typically support the legality of abortion from a women's rights perspective; that is, they believe that women deserve full autonomy in their reproductive choices. Many people believe that abortion rights directly implicate social and gender equity between the sexes (Hull, Hoffer, and Hoffer; Scheiwe) and that abortion is an issue of a woman's right to privacy in matters concerning her own body (Cook 1998a). A pro-choice stance does not, however, necessarily mean that people who hold this view approve of abortion on a moral or ethical level; in fact, a number of them find abortion itself objectionable. They still do, however, believe that the procedure must be available as an option when the circumstances surrounding a pregnancy make abortion the best option (Beckwith).

[8] Those in the pro-life camp ground their opposition to abortion in their belief that life begins at conception and that abortion is therefore tantamount to murder (Hopkins, Zeedyk, and Raitt; Maxwell). Punishment, their argument runs, is deserved by anyone who undergoes or performs an abortion and, if it is not leveled somehow here on Earth, will be dealt by God when the women and their doctors face judgment day (Griffith). Pro-life supporters often lament the loss of the traditional family and believe that modern gender roles and the rise of women's rights movements have systematically devalued motherhood (Cook 1998b; Ginsburg; Griffith). Pro-life proponents, overall, express a socially and sexually conservative outlook that is primarily based in religious tenets.

[9] *The Death Penalty.* The death penalty is not quite the topic of fierce social and political debate that abortion is because the majority of Americans support the policy. In 2007, 69

percent of U.S. citizens surveyed supported the death penalty (Newport). While that number has fluctuated over the years, the majority of the American citizenry believe that death is an appropriate punishment for murder. This support, though, may be limited to particularly egregious crimes (see Roberts and Stalans). In addition, survey estimates of support are subject to substantial variation depending on how questions are worded and whether respondents are given alternative punishment options, such as life in prison (Moon, Wright, Cullen, and Pealer). This finding is not limited to the death penalty but, in fact, extends to public opinion about punitive sanctions as a whole (Pratt).

[10] Death penalty opponents believe in a right to life for all people regardless of their crimes (Zimring). They find state-sanctioned execution barbaric (Bedau) and believe it to be an indicator of how civilized and mature a society is (Kohlberg and Elfenbein). In addition, opponents point to evidence of substantial bias in the application of the death penalty and argue that poor and minority offenders are put to death at a disproportionate rate relative to offenders from other economic and social strata (Borg; Britt; Johnson; Unnever and Cullen).

[11] Death penalty supporters draw on a variety of explanations for their opinions. Many endorse retribution as the justification for capital punishment – an eye for an eye and a life for a life. Some cite deterrence and incapacitation (van den Haag; Peterson and Baily) and others contend that execution is morally defensible in the catharsis it affords victims' families (Gerber and Engelhardt-Greer) and because it is, fundamentally, a reaffirmation of the sanctity of human life and the wrongness of willfully taking the life of another human being (Cook 1998a; Ezorsky; Ten).

Where they Meet: The Pro-Life and Pro-Death Penalty Group

[12] The interest in the present study is on the people who are strongly against abortion, yet who also favor the death penalty for people convicted of murder; in other words, we are interested here in those people who believe that the willful taking of life is absolutely wrong in some contexts but is moral and just in others. Opposition to abortion and support for the death penalty are typically found, especially when they co-occur, among conservatives. The political right, in turn, finds the foundation for its positions on moral issues in tenets either directly or indirectly derived from Christianity (Tarico). Some researchers dub the recent rise in strict conservative attitudes the “New Religious Right” and have explained that this “New Religious Right” activism tends to permeate denominational boundaries, especially under the aegis of issues such as abortion” (Morgan and Scanzoni: 368). Wiecko and Gau, moreover, found that religiosity was among the best predictors of membership in the pro-life/pro-death penalty group. In the present study, then, we use religiosity as our primary framework for understanding why some people hold pro-life/pro-death penalty beliefs.

[13] It is not sufficient for purposes of analyzing these conflicting beliefs to claim that the unborn are innocent, while the murderers are not, and to assume that this distinction suffices under a religiosity framework wherein religion is predicated upon moral judgment. While there is a clear link between Christianity and anti-abortion sentiments, the relationship between Christianity and support for the death penalty is not absolute. The sixth commandment states, “Thou shalt not murder.” This proscription contains no exceptions and no room for considering the human worth of the person on the receiving end of the slaughter. The meaning of “murder” is possibly open to interpretation – with pro-capital

punishment Christians arguing that execution is not murder but is justified in the name of retribution – but this interpretation is belied by the historical purpose behind the sixth commandment, which was to eliminate blood feuds (Smith). That the intent behind the banning of murder was to prevent initial killings and the deadly retaliations they spawned speaks right to capital punishment and the alleged righteousness of the eye-for-an-eye doctrine.

[14] Many Christians do endorse capital punishment because their religion taught them to demand an eye for an eye, yet many others reject this retributive notion in favor of the teachings of forgiveness (Unnever, Cullen, and Bartowski) and/or the belief that it is God's job, not humans', to pass judgment on a human's life. In this way, there is a divide among Christians in terms of support for the execution of convicted murderers (Unnever and Cullen) and other harsh correctional strategies (Unnever, Cullen, and Applegate). Given the somewhat schizophrenic nature of Biblical texts – alternating between revenge and forgiveness, violence and compassion – it is not at all surprising to find divides among Christians regarding the morality of killing killers.

Gender Differences in Religiosity

[15] Many scholars have focused on the interaction between religion and gender (Fischtein, Herold, and Desmarais). There is little room for doubt that gender differences in religiosity exist; nearly all empirical investigations into gender differences have yielded evidence of disparity to a greater or lesser extent. Women, by and large, score higher on all conventional dimensions of religiosity (e.g., Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi; Bryant; Maselko and Kubzansky; Ozorak; Roth and Kroll; Smith et al.).

[16] Gender differences tend to show up early and to persist over the life course. Smith et al. found that adolescent girls scored higher than their male counterparts on religious affiliation, religious service attendance, and involvement in church youth programs. These differences are not an artifact of age. In Bryant's study of college students, female students reported stronger commitment to religion relative to male students. Women were also more likely to endorse religious and socially conservative ideas, such as the notion that people who do not believe in God will be punished.

[17] Other studies focusing on college students have led to the same conclusion. Bang, Hall, Anderson, and Willingham surveyed female college students and discovered a strong relationship between self-reported religious fundamentalism and role-sharing expectations. Morgan and Scanzoni, similarly, reported a strong relationship between female college students' religiosity and their attitudes about traditional sex roles. Women who were more religious also endorsed traditional sex roles. Endorsement of traditional sex roles was, in turn, related to lower expectations for careers in the workforce. Religiosity, therefore, reduced women's expected workforce participation via its effect on modern sex role views.

[18] There is, furthermore, evidence that religion becomes more important to women and less important to men over time and that religious beliefs turn more stringent and inflexible as people age (Bryant). Cornwall concluded from a review of the literature that religiosity tends to decline in the late teens and early twenties and then rises again in the late twenties and early thirties. Studies of adults have demonstrated a gender-religiosity effect for various

health outcomes. Maselko and Kubzansky analyzed religiosity and various measures of health for a sample of 18- to 65-year-old adults. They found, contrary to the bulk of the literature on the topic, a stronger effect for religion on health for men than for women. Other studies have shown gender-religiosity interaction effects for various health outcomes among elderly adults, including a reduction in the incidence of depression among elderly women who attend church regularly (Norton et al.; but see O’Hanlon, Cropley, and Booker, reporting null effects for gender differences among older Episcopalians).

[19] There is, as yet, no consensus on the reason(s) for these differences (Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi; Francis). Theories range from individual- to societal-level (Francis). Roth and Kroll undertook a test of risk preference theory, which attempts to explain gender differences in terms of supposed sex differences in risk-taking behavior. Men, according to risk preference theory, are less religious than women because men are more willing to take risks. Women, conversely, do not like taking risks and are therefore unwilling to gamble with things like eternal damnation resulting from a failure to adopt a religious orientation. Roth and Kroll did find that women were significantly more likely than men to interpret the Bible literally, which is a hallmark of deep religiosity. In all the models, however, risk preference theory was either not supported or was directly contradicted by the data.

[20] Other researchers have posited a variety of other potential explanations, including the idea that women “are more religious because they are *supposed* to be more religious” (emphasis added; Cornwall: 117). Women, it is hypothesized, evince greater religiosity because, as mothers, they are expected to be the primary source of religious socialization for their children. There is, to date, no empirical evidence testing this supposition (Cornwall; Francis).

[21] Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi listed several general explanations that have been advanced to account for the differential experiences of men and women. One of these potential explanations centered on the process of sex role socialization – girls are brought up to be compliant and obedient, to look to others for guidance, and to assume a passive stance in life. Boys, on the other hand, are trained to be more independent and self-reliant. In the context of reference group theory (discussed in detail below), then, women should experience religion more intensely because they may be more likely to affiliate with religious groups and to adopt the viewpoints given to them by their religious reference group.

The Reference Group Theory of Religious Affiliation

[22] One theory that has gained prominence in the study of religion is reference group theory. Reference group theory originally derives from fields related to social psychology. By virtue of the structure of a society like the United States where people are physically, socially, and economically mobile, the social system consists of a multitude of groups to which members of society either currently belong or aspire to become a part of. Everyone belongs to many groups, but there are some groups that hold special appeal to the individual and that entice the individual to want to be a member of that group. These are reference groups. People desire to be accepted by these groups; they desire affiliation with and the approval of other members of the groups. The way to obtain this is through conformity with the reference group’s norms and values (Sherif and Sherif 1969; see also Sherif and Sherif 1964).

Conformity and compliance with the values set forth by the reference group provides the individual a feeling of acceptance and psychological comfort (Clagett).

[23] Reference groups can be normative or comparative (Sherif and Sherif 1969). The normative function of reference groups comes through when group members or aspiring members look to the group for behavioral and attitudinal guidelines (Clagett). Comparative reference groups are groups to which an individual compares himself in order to assess his personal situation relative to that of others in the comparative group. The comparative function of reference groups can be a source of strain for individuals who feel their personal positions or statuses are inferior to those of others in the reference group to which they are comparing themselves (Merton and Rossi). Reference groups can influence their members' actions strongly, even if the groups are large and the various members of the group are unaware of other members' existence (Sherif and Sherif 1969) because it is the individual's drive to be part of a group and the internal satisfaction a person gets from knowing she is a member that makes her want to belong to the group (Sherif and Sherif 1964).

[24] Religious denominations and institutions are reference groups to which religious people may look for guidance. Religions serve a normative function (Cochran, Chamlin, Beeghley, and Fenwick) by providing doctrines that delineate right and wrong and that tell individuals what to do and what to believe in order to be true to their faith. Reference group theory is one of the theories that have been posited to account for religious affiliation and adoption of doctrines and dogmas and it has received some empirical support in the few tests that have been conducted.

[25] Cochran and Beeghley found somewhat mixed but generally supportive results for an interaction effect between the stringency of a religion's prohibitions on certain forms of sexual behavior (premarital, extramarital, and homosexual) and the depth individuals' self-reported religiosity. Denomination did not matter in terms of extramarital or homosexual sexual behaviors because, the authors surmised, all religions tend to proscribe these acts. There were, however, significant differences in attitudes regarding premarital sex – people whose religions more strongly opposed premarital sex were more likely to see this behavior as wrong compared to people whose religions were more lax on the issue or did not have a strong position one way or the other.

[26] Cochran et al. found a similar pattern of results when the dependent variable was people's actual sexual behaviors as opposed to their attitudes about sexual behaviors. Religious prohibitions influenced people's premarital sexual activity only among those who affiliated with denominations that strongly proscribed such behavior, and, in addition, the strength of people's religiosity also generally predicted their sexual behaviors. Lefkowitz, Gillen, Shearer, and Boone reported modest associations between youths' religious involvement and sexual behaviors. Zaleski and Schiaffino, likewise, found a negative relationship between college students' religiosity and their frequency of sexual activity, a finding they attributed to religion having possibly offered these students an alternative reference group. Whereas the students' peers and other college groups may have been tolerant or approving of non-marital sexual activity, highly religious students adopted their churches as their reference group of choice and referred to institutional doctrines for guidance.

Current Focus

[27] In the present study, we propose to use reference group theory as a framework for understanding both the effects of religiosity measures on attitudes about abortion and the death penalty and the differential effects these measures may have on women and men of faith. There are, to our knowledge, no extant studies that explicitly use reference group theory as a potential explanation for gender differences in religion. There are, likewise, no studies to date that employ both concepts in order to obtain a broader understanding of the reasons why people hold seemingly-conflicting beliefs regarding abortion and capital punishment. The current research, then, serves the dual purposes of expanding the literature on religious reference group theory while simultaneously investigating whether and to what extent reference group theory explains people's membership in a belief system that declares life sacred in some situations and dispensable in others.

[28] This study is original in its formulation, yet the existing literature summarized above does lend itself to a specific hypothesis, which is stated as such:

Hypothesis: Religious attachment will be a stronger predictor of women's membership in the pro-life/pro-death penalty group.

[29] The hypothesis states, in essence, that religion is a more powerful reference group for women than for men because, as the literature has shown, women are more religious than men. Women are socialized into compliance with and reliance upon others. Women typically score higher on ratings of persuasibility and suggestibility relative to men (see Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi for a review). Ozorak found that women who saw flaws or problems in their religions were far more likely to use cognitive dissonance-reduction strategies to explain away the contradictions than they were to openly oppose the religious teachings or the church itself. The assumption is made here, then, that women identify with and fear the loss of the religious reference group more so than men do because the reference group is more integral to the life of a woman than it is to that of a man.

Methodology

Data

[30] The data used here came from the 2006 General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS was chosen as the data source because it covers a large sample of Americans from a range of socioeconomic strata and because it contains survey questions regarding respondents' beliefs about abortion and the death penalty. In addition, it has an array of questions tapping religious beliefs and practices, making it a good data set for testing the hypotheses under investigation here. The sample consisted of all those respondents who reported being Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Orthodox Christian, or Christian. Persons of all other faiths were omitted from the analyses for fear of confounding the results by including religions that do not have Jewish and Christian roots and are fundamentally different from this Western religious tradition in important ways.²

² Jewish respondents were included in the analyses because of the common history shared by Judaism and Christianity and because 5.3 percent of GSS respondents who reported being Jewish fell into the pro-life/pro-death penalty category. The Jewish faith relies more on rituals and traditions than on specific belief patterns,

Variables

[31] The dependent variable in this analysis was a dichotomous measure of whether respondents fall into the pro-life/pro-death penalty group or not (0 = not in the group; 1 = in the group). The abortion question gave respondents several hypothetical scenarios and asked if respondents would “allow” or “oppose” abortion under the given circumstance. The primary independent variables are *religious fundamentalism* and *religious attachment*. Both variables were scales created by standardizing and summing individual survey items that hung together conceptually and statistically. The fundamentalism scale was composed of items asking respondents how fundamentalist they currently are, whether they think the Bible is the literal word of God, whether they have ever had a born-again religious experience, whether they have ever tried to convince anyone to accept Jesus, and whether they believe that sinners must be punished (Cronbach’s alpha = .670; all item scaling and factor loadings are located in the appendix). The alpha level of .670 was slightly less than the desirable .700 cutoff for internal consistency, so a weighted factor score was computed and the analyses run using this scale. The results did not change, so the unweighted scale was retained.

[32] Religious attachment was the second independent variable. It is important to know how strongly respondents are attached to their religion in order to know how influential a reference group the religious sect is. Fundamentalism should be related to the dependent variable insofar as fundamentalists are attached to and highly affiliated with the fundamentalist reference group. Attachment is measured with a three-item scale: The frequency with which respondents pray; respondents’ self-reported affiliation with their religious group; and the frequency of their church attendance (alpha = .621). Once again, a weighted factor score was computed and the analyses rerun as a cross-check on the validity of the unweighted scale. The results stayed the same.

[33] Several control variables were employed as well. The first was *sexual restrictiveness*. Sexual restrictiveness, like fundamentalism, is a measure of the extremity of a religion’s teachings and the stringency of its tenets. Prior literature has demonstrated that religious reference groups have more power over their members when those groups promulgate clear, strict rules for beliefs and behaviors. Sexual restrictiveness, then, is a measure of how right or wrong respondents think non-traditional sexual activities are. This scale (alpha = .712) contained two items tapping respondents’ attitudes about homosexual activities (whether homosexual sex is wrong and whether homosexuals should have the right to marry) and two items tapping their beliefs about non-marital sex (whether it is all right for teens age 14 to 16 to take birth control and whether premarital sex is wrong).

[34] A second attitudinal control variable was a scale tapping respondents’ attitudes about *traditional gender roles*. This index was composed of three items: Respondents’ belief that preschool children suffer if the mother works; belief that a mother working does not hurt the children (reverse coded); and the belief that it is better for men to work and for women

meaning that individual Jews vary widely in their specific conceptualizations of God and the Bible and it is entirely possible to be Jewish and to endorse Biblical literalism (Smith). For these reasons, Jewish respondents were incorporated. To ensure the validity of the results, all models were rerun after omitting Jewish persons and the results did not change.

to look after the home ($\alpha = .771$). The remaining control variables were respondent *age* (continuous in years), *race* (0 = Nonwhite, 1 = White), *education level* (0 = Less than high school, 4 = Graduate degree), *marital status* (0 = Not married, 1 = Married), *whether or not they have had children* (0 = Never had children, 1 = Have had children), and *region of residence* (0 = Not South, 1 = South).

Results

[35] The sample size was $N = 1,801$ after restricting the respondents to those reporting membership in a Jewish or Christian faith and to those who provided an answer to the abortion and death penalty questions. The dominant religious sects reported were Protestant (64 percent) and Catholic (30.6 percent). Roughly 5 percent of both men and women (4.7 percent and 5.3 percent, respectively) who belonged to a Jewish or Christian sect were in the pro-life/pro-death penalty group and women comprised 63.7 percent of the nexus group. A preliminary caution is warranted due to the small portion of the total number of cases that fall into the pro-life/pro-death penalty group ($N = 94$). In logistic regression, it is ideal to have the sample evenly divided between the two categories of the dependent variable; when they are very unequal, one risks the error of interpreting a large change in an odds ratio to mean a large substantive change in the dependent variable when, in fact, even large changes in the odds are substantively minor because of the low prevalence of the characteristic under investigation.

[36] We think that although a larger sample size containing greater numbers of people in the pro-life/pro-death penalty group would be helpful, the validity of our findings is not threatened by the inequality of the two dependent variable categories because we are not actually interested in the magnitude of the odds ratios. We are, rather, interested in the pattern of results that emerges when the fundamentalism and reference group variables are compared. Due to the small portion of the total number of cases that belong to the pro-life/pro-death penalty group, we will refrain from making statements about the actual size of the odds ratios and instead stick to a discussion of the overall meaning of the models.

[37] The descriptive information for the sample can be found in Table 1. The sample demographics matched those of the general population quite closely. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2006 estimates, the U.S. population was 50.7 percent female and 80.1 percent white. The median household income in 2004 was \$44,334 and in 2000, 80.4 percent of persons age 25 and older held at least a high school degree. In the GSS sample, 58 percent were women, 72 percent were white, the median household income category was \$40,000-\$49,999, and 77.7 percent of those age 25 and higher had completed high school or more. The differences between the sample and the population were minimal and those that did arise were probably a result of restricting the GSS sample to Christians and Jews. It is interesting to note, though, how similar the predominantly Christian sample was to the U.S. population as a whole, which is likely evidence of the prevalence of Christianity in this country.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for all Variables in the Analysis

	Range	Mean	S.D.
Dependent: Pro-Life/Pro-Death Penalty	0 – 1 (1 = In Group)	.05	.22
Religious Attachment	-4.27 – 3.65	.40	2.25
Religious Fundamentalism	-5.95 – 6.51	.86	3.31
Sexual Restrictiveness	-5.12 – 4.89	.56	2.89
Traditional Gender Roles	3 - 12	6.86	2.01
Marital Status	0 – 1 (1 = Married)	.51	.50
Sex	0 – 1 (1 = Female)	.58	.49
Ever had Children	0 – 1 (1 = Yes)	.76	.43
Race	0 – 1 (1 = White)	.72	.45
Age	18 - 88	48.14	16.68
Education	0 – 4	med = 1.00	1.173
Income	1 - 25	med = 18.00	5.44
Region	0 – 1 (1 = South)	.42	.49

Table 2. Correlations for all Variables in the Models predicting Pro-Life/Pro-Death Penalty Group Membership

Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. DV: In Group	1.000												
2. Fundamentalism	.174**	1.000											
3. Attachment	.180**	.501**	1.000										
4. Sexual Restrictiveness	.239**	.479**	.407**	1.000									
5. Traditional Gender Roles	.100**	.158**	.085**	.293**	1.000								
6. Female	.013	.078**	.171**	-.031	-.186**	1.000							
7. Age	-.029	-.056**	.118**	.204**	.163**	.020	1.000						
8. Children	.026	.071**	.100**	.146**	.034	.101**	.312**	1.000					
9. White	.060*	-.222**	-.074**	-.012	-.013	-.018	.215**	-.001	1.000				
10. Married	.077**	-.009	.108**	.187**	.072**	-.066**	.049**	.269**	.136**	1.000			
11. Education	-.020	-.218**	.063**	-.141**	-.206**	-.021	-.026	-.133**	.190**	.094**	1.000		
12. Income	-.002	-.199**	.019	-.104**	-.090**	-.124**	-.028	-.005	.228**	.394**	.408**	1.000	
13. South	.040	.305**	.145**	.163**	.044	-.032	-.052**	.005	-.135**	-.067**	-.078**	-.078**	1.000

* p < .05 ** p < .01

[38] Table 2 shows the inter-item correlations for all variables in the models. Fundamentalism, attachment, and sexual restrictiveness were significantly related to the outcome variable of group membership and the correlations were moderate in strength. The remaining variables did not show a strong connection to the dependent variable. Many of the scales were highly correlated with other scales (e.g., fundamentalism and attachment correlated at $r = .501$), so the models were first run using ordinary least squares regression in order to obtain collinearity diagnostics. No indication of collinearity emerged, as all variance inflation factors were less than 2.0 and all condition indices were less than 22. In addition, all independent variables were sufficiently normally distributed such that no transformations were necessary.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Results for the Full Sample: Effect of Religious Attachment on the Model

Independent Variable	Model 1		Model 2	
	b (SE)	exp(b)	b (SE)	exp(b)
Attachment	--	--	.292* (.122)	1.339
Fundamentalism	.174* (.076)	1.190	.117 (.079)	1.124
Sexual Restrictiveness	.396*** (.105)	1.485	.312** (.109)	1.366
Traditional Gender Roles	.079 (.095)	1.082	.075 (.095)	1.078
Married	.880* (.444)	2.412	.881* (.448)	2.413
Female	.146 (.394)	1.157	-.040 (.401)	.960
Children	.260 (.532)	1.297	.339 (.532)	1.403
White	.507 (.455)	1.660	.566 (.468)	1.761
Age	-.020† (.012)	.980	-.026* (.012)	.974
Education	-.003 (.191)	.997	-.128 (.200)	.880
Income	-.101** (.038)	.904	-.101* (.040)	.904
South	-.224 (.382)	.800	-.120 (.387)	.887
Constant	-2.864* (1.141)	.057	-2.521* (1.161)	.080
Model χ^2	61.897***		67.898***	
Nagelkerke R ²	.266		.290	
N	571		568	

† $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

[39] The dichotomous nature of the dependent variable necessitated use of logistic regression to analyze the data (0 = Not in the pro-life/pro-death penalty group, 1 = In the group). The model was first run for males and females together to get an overall sense of the applicability of reference group theory. The results of this model are displayed in Table 3. Model 1 in Table 3 shows the results for the analysis before adding the attachment variable. Fundamentalism, as expected, was a significant predictor of pro-life/pro-death penalty group membership ($\exp(B) = 1.190$, $p = .02$). People who scored high on the fundamentalism scale

were more likely to be strongly pro-life and pro-capital punishment. Sexual restrictiveness was also a significant predictor of group membership ($\exp(B) = 1.485$, $p = .000$), indicating that people who held anti-homosexual beliefs and beliefs about the inappropriateness of teenage and premarital sex were more likely to be in the group. Marital status, age, and income were the only significant demographic variables. Married persons were more likely to be in the group ($\exp(B) = 2.412$, $p = .047$), as were younger persons ($\exp(B) = .980$, $p = .099$) and respondents with lower incomes ($\exp(B) = .904$, $p = .009$). The negative relationship for age was interesting, as it was contrary to what would have been expected based on prior literature showing that the strength and conservatism of religious values tends to increase with age. Perhaps these results are indicative in a shift in the age group most susceptible to conservative religious doctrines.

Table 4. Logistic Regression Results with Sample Split by Gender for Dependent Variable Membership in the Pro-Life/Pro-Death Penalty Group

Independent Variable	Males		Females	
	b (SE)	exp(B)	b (SE)	exp(B)
Attachment	--	--	--	--
Fundamentalism	.159 (.123)	1.172	.184† (.101)	1.201
Sexual Restrictiveness	.453* (.184)	1.572	.376** (.127)	1.457
Traditional Gender Roles	-.161 (.159)	.851	.225† (.120)	1.252
Married	1.262 (.897)	3.532	.759 (.566)	2.136
Children	-.229 (.815)	.795	.952 (.852)	2.590
White	.434 (.763)	1.543	.538 (.590)	1.712
Age	-.017 (.021)	.983	-.025 (.016)	.975
Education	.160 (.283)	1.174	-.111 (.270)	.895
Income	-.159* (.065)	.853	-.069 (.051)	.933
Region	-.216 (.660)	.806	-.147 (.491)	.863
Constant	-.419 (1.802)	.658	-4.455** (1.512)	.012
Model χ^2	27.031***		40.974***	
Nagelkerke R ²	.281		.297	
N	250		321	

† $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

[40] Next, the attachment variable was introduced to assess its impact on the model. It was hypothesized in this study that attachment to the religious reference group would be a significant predictor of pro-life/pro-death penalty attitudes. As can be seen in Model 2 of Table 3, the results supported the hypothesis. The attachment variable was significant ($\exp(B) = 1.339$, $p = .017$) and the fundamentalism variable lost significance and dropped out of the model. This is strong support for the notion that the effects of religious

fundamentalism on pro-life/pro-death penalty attitudes is channeled through people's level of attachment to the religious reference group.

[41] The next step was to divide the sample by gender and run separate models for female and male respondents. Gender was not significant in the first two analyses using the entire sample (see Table 3 above), but the absence of a main effect does not preclude the possibility of an interaction effect. In other words, gender may interact with fundamentalism and/or attachment in ways that are not apparent when only the main effect is examined. Based on past literature showing marked support for the notion that women experience religion differently than men do, it was justified to continue with the gender-dichotomized analyses as planned. Dividing the sample by gender reduced the overall number of people in each subsample and, particularly, the number of people in each subsample's pro-life/pro-death penalty group. To adjust for this, the acceptable level of significance was raised to $p < .10$ so that meaningful relationships would not be incorrectly rejected simply because of small sample sizes.

Table 5. Logistic Regression Results with Sample Split by Gender for Dependent Variable Membership in the Pro-Life/Pro-Death Penalty Group: Effect of Religious Attachment on the Model

Independent Variable	Males		Females	
	b (SE)	exp(B)	b (SE)	exp(B)
Attachment	.165 (.179)	1.180	.382* (.184)	1.466
Fundamentalism	.121 (.129)	1.129	.123 (.104)	1.131
Sexual Restrictiveness	.398* (.189)	1.488	.272* (.134)	1.313
Traditional Gender Roles	-.152 (.159)	.859	.212† (.123)	1.237
Married	1.169 (.889)	3.218	.802 (.585)	2.231
Children	-.174 (.818)	.840	.986 (.852)	2.681
White	.447 (.779)	1.563	.625 (.614)	1.869
Age	-.017 (.020)	.983	-.033* (.016)	.967
Education	.089 (.291)	1.093	-.249 (.288)	.779
Income	-.145* (.065)	.865	-.077 (.055)	.925
Region	-.157 (.668)	.854	.009 (.503)	1.009
Constant	-.535 (1.790)	.586	-4.141** (1.593)	.016
Model χ^2	27.295**		45.848***	
Nagelkerke R ²	.288		.331	
N	248		320	

† $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

[42] The results of the first gender-dichotomized analyses are presented in Table 4. These models revealed some interesting differences between men and women's religiosity. Fundamentalism was not a significant predictor of pro-life/pro-death penalty group

membership among men ($p = .199$), but was significant for women ($\exp(B) = 1.202$, $p = .069$). Fundamentalism, it would appear from these analyses, may be a stronger influence on women's attitudes than on men's. Sexual restrictiveness strongly affected both men and women's likelihood of being in the pro-life/pro-death penalty group ($\exp(B) = 1.572$, $p = .014$; $\exp(B) = 1.457$, $p = .003$), which indicated that group membership may be associated with an overarching view supporting "appropriate" sexual behavior.

[43] The final model, displayed in Table 5, incorporated the reference group variable – attachment – into the model. The results of these analyses supported the hypothesis, which predicted that religious attachment (i.e., strength of affiliation with the reference group) would be a stronger predictor of group membership for women than for men. The significant effect of religious fundamentalism on women's membership in the pro-life/pro-death penalty group was washed out and the attachment variable was statistically significant ($\exp(B) = 1.466$, $p = .038$). Attachment was, however, not significant for men ($p = .354$), indicating that affiliation with and attachment to the religious reference group did not impact men like it did women. Taken together, the results of the preceding analyses suggest that: 1) Reference group theory does a good job explaining the effects of religiosity on pro-life/pro-death penalty attitudes; and 2) Reference group theory does a better job predicting women's attitudes than it does men's. The implications of these findings are discussed below.

Discussion

[44] The present study was undertaken with an aim to seek a better understanding of the reasons why some people – in this case, people of Jewish and Christian faiths – condemn abortion in even the most extreme circumstances while simultaneously supporting the death penalty for persons convicted of murder. In the first instance, life is alleged to be sacred and its destruction sinful. There is no accommodation for the circumstances under which the mother became pregnant; abortion is held to be inherently evil irrespective even of whether or not she actually consented to having sex in the first place. In the second case, an exception is made for convicted killers – their lives are not at all sacred. Willful killing in one circumstance (abortion) is said to be wrong under the rationale that the unborn child is a human being and that killing a human being is not okay, yet if willful killing were always wrong, then capital punishment would be considered wrong, too. There is, thus, a paradox, particularly if one considers that the sanctity of life and the sinfulness of taking life is the whole reason murderers are led to the gallows – proverbially or literally – in the first place. No crime is more worthy of punishment than that of killing, yet killing is the prescribed punishment.

[45] This contradiction is not explained away simply by appealing to a distinction between the "innocent" and the "guilty." The Bible's use of violence is certainly not lost on any reader; indeed, violence in the name of God is a persistent theme. At the same time, however, the sacred passages also extol the beauty of forgiveness and compassion. While the Bible is filled with episodes of God sanctioned violence, those images are suppressed in favor of a more benevolent God. In addition, church walls and the homes of avid Christians are not adorned with images of Jesus running swords through his enemies; rather, Jesus is depicted as a man/deity whose love and forgiveness were not constrained by judgment or hatred. What makes a convicted murderer "guilty" and deserving of death, then, is in the eye

of the Christian judging him; it is not a principle that can be readily discerned as the unambiguous message of the Bible.

[46] The fact that our religiosity variable was a significant predictor of pro-life/pro-death penalty attitudes is likely a function of the fact that we operationalized religiosity in terms of fundamentalism, a type of religiosity that is much more rigid than other types of religiosity. In addition, 60 percent of the GSS sample was Protestant, the form of Christianity to which most fundamentalists adhere and which tends to be more rigid in their moral structures about right and wrong (Curry). Had we used a measure of religiosity that tapped beliefs about forgiveness, we might have seen some very different results (see, e.g., Unnever et al. 2005, 2006). The conclusions that flow, then, are likely limited to Christian fundamentalists who take the Bible as the literal word of God.

[47] The first important finding from this study was that reference group theory proved to be a valid theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between fundamentalism and pro-life/pro-death penalty attitudes. In the full-sample models, fundamentalism emerged as a significant predictor of group membership only when religious attachment was omitted from the model. Once attachment was entered, the fundamentalism variable dropped out. The conclusion that arises from this is that fundamentalists strongly attached to their religious reference group may be more likely to mesh beliefs that people who are either not fundamentalist and/or not strongly attached would find incompatibly polemic. Fundamentalism is, by itself, not enough to spark this merging; one must also be firmly committed to the religious sect that promulgates these pro-life/pro-death penalty views in order to internalize them and make them their own.

[48] The second major finding of these analyses was that reference group theory may operate differently across women and men. An abundance of prior literature attests to gender differences in religion, with women consistently scoring higher than men on all religiosity variables. Once we found that reference group theory worked well in explaining variation in the full sample, we broke the respondents down by gender to test for interaction effects. The results of these analyses were somewhat tentative given the small sample sizes caused by the division of the sample, but the overall pattern of results was consistent with the hypothesis. Religious fundamentalism significantly predicted women's membership in the pro-life/pro-death penalty group, but it did not affect men's membership. The origin of women's attitudes about abortion and capital punishment may, therefore, be in religious doctrines, while it remains unclear where men find the rationales to guide their attitudes.

[49] The inclusion of the attachment variable produced significant results across the sexes. As it had in the full-sample model, the effects of religious attachment quashed the effects of fundamentalism, yet this result was only obtained for women – attachment was not significant for men. It was originally hypothesized that the religious reference group would be more influential in determining women's attitudes than it would be for men's beliefs because prior theories have suggested that women are socialized from childhood to be group-oriented and to value others' opinions about them and conform to others' expectations.

[50] Under a reference group theory framework, women would be expected to regard the religious reference group more highly because the guiding rationale behind reference group

theory is that people wish to be accepted by the group and to feel that they are a part of it and will, therefore, adjust their beliefs and behaviors to comport with those that the reference group values. The analyses generated support for the idea that the religious reference group is more important for women than it is for men. Again, this conclusion is somewhat circumspect because of the small sample sizes, but it does provide solid preliminary evidence of a gender difference that should be further explored in future research.

[51] Overall, then, the conclusions from this study suggest that (1) Reference group theory is a viable explanation for why certain people subscribe to what are for many people contradictory systems of beliefs; and (2) Reference group theory is a viable explanation, too, for gender differences in the effects of religious fundamentalism on these belief systems. Future research should give reference group theory a more prominent position in the study of religiosity than it currently occupies and should especially investigate it as an explanation for gender differences in religiosity. The use of larger samples and a variety of different religiosity measures is encouraged, as testing the conclusions arrived at in the present study under different conditions could lend important insight into the study of the religion-public opinion link. In addition, since fundamentalism and attachment did not appear to predict men's membership in the pro-life/pro-death penalty group, future researchers should concentrate on finding out what does affect their abortion and death penalty attitudes. Reference group theory is a good jumping-off point for a better understanding of how religious fundamentalism relates to attitudes about social and political issues.

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