

The Importance of Religion, and the Role of Individual Differences

In the United States, the majority of residents report that religion is very important (Pew Research Center 2012a). Additionally, many American city and community ordinances do not allow alcohol to be sold on Sundays (Legal Beer, n.d.), several radio and television stations regularly provide religious programming (Hangen 2002; Hilmes 2013), and along major roads throughout the United States there are billboards with religious messages declaring, “Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world” and “Life is nothing without God” (see Meyer 2013). On Sundays many Americans attend worship services and spend time with other religious people in formal or informal activities (Newport 2015).

While people in the most religious regions of America like the Bible Belt are likely to take their faith very seriously, across the nation residents are quite religious, much more so than in western Europe (Holifield 2014; Pew Research Center 2012a). Somewhat similarly, in many Muslim-majority nations like Morocco and Egypt, the call for prayer rings out across communities five times a day, prompting the majority of Muslims to stop what they are doing to pray (Pew Research Center 2012d). In many Muslim-majority countries, most residents attend mosque at least once a week and fast during the holy month of Ramadan (Pew Research Center 2012d). Conversely, in northern Europe, where historically mainline Protestant faiths like Lutheranism have dominated, many residents do not regularly attend church services or find religion to be very important (Manchin 2004).

Across the globe there is wide variation in the extent to which people are religious and live in places with strong religious cultures. The religion to which one adheres, as well as personal religious importance, has a meaningful influence on feelings about homosexuality. Additionally, differences across national religious contexts can affect attitudes, even for people who are not very religious. In this chapter I examine the roles of personal religious beliefs and the national religious context (i.e., dominant religion and mean level of religious importance), as well as individual demographic characteristics, for shaping public opinion about homosexuality.

MAJOR RELIGIONS' AND FOLLOWERS' ATTITUDES ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

Religions tend to vary quite substantially in the extent to which their adherents find homosexuality problematic. In figure 3, I present predicted scores for disapproval of homosexuality by different religious affiliations. The two most conservative religious groups appear to be Protestants and Muslims, followed by Hindus. The most liberal groups are Jews, Catholics, and people with no religious affiliation. Buddhists and Eastern Orthodox Christians fall in the middle. A number of other studies have found some of the same religion differences for homosexuality-related attitudes (Adamczyk and Pitt 2009; Ellison, Acevedo, and Ramos-Wada 2011; van den Akker, van der Ploeg, and Scheepers 2013).

Why do affiliates of Muslim and Protestant faiths appear more likely than others to disapprove of homosexuality? A flawed but reasonable explanation would be that their major religious texts differ in what they say about homosexuality. For Judeo-Christian faiths, homosexual behaviors are explicitly mentioned and condemned in the Bible. For example, the Bible's Old Testament, which is used by both Jews and Christians, declares, "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads" (Lev. 20:13 [Moo 1973]). Like the Bible, the Qur'an is also clear that homosexuality is problematic: "Do you approach males among the worlds. And leave what your Lord has created for you as mates? But you are a people transgressing" (Qur'an 26:165–66 [Aminah Assami 2011]).

Whereas Judeo-Christian and Muslim religious texts make clear prescriptions regarding homosexuality, Buddhism offers less-explicit guidance. In the Vinaya, which provides the regulations for Buddhist monks,

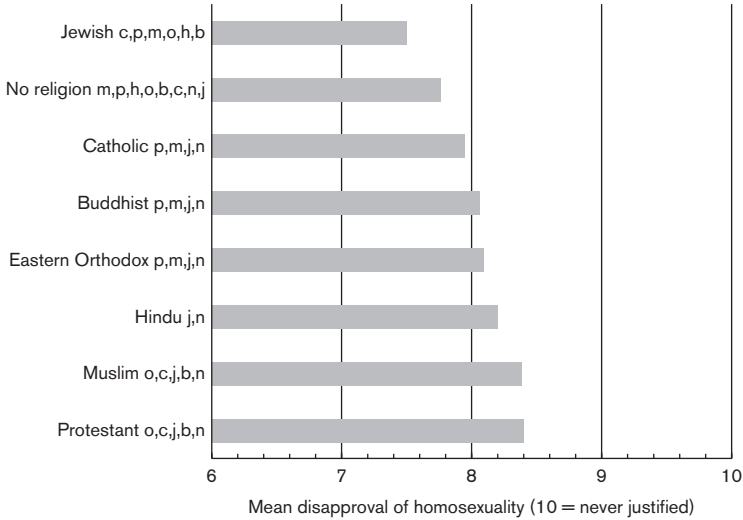


FIGURE 3. Marginal estimates for mean disapproval of homosexuality by religious affiliation. (Society $N = 87$; individual $N = 202,316$)

SOURCE: WVS, waves 4, 5, and 6.

NOTE: Whenever multilevel data are used, the range of the dependent variable, which is justification for homosexuality, goes from 0 to 10, where 10 means “never justified.” Marginal estimates are presented for a married Protestant man who has completed secondary school and has a mean score on all other individual-level variables in model 2 of table 8 in appendix B. This profile is held constant so religious differences can be assessed. Lowercase letters indicate significant differences ($p < .05$, two-tail test) between each religious group and the others, where p = Protestant, m = Muslim, h = Hindu, o = Eastern Orthodox, b = Buddhist, c = Catholic, n = no religion, and j = Jewish.

sexual intercourse is prohibited, and this is typically interpreted as including sex with anyone. Hindu texts provide more direction, explicitly stating that homosexual acts require penance. The ancient Hindu code, for example, explains, “A twice-born man who commits an unnatural offence with a male, or has intercourse with a female in a cart drawn by oxen, in water, or in the day-time, shall bathe, dressed in his clothes” (Vinaya 11,174 [Bühler 1886]).

Religions typically have subgroups or denominations that operate under a common name, tradition, or identity. Within Islam, for example, there are Sunni and Shiite Muslims. Finer distinctions could also be made based on the school of Islamic thought (e.g., Hanafi for Sunni Muslims). These narrower categories can be particularly important for understanding differences within the major religions for how adherents view homosexuality. In the WVS, Judeo-Christian faiths are the only ones for which researchers collected more detailed information on

subgroups.¹ While all Judeo-Christian faiths use a religious text that explicitly proscribes homosexuality, figure 3 shows that Jews, Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox Christians have not been as successful as Protestants at getting their adherents to form attitudes that are consistent with biblical statements that condemn homosexuality.

The findings about Protestants may seem somewhat surprising because many Protestant adherents in Europe and the United States appear quite liberal, and indeed many are. The reason that Protestants in figure 3 appear to have attitudes that are more similar to those of Muslims rather than of Catholics or Jews likely has to do with the much more traditional views that conservative Protestants have relative to mainline Protestants. Unfortunately, the WVS data do not distinguish between mainline (e.g., Presbyterian Church USA, United Church of Christ, and American Baptist Churches USA) and conservative or Evangelical Protestant denominations (e.g., American Baptist Association, Assemblies of God, Christian Brethren, and American Reformed Presbyterian Church). In a separate analysis I found that, compared with Muslims, Protestants have much greater variation in their attitudes,² suggesting that this group is a lot less cohesive. Additionally, research conducted in the United States, which has many diverse Protestant faiths, making it particularly ideal for examining differences, has found that when they are divided into mainline and conservative Protestant groups, the latter are especially likely to disapprove of homosexuality (Finlay and Walther 2003; Fulton, Gorsuch, and Maynard 1999; Hill, Moulton, and Burdette 2004). Conversely, mainline Protestants are more likely to resemble Catholics in their views about homosexuality (Burdette, Ellison, and Hill 2005).

Part of the reason for differences among Protestants is that mainline groups are more likely to interpret the Bible metaphorically and conservative Protestants are more likely to interpret it literally. With a literal interpretation of the Bible, conservative Protestants take a very basic view of the text and are less inclined to update their understanding with a more modern view of the world (Ellison and Musick 1993; Emerson and Hartman 2006; Hunter 1987). Likewise, as I discuss in more detail below, researchers have found that, compared with mainline groups, conservative branches of Protestantism have been growing more rapidly and that in some countries religious decline has been less extreme among conservative Protestants compared with mainline groups (Bibby 1978; D.M. Kelley 1977, 1978). Because conservative Protestants are more likely to interpret the Bible literally, have been

more successful at getting their adherents to abide by religious proscriptions, and have been growing faster—and are, therefore, increasing their influence—the entire group of Protestants (conservatives and mainlines) found in figure 3 appears to have attitudes that are more likely to resemble those of Muslims than those of other Judeo-Christian groups.

THE POWER OF RELIGIOUS REWARDS AND COSTS

The less supportive attitudes of Muslims and many Protestants exhibited in figure 3 are consistent with findings from a vast array of empirical studies (Adamczyk and Pitt 2009; Finlay and Walther 2003; Fulton, Gorsuch, and Maynard 1999; van den Akker, van der Ploeg, and Scheepers 2013; Hill, Moulton, and Burdette 2004; Kuyper, Iedema, and Keuzenkamp 2013). Indeed, it is rare to find research showing that Muslims and Protestants, especially those who adhere to more-conservative versions, report friendlier attitudes about homosexuality than other religious groups. The extent to which adherents literally interpret their religious texts can provide some information on differences in attitudes. As I explain below, rational choice perspectives on religion (Finke, Guest, and Stark 1996; Finke and Stark 2005; Iannaccone 1994, 1995; Stark and Finke 2000) are able to offer additional insight into why Muslims and Protestants (likely the more conservative ones) have been so successful at getting their followers to maintain attitudes that are consistent with religious proscriptions.

For much of the twentieth century social scientists generally thought that as nations became more economically developed, religious belief would decline. The idea was that when people began to feel more physically secure (Inglehart and Baker 2000) and were exposed to different religions, they would start questioning their faith, and eventually give up their beliefs for a more “rational” understanding of the world (Berger 2011).³ Consistent with these ideas, throughout the twentieth century religious belief in Europe—specifically, western Europe—appeared to be declining (Crockett and Voas 2006; Voas 2009; Voas and Crockett 2005). Many early social scientists who thought that religious secularization was occurring (e.g., Durkheim, Weber, Marx, and Freud) resided in Europe. The idea that the world was becoming more secular had a big influence on how they generally viewed religion at that time.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, researchers began to notice that religious belief was not universally declining. In many nations outside of western Europe, religious belief seemed to remain relatively high.

For example, in 1990, 80% of Americans reported that religion is important (WVS 2015). In contrast, in 1990 only 34% of Germany's residents reported that religion was important, in Spain it was 53%, and in Sweden it was 27%. In 2005 the proportion of Americans who found religion important dropped to 70% but was still quite high, especially compared with residents from many western European nations. In addition to relatively high levels of religious belief in many non-European countries, researchers began noticing that many newer religions (Stark and Iannaccone 1997), such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, were expanding (D.M. Kelley 1977, 1978). Likewise, religious fundamentalism seemed to be increasing in places, like Iran, that previously seemed to be secularizing (Almond, Appleby, and Sivan 2003). Finally, in some of the countries from the former Soviet Union (Greeley 1994), which had made great attempts to squelch belief, religious faith appeared to be increasing. The patterns revealed at the end of the twentieth century suggested that religious belief was not universally decreasing. Rather, in some places and for some religions it appeared to be growing.

Researchers working with the "New Paradigm" (C.M. Warner 1993), as it was initially referred to, began to develop alternative thoughts about what contributed to the rise and fall of religious belief. These researchers borrowed ideas from microeconomics to explain why some religions and denominations were much more successful than others at recruiting converts and maintaining their congregations (Finke, Guest, and Stark 1996; Finke and Stark 2005; Iannaccone 1994, 1995; Stark and Finke 2000). Ideas from the New Paradigm can help us understand why people from some religions and denominations are more likely than others to disapprove of homosexuality. The micro basis of these ideas is that people maximize benefits and try to reduce costs, even when they are considering which religion to follow (Iannaccone 1994, 1995; Stark and Finke 2000).

A key reason why people tend to stay in the same religion as their parents is that early religious experiences are likely to shape later religious preferences. For example, people who grew up with traditional organ music may not like religious services where an electric guitar is being played. Likewise, some people may have always felt comfortable with fellow adherents "speaking in tongues" (i.e., glossolalia), which is practiced by some conservative Protestants. However, individuals who are not familiar with it may find it bizarre and unsettling. Because people are typically born into a given faith (Myers 1996), there are high

costs, such as disappointing family members and fewer opportunities to socialize with friends, to leaving their religion. Indeed, Ellison and Sherkat (1995) point out that in some places the social and familial obligations to belonging to a given religion may be so strong that regular religious involvement may be perceived as involuntary.

Along with the costs of not belonging to a religion, there are typically a lot of benefits to being involved with a specific faith. By actively participating in a given religion or denomination, many adherents may feel that they will ultimately be rewarded for their devotion with a wonderful afterlife (Iannaccone 1994; Stark and Finke 2000). There are also short-term benefits. In many nations, including Ireland and Poland, religious organizations have been important institutions for organizing citizens around political goals (Bosi 2008; Johnston and Figa 1988). If residents are interested in political or economic change, it can be very useful to be involved with the local religious community. In the United States, for example, the Black church has historically been a key organizer for social and political concerns related to the African-American community (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

Additionally, some places of worship offer a warm and friendly group of congregants (Iannaccone 1994), free babysitting during religious activities, language classes, after-school activities for teens (Adamczyk 2012a, 2012b; Adamczyk and Felson 2012), and social, financial, and physical- and mental-health services (Cnaan, Sinha, and McGrew 2004; Twombly 2002). If adherents are encouraged to primarily interact with other religious followers, the religious organization typically provides opportunities to socialize. These occasions may include ice-cream socials, bowling nights, and Sunday-morning breakfasts.

Religions and denominations differ in the extent to which they make demands on their followers and their ability to get their adherents to abide by religious proscriptions (Iannaccone 1994). These demands may include restrictions on food (e.g., not eating pork, beef, or onions), dress (e.g., wearing the hijab), and interactions (e.g., not spending time with unrelated people of the opposite sex). It may seem that having many restrictions would make a religion less desirable. Certainly, there are some religious groups that are particularly strict, and the heavy obligations cause some people to leave. But, as Stark (1996b) and Iannaccone (1994) point out, under the right circumstances the exact opposite may occur. Some people may feel that because they make sacrifices that other people are unwilling to make, they have a particularly special relationship with God.

How do these ideas shed light on differences between religions in how adherents think about homosexuality? Differences in attitudes about homosexuality can partially be explained by the success of different religions and denominations in getting their adherents to abide by religious proscriptions and develop feelings and opinions that are consistent with more-literal interpretations of homosexuality in religious texts. Muslims and conservative Protestants are some of the fastest-growing religious groups (Almond, Appleby, and Sivan 2003; Bibby 1978; D.M. Kelley 1977, 1978). They also appear more successful than others at getting their followers to abide by their demands. A number of studies have found that relative to other major religions, conservative Protestants and Muslims are better able to shape a range of attitudes and behaviors, including those regarding premarital and extramarital sex (Adamczyk and Hayes 2012), alcohol consumption (Adamczyk 2011; Ghandour, Karam, and Maalouf 2009), prostitution (Stack, Adamczyk, and Cao 2010), pornography (Sherkat and Ellison 1997), and abortion (Adamczyk 2008; Evans 2002).

CATHOLICISM, VATICAN II, AND LIBERAL ATTITUDES ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

Before discussing the role of religious importance, differences in the views of Catholics and Protestants warrant some attention. In certain parts of the world (e.g., North America and Europe) Catholicism and Protestantism share a lot of similarities and to some extent have competed with each other for adherents. It may seem like Catholics should be more conservative in their attitudes than Protestants—in part because they have some sex-related proscriptions, like birth control and divorce, that many Protestant groups do not share. However, as shown in figure 3, Catholics are significantly more liberal than Protestants in their views about homosexuality. Why are Catholics on average more tolerant than Protestants? There are a couple of reasons for these differences.

Because several nations in the WVS did not make finer distinctions between conservative and mainline Protestants, both groups are combined in figure 3. Protestants appear more conservative, in part, because a substantial proportion of them are likely to take the Bible literally and, as discussed above, their brand of Protestantism generates higher levels of devotion. Catholics and mainline Protestants are more inclined to view the Bible metaphorically. Additionally, in the 1960s the Catholic Church enacted Vatican II, which revised many Catholic rituals and sof-

tened restrictions. The church's goal was to provide a more individualized and less institutionalized version of Catholicism (Pope 2012; Vatican II—Voice of the Church, n.d.). However, by making the faith more accessible, Vatican II may have inadvertently reduced the extent to which adherents felt that they were giving a lot to a demanding God who was going to allow only the most ardent believers into his kingdom. Since Vatican II Catholic religious engagement has declined (Ignazi and Wellhofer 2013; Stark and Finke 2000; Stark and Iannaccone 1996), even as many people still claim a Catholic religious and cultural identity.

Since the Catholic Church is clear in its condemnation of homosexuality, Catholics who are actively engaged in their faith and take it very seriously are going to be less likely to approve of homosexuality. However, the proportion of Catholics who say their religion is very important is only 48%, which is much lower than it is for Muslims (78%) and Protestants (60%).⁴ If people are born Catholic or in a nation, like Italy or Spain, where the Catholic Church has a long history, many may continue to claim a Catholic identity, even if they do not actively attend religious services or use their faith to inform their attitudes and behaviors. (See chapter 5.)

THE KEY ROLE OF RELIGIOUS IMPORTANCE IN SHAPING ATTITUDES

So far I have been focused on explaining how adherents of the various major religions differ in their attitudes about homosexuality. As noted above, all major religions have proscriptions regarding homosexuality. Within any of the major religions, people who are highly committed to their faith, regardless of what it is, are going to be more likely to disapprove of homosexuality (Ellison, Acevedo, and Ramos-Wada 2011; van den Akker, van der Ploeg, and Scheepers 2013; Hill, Moulton, and Burdette 2004). Indeed, as I illustrate in figure 4, the extent to which people say religion is important in their lives has a greater influence on their attitudes than the specific religion to which they adhere. As I explain below, there are several processes through which religious importance may shape attitudes (Olson, Cadge, and Harrison 2006; Sherkat et al. 2011; Whitley 2001).

One of the major ways through which religious importance is likely to shape views is through individuals' engagement with a community of other religious believers. Individuals who say that religion is important in their lives are more likely to be physically involved in their faith (Pew

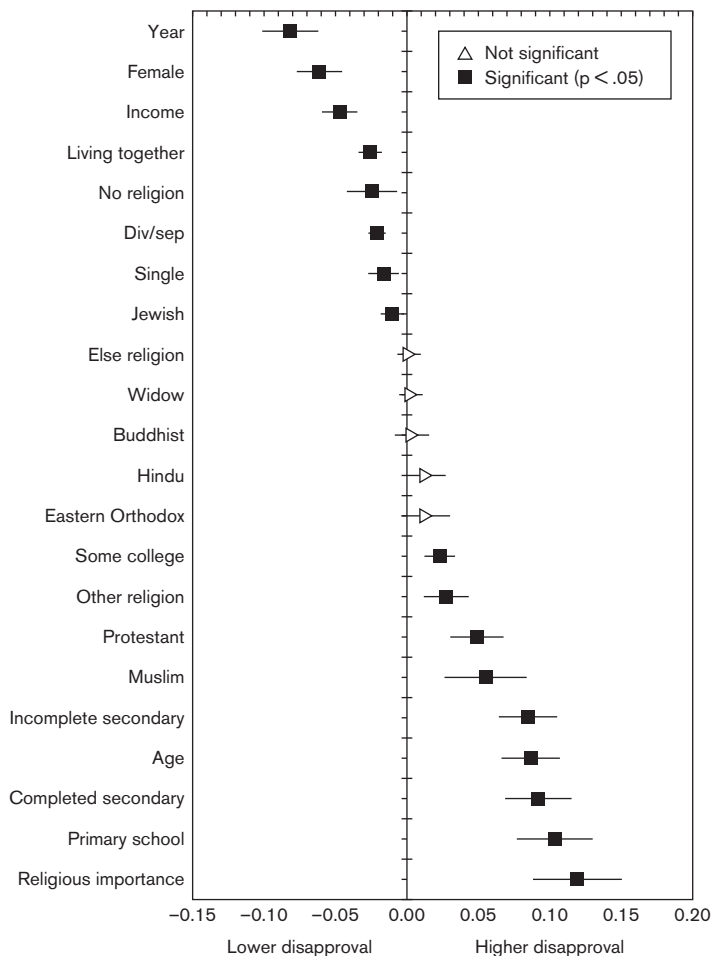


FIGURE 4. Standardized coefficients of individual characteristics for explaining disapproval of homosexuality. (Society N = 87; individual N = 202,316)

SOURCE: WVS, waves 4, 5, and 6.

NOTE: It can be difficult to compare standardized variables for both dummies and interval-level variables from the same model. The standard formula, which is used here, is: $\text{Beta} = \text{unstandardized coefficient} \times (\text{standard deviation of the dependent variable} / \text{standard deviation of the predictor})$ ($\text{Beta} = \beta (S_x/S_y)$). One problem with standardizing interval and dummy variables this way is that, although a standard deviation is applicable to interval-level variables, it does not intuitively make sense for dummy variables. To assess relative influence among dummy variables, their untransformed coefficients can be compared with each other. The coefficients used to create this figure were taken from model 1, table 8 in appendix B. The reference category for religious affiliation is “Catholic,” for marital affiliation it is “married,” and for education it is “completed college.”

Research Center 2008). All religions have opportunities for people to engage other adherents through religious classes, services, rituals, and study groups. With these activities religious followers are likely to get formal exposure to how their religion views homosexuality, and all religions have some proscriptions regarding homosexuality. In sermons and speeches some religious leaders may describe homosexuality as a sin or social evil (Adamczyk, Kim, and Paradis 2015). Many religious organizations are also likely to informally disseminate information about issues such as homosexuality through fliers and word-of-mouth, and help organize people from within and outside their congregations to attend public talks and protests related to the morality of homosexuality or the legalization of same-sex relationships (Agadjanian and Menjívar 2008; Miceli 2005; Scheitle and Hahn 2011).

A lot of research has found that, along with formally engaging their faith, individuals who take their religion seriously are likely to develop relationships with other religious followers who may influence their feelings and behaviors (Adamczyk and Felson 2012; Adamczyk and Palmer 2008; Regnerus 2002, 2003). Through social interactions (Akers 2009; Sutherland 1947) with other religious people, adherents learn how to think about and address a given issue. As a result of exposure, observation, and interaction with other religious followers, adherents may come to disapprove of homosexuality. Additionally, when people feel attached to others they are less likely to exhibit attitudes and participate in behaviors about which they think others would disapprove (Hirschi 2009). Finally, a number of studies have found that the more formally and informally religious people are involved with other religious adherents, the less time and energy they have to develop relationships with individuals who may have alternative views (Scheitle and Adamczyk 2009; Schwadel 2005).

Through social learning (Akers 2009; Sutherland 1947) and control processes (Hirschi 2009), religious adherents may develop attitudes that are consistent with religious proscriptions regarding homosexuality. But even if they do not initially support the views of their religion, Kelman's (2006) work suggests that over time they may adopt dominant perspectives to maintain their sense of self and increase the likelihood of a desirable relationship with others whom they value (see also Adamczyk and Hayes 2012). As a result, adherents who belong to a religion that disapproves of homosexuality may adopt the more negative views of the larger group to preserve relationships with other congregants and maintain a self-image based on the expectations of their religious reference group.

SPURIOUS RELATIONSHIPS, RELIGIOUS SWITCHING, AND CHANGES TO RELIGION

Up until this point, religious beliefs and affiliation have been described as *influencing* attitudes, and there is good reason to think that they precede feelings about homosexuality. Most people develop their initial beliefs when they are children. Parents have one of the most important effects on their children's religious faith (Myers 1996; Ozorak 1989), in part, because they control the religion to which their children have access and the extent of their children's involvement, since they will likely bring them to the house of worship. In general, people's level of religious involvement tends to change at least some over their life course, decreasing during young adulthood as they leave home and encounter new experiences, and increasing again as they settle down and begin to have children of their own. Nevertheless, religious affiliation tends to remain stable. Research has found that a relatively small proportion of people switch faiths, especially from stricter denominations to more liberal ones or from one major religion, like Islam, to another, such as Christianity (Barro and Hwang 2008; Scheitle and Adamczyk 2010). Likewise, a key predictor of the strength of people's religious faith is their parents' level of religious belief and engagement (Ruiter and Van Tubergen 2009). Even before children have much understanding of the differences between homosexuality, bisexuality, and heterosexuality, if their parents are religious, they will have been exposed to religion, and initial beliefs are likely to have begun developing (Myers 1996).

While there is good reason to think that religious beliefs precede views about homosexuality, personal experiences, including relationships with openly gay men and lesbians, can affect attitudes about homosexuality, even among religious people. When more-religious individuals encounter ideas or have experiences that make them rethink their views on a given issue, like homosexuality, how do they negotiate the potential discord between their religion and feelings about homosexuality? If religious believers have experiences that suggest that homosexuality is not as morally problematic as their religion argues, they may try to downplay how their faith views homosexuality, focusing instead on their faith's other valuable characteristics.

Additionally, within the same religion and even denomination, there is a range of different perspectives on the morality of homosexuality, depending, in part, on how literally leaders encourage adherents to view religious proscriptions. Religious believers who struggle with inconsis-

encies between their religion's view and personal feelings about homosexuality may switch to a more accepting or tolerant denomination or house of worship (e.g., church or mosque) within the same religion (e.g., moving from Missouri Synod Lutheran to Evangelical Lutheran). If individuals cannot find a more appealing "brand" of religion that better matches their feelings, they may ultimately leave their faith.

Religions and denominations can also change their stance on homosexuality, which can affect the way adherents feel about homosexuality. For example, over the past thirty years American Evangelical Christians' views on homosexuality have become a little more liberal (J.N. Thomas and Olson 2012), though they are still a lot less tolerant than mainline Protestants and Catholics. This change in the church's perspective appears to be moving very slowly, though in step with society-wide adjustments that have occurred within the United States (Andersen and Fetner 2008a; Loftus 2001). As church leaders, religious publishers, and Christian media outlets put forth more-liberal interpretations on the morality of homosexuality, they may influence how religious believers view homosexuality. There is a dynamic interaction between larger societal perspectives on homosexuality, adherents' feelings about same-sex relationships, and the views put forth by religious organizations, leaders, and publishers.

WHY CONSERVATIVE RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENTS REDUCE SUPPORT FOR HOMOSEXUALITY

When people think about the influence of religion, they may consider the role that personal religious beliefs play in shaping attitudes. However, the religious beliefs of others can also have a powerful effect on one's own attitudes and behaviors (Adamczyk 2009; Adamczyk and Felson 2006; Adamczyk and Palmer 2008) and how they see the world (Finke and Adamczyk 2008; van den Akker, van der Ploeg, and Scheepers 2013). For understanding cross-national attitudes about homosexuality, the overall strength of religious belief within a nation is particularly important. In appendix B, table 8, model 3, I provide insight into how a nation's overall levels of religious importance shape attitudes. Even after accounting for a range of personal characteristics including personal religious beliefs, as the overall level of religious importance increases, all residents become less accepting of homosexuality.

What is the process through which the national religious context shapes residents' attitudes?⁵ The macro religious climate will include

some of the power of more-intimate and local religious influences. Hence, when a high proportion of people within a nation find religion important, friendship groups are more likely to be infused with religious people whose views on issues like homosexuality are likely known or assumed. To preserve relationships with other religious people they value and to maintain a self-image based on reference-group expectations, even residents with little religious faith may adopt majority views on moral issues like homosexuality.

Additionally, in more-religious nations both local and national media outlets are likely to reflect dominant religious views, and businesses, schools, and other institutions will be more likely to support religiously inspired preferences, including those that disapprove of homosexuality. In more-religious countries, religious organizations may assume more functions, including organizing social events and coordinating residents to take civic and political action. In some religious nations like Saudi Arabia, religious leaders provide direct input into government decisions, making laws and creating policies that support religious precepts that are likely to condemn homosexuality. Likewise, the more highly religious and conservative people are, the less likely residents will be to encounter ideas and individuals who challenge religion-inspired perspectives regarding homosexuality. The government in more-religious countries may censor newspapers, magazines, and television so that they do not violate religious sensibilities. They may also restrict nonprofit organizations and human rights groups that promote views that are inconsistent with conservative religious precepts. Finally, there may not be any gay bars or other social places for LGBTQ individuals to meet other people who have friendlier attitudes, and there may be limited access to Internet sites where one could get more information about gay and lesbian people.

Even if the macro religious climate is not giving a direct message about the unacceptability of homosexuality, norms and policies related to other “moral” issues such as premarital sex may remind residents that religious precepts are generally supported. For example, Islam discourages the free mixing of the sexes (Muslim Women’s League 1999), and many Muslim leaders and adherents support this religious precept. Nations like Saudi Arabia have formally implemented laws and policies that limit the mixing of the sexes, and religious police monitor public interactions (Raphael 2009). As a result, all residents are less likely to see men and women who are unrelated to each other informally interacting in public. But even in nations that do not have such laws, if they have a high proportion of religiously engaged Muslims, religious

precepts regarding interactions between the sexes may be informally supported (Adamczyk and Hayes 2012). These religiously inspired restrictions serve to remind both religious and secular residents that they are living in a country where religious precepts related to a range of issues, including homosexuality, are generally upheld.

Differences in the macro religious climate can explain, in part, why there are such big differences in cross-national attitudes about homosexuality. Additionally, because the macro religious context has an effect on attitudes beyond the influence of personal religious beliefs, it may be particularly difficult to change the way a nation's people view homosexuality. Not only would people's understanding of religious precepts regarding homosexuality have to change, but so would the larger culture (e.g., informal norms and values) and structure (e.g., laws, policies, and religious police) so that even less-religious people would come to see homosexuality in a new light.

THE ROLE OF THE DOMINANT RELIGION

In addition to the strength of religious belief within a country, the majority religion is likely to shape attitudes. Most nations are dominated by a single world religion, and only Christianity and Islam are prominent in a large number of nations. In countries like Azerbaijan, Niger, and Senegal, over 95% of people affiliate with Islam. Conversely, in nations such as Namibia, Haiti, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, less than 1% of people affiliate with Islam and over 90% of people affiliate with Christianity (i.e., Catholicism or Protestantism). While Hinduism and Buddhism have large followings, these faiths dominate a minority of nations, and only in Israel does Judaism dominate.

As discussed above, conservative Protestants and Muslims are more likely than other religious adherents to disapprove of homosexuality, in part, because these faiths are particularly successful at generating high levels of religious belief and commitment. Additionally, their leaders are more likely to encourage a literal interpretation of religious proscriptions. In figure 5, I present the mean disapproval level of homosexuality by the dominant faith of the nation. Nations that are dominated by Islam have the highest mean level of disapproval. Nations with a mixture of conservative Protestantism and other types of Christianity also have populations that are highly disapproving. I noted above that many European nations have Protestant-majority populations and are supportive of homosexuality, but their more conservative counterparts in other parts of the world

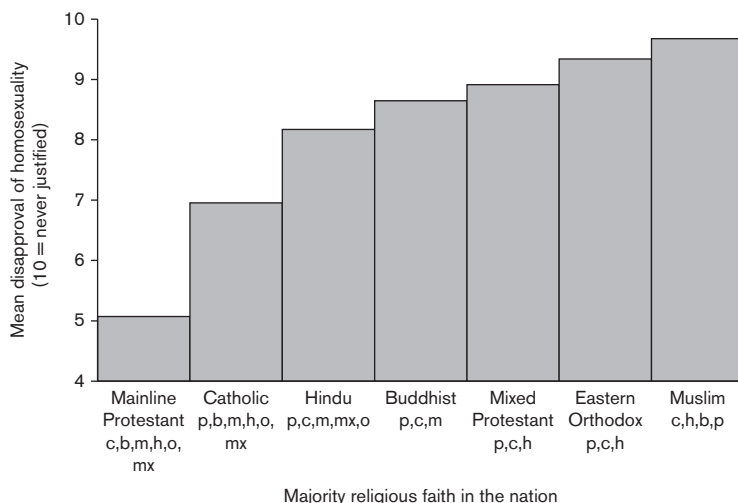


FIGURE 5. Marginal estimates for individual disapproval of homosexuality by the majority religious faith in the nation. (Society $N = 87$; individual $N = 202,316$)

SOURCE: WVS, waves 4, 5, and 6.

NOTE: Marginal estimates are presented for a married Protestant man who has completed secondary school and has a mean score on all other individual-level variables in model 2 of table 8 in appendix B. Lowercase letters indicate significant differences ($p < .05$, two-tail test) between each religious group and the others, where p = Mainline Protestant, mx = Mixed Christian, m = Muslim, o = Eastern Orthodox, c = Catholic, b = Buddhist, and h = Hindu. In a separate analysis I found that controlling for whether the respondent lived in Africa had no significant effect on the results.

lower the overall mean for Protestant nations in general. This distinction is well illustrated in figure 5, where, unlike in the individual-level analysis, I am able to differentiate between mainline Protestant countries and nations that include a mixture of Christian faiths, including conservative Protestants. The nations categorized as mainline Protestant are Finland, Great Britain, New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden. (See appendix A.) As a whole, these nations have the most liberal views. Additionally, while these nations have Protestant histories, they have some of the lowest proportions of residents who are activity engaged in their faith.

Another distinction that is important in figure 5 is that nations dominated by the Eastern Orthodox faith (e.g., Russia, Romania, Ukraine, etc.) also appear to have highly disapproving views. Indeed, there is no statistical difference in the level of disapproval between residents living in mixed Protestant, Muslim, and Eastern Orthodox nations. The individual-level data found in figure 3 show that Muslims and Protestants

have the least-approving views, and these findings are consistent with those found in figure 5. Conversely, figure 3 shows that, relative to others, Eastern Orthodox adherents fall in the middle. They are more liberal than Muslims and Protestants, and less supportive than Jews and people with no religion. They do not differ significantly from Buddhists or Catholics.

So why do people living in nations dominated by the Eastern Orthodox faith appear so conservative when Eastern Orthodox adherents appear relatively moderate? I think that part of the answer comes from some of the other dynamics surrounding homosexuality in nations dominated by the Eastern Orthodox faith. Many Eastern Orthodox nations have Communist pasts and only recently became democratic. In the next chapter I will explain the important role that democracy has in shaping attitudes. Additionally, over the last twenty years many Western nations have increasingly supported homosexuality and related rights. Some Eastern Orthodox nations, like Russia, have pushed back against this pressure, which seems related, in part, to historical conflicts (i.e., the Cold War) between these countries and concerns related to Western imperialism (Stan and Turcescu 2000; Wilkinson 2014). Likewise, there has been a movement in some Eastern Orthodox nations to embrace “traditional values,” which are being promoted as a key part of national identity (Turcescu and Stan 2005; Wilkinson 2014). The differences presented in figure 5 may be more illustrative of historical, cultural, and institutional dynamics than the influence of Eastern Orthodox adherents, who on average have attitudes that fall at the mean for religious followers across the world.

MORAL COMMUNITIES AND PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

In addition to a direct influence of the religious climate on all residents, social scientists have investigated whether some religious contexts, such as schools and friendship groups, have a greater effect on the attitudes and behaviors of more-religious people than secular individuals. Sociologists of religion refer to this relationship as the *moral communities hypothesis*, which posits that when religious adherents are around other religious people, religious followers’ own beliefs are more likely to influence their own behaviors (Finke and Adamczyk 2008; Regnerus 2003; Stark 1996a; Stark, Kent, and Doyle 1982). Rodney Stark (1996a), who initially laid the groundwork for the moral communities hypothesis,

explains that when individuals are around other religious people, “religion enters freely into everyday interactions and becomes a valid part of the normative system” strengthening the relation between personal religiosity and behavior (164). Conversely, when more-religious individuals are in the minority, religion becomes a compartmentalized part of their life and is less likely to shape attitudes and behaviors.

Researchers have tested the moral communities hypothesis by looking at whether a high proportion of people within friendship groups (Adamczyk and Felson 2006; Adamczyk and Palmer 2008), schools (Regnerus 2003; Stark, Kent, and Doyle 1982), regions (Stark 1996a), and nations (Finke and Adamczyk 2008; Scheepers, Te Grotenhuis, and Van Der Slik 2002) strengthen the relationship between personal religious beliefs and attitudes and behaviors related to premarital sex, delinquency, and crime. The greatest support for the moral communities hypothesis has been found at more-micro levels like friendship groups (Adamczyk 2012c) and schools (Regnerus 2003; Stark, Kent, and Doyle 1982). Very few studies have found support for the moral communities hypothesis at the national level, and there have not been any studies finding that the country religious context moderates the effect of personal religious beliefs on attitudes about homosexuality. I, too, tested for a moral communities effect on attitudes about homosexuality and did not find a statistically significant influence. (See appendix B, table 9, model 5.)

It would make sense that the moral communities effect is more likely to be found in more-micro contexts. Stark, Kent, and Doyle (1982) point out that it is in more-intimate groups and places where people really get to know each other that religious norms become salient. Some of the religious influence emanating from smaller contexts emerges at the national level, but this force is more likely to affect all people rather than just more-religious individuals. For understanding the influence of the national religious context on attitudes about homosexuality, it is important to keep in mind that the proportion of residents who find religion important influences the attitudes of secular *and* religious residents.

OTHER DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS THAT SHAPE ATTITUDES

Aside from the importance of religion and religious affiliation, there are several other demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and education, that are associated with attitudes about homosexuality. In the

next chapter I am going to take a closer look at the macro factors, aside from religion, that shape public opinion. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the other personal characteristics that are likely to shape disapproval of homosexuality across a range of different nations.

In figure 4, I presented the relationship between seven substantively meaningful and statistically significant demographic characteristics (i.e., religious importance, education, age, religious affiliation, marital status, income, and gender) for explaining disapproval of homosexuality in a sample of eighty-seven nations across the world. Beyond the characteristics presented in figure 4, there are a host of other factors that may explain why some people are more likely to approve of homosexuality than others. For example, seeing two men being physically beaten by police for holding hands may increase sympathy for homosexuality-related issues. Conversely, being propositioned as a youth by someone of the same sex may lead to less tolerance for homosexuality. There are likely to be some additional factors that could explain attitudes but cannot be as easily measured. Figure 4 presents the major demographic factors that researchers, including me, have found to be consistently related to feelings about homosexuality and are relatively easy to measure

Across the world, women tend to have more liberal attitudes about homosexuality than men (Hinrichs and Rosenberg 2002; Kerns and Fine 1994; V.K.G. Lim 2002; Meaney and Rye 2010; Winter, Webster, and Cheung 2008). Research has found that one of the most common explanations for why men and women differ relates to variation in gender-role values (Butler 1990). Men are more likely than women to have attitudes that are consistent with traditional gender roles (Brown and Henriquez 2008). People who have more-traditional views of gender are more likely than others to think that women should be feminine and nurturing and be their family's primary caretaker. Likewise, from a more-traditional perspective, men should appear strong, masculine, and stoic, and be the family's primary breadwinner.

Because they are not exclusively attracted to the opposite sex, people who engage in same-sex behaviors do not follow traditional gender roles. Additionally, they may dress or act in ways that do not conform to traditional gender stereotypes. Some research has suggested that gender differences in tolerance for homosexuality can be completely explained by gender differences in traditional gender-role attitudes (Kerns and Fine 1994). Hence, rather than biology explaining differences between men and women, people who strongly value traditional gender roles may be less likely to be supportive, regardless of their gender.

The majority of scholarly work on attitudes about homosexuality does not distinguish between feelings toward various LGBTQ individuals. For researchers interested in understanding how gender and sexual identity intersect, as well as the ways race and economic status may complicate this relationship, this lack of data is a big limitation (Worthen 2013). Unless one asks how people feel about different groups (e.g., bisexual vs. gay, or black queer men vs. white queer women), it is difficult to assess the extent to which the public's views may change depending on individual characteristics. Some of the research (Herek 2000; Hinrichs and Rosenberg 2002; Kerns and Fine 1994) that has tried to disaggregate attitudes related to various LGBTQ individuals has found that men and women tend to differ more in their attitudes toward gay men than toward lesbians. Studies by Eliason (1997) and Herek (1988), for example, find that heterosexual men are more likely to feel coldly toward gay men but have warmer feelings towards lesbians, perhaps because lesbians are seen as less of a threat to their masculine identities. Likewise, research by Herek and McLemore (2013) shows that some people tend to express less-favorable views toward bisexual individuals than toward those who are exclusively homosexual, possibly reflecting negative stereotypes that bisexuals are less likely to be monogamous and more likely to spread sexually transmitted diseases like HIV.

As I show in figure 4, education also has an important role to play in explaining why people differ in their attitudes. People with higher levels of education on average tend to have more supportive views. Some research has argued that education can increase cognitive sophistication, leading to more tolerance and support for homosexuality (Ohlander, Batalova, and Treas 2005). People with higher levels of education are more likely to have nuanced understandings of the world and are more likely to be accepting of ambiguities and inconsistencies (Jackman and Muha 1984). Some research has also found that while less-educated people are more likely to rigidly classify others, more-educated people are less likely to make judgments that are mediated by irrational anxieties (e.g., feelings of threat) (Sniderman et al. 1991). They may also be better at expressing their feelings about other out-groups (Chong 1993), drawing a distinction between their personal views about specific behaviors (i.e., the morality of homosexuality) and whether a group that they may not personally like should be given civil liberties and rights.

In appendix B, table 8, model 1, I present the coefficients for individual-level influences, including education. As I was putting this analysis

together, I found that education did not have a linear effect on attitudes whereby peoples' attitudes became incrementally more tolerant as individuals gained education. There were some differences between respondents who, for example, attended primary school as opposed to secondary school. However, for different educational levels the biggest increases in tolerance were found for individuals who attended college versus those who only completed high school. The importance of this distinction emerges again in the next chapter when I discuss the macro influence of education on shaping attitudes.

Along with education, I show in figure 4 that income also has a liberating influence on attitudes about homosexuality. While more-educated people also tend to have higher incomes, the influence of income remains even after accounting for education. (See also Andersen and Fetner 2008a, 2008b; and Kuyper, Iedema, and Keuzenkamp 2013.) Why do people with higher incomes tend to be more supportive of homosexuality? Some work has found that people with higher incomes tend to be more tolerant (Andersen and Fetner 2008b), in part, because they tend to enjoy a greater sense of security. People with lower incomes are more likely to be particularly concerned about having enough money to support themselves and their families. Conversely, research has suggested that individuals with more economic resources are less likely to feel competition from others and, hence, are more likely to be comfortable in their social position, leading to greater trust and limiting prejudice (Kunovich 2004).

In addition to gender, education, and income, a number of studies, including my findings presented in figure 4, show that marital status appears to have a role in shaping attitudes (Sherkat et al. 2011; Sherkat, De Vries, and Creek 2010). People who are more conservative and value a more traditional family structure are more likely to get married. Once married, they are likely to develop relationships with other people who hold more-conservative values and have a traditional family, further influencing their attitudes about homosexuality.

A final demographic factor that a number of previous studies, and my findings presented in appendix B, have found to be associated with attitudes is age. The influence of age tends to be confounded with cohort differences where the same age group (e.g., baby boomers, generation X) tends to have many of the same experiences and, therefore, develop similar attitudes. Younger people and those from later cohorts tend to have more-permissive attitudes about sex-related issues in general (Finke and Adamczyk 2008) and about homosexuality in particular

(Kuyper, Iedema, and Keuzenkamp 2013). One possible reason for this relationship is that younger people often have more time and energy than older individuals. People tend to invest in important social problems and movements that are pushing for change when they are not overly committed to their occupations, families, or a specific geographical location (Ryder 1965)—any of which may limit the time, energy, and interest they have in new social issues.

Major historical events can also have an important influence on young minds, shaping the way an entire cohort thinks about a given issue. For example, beginning in the 1980s the HIV/AIDS crisis in the United States became a major news issue. For some Americans the media attention given to HIV/AIDS and the government's initially inadequate response may have had a role in shaping their views. Research has found that, once people begin to adhere to a given set of values, they tend to become more cognitively and structurally constrained so that the views they develop in their youth are likely to maintain themselves as they get older (Alwin and Krosnick 1991).

TRADITIONAL VALUES, AN AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY, AND CONTACT

Aside from the five demographic characteristics I discussed above (i.e., gender, education, income, marital status, and age), there are three additional factors that previous research has found are fairly consistently related to attitudes about homosexuality. These are traditional values, an authoritarian personality, and the extent of contact with openly gay and lesbian individuals. These factors tend to overlap with some of the other demographic characteristics mentioned above. Men and married individuals, for example, are more likely to value traditional gender roles, which can explain why they tend to have cooler feelings about homosexuality than others. But, irrespective of their gender, people with more-traditional values about sex and gender issues are also more likely to view homosexuality as problematic (Brewer 2003; Hicks and Lee 2006; Lottes and Alkula 2011), in part, because LGBTQ individuals do not conform to traditional gender roles (Kerns and Fine 1994; Whitley 2001).

People who value extreme gender-role rigidity may also have stronger authoritarian leanings (Adorno et al. 1950; Altemeyer 1998). The characteristics associated with an authoritarian personality include a strong desire for order, power, security, status, structured authority, and

obedience. Research has found that because people with these traits tend to have a stronger attachment to the status quo, they are more likely to oppose ideas that are new or different from what they already know, including views that may be seen as challenging traditional establishments (Haddock and Zanna 1998). They may also be more likely to react punitively toward people whose behavior seems unconventional (Abrams and Della Fave 1976). Consistent with these ideas, a number of studies have found that individuals with authoritarian personality characteristics tend to be less supportive of homosexuality (Detenber et al. 2013; K. Kelley et al. 1997; Vicario, Liddle, and Luzzo 2005; Whitley and Lee 2000).

Finally, there is a lot of research showing that people who are friends with someone who is openly gay or lesbian are likely to have friendlier feelings toward homosexuality (Detenber et al. 2013; Herek and Capitanio 1996; Hinrichs and Rosenberg 2002). Indeed, across a range of studies, personally knowing someone who identifies as gay or lesbian is an important predictor of people's feelings about homosexuality (Detenber et al. 2013; Herek and Capitanio 1996; Hinrichs and Rosenberg 2002). Familiarity, especially if it is related to likability, tends to breed empathy, trust, and compassion. Of course, the relationship can also work in the opposite direction. Openly gay and lesbian individuals are going to be hesitant about coming out to someone who does not seem supportive of homosexuality. Conversely, if they feel that someone is accepting, they may be more inclined to reveal their identity and develop a relationship.

THE POWERFUL INFLUENCE OF OVERLAPPING INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

The way that social scientists tend to measure and present the influence of individual characteristics may make it seem like these factors operate in isolation. All of the individual factors discussed above and presented in figure 4 do indeed have independent influences on attitudes. Hence, irrespective of their gender, married couples are more likely than single individuals to disapprove of homosexuality. Likewise, even though income and education are correlated, they have unique effects on attitudes. However, these factors also tend to have reciprocal relationships with each other, strengthening their overall influence. Hence, someone who has more-traditional values *and* a more authoritarian personality is more likely to be interested in getting married. Getting married is

likely to lead to more interactions with other people who have conservative values, further enforcing an individual's own disapproving views about homosexuality and limiting the likelihood of their interacting with someone who is openly gay.

While each individual characteristic can influence the extent to which people disapprove of homosexuality, their collective effect is powerful. Hence, young single women who are childless, graduate from college, have high incomes, and are moderately religious have a mean disapproval score of 6.20 on a scale ranging from 1 (i.e., homosexuality is always justified) to 10 (i.e., homosexuality is never justified). In contrast, older, married, highly religious men with a primary school education and low incomes have an average score of 9.36.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided insight into the influence of religion and several demographic characteristics for understanding why people differ in how they feel about homosexuality. Gender, education, income, marital status, age, and religion are important factors. Regardless of where they live, my analysis presented in figure 4 and appendix B shows that on average people who have the same demographic profile tend to have attitudes that vary in a similar way. Hence, in both Uganda and the United States older people tend to have more-disapproving attitudes than younger individuals. In terms of how demographics shape attitudes, residents across the world are not that different from each other. Among the demographics examined, religious importance has the greatest influence on attitudes about homosexuality.

Not only do personal religious beliefs shape attitudes, but so does the religious context of a nation. Overall levels of religious importance within a nation, as well as the dominant religious faith, can shape attitudes about homosexuality, even for people who do not think religion is very important or do not affiliate with a given faith. Additionally, as I showed with the contrast between religious adherents and the dominant faith, differences between individual religious adherents (e.g., Eastern Orthodox, Protestant) are not always mirrored at the national level. Factors like the cultural history and regional dynamics may be at least partially responsible for cross-national differences in attitudes that appear to be related to the dominant religion.