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Religious Tradition, Religiosity, Or Everyday Theologies? Unpacking Religion's Relationship To Support For Legalizing Same-Sex Marriage Among A College Student Sample

By: N. Eugene Walls, Michael R. Woodford, and **Denise L. Levy**

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ORIGINAL PAPER

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Keywords   Same-sex marriage · Gay · Lesbian · Bisexual · Sexual minority · Religion · Religiosity · Everyday theologies

Introduction

Over the past few decades, support for lesbian and gay rights has increased (Avery et al. 2007), with same-sex marriage being a focal point in the recent political landscape of the United States. Currently, same-sex marriage is legal in 13 U.S. states (California, Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts,

N. E. Walls (✉)
Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver, 2148 S. High St., Denver, CO 80208, USA
e-mail: ewalls2@du.edu

M. R. Woodford
School of Social Work, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

D. L. Levy
Department of Social Work, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, USA

Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington), Washington D.C., and among Oregon's Coquille, with several other states in the midst of legislative initiatives or judicial hearings that could eventually allow same-sex couples to be legally married. As legislation and court cases move forward, supporters and opponents of same-sex marriage continue to vocalize their opinions in the public sphere. This includes a number of religious groups, with some having played instrumental roles in recent legislative battles, mostly opposing the legalization of same-sex marriage. The involvement of religious groups in the same-sex civil marriage movement is not surprising given the historical influence of religious institutions in defining romantic and intimate relationships (Herman 2001; Warner 1993).

Research demonstrates that Americans' opinions about legalizing same-sex marriage are strongly influenced by religion (Herek 2006; Olson et al. 2006). However, scholarship on the topic is limited in several ways. Sociological research on religion has primarily attended to religious tradition—the faith and denominational tradition embraced by the individual—and religiosity—the devoutness or importance of one's faith in one's life—while giving less attention to the actual religious beliefs of individuals (Yamane 2007). The opposite pattern exists in the social psychological research on religion wherein beliefs and religiosity are often examined, but religious tradition is not (Batson and Ventis 1982). Few studies have examined all three, potentially obscuring the possibility that religious tradition, religiosity, and individually held religious beliefs all contribute uniquely to attitudes. By failing to include all three, existing scholarship may have missed much of the explanatory power of religion (Yamane 2007). It is to this gap in the literature that this study speaks.

To better understand the role of religion in shaping opinions about legalizing same-sex marriage, it is important to consider the role of personal religious beliefs, or what Moon (2004) terms *everyday theologies,* in the context of religious tradition and religiosity. "If we accept that social power works through beliefs, through people's deeply held understandings of the world, then it is all the more crucial … to analyze their effects on people" (p. 8). And just as policies about same-sex marriage are evolving, both in terms of governmental policy and denominational doctrine, the same is likely true for individual opinions, as people's everyday theologies evolve.

While there have been shifts toward greater endorsement for legalizing same-sex marriage in the United States within generational cohorts in the last few years, the clearest pattern is one across generations where young adults are more likely than older generations to support legalization (Jones 2013). This makes young adults an important population to examine in the context of the legalization of same-sex marriage. However little is known about the role that religion plays among young adults with regard to their attitudes about civil same-sex marriage. To advance knowledge of the role religion plays in endorsement for the legal recognition of same-sex marriage among young adults, among a sample of college students we examine the explanatory power of everyday theologies, operationalized as endorsement for six different religious themes, and that of religious tradition and religiosity. Additionally, we test several hypotheses regarding various dimensions of everyday theologies, while controlling for religious tradition and religiosity among

a sample of college students. To create robust models, we also control for demographic factors known to be important predictors of attitudes regarding same-sex relationship recognition and same-sex sexuality. Alongside building scientific knowledge, the results are informative for social movements aiming to promote and foster support for legalizing same-sex marriage, as well as those opposed to such efforts. Knowledge about how to frame issues to resonate with target populations to gain support for social movement goals is central to shaping movement outcomes (Benford and Snow 2000).

Religious Tradition, Religiosity, and Everyday Theologies

Although most Americans identify themselves with denominational labels (Kosmin et al. 2001), such as Baptist, Catholic, or one of the over 2,000 denominations present in the United States (Mead et al. 2005), denominational classifications have not been particularly predictive in social science research. This has lead Yamane (2007) to argue that the U.S. religious context is one of "belonging without believing," and some religion scholars to posit that sharper differences actually exist along broader lines (Roof and McKinney 1987), that is, families of religious traditions that share some historical and cultural similarities (Roof and McKinney 1987; Steensland et al. 2000). This religious tradition approach has been more fruitful in social science research than the denominational classification approach, and illustrates how different religious traditions can be seen to "array themselves from morally conservative to liberal" (Yamane 2007, p. 42). Even so, there is still significant variability in attitudes within specific traditions (Evans 2002; Smith 1998), thus the religious tradition approach—while an improvement over denominational classifications—still has limited explanatory power, suggesting that "something *other than* religious tradition explains most of the difference" (Yamane 2007, p. 43) in attitudes on morality and other sociopolitical issues.

Religiosity, whether measured as the importance of religion in one's life or as participation in religious activities, has explanatory value above and beyond denomination or religious tradition in predicting sociopolitical values and attitudes. In fact, many differences between religious traditions become attenuated or disappear once religiosity variables are added to statistical models (see, for example, Gay and Lynxwiler 1999). Findings typically have indicated that increased levels of religiosity tend to be associated with more politically conservative attitudes (Blasi 2006; Hicks and Lee 2006).

In many studies (see, for example, Finlay and Walther 2003; Bolzendahl and Brooks 2005), it has been assumed that individually held religious beliefs are congruent with the doctrine of the denomination to which individuals belong, although they are not typically examined to determine if that is the case. When actually evaluated, studies frequently conclude that individuals' beliefs often vary from their denomination's doctrine (Woodford et al. 2012a, b; Moon 2004; Yamane 2007). The degree of doctrine-belief congruence varies both by faith tradition and by topic (D'Antonio et al. 2001; Hoge et al. 1994; Poloma 1989). Moreover, the doctrine-belief congruence assumption neglects to recognize the agency that people have in their own spiritual journeys (Dillon 1999), and conceptualizes religious

doctrine as a fixed phenomenon (Chaves 1997). Changes in the policies of some Christian denominations about the ordination of openly gay/lesbian ministers in recent decades are just one indicator of the changing nature of religious doctrine regarding sexuality.

To understand the influence of religion on contemporary issues, we must attend to individually held beliefs or what Moon (2004) calls *everyday theologies*, which are the beliefs that emerge through social interaction with others. Moon argues that one's beliefs, while influenced by doctrine and scripture, are significantly shaped by one's lived experiences, and she demonstrates this in her ethnographic examination of the discernment process undertaken by two different Methodist congregations regarding issues of same-sex sexuality. She explains:

> These ideologies are formed in communities and can help people to experience religion as truthful and transcendent rather than as hollow human tradition. People's experiences teach them about life and shape what makes sense to them. In this way, members' understandings of Scripture are shaped by their life experience. (p. 62)

For members of the congregations in her study, views about the church's role in dealing with social problems, the sinful nature of human beings, and pain and suffering were religious themes inherent in their everyday theologies.

Though the concept of everyday theologies has been conceptually linked to attitudes regarding same-sex sexuality in general (Woodford et al. 2012a) and same-sex marriage specifically (Woodford et al. 2012b), this article is the first attempt to investigate this concept empirically. Much of the literature on endorsement for same-sex marriage focuses solely on religious tradition and religiosity; by including everyday theologies, we hope to obtain a more nuanced understanding of the underlying structure of attitudes toward civil same-sex marriage among young people.

Everyday Theologies and Themes in the U.S. Religious Landscape

Alongside the religious themes that Moon (2004) identified, other religious themes may also play a role in shaping opinions about civil same-sex marriage. Drawing additional themes from the extant scholarship on the U.S. religious landscape, we identify six religious themes as potential predictors of attitudes toward civil same-sex marriage. Although some of these themes, namely moral absolutism/relativism and universalism/anti-universalism, have been utilized in the literature on attitudes toward same-sex sexuality (Giroux 2005; Yip 2003), this is the first study to use multiple religious themes in examining attitudes toward legalizing same-sex marriage while controlling for religious tradition and religiosity. Brief summaries of the six themes and suggested hypotheses follow. More in-depth discussion of the themes has been published elsewhere (Walls 2010).

The Social Gospel

Predominantly a mainline Protestant Christian intellectual movement that reached its zenith in the early 20th century, the social gospel movement applies Christian

principles to social problems, providing religious rationale to take action to address these concerns (Bowman 2007; Rossinow 2005). The social gospel and other similar perspectives, including liberation theologies continue to be relevant in contemporary religious communities (Scimecca and Goodwin 2003; Todd 2011). This aspect of Christian religion focuses on inequality, oppression, and liberation from unjust social conditions and draws support from religious doctrines that focus on God's and Jesus' treatment of the oppressed and the poor (Hook and Davis 2012); thus, belief in the social gospel may shape one's support for same-sex marriage. Given the importance of social gospel thought in liberal and mainline Protestant theology and its primary focus on issues of oppression, it seems likely that higher levels of support would be associated with higher endorsement for civil same-sex marriage.

Human Nature

The nature of humanity is one of the most central beliefs in most religious ideologies (Stevenson and Haberman 1998). Some faith traditions—particularly conservative Protestant traditions—utilize an original sin framework and embrace the idea that human nature is fundamentally sinful (Ellison and Sherkat 1993; Minnick 1994). This may lead some to a "love the sinner, hate the sin" framework (Bassett et al. 2002; Rine 2012; Yip 2003) that might promote *conditional* tolerance of difference, but could still lead to the restriction of marriage rights based on the view of same-sex acts as sinful. Given this, it seems likely that higher levels of belief in the innate sinfulness of humanity would be associated with decreased support for the legal recognition of same-sex marriage.

Perception of Pain and Suffering

Moon (2004) noted that ideas about pain were used by the congregations in her study both to suggest that the church should affirm same-sex sexuality as part of God's gift of sexuality as well as to suggest that the church should play a role in 'healing' gay and lesbian individuals from their same-sex orientation. She argues that the language of pain is "an appealing language for Christians because many see it as a key theme in the teachings and life of Christ" (Moon 2004, p. 222). For those who have undergone trauma or stress themselves, they may lean into religion as a coping mechanism (Park 2005), potentially priming them to use religion as a source of compassion for the suffering of others. Unjust suffering has been used as the basis for a framework for making political demands for rights of many oppressed groups (Moksnes 2005). As such, the belief that one brings pain and suffering *upon oneself*—that is that the suffering is a result of one's own failings—is likely to be associated with decreased support for civil same-sex marriage.

Moral Absolutism/Relativism

The belief that moral authority is fixed and unchanging is a religious theme that plays a role in the intensification of conflict between religious liberals and

conservatives both within the same denomination and between denominations (Roof and McKinney 1987; Wuthnow 1988). Evangelical Protestants tend to be the most absolutist, while religious liberals tend to have a more relativistic notion of morality (Hunter 1991; Sherkat and Ellison 1999). The tension between the two perspectives has been influential in religious thought in the United States (Giroux 2005; Hopson and Smith 1999) and is a central theme in Hunter's (1991) culture wars. Absolutism can influence religion through "traditional" narratives about sexuality, including the reduction of sexual identity to "sinful" acts (Yip 2003). Moreover, absolutist beliefs can prevent individuals from reconciling their personal religious beliefs with a pluralistic and diverse society (Rine 2012). Absolutist beliefs have been linked to anti-gay political movements in the United States (Giroux 2005), and as such, we expect that higher levels of absolutist thinking will be related to decreased support for legalizing same-sex marriage.

Anti-universalism/Universalism

Universalism emphasizes a concern for the welfare of all people, and generally holds that all persons are related to and will be reconciled with God. While most religious traditions claim goals of unconditional love, most actually practice a circumscribed version that directs the selflessness of universalism only to members of their particular religious in-group (Wuthnow 1991). Bassett et al. (2002) found that devout Christians will offer assistance to gay and lesbian people, even if they view same-sex sexuality as a sinful act, when they embrace a belief that affirms the value of all people regardless of behaviors. Thus, we posit that those who embrace universalism may look past their own beliefs and evaluations of gay and lesbian people to support equal rights for same-sex couples, while those who embrace an anti-universalist belief would likely oppose such rights.

Perception of Forgiveness

Themes of forgiveness are central to religious discourse (Lutjen et al. 2012; Toussaint and Williams 2008; Tsang et al. 2005), and hence ideas about the concept of forgiveness may play a role in people's perspectives on controversial sociopolitical attitudes, including same-sex marriage. It seems logical that higher levels of believing in a God that freely forgives all would be associated with increased support for legalizing same-sex marriage.

Attitudes About Same-Sex Marriage

In this section we outline the relationship between religious traditions, religiosity, and the various religious themes examined in this study with attitudes about same-sex marriage. Because of the limited scholarship in this area, at times we broaden the discussion to look at more general attitudes about lesbian women and gay men.

Religious Tradition

Most studies indicate that individuals who identify as evangelical Protestants[1] tend to have the most negative attitudes toward same-sex sexuality and lesbian and gay rights, including the legal recognition of same-sex relationships (Jones 2010; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2011). Jews and liberal Protestants tend to be the most supportive of lesbian and gay rights of all religious groups, similar in opinion to those who are secular or unaffiliated with religious institutions. Catholics and mainline Protestants tend to fall somewhere in the middle (Finlay and Walther 2003; Fisher et al. 1994). Strong religious tradition effects have been found on attitudinal support for legalizing same-sex marriage and civil unions (Olson et al. 2006; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2003) and on geographic voting behavior patterns on the topic (McVeigh and Diaz 2009; Sullins 2010).

Religiosity

High levels of religiosity and religious commitment have been fairly consistent predictors of negative attitudes toward lesbian women and gay men (Fisher et al. 1994; Mohr and Sedlacek 2000) as well as increased opposition to legalizing same-sex marriage. Jones (2010) found that among Americans who said that religion was "very important" in their lives, 70 % opposed legalizing same-sex marriage, while among Americans who said that religion was "not important," 71 % supported marriage laws inclusive of same-sex couples. Similarly, in another study, 80 % of respondents with high levels of "religious commitment" opposed legalizing same-sex marriage (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2003). Assessing religiosity using measures of religious service participation has likewise found greater levels of religiosity to be associated with greater opposition to legal same-sex relationship recognition (Swank and Raiz 2010; Whitehead 2010). The relationship with the private religiosity of personal prayer has not been previously examined.

Everyday Theologies

Research on the relationship between the six religious themes explored in this study and attitudes about same-sex sexuality or the legalization of same-sex marriage is virtually non-existent. Giroux (2005) and Yip (2003) suggest that moral absolutism plays a substantial role in the opposition to lesbian and gay rights, and given that evangelical Christians tend to be higher in moral absolutism, this may be one of the underlying themes that explains part of the historically anti-same-sex sexuality stances held by many evangelical Christians. Relatedly, Bassett et al. (2005) found that individuals who scored lowest on a subscale measuring *openness to religious*

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[1] Various studies have sometimes defined this group as fundamentalists, sometimes as conservative Christians, and sometimes as having been 'born again.'

questions and highest on a subscale measuring *foreclosed/nonreflective faith*—two aspects of religiousness that are likely related to moral absolutism—were the most rejecting of lesbians and gay men. In their exploration of same-sex marriage, Olson et al. (2006) found that those who prioritized 'moral issues'—a topic similar to some of our religious themes—were significantly more likely to oppose legalizing same-sex marriage than those who did not.

Two recent studies that considered individual-level religious syncretism concerning same-sex sexuality—that is how much respondents agreed or disagreed with their religion's stance on "homosexuality"—have produced interesting findings. Among the studies' samples, level of agreement with one's church's teachings on same-sex sexuality was not correlated with levels of sexual prejudice or support for same-sex marriage for those in denominations that did not teach that "homosexuality" was a sin, but was significantly correlated for those whose denominations taught that "homosexuality" was a sin (Woodford et al. 2012a, b).

While significant theorizing about some religious beliefs examined in this study exists, particularly regarding the beliefs of universalism and moral absolutism, little empirical research has been undertaken to examine the relationships between these beliefs and sociopolitical attitudes, including civil same-sex marriage. It is to this task that we now turn our attention.

Hypotheses

As our primary hypothesis for the study, we anticipate that the model testing everyday theologies (i.e., the set of religious beliefs) will be a stronger predictor of attitudes toward legalizing same-sex marriage than either the model testing religious tradition or the model testing religiosity. Further, we have a set of secondary hypotheses predicting the relationships between the dependent variable and religious tradition, religiosity, and the individual religious themes which follow.

Given the literature on the relationship between religious tradition and attitudes toward lesbian women and gay men, and civil same-sex relationship recognition policies, we anticipate that respondents who identify as secular, Catholic, and liberal/mainline Protestant will be more likely to support the legalization of same-sex marriage than those who identify as evangelical Protestants. This difference should be most evident between evangelical Protestants and seculars. Similarly, based on extant literature, we expect that higher levels of religiosity will be associated with less support for legal recognition of same-sex marriage.

There is less empirical support to guide hypothesizing about the relationships of the various religious themes examined herein on attitudes about the legalization of same-sex marriage. However, given that the scholarship on religion provides evidence of how these themes map onto religious traditions, we have extrapolated from those relationships to suggest a preliminary hypothesis for each of the six religious themes explored in this study (See above and Table 1).

Table 1 Survey items and secondary hypotheses regarding religious themes of everyday theologies

Everyday theologies theme	Survey item	Hypothesized direction of relationship
Social gospel	There is little that religion can do about the problems of society, except to try to change people's lives individually (R)	Increased support for same-sex marriage
Human nature as sinful	Although people are naturally base and sinful, they can rise above these instincts and do great things that are pleasing to God	Decreased support for same-sex marriage
Perception of pain and suffering as brought on by self	People usually bring suffering on themselves	Decreased support for same-sex marriage
Moral absolutism	Right and wrong should be based on God's laws	Decreased support for same-sex marriage
Anti-universalism	There is only one true religion	Decreased support for same-sex marriage
Perception of forgiveness as given to all	God's forgiveness is given freely to all	Increased support for same-sex marriage

(R) indicates that the item was reverse coded for analyses. The theoretical range for each religious theme is 1–7, with a higher score indicating stronger endorsement

Methodology

Participants

Participants in the study were undergraduate students enrolled in introductory sociology courses at six U.S. colleges and universities. Five of the research sites were private universities, including two Catholic-affiliated schools, one Mennonite-affiliated college, and one Baptist-affiliated university. The sixth school was a public university in the Midwest. A total of 651 respondents completed the survey; however, 27 respondents (4.1 %) were excluded from the analytical sample due to missing values on one or more of the variables examined in the study. Females are overrepresented in the sample which is not uncommon in samples from sociology courses (American Sociological Association, Research and Development Department [ASARDD] 2006) as well as undergraduate students, generally (The Chronicle of Higher Education 2010). Compared to sociology majors and undergraduate students overall, racial/ethnic minority students are underrepresented (ASARDD 2006; The Chronicle of Higher Education 2010).

Measures

Demographics

We inquired about gender (*male*, *female*), race and ethnicity, political ideology, family income, and family size. Because of low cell counts, *American Indian/Native American*, *Biracial/multiracial*, and *Other* were combined into other race/ethnicity.

Political ideology was captured through the use of a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly liberal, 7 = strongly conservative). To measure family income, respondents selected from 12 categories ranging from *Under $5,000* to *$105,000 and over*. The lowest two categories were combined into one and recoded as 'Under $20,000' ($20,000 for statistical analysis) and the final category of *$105,000 and over* was combined with the *$95,000 to $104,999* category and recoded as '$100,000 or more' ($100,000 for statistical analysis). All other categories were recoded to the midpoint of the category.

Religious Tradition

The set of religious tradition variables were derived from three questions. The first asked, "What religion do you consider yourself?" with a response set of *Buddhist*, *Christian*, *Hindu*, *Islamic*, *Jewish*, *No religious belief/Agnostic/Atheist*, and *Other (please specify)*. A second question asked those who identified as Christian to place themselves in a religious tradition category. It asked, "If you are Christian, which of the following categories best describes you?" The response set listed families of religious traditions (e.g., *Catholic, mainline Protestant*) based on Steensland et al.'s (2000) schema. Finally, as an additional check on classification, respondents were asked, "What is the actual name of the church you attend or consider yourself to be a part of (this information is for denominational classification purposes only)?" and were given a place to enter the name of their church. From these three questions a set of religious tradition variables was derived based on the Steensland et al. (2000) schema.[2]

Religiosity

Following the lead of Eggebeen and Dew (2009) who argue that religiosity is a multidimensional construct that includes participation behaviors—both public and private—as well as importance, we utilize three variables to capture religiosity. Respondents were asked, "Do you go to religious services … *more than once a week* to *never*?" (public participation [attendance]; 6-point Likert scale), "Outside of attending religious services, do you pray…*several times a day* to *never*?" (private participation [prayer]; 5-point Likert scale), and "Would you say your religion provides… *little or no guidance* to *a great deal of guidance* in your day to day life?" (guidance; 4-point Likert scale). Scores were (re)coded so that higher numbers on each scale equate to higher levels of religiosity.

Everyday Theologies

To capture the concept of the six themes of everyday theologies, respondents were asked questions related to each theme. These questions were embedded in a section of

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[2] Liberal and mainline Protestants were combined given the small number of respondents who identified as liberal Protestants. Black Protestants were not designated as a separate category due to the small number of African Americans in the sample, and initial analyses which indicated that African American Protestants (the majority of African Americans in the sample) were not significantly different on the dependent variable than White evangelical Protestants. No respondents identified as Jewish in the sample.

the survey asking about a wide range of values, ethics, and beliefs. Each of the questions was answered with a seven-point Likert scale response set ranging from *Strongly agree* to *Strongly disagree*. All questions were (re)coded for usage such that higher numbers represented increased endorsement of the attitude (See Table 1).

Endorsement for Civil Same-Sex Marriage

To capture support for civil same-sex marriage, respondents were asked, "Same-sex couples should have the right to marry one another in the U.S." with a seven-point response set (1 = *Strongly agree,* 7 = *Strongly disagree*). The variable was recoded so that those who agreed (*strongly, somewhat,* or *slightly*) were coded 1 to represent endorsement, while those *who neither agreed nor disagreed*, *slightly disagreed*, *somewhat disagreed*, or *strongly disagreed* were coded 0 to represent non-endorsement.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 contains the descriptive statistics for the demographic, religious traditions, and religiosity. Correlations of variables can be found in Table 3 and regression results in Table 4.

The sample was predominately White and female. The largest percentage was raised in an urban area, and had a family income of slightly more than $70,000. Nearly 40 % of the sample identified as Catholic, followed by 33.8 % as evangelical Protestants. In terms of religiosity, the students, on average, reported attending services almost every week, praying a few times each week, with religion offering quite a bit of guidance in their lives.

Concerning the religious themes, those endorsed (mean scores greater than the midpoint of the scale) overall by the sample include the belief that God's forgiveness is freely given, the perception that humans are naturally base and sinful, and moral absolutism. Landing in the center of the scale (indicating neither agreeing nor disagreeing) are the endorsement of social gospel beliefs, and the belief that people bring suffering on themselves. The mean concerning the belief that there is only one true religion fell on the disagreement side of the scale (i.e., ≤3.5). Turning to our dependent variable, 43.8 % of the sample endorsed the legalization of same-sex marriage.

Regression Models

We used logistic regression to predict support for legalizing same-sex marriage.[3] Models 1 through 3 combine the set of demographic control variables singularly with religious tradition, religiosity, and the everyday theology religious themes,

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[3] Ordinal logistic models were explored since the original form of the dependent variable was an ordinal Likert scale. The overall patterns found were similar to those found using logistic regression and, as such, the decision was made to report the logistic models as they are much more familiar to readers and do not entail the parallel regression assumption risks endemic to ordinal logistic models (see Long 1997).

Table 2 Descriptive statistics, demographic characteristics and religion variables

Variable	n	%/M (SD)
Gender		
Male	186	29.81
Female	438	70.19
Race/ethnicity		
African American	34	5.45
Asian American	22	3.53
Latino/a	38	6.09
Other race/ethnicity	20	3.21
White	510	81.73
Urbanicity		
Open country/farm	86	13.78
Small town (under 50,000)	159	25.48
Suburban (near a large city)	144	23.08
Urban (over 50,000)	235	37.66
Income		$70,160.00 ($27,878.00)
Political orientation		
Strongly liberal	33	5.29
Liberal	115	18.43
Slightly liberal	73	11.70
Middle of the road	148	23.72
Slightly conservative	89	14.26
Conservative	135	21.63
Strongly conservative	31	4.97
Family size		4.52 (1.64)
Religious tradition		
Conservative Protestant	211	33.81
Liberal/mainline Protestant	72	11.54
Catholic	241	38.62
Non-Christian	9	1.44
Secular	83	13.30
Attendance		
Never	79	12.66
A few times a year	137	21.96
Once or twice a month	76	12.18
Almost every week	80	12.82
Once a week	171	27.40
More than once a week	81	12.98
Prayer		
Never	68	10.90
Once a week or less	123	19.71
A few times a week	134	21.47

Table 2 continued

Variable	n	%/M (SD)
Once a day	130	20.83
Several times a day	169	27.08
Guidance		
Little or no guidance	80	12.82
Some guidance	177	28.37
Quite a bit of guidance	176	28.21
A great deal of guidance	191	30.61

respectively. This allows us to determine how each set of religion variables performs without the influence of the remaining religion variables. Model 4 combines the control variables with all three sets of religion variables. The drop in deviance test (Ramsey and Schafer 2001) statistic indicates the explanatory power of each model, with a lower score suggesting a better performing model among nested models, while the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) difference is used for the same purpose among non-nested models (Rafferty 1995). Our primary purpose is not to determine the relative weight of each of the predictors compared to one another; however, in addition to reporting the adjusted odds ratios (AOR) and standard error for the final model, we also include the standardized coefficients in order to capture some of the nuanced relationships. Because of the collinear relationship of the religion variables, variance inflation factors and the condition number for the models were examined, and the condition number for all models reported was below 30 as recommended (Belsey et al. 1980). To take into account that data were collected in six different school settings, the cluster option in Stata 12.1 was used to control for possible non-independence among clustered data.

Model 1: Religious Traditions

The religious traditions model finds, as predicted, that seculars, Catholics, and liberal/mainline Protestants were all significantly more likely to support civil same-sex marriage than evangelical Protestants ($p < .001$, for all three). Seculars were 7.4 times as likely to support extending marriage rights to same-sex couples than evangelical Protestants (the largest difference, as predicted), Catholics were 2.4 times as likely, and liberal/mainline Protestants were 1.5 times as likely. Those reporting a non-Christian religious tradition were also at increased odds of supporting legalizing same-sex marriage ($p < .05$, 3.7 times as likely). Using the drop in deviance test, we found that the addition of the religious tradition variables significantly improved the model fit over the control variables model ($p < .001$).

Model 2: Religiosity

In the second model, the religiosity variables were added to the demographics controls. Prayer was statistically significant ($p < .05$), while neither attendance nor

Table 3 Correlations between continuous and interval variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Income	1.00											
2. Political orientation	0.17***	1.00										
3. Family size	0.33***	0.12**	1.00									
4. Religiosity: attendance	0.19***	0.30***	0.17***	1.00								
5. Religiosity: prayer	0.05	0.30***	0.07	0.62***	1.00							
6. Religiosity: guidance	0.04	0.31***	0.07	0.62***	0.67***	1.00						
7. Social gospel	0.06	0.07	0.03	0.28***	0.25***	0.29***	1.00					
8. Human nature	−0.06	0.21***	−0.01	0.25***	0.28***	0.31***	0.03	1.00				
9. Perception of suffering	−0.08*	0.12**	−0.04	−0.08*	−0.98	−0.94	−0.16***	0.12**	1.00			
10. Absolutism	−0.02	0.39***	0.06	0.50***	0.51***	0.56***	0.20***	0.41***	0.06	1.00		
11. Anti-universalism	0.03	0.34***	0.05	0.38***	0.39***	0.40***	0.15***	0.31***	0.16***	0.49***	1.00	
12. Perception of forgiveness	−0.00	−0.15**	0.01	−0.31***	−0.35***	−0.35***	−0.39***	0.40***	−0.17***	−0.48***	−0.21***	1.00

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

Table 4 Multiple logistic regression of support for legalizing same-sex marriage on demographics, religious tradition, religiosity, and religious themes

	Model 1 AOR (SE)	Model 2 AOR (SE)	Model 3 AOR (SE)	Model 4 AOR (SE)	Model 4 β
Male	0.274***	0.253***	0.314***	0.293***	−0.229
	(.0738)	(.0469)	(.0607)	(.0649)	
Race/ethnicity (reference = White)					
African American	0.259	0.303	0.200*	0.203	−0.147
	(.1922)	(.2212)	(.1635)	(.1727)	
Asian American	0.546*	0.454***	0.352***	0.368**	−0.075
	(.1491)	(.0825)	(.0944)	(.1196)	
Latino/a	0.652	0.833	0.599	0.554	−0.057
	(.2298)	(.2932)	(.1929)	(.1697)	
Other race/ethnicity	0.651	0.706	0.457	0.455	−0.057
	(.5324)	(.4892)	(.2164)	(.2019)	
Urbanicity (reference = urban)					
Open country/farm	0.434*	0.407*	0.451	0.441	−0.115
	(.1614)	(.1602)	(.2021)	(.1919)	
Small town	0.775	0.708	0.715	0.767	−0.047
	(.3613)	(.3408)	(.3118)	(.3351)	
Suburb	0.905	0.942	0.822	0.796	−0.039
	(.3012)	(.3152)	(.2874)	(.2870)	
Income (in $10,000 s)	1.047	1.078	1.040	1.040	0.044
	(.0398)	(.0458)	(.0468)	(.0352)	
Political orientation	0.451***	0.467***	0.479***	0.480***	−0.498
	(.0363)	(.0315)	(.0268)	(.0395)	
Family size	0.844***	0.873***	0.841***	0.842***	−0.100
	(.0276)	(.0234)	(.0346)	(.0301)	
Religious tradition (reference = evangelical Protestant)					
Liberal/mainline Protestant	1.476***			1.190	0.023
	(.1453)			(.2018)	
Catholic	2.346***			1.688**	0.104
	(.4548)			(.2985)	
Non-Christian	3.803*			1.894	0.031
	(2.0482)			(.8338)	
Secular	7.326***			3.553***	0.175
	(0.9644)			(.7234)	
Religiosity					
Attendance		0.828		0.954	−0.032
		(.0937)		(.1241)	
Prayer		0.830*		0.891	−0.063
		(.0727)		(.0873)	
Guidance		0.846		1.122	0.048
		(.0962)		(.1915)	

Table 4 continued

	Model 1AOR (SE)	Model 2AOR (SE)	Model 3AOR (SE)	Model 4AOR (SE)	Model 4β
Everyday theology themes					
Social gospel			0.747***	.757***	−0.197
			(.0540)	(.0631)	
Human nature as sinful			0.963	1.003	0.002
			(.0364)	(.0319)	
Perception of pain and suffering			0.803**	0.781***	−0.161
			(.0616)	(.0574)	
Moral absolutism			0.716***	0.757***	−0.208
			(.0492)	(.0606)	
Anti-universalism			0.855**	0.872**	−0.127
			(.0474)	(.0400)	
Perception of forgiveness			0.924	0.893	−0.067
			(.0696)	(.0524)	
N	624	624	624	624	
McKelvey and Zavoina's R^2	.494	.490	.582	.603	
Deviance	588.32	590.66	541.76	528.54	

AOR adjusted odds ratios, *SE* standard error

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

guidance reached a level of statistical significance.[4] The AOR of 0.83 suggests that for every one point increase in frequency of prayer (on a five-point scale), there is a 17 % decrease in likelihood of supporting legalizing same-sex marriage. Based on these results we would anticipate that, on average controlling for all other variables in the model, a person who never prays would be approximately 88 % more likely to endorse civil same-sex marriage than a person who prays several times a day. The model is a statistically significantly better fitting model than control variables model ($p < .001$).

Model 3: Everyday Theology Themes

In the third model, the variables capturing the six religious themes of the everyday theologies were added to the demographic variables. Neither believing that humans

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[4] The religiosity variables are strongly correlated with one another (see Table 3). As such, additional models were run entering each religiosity variable into the demographic variables-only model individually as well as entering a combined religiosity index variable ($\alpha = .82$). Individually each variable reached a level of significance as did the religiosity index variable ($p < .001$; models not shown). By entering all three religiosity variables, which represent three dimensions of religiosity into the same model as we have done, the model suggests that private behavior (prayer) has the strongest relationship among the types of religiosity.

are naturally base and sinful, nor perception of God's forgiveness being given freely to all reached a level of significance, however, the remaining four religious theme variables did. Contrary to our hypothesis, an increased endorsement of social gospel was associated with *decreased* support for legalization of same-sex marriage ($p < .001$, AOR $= 0.75$). For every one point increase in endorsement of the social gospel perspective (on a 7-point Likert scale), there is a 25 % decrease in likelihood of supporting legalization of same-sex marriage. Consistent with our hypotheses, perception of pain and suffering ($p < .01$, AOR $= 0.80$), moral absolutism ($p < .001$, AOR $= 0.72$), and anti-universalism ($p < .01$, AOR $= 0.86$) were each associated with decreased support for civil same-sex marriage. Specifically, higher levels of belief that one has brought on one's own pain and suffering were associated with decreased support for legalizing same-sex marriage, representing a 20 % decrease in likelihood that the respondent supported civil same-sex marriage with everyone point increase in endorsement of blaming pain and suffering on the person experiencing it. Likewise, for every one point increase in endorsement of moral absolutism, there is a 28 % decrease in likelihood that the respondent supported legalized same-sex marriage. Similarly, higher levels of endorsement of the belief that there is only one true religion were also associated with decreased support for civil same-sex marriage representing a 14 % decrease in likelihood that the respondent supported extending marriage rights to same-sex couples with every one point increase in endorsement of anti-universalism. As predicted, the model with religious themes is a better fitting model than the control model, the religious tradition model (Model 1), and the religiosity model (Model 2).

Model 4: Full Model

In this model, religious tradition, religiosity, and the six religious themes were all added to the demographic controls concurrently. With regard to religious tradition, Catholics and seculars continue to be significantly different than evangelical Protestants in their reported levels of support for the dependent variable. In particular, Catholics were 1.7 times as likely ($p < .01$) and seculars were 3.6 times as likely ($p < .001$) to support legalizing same-sex marriage than evangelical Protestants. Liberal and mainline Protestants as well as those from non-Christian faith traditions were no more or less likely to support civil same-sex marriage than evangelical Protestants. None of the religiosity variables were significant predictors in the combined model. Finally, the pattern of relationships between religious themes and the dependent variable stayed almost the same as in Model 3 (religious beliefs), specifically some changes in AOR values were observed and the statistical significance of perceptions of pain and suffering increased. In terms of the standardized coefficients, as seen in the final column, although the observed effect sizes of all of the religious variables were small and many were fairly similar, the everyday theologies themes of moral absolutism and social gospel demonstrate the highest effect sizes ($\beta = -.21$ and $\beta = -.20$, respectively). Comparing this model with the control model and the three nested models, we find the final model to be a significantly better fitting model than all of the other models.

Demographic Findings Across All Models

Across all models reported, the demographic controls performed consistently with much of the literature concerning attitudes about lesbian women and gay men, or support for same-sex relationship recognition. Males, those with conservative political views, and those from larger families were significantly less likely to support legalizing same-sex marriage. With one exception, any racial and urbanicity differences that reached levels of significance in preliminary models, were not significant in the final model. The one exception is the consistent finding across models that Asian Americans were less likely to support civil same-sex marriage than Whites ($p < .05$).[5]

Discussion

Yamane ([2007](#)) observed that in order to understand the role of religion on sociopolitical beliefs, it is necessary to consider religious tradition, religiosity, and individual-level religious beliefs. Consistent with this assertion and our primary hypothesis, we found that the model that controlled for everyday theology themes offered greater explanatory power than the model controlling for religious traditions and that controlling for religiosity, and that the final model which controlled for all religious factors offered the most explanatory power. Given this, this discussion focuses primarily on the final model and the implications that arise from its findings. At times, however, comparison with prior models is made to illuminate important points.

Concerning religious tradition, although significant in the religious tradition-only model, the difference between liberal/mainline Protestants and evangelical Protestants disappeared with the addition of religiosity and the religious themes in the final model. This suggests that some qualitative difference in an aspect (or combination of aspects) of how religion is practiced and understood is what differentiates liberal/mainline Protestants from evangelical Protestants in terms of support for legalizing same-sex marriage among college students. Post-hoc analysis suggests that the primary difference between liberal/mainline Protestants and evangelical Protestants that explains their difference in opinion on civil same-sex marriage is endorsement of moral absolutism. The addition of only the moral absolutism variable to Model 1 (religious traditions; post hoc model not shown) results in the significant difference between the two religious traditions disappearing, suggesting that the primary difference undergirding these religious traditions in terms of support for legalizing same-sex marriage is the belief in moral absolutism.

Shifting our attention to religiosity, we found that in the presence of religious traditions and the six religious themes, none of three types of religiosity examined herein significantly predict support for legalizing same-sex marriage. In models where only one type of religiosity is entered at a time with the demographic variables, each religiosity variable reaches statistical significance (models not

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[5] The level of statistical significance was $p < .001$ for Models 2, 3, and $p < .01$ for Model 4.

shown). However, in the analysis that combined the demographics with all three types of religiosity (Model 2), only the prayer variable retained statistical significance, suggesting that it is more influential than the other two types of religiosity in predicting the dependent variable. Post-hoc analyses examining the influence of the set of religious traditions and each of the six religious themes individually on the relationships between prayer and support for the dependent variable (models not shown) did not provide a clear pattern of which of these influences individually best explained this loss of significance, suggesting it is a combination of factors that is responsible.

Taken all together, these findings suggest that religiosity—in and of itself—may have a smaller role to play in opinions about civil same-sex marriage among young people than the actual context of that religiosity. That is not to say that religiosity is not important, but rather that its relationship to sociopolitical opinions among undergraduate college students likely varies based on the specific religious context. This proposition is logical given that religious commitment combined with a strong moral absolutist opinion would likely have a very different impact on attitudes about extending marriage rights to same-sex couples than religious commitment combined with strong beliefs in universalism, or that high levels of religiosity for evangelical Protestants may mean something very different than high levels of religiosity for Catholics in the context of opinion about legalizing same-sex marriage. These findings mirror those of recent studies conducted by the authors (Woodford et al. 2012a, b), whereby the strength of agreement or disagreement with religious doctrine on same-sex sexuality varies based on the actual doctrine. In the larger picture of scholarship on religion, these findings suggest that scholars need to re-examine the fairly well established relationship between religiosity and attitudes about same-sex marriage, as well as attitudes about lesbian and gay people, to determine *how* the influence of religiosity functions differently in various religious tradition contexts and in relationship to various religious beliefs.

Finally turning our attention to the influence of everyday theologies, operationalized herein as six different religious themes, we found that the addition of religiosity and religious traditions to the religious beliefs model did little to change the impact of social gospel, perception of pain and suffering, moral absolutism, and anti-universalism on support for legalizing same-sex marriage among college students. As was found when controlling for demographics and the religious themes (Model 3), each of these variables was negatively associated with support for civil same-sex marriage in the full model. These results provide partial support for our secondary hypotheses concerning the role of specific religious themes (human nature as sinful and perception of forgiveness were not significant).

Contrary to our hypothesis, we found that increases in the social gospel perspective were associated with decreased support for legalizing same-sex marriage. Based on the idea that liberal and progressive religions have historically endorsed the deprivatization of religious beliefs from personal belief to sociopolitical action to address the social problems of the world, the original hypothesis posited that increases in the social gospel perspective would be associated with increased support for legalizing same-sex marriage. What might explain the significant finding in the opposite direction? A number of scholars have documented

that a substantial shift has occurred in conservative Protestant churches. Historically, these churches have seen their responsibility as saving souls rather than putting energy into remaking the world according to their view of God's plan (Marsden 1980; Regnerus and Smith 1998). However, in the last couple of decades, these churches have embraced an activist stance whereby one aspect of being a 'good' Christian is the deprivatization of one's faith. This has resulted in increased influence in the political marketplace for conservative Christians (Geest 2007; Piven and Walzer 2007). So, while liberal and mainline Protestants have historically seen it as their Christian duty to shape society into their progressive view of God's plan for the world—a view more in line with left of center political ideas—conservative Protestants, have *more recently* embraced a similar notion, but with a view of God's plan that is substantially more reactionary and based on traditional notions of gender, sexuality, and morality. It is possible that this shift of increased deprivatization may play a role for young adults and their stance toward civil same-sex marriage.

Limitations

Though this study advances knowledge concerning the role of religion and support for civil marriage, several limitations are noteworthy. Even though this study utilized a sample from six different universities to increase variability, it is based on an undergraduate student, convenience sample. Two concerns with such samples are typically raised: the stability of young adults' sociopolitical attitudes and the lack of generalizability. Regarding the first point, the existing empirical evidence on the stability of political attitudes of young adults provides only weak support for the idea that young adults' attitudes are significantly more dynamic than those of middle-aged and older adults (Alwin and Krosnick 1991; Sears 1983). The second concern regarding generalizability is an issue that should be kept in mind when reviewing the findings. Because the findings are not generalizable to the general public, nor even generalizable to all student populations, replication with other populations is needed. In addition to political identity, the religious identity of young people may also be in flux (Fowler 1981), especially for those attending university or college (Chickering and Reisser 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). Because the sample was recruited from social science courses there is an expected over-representation of females in the sample. While the gender differences that emerge are in the direction anticipated, the low percentage of males in the sample may have obscured some relationships that vary based on gender.

Another concern is that the religious themes examined in this study are assessed by single-item variables rather than indices that might better capture the multidimensionality of complex religious beliefs. Empirically reliable indices were not available for this study, thus further work developing and using such indices would substantially strengthen the findings.

Finally, given the data are cross-sectional, the findings should not be interpreted to suggest causality. While religious beliefs, traditions, and religiosity may indeed have a causal relationship with attitudes about legalizing same-sex marriage, it is also likely that attitudes about this topic may cause religious people to critically re-examine their

religious affiliation and beliefs. In fact, embedded in the notion of "everyday theology" is the idea that there is a fluid, bidirectional relationship between these types of sets of variables.

Implications

The findings of this study have a number of implications for social movements, especially those engaging young adults, as well as future research. Consistent with earlier studies (Moon 2004; Woodford et al. 2012b; Yamane 2007), the current findings highlight that social movements working toward the legalization of same-sex marriage should be careful not to dismiss the support of certain religious communities based on the belief that members of those communities oppose the legalization of same-sex marriage because their denomination belongs to a conservative tradition or is opposed to civil same-sex marriage.[6] Although the probability of someone from certain faith traditions (e.g., evangelical Protestant) supporting the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples may be less than someone from a tradition with more progressive doctrinal stands (e.g., Catholic), there is still variability in support for legalizing same-sex marriage within all of the religious traditions. In congregations (or denominations) that are taking a public stand against pro-lesbian/gay policy, Moon (2004) demonstrates that norms about dissent may be at play that foster the appearance that there is uniform agreement with the stance within the group even when that is not the case. Likewise, the assumption that a congregation associated with a historically progressive denomination will be supportive of civil same-sex marriage could lead to problems whereby pro-same-sex marriage community organizers and activists face resistance where they assumed there would be little to none.

A potentially more helpful barometer of people's views on legalizing same-sex marriage are the everyday theologies that they embrace—particularly ideas about the social gospel and the endorsement of moral absolutism. While this study is cross-sectional in nature and cannot provide evidence of cause and effect, one intriguing notion of influencing people's opinions on same-sex marriage laws would be to engage them in critical dialogues about these underlying religious themes and develop social movement strategies and frames that resonate with their endorsement of these everyday theologies. Additionally, if we embrace the notion that Moon (2004) suggests whereby people's theologies shift according to life experiences and in community with others, then working at the level of these religious building blocks may be one way in which to effect change in attitudes about civil same-sex marriage in an indirect manner.

Concerning research, the results suggest that building conclusions on the assumption that individual belief equates with the doctrine of their faith tradition is

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[6] Given that many organizations that oppose same-sex marriage are based on religious ideologies, those organizations have relied heavily upon the support of religious communities and have thus, not dismissed religious communities in the same manner that pro-same-sex marriage organizations have.

highly problematic. The findings add to a growing body of literature that demonstrates that this is simply not the case on certain topics. It also suggests that some aspects of everyday theologies may be potentially more important than either religious tradition or religiosity in predicting attitudes toward some sociopolitical issues.

The loss of significance of the religiosity variables, specifically prayer in the final model suggests that religiosity may mean quite different things for different religious traditions or for people who endorse different religious beliefs. This raises concerns for a substantial body of literature that has equated higher levels of religiosity with more negative attitudes toward lesbian women and gay men and same-sex relationship recognition rights. The context of religiosity appears to matter, thereby signifying the need to explore interaction effects between religiosity and religious tradition or between religiosity and endorsement of various religious beliefs. Additionally, the performance of the various religious variables across the models as well as conceptual ideas about the functioning of the religious beliefs also suggest that future research may want to examine religious beliefs as mediating factors between religious traditions and religiosity and sociopolitical attitudes.

There are obviously still other factors that influence opinions on marriage laws that need to be explored. The gender effect maintains significance across all the models suggesting that religious variables do not explain the difference in opinion on legalizing same-sex marriage between men and women. Other variables, such as endorsement of traditional gender roles, social dominance orientation, or right-wing authoritarianism may be part of the belief structure that explains this difference. Similarly political ideology (significant in all models) does not appear to be influenced by the addition of the religious variables, suggesting the need for delving below the blunt measure of political ideologies on a liberal-conservative continuum to understand what underlying political beliefs—*everyday politics?*—may be at work.

Finally, psychological mechanisms likely undergird the relationships uncovered in this study between religious beliefs and support for legalizing same-sex marriage. Understanding these mechanisms could provide more insight into the symbolic and psychological meaning of the religious beliefs and the process by which they are translated into sociopolitical attitudes.

Much work remains to be done to understand young adults' (and the general public's) attitudes about policies concerning same-sex marriage. Though appeals to political themes such as equality, fairness, and democracy are no doubt an important part of the strategies that may be useful for same-sex marriage advocates and organizations, failure to recognize and address the importance of religious motivations could very well result in a substantial portion of young people (and others) in the United States remaining staunchly committed to the denial of marriage rights for same-sex couples. Failure to utilize religious themes in pro-same-sex marriage messages misses opportunities that have the potential to resonate with citizens who have, for the most part, been dismissed by the same-sex marriage legalization movement as unchangeable.

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