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The Effect of Religiosity on Attitudes towards Homosexuality

Samantha Saunders

Huron University College of University of Western Ontario

The study examines the impact religiosity has on attitudes towards homosexuality. 32 male and female participants from various demographic profiles were recruited from the University of Western Ontario to participate in the study. Participants were exposed to images of either a homosexual or heterosexual couple, were asked questions regarding the image and then were surveyed using scales measuring levels of religiosity and attitudes towards homosexuality. A 2x2 ANOVA was conducted. A strong relationship between images and attitudes towards homosexuality was found as participants showed a significant change in attitudes towards homosexuality depending on which image they were exposed to. In addition there was a slight relationship between level of religiosity and attitudes towards homosexuality; however the results did not prove to be significant. The results demonstrate there was some limitations to the current study and further should be undertaken.

Previous studies exist which support the notion of a strong correlation between religiosity and attitudes towards homosexuality. The term religiosity implies the quality of being religious (Kroll, Egan, Richard, Carre, Johnson, and Carey, 2007). It has been suggested in several studies that religion, particularly one which has a conservative theology, is a strong predictor of negative attitudes towards homosexuals (Rosik, Griffith, Cruz, 2007). Such studies have also established that the religious effect, more so than any other variables e.g. gender or ethnicity, will provoke the greatest anti-gay sentiments (Rosik, Griffith, Cruz, 2007). There is a noticeable disparity growing regarding attitudes towards homosexuality between the devoutly religious communities.
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and the rest of society (Rosik, Griffith, Cruz, 2007). Previous studies attempt to
demonstrate that these devoutly religious communities are the main identifiable groups
which overtly hold negative beliefs towards gay men and lesbians women (Rosik,
Griffith, Cruz, 2007). Though individual members of religious organizations hold
differing views on homosexuality, most religious institutions actively denounce
homosexuality as being an unnatural life style and preach that homosexuals are morally
corrupt (Sanabria, 2002). In the Sanabria (2002) study, he attempted to find whether
religious fundamentalism attributed to a homophobic belief system. His results showed
that there was a positive correlation between scores from the Religious Fundamentalism
Test (RF) and scores from the Attitudes towards Lesbians and Gay Men Scale
(ATLGM-S) (Sanabria, 2002). These scores suggest that the higher a person’s religious
fundamentalism, the higher number of negative attitudes he or she holds towards
homosexuality. In addition, Sanabria (2002) stated that beliefs towards homosexuals are
not only derived from religious fundamentalism, but also by the amount of religious
emphasis during formative years and also by a person’s religious approach (intrinsic or
extrinsic). Sanabria suggest that the amount of religious training throughout a person’s
life can lead to a development of prejudice. A development of prejudice results from an
individual’s life experiences when ultimately prejudice becomes a part of the
individual’s philosophy on life. Organized groups such as religious institutions are
active in reinforcing attitudes and values that shape prejudice beliefs (Sanabria, 2002).
This early religious training is suggested to be correlated with a life-long prejudice
towards gay men and lesbians. These attitudes are also shaped according to whether one
has intrinsic or extrinsic religious beliefs. According to Sanabria (2002) an individual
who is intrinsic is characterized as having a close relationship with God or a higher
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being, and involves his or her faith throughout all aspects of his or her life. An extrinsic individual identifies with a belief but does not allow it to influence his or her everyday life (Sanabria 2002). In the Rowatt and Shmitt study (2003), the intrinsic religious approach has been found to be related to restrained sexuality and desire across 52 different cultures whereas the extrinsic religious approach is associated with higher level of sexuality (Rosik, Griffith, Cruz, 2007). This study suggests that intrinsic individuals have a greater tendency to have homophobic beliefs (Rosik, Griffith, Cruz, 2007).

In the Sanabria (2002) study he found that gender and ethnicity were attributers to attitudes towards homosexuality. Because of this finding the current study ensured that there was a large variance in gender and ethnicity to ensure that there would be little if any bias in my results. Similar to the Sanabria (2002) study, the current study examines how the effects of religious fundamentalism, religious emphasis, and religious approach (intrinsic or extrinsic) affect attitudes towards gay men and lesbians. The current study should demonstrate a significant impact on homosexual beliefs due to religiosity.

Method

Participants

A total of 32 individuals participated in this study. The participants were all students enrolled in the University of Western Ontario and were recruited on the campus of Huron College and also on the main campus of the university. Nothing would make them ineligible to participate in the study other than not having corrected normal vision. There were 12 males and 20 females represented in this study. The participants'
Ages ranged from 18 to 23 with a mean of 20.3. The majority of participants identified as being Caucasian, followed by Black (African decent). In response to the question “which religious denomination do you currently belong to”, the majority of participants answered other. The demographic characteristics of the study may be found in Appendix A.

**Materials**

The materials used for the study were 3 images, questions regarding the image, a demographic form, the Religiosity Scale and the Attitudes towards Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (ATLGM-S) (Herek 1988). The 3 images depicted a homosexual male couple, a homosexual female couple and a heterosexual couple. The questions which followed the images were the same for all 3 images. The images and the questions may be found in the Appendix. The demographic form consisted of 4 different items, gender, age, ethnicity and religious denomination.

The Religiosity Scale was created for this study. The Religiosity Scale consisted of 10 items on a 5-point scale. The responses could range from “1 = strongly disagree” to “5 = strongly agree”. The questions were not specific to any religious beliefs and therefore were able to be applied to multiple religions, i.e. Muslim, Christian etc. The questions were derived from 3 previously created instruments, the Religious Fundamentalism Scale (RF) (Altemeyer, Hunsber, 1992), the Intrinsic Religious Motivation Scale (IMS) (Hoge, 1972) and the Religious Emphasis Scale (RES) (Altemeyer, 1988). The majority of the questions were derived from the RF which measures an individual’s level of fundamental vs. Liberal beliefs (Sanabria, 2002). The
IMS also contributed to a great portion of the Religiosity Scale. The purpose of the IMS is to measure the level of internal vs. external oriented beliefs (Sanabria, 2002). Finally the remaining questions were derived from the RES which measures the level of childhood experiences with religion (Sanabria, 2002). Potential scores on the Religiosity Scale could range from 10 to 50. A high score on the religiosity scale indicated high religiosity while a low score indicated a non-religious individual. Some questions on the scale required reverse scaling. The total time for completing the Religiosity questionnaire is no more than 5 minutes.

The ATLGM-S consisted of 10 items on a 5 point scale. The responses could range from “1 = strongly disagree” to “5 = strongly agree”. The ATLGM-S consisted of 2 subscales. One subscale asked questions pertaining to male homosexuality, while the other asked questions pertaining to female homosexuality. Both scales are added together to produce a total score (Sanabria, 2002). Potential scores on the ATLGM-S can range from 10-50. A high score indicated a high level of negative attitudes regarding homosexuality and a low score indicated tolerance for homosexuality. The scale consists of 4 positive items on the scale required reverse scoring (Sanabria, 2002). The total time for completing the ATLGM-S is no more than 5 minutes.

Procedure

Participants were given a letter of information and participant consent form. Considering the study required participants to answer sensitive personal questions, they were informed that they could withdrawal from the study at any time and that all information provided would remain confidential. Participants were first asked to fill in
the participant demographic information form. Following this the participants were
exposed to one of three images. Half of the participants (16) were exposed to an image
of a heterosexual couple while the other half was exposed to an image of a homosexual
couple. Those participants who were shown an image of a homosexual couple was either
shown an image of a male homosexual couple (if the participant was a male) or a female
homosexual couple (if the participant was a female). Following the exposure to the
images, all the participants were given the same questions to answer regarding the
images. After answering the questions, participants first answered the ATLGM-S
(Herrick 1988) followed by the Religiosity Scale. After the participant had completed
the various instruments of measurement, they received a debriefing statement which
described how the study was measured and manipulated, and what the results from the
data should demonstrate.

Results

A 2X2 ANOVA was used to determine if religiosity significantly impacted attitudes
towards homosexuality. The experimental design was directional.

According to the analysis, there was a significant relationship between attitudes
towards homosexuality and participants who were shown images of either a homosexual
or heterosexual couple shown in Figure 1.

\( F(1, 28) = 17.9, P < .01 \)

The strength of effect for the rows variable accounted for 37% of the total
variance. The analysis indicated that there was no significant column or interaction
effect.
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Fig 1. Graph Showing the Mean Scores of Homosexual Attitudes of Participants with High (Series 1) and Low Religiosity (Series 2)
Discussion

The results of the study do not support previous claims that high religiosity is positively correlated with a homophobic belief system (Sanabria 2002). Though the current study indicates that there is a slight correlation between religiosity and attitudes towards homosexuality, there is still not a significant correlation. The individual data does however show that the highly religious participants have more negative attitudes towards homosexuality than the heterosexual participants after being exposed to images of homosexual couples. It seems probable that due to a series of limitations, the current study could have yielded similar results to Sanabria (2002).

Had there been more participants, a significant relationship would have existed between the scores of the Religiosity Scale and the ATLGM-S (Herrick, 1988). Because the participants were generally in the same age range it is possible that they had fewer differentiating beliefs towards homosexuality. Furthermore because the participants had been raised during a liberal time period with increasing acceptance for homosexuals, it is likely that the participants do not hold any considerable anti-gay sentiments. Finally all of the participants are university educated. The Rosik, Griffith, Cruz (2007) study suggests that individuals with higher levels of education are more tolerant towards homosexuality.

Another possible limitation to the current study was the environment in which participants completed the questionnaires. A more controlled setting would have been favourable for the validity of the data. Many of the participants completed the tasks of the study in a very casual setting among friends and peers. It is possible that the
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participants' external environment may have influenced them to answer questions in a particular way.

Further research into the current study might try to rectify the limitations previously expressed. The researcher should attempt to recruit a greater number of participants with even more variation in regards to age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, educational level and religious background. In addition the researcher should create a controlled environment in which participants can complete the required measurements of the study, without the influence of any extraneous variables.

Furthermore instead of combining different measurements of religiosity into one scale, the researcher may want to increase the number of scales to measure the multiple aspects of religiosity, such as in the Sanabria (2002) study. An increase in the number of detailed questionnaires on religious beliefs may be needed in order to strengthen the assessment and correlation between religiosity and attitudes towards homosexuals.
References


## APPENDIX A

### Participant Demographic Characteristics

<table>
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<th>Item</th>
<th>Number</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atheist</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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APPENDIX B
Male Homosexual Couple Images
APPENDIX C

Female Homosexual Couple Image
APPENDIX D

Heterosexual Couple Image
APPENDIX E

Questions Relating to the Images

1. How did the two individuals meet?

2. What are the individuals thinking in this picture?

3. What kind of relationship do the two individuals have?

4. What events will happen in the future regarding their relationship?
APPENDIX F

Religiosity Scale

(1) Strongly Disagree (2) (3) (4) (5) Strongly Agree

1. My faith involves all my life
   (1).......(2) ........(3) .......(4) ........(5)

2. My faith sometimes restricts my actions
   (1).......(2) ........(3) .......(4) ........(5)

3. Nothing is as important to me as serving God as best as I know how
   (1).......(2) ........(3) .......(4) ........(5)

4. I try hard to carry my religion into all my other dealings in life
   (1).......(2) ........(3) .......(4) ........(5)

5. My religious beliefs are really what lie behind my whole approach to life
   (1).......(2) ........(3) .......(4) ........(5)

6. It doesn’t matter so much what I believe as long as I lead a moral life
   (1).......(2) ........(3) .......(4) ........(5)

7. Although I am a religious person, I refuse to let religious consideration influence
   my everyday affairs
   (1).......(2) ........(3) .......(4) ........(5)

8. No one religion is especially close to God, nor does God favour and particular
   group of believers
   (1).......(2) ........(3) .......(4) ........(5)

9. Parents should encourage their children to study all religions without bias, and
   then makeup their own minds about what to believe
   (1).......(2) ........(3) .......(4) ........(5)

10. When you get down to it, there are only two kinds of people in the world: the
    Righteous who will be rewarded by God, and the rest who will not.
    (1).......(2) ........(3) .......(4) ........(5)
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