

A Bond Between Man and Woman: Religiosity, Moral Foundations, and Same-Sex Marriage Attitudes in the Philippines

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Same-sex marriage in the Philippines remains a highly contentious issue due to the influence of religion in this predominantly Catholic country, where it is often framed as an issue of morality. However, the psychological underpinnings of this religious influence still merits further exploration. Thus, we examined the role of religious behaviors and moral foundations in predicting attitudes toward same-sex marriage among Filipinos. Data from 385 participants revealed that the particular behavior of reading the main sacred text of one's religion, rather than the often-used predictor of religious attendance predicts negative attitudes. Beyond these religious variables, the moral foundation of Purity/sanctity also predicts negative attitudes. Recommendations for further research and possible implications on attitude change are discussed in light of these findings.

Keywords: same-sex marriage attitudes, religiosity, moral foundations theory

Same-sex marriage has been an up and coming issue. As of 2015, twenty countries have legalized same-sex marriage (Freedom to Marry, 2015), with the trend likely to increase over time. In the Philippines, local activists have tried to avoid this discussion in favor of advocating

anti-discrimination laws (Lim & Jordan, 2013). Nevertheless, it is an important issue to discuss, as studies have shown that legal recognition of same-sex partners reduces social exclusion, alleviates the oppressive effects of institutionalized stigma, and increases access to more benefits and resources, which in turn can improve mental and physical health (Badgett, 2009 ; Buffie, 2010). Likewise, global changes, especially the recent US supreme court decision to legalize same-sex marriage have raised the issue locally. Legal and political hurdles abound in the Philippine context – notably, the Family Code which stipulates that marriage must be between a man and a woman (Executive Order 209, 1987). Although legal petitions challenging the Family Code in favor of same-sex marriage have been created, none have prospered.

A major factor in the Philippine context is the influence of the Catholic Church, which strongly opposes same-sex marriage (Villegas, 2015). However, the hold of the Church on legislation may not necessarily be absolute, as seen in the recent passage of the Reproductive Health (RH) Law, which had strong public support despite vocal opposition from Church leaders. Notably, to counteract anti-RH advocates' emphasis on God and the sanctity of life in their moral messaging (Luczon & Francisco, 2015; Montiel, Umel, & de Leon, 2015), lay advocates of the of the RH Law emphasized the moral discourse of rights, highlighting the law as one that is pro-life and promoting responsible parenthood. Other Christian denominations, such those belonging to the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC) on the other hand, defended the RH initiative on grounds of equality, arguing that the law is not only pro-life but also pro-poor and pro-development (Araullo, 2011). Quite unexpectedly, the PCEC also claimed to have found “nothing immoral” with the RH proposition. It is therefore important to understand how social psychological factors such as the interplay of religiosity and morality leverage public opinion on issues, which may have an impact on policies on same-sex marriage.

Some factors have been consistently linked to such attitudes, with women, younger people, and liberals more likely to approve of same-sex marriage. Political conservatives and religious people, in contrast, are more likely to hold negative attitudes toward same-sex marriage

(Duncan & Kimmelmeier, 2012; Herek, 2011; Koleva, Graham, Iyer, Ditto, & Haidt, 2012). It comes as no surprise that religiosity is linked to same-sex marriage attitudes given pronouncements in religious doctrines against homosexual acts (Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006). On the surface, this may suggest that the predominant Catholicism in the Philippines would certainly predict negative attitudes toward same-sex marriage. However, studies looking into attitudes toward same-sex marriage typically consider religiosity in terms of frequency of attendance in religious ceremonies and membership in a religious denomination (Brumbaugh et al., 2008; Duncan & Kimmelmeier, 2012; Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006). This may fail to capture other facets of religiosity, especially in a context such as the Philippines where 80.6% of the population is Roman Catholic (Bueza, 2015) and 87% consider religion very important in their lives (Pew Research Center, 2015). Religious attendance may instead be a social activity, or something done out of routine or conformity to social norms. Thus, other religious behaviors such as praying and reading religious texts may give a more complete picture of religiosity (Dy-Liacco et al., 2009).

Within and beyond the confines of religion, same-sex marriage is often discussed and debated as a moral issue, with opposition typically coming from a religious standpoint invoking God and the natural order, and supporters framing it as an issue of equal human rights (Brewer, 2003; Ghavami & Johnson, 2011). Such arguments are reflective of differences within the framework of Moral Foundations Theory (Graham et al., 2012; Haidt, Graham, & Joseph, 2009). Moral foundations are seen as intuitions representing differences in moral concerns, thus predisposing people toward particular social and political beliefs, typically delineated as liberal or conservative (Haidt et al., 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2006). These five moral foundations include: Harm/care, Fairness/reciprocity, Ingroup/loyalty, Authority/respect, and Purity/sanctity. The Harm/care foundation is concerned about preventing harm, and showing care for others in one's moral evaluations. The Fairness/reciprocity foundation emphasizes equality and justice in determining right or wrong. Ingroup/loyalty, on the other hand, gives importance to maintaining the cohesion of one's ingroup, while Authority/respect prioritizes fulfilling one's own duties within the social hierarchy. Finally, Purity/sanctity is concerned with

keeping the sanctity of one's body and spirit, and is typically associated with the emotion of disgust. Liberals are said to emphasize the individualizing foundations of Harm/care and Fairness/reciprocity, while conservatives consider all five foundations (Graham et al., 2012; Haidt et al., 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2006) in their moral lives.

Indeed, researchers have examined the relations of religiosity and moral foundations with homonegativity (Rosik, Dinges, & Saavedra, 2013). The binding foundations of Purity/sanctity and Ingroup/authority predicted greater homonegativity, whereas the individualizing foundation of Harm/fairness did so in the opposite direction, above and beyond intrinsic religiosity and demographic factors. A similar role for Purity/sanctity was also seen in another study that sought to understand differences in attitudes about contested social issues (Koleva et al., 2012), including same-sex marriage. In a large sample of US adults, Purity/sanctity was the strongest predictor of moral disapproval of same-sex marriage and support for banning same-sex marriage over and above gender, religious attendance, and political ideology. Harm/care, Ingroup/loyalty, and Fairness/reciprocity also negatively predicted disapproval, albeit with weaker effect sizes. These studies highlight the strength of the theory in understanding multiple, sometimes conflicting, psychological motivations behind certain sociopolitical attitudes and diversity within social groups such as liberals and conservatives. Thus, this perspective may also be useful in understanding attitudes towards same-sex marriage within the Philippine context. However, in contrast to the US context where the study was conducted and the theory developed, the liberal-conservative divide in political ideologies is not as pronounced in the Philippines. Instead, differences in liberal and conservative sociopolitical attitudes may be rooted in religiosity.

In sum, previous work has demonstrated that religiosity is linked to negative attitudes toward same-sex marriage (Duncan & Kimmelmeier, 2012; Herek, 2011; Koleva, et. al., 2012; Olson, et. al., 2006). However, religiosity has often been measured in terms of religious attendance, excluding other religious behaviors. Understanding religiosity is especially important for LGBT psychology in the Philippines, given the role of religion in our sociocultural context (Ofreneo, 2013). Koleva and colleagues (2012) have also clarified the

role of moral foundations in predicting same-sex marriage attitudes, albeit in an American context, where liberal-conservative divisions are prominent. In a setting such as the Philippines where religion rather than political orientation tends to take center stage in public opinion, it is also worth examining the interplay of religiosity and moral foundations in predicting same-sex marriage attitudes. Given these gaps in the research, this study investigates the role of religious behaviors and moral foundations in predicting attitudes toward same-sex marriage within the Philippine context. Using moral discourses that also embody religious values has already worked for advocating the passage of a law strongly opposed by the Catholic Church (Luczon & Francisco, 2015; Montiel et al., 2015). Thus, it may also have the potential to shape the discourse on same-sex marriage, and beyond this, equal rights for Filipinos of different groups and identities.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 467 students from a large public university in Metro Manila participated in the study, with 385 respondents included in the final analysis based on their responses to the filter items on the Moral Foundations Questionnaire. Their ages ranged from 16 to 27, with a mean of 19.04 ($SD = 1.25$). Of the 385 participants, 51% ($n = 196$) were female, while 49% ($n = 189$) were male. Majority of participants identified as Roman Catholic (67.8%, $n = 261$), followed by Born Again Christian (14.8%, $n = 57$), atheist or agnostic (10.7%, $n = 41$), Iglesia ni Cristo (2.9%, $n = 11$), other Judeo-Christian (1.6%, $n = 6$), Mormon (1%, $n = 4$), and Islam (.5%, $n = 2$). The remaining three (0.8%) indicated that their religion was not among any of the given options. In short, almost all religiously affiliated participants belonged to Christian denominations.

Procedure

Participants were recruited over two semesters from the subject pool of students enrolled in an Introduction to Psychology class in a

large Philippine university by posting information about the study on bulletin boards. Students were given the link to the website where the survey was made available. Participation was voluntary, and students were given course credit for answering the survey, which also included variables beyond the scope of the present study. We ensured participants that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential, and provided them with our contact information in case they had questions or concerns.

Measures

Attitude towards same-sex marriage. Attitudes toward several social issues were measured in the survey by giving this instruction: “Indicate the extent to which you feel positive or negative toward each issue.” The response scale ranged from 0 = very negative to 10 = very positive. For this analysis, only results for the item on same-sex marriage is presented.

Religious behaviors. Participants reported their religious behaviors through the four-item Religious Behavior Index (Dy-Liacco et al., 2009), which asked how often they perform the following: “Read the main sacred text your religion (e.g, Bible, Geeta, Koran, Torah, etc.)” (1 = never, 7 = several times a week), “Read other religious literature” (1 = never, 7 = several times a week), “Pray” (1 = never, 8 = daily), and “Attend religious services” (1 = never, 5 = quite often). Items were analyzed separately to better nuance which aspects of religiosity factor in, particularly within this predominantly Catholic context.

Moral foundations. Participants answered the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (Graham et al., 2012). The first part of the MFQ asks participants to rate the relevance of certain considerations in deciding whether something is right or wrong, and the second part asks for their agreement or disagreement to a number of statements. Six items measure each moral foundation of Harm/care ($\alpha = .60$), Fairness/reciprocity ($\alpha = .62$), Ingroup/loyalty ($\alpha = .59$), Authority/respect ($\alpha = .54$), and Purity/sanctity ($\alpha = .68$). Two catch items (“Whether or not someone was good at math,” “It is better to do good than to do bad”) were also included and used to remove cases based on responses to these items.

Political beliefs. Participants rated their political beliefs by responding to this item: “Where would you locate yourself in terms of your political beliefs?” (1 = Liberal, 7 = Conservative).

Analysis

We performed hierarchical regression analysis to distinguish the impact of demographic variables, political beliefs, religious behaviors, and moral foundations. The first model included demographic variables of age and gender, with gender dummy-coded for the analysis (1 = female, 0 = male), political beliefs, and religious attendance. These variables were selected for the first block given the robust research findings on their links with same-sex marriage attitudes (Duncan & Kimmelmeier, 2012; Herek, 2011; Koleva, et. al., 2012). To test whether other religious behaviors may be better predictors of same-sex marriage attitudes compared to religious attendance, the remaining three religious behaviors (reading the main sacred text of one’s religion, reading other religious texts, and praying) were added in the second model. To better understand possible psychological underpinnings of these religious behaviors, moral foundations were the last to be included in the third model.

RESULTS

On average, scores on same-sex marriage attitudes fell slightly above the midpoint ($M = 6.69$, $SD = 3.41$) suggesting moderately positive views on the issue. Gender did not predict such attitudes in the first two models ($\beta_1 = .450$, $\beta_2 = .530$). However, women tended to have more positive attitudes toward same-sex marriage when moral foundations ($\beta_3 = .594$) were held equal. In contrast, age was not a significant predictor all throughout the analysis. Political beliefs consistently predicted attitudes ($\beta_1 = -.738$), with conservatives having more negative attitudes than liberals. The effect of political beliefs progressively weakened, but remained significant when other religious behaviors ($\beta_2 = -.625$) and moral foundations ($\beta_3 = -.468$) variables were factored in. More frequent religious attendance was associated with more negative attitudes in the first model ($\beta_1 = -.720$), but not

Table 1. Descriptives

| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>min</i> | <i>max</i> |
|-------------------------------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Same-sex marriage | 6.69 | 3.41 | 0 | 10 |
| Age | 19.04 | 1.25 | 16 | 27 |
| Political beliefs | 3.19 | 1.48 | 1 | 7 |
| Religious behaviors | | | | |
| Attending religious services | 3.64 | 1.37 | 1 | 5 |
| Reading main sacred text | 3.11 | 1.73 | 1 | 7 |
| Reading other religious texts | 2.37 | 1.42 | 1 | 7 |
| Praying | 5.65 | 2.39 | 1 | 8 |
| Moral Foundations | | | | |
| Harm/care | 3.82 | .66 | 1 | 5 |
| Fairness/reciprocity | 3.91 | .52 | 2 | 5 |
| Ingroup/loyalty | 3.07 | .73 | 1 | 5 |
| Authority/respect | 3.08 | .72 | 1 | 5 |
| Purity/sanctity | 2.74 | .97 | 0 | 5 |

alongside other religious behaviors ($\beta_2 = -.175$) and moral foundations ($\beta_3 = -.148$). When all religious behaviors were included in the model, only reading the main sacred text of one's religion negatively predicted same-sex marriage attitudes ($\beta_2 = -.632$), over and above moral foundations ($\beta_3 = -.553$). Only Purity/sanctity ($\beta_4 = -.818$) predicted same-sex marriage attitudes among the five moral foundations.

Table 2. Regression Coefficients

| Variable | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | | Model 3 | | |
|-------------------------------|----------|--|-------------|----------|--|-------------|-----------|--|-------------|
| | β | 95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound | Upper Bound | β | 95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound | Upper Bound | β | 95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| (Constant) | | | | | | | | | |
| Gender | .450 | -.158 | 1.059 | .530 | -.039 | 1.107 | .594* | .035 | 1.152 |
| Age | -.067 | -.263 | .129 | -.056 | -.240 | .129 | -.070 | -.251 | .110 |
| Political beliefs | -.738*** | -.947 | -.530 | -.625*** | -.824 | -.426 | -.468*** | -.672 | -.263 |
| Attending religious services | -.720*** | -.945 | -.494 | -.175 | -.458 | .109 | -.148 | -.430 | .134 |
| Other religious behaviors | | | | | | | | | |
| Reading main sacred text | | | | -.632*** | -.852 | -.412 | -.553*** | -.770 | -.336 |
| Reading other religious texts | | | | -.074 | -.305 | .158 | -.059 | -.284 | .167 |
| Praying | | | | -.132 | -.294 | .029 | -.039 | -.202 | .124 |
| Moral Foundations | | | | | | | | | |
| Harm/care | | | | | | | .535 | -.030 | 1.099 |
| Fairness/reciprocity | | | | | | | .365 | -.318 | 1.048 |
| Ingroup/loyalty | | | | | | | -.363 | -.850 | .123 |
| Authority/respect | | | | | | | -.009 | -.532 | .513 |
| Purity/sanctity | | | | | | | -.818*** | -.1253 | -.384 |
| F change | | | | | | | | | |
| R² | | | | | | | 18.006*** | | 5.416*** |
| Adjusted R² | | | | | | | .321 | | .367 |
| | | | | | | | .309 | | .347 |

** p < .01
*** p < .001

DISCUSSION

This study examined the role of religious behaviors and moral foundations in predicting attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Religious attendance, the most commonly used measure of religiosity (Duncan & Kimmelmeier, 2012; Herek, 2011; Koleva, et. al., 2012), was significant alongside other variables commonly used to predict same-sex marriage attitudes. However, when other religious behaviors were factored in, only reading the main sacred text predicted attitudes. Among the moral foundations, only Purity/sanctity predicted negative attitudes. Consistent with previous research, (Duncan & Kimmelmeier, 2012; Herek, 2011; Koleva, et. al., 2012), political beliefs also contributed to the model, albeit in decreasing intensity when religious behaviors and moral foundations were factored in. Women were also more likely to have positive attitudes, but only when moral foundations were included in the model.

The significant role of Purity/sanctity confirms previous research (Koleva, et. al., 2012), and comes as no surprise, as this foundation tends to play heavily in issues related to sexuality (Graham, et. al., 2012). However, other moral foundations do not seem to play much of a role, contrary to the aforementioned study. Despite the emphasis of advocates on messages of equality and love in pushing for same-sex marriage, the moral foundations of Fairness/reciprocity and Harm/care do not seem to be related to attitudes towards the issue among our Filipino respondents. It is possible that the concept of marriage and sexuality in the Philippines is seen more as a church-related rather than a secular issue, that the messaging of church leaders about the sanctity of marriage tends to have a greater impact on attitudes. Aside from identifying relevant moral foundations in relation to the issue, consideration of morality also allows for a more nuanced understanding of gender differences. Although previous research has consistently shown that women tend to have more positive attitudes toward same-sex marriage (Duncan & Kimmelmeier, 2012; Herek, 2011; Koleva, Graham, Iyer, Ditto, & Haidt, 2012), the results of this study suggest further unpacking gender with moral foundations to better understand the source of these gender differences.

As expected, religious influence is evident in the role of religious

behaviors in predicting same-sex marriage attitudes. It is notable that although religious attendance predicted attitudes in the initial model, this effect became nonsignificant when other religious behaviors were considered, and instead was better captured by the behavior of reading the main sacred text of one's religion. Given the nature of the student sample whose church attendance may be required by their parents, as well as the integration of religious rituals in Filipino society, it is possible that attendance in religious services does not necessarily signify greater religiosity. Thus, the findings of the study highlight the need for finer distinctions in measures of religiosity, especially in contexts where religion is heavily integrated into the cultural norms and family life.

Indeed, in this study, reading the main sacred text of one's religion explains more about negative same-sex marriage attitudes. Why then would this be the case? One possibility could be that stigmatization of gay people is largely rooted in conventional interpretations of particular Biblical verses that highlight the sinfulness of homosexual acts (Yip, 1997) and the failure to appreciate disparities in historical and cultural contexts and meanings between ancient-biblical and modern times (Bautista & Bautista, 2015). These authors also discussed measures to contest the stigma stemming from the Bible. Gay Christians reinterpreted passages that stigmatize homosexuality, emphasized biblical passages that reflect broader Christian principles, and questioned the relevance of the passages within current sociocultural contexts (Yip, 1997). From a Christian Evangelical perspective, Bautista and Bautista (2015) also suggest interpreting biblical teachings alongside current scientific findings. Such scripture-based strategies may help reduce homonegativity among religious people, who are more likely to disapprove of homosexuality (Adameczyk & Pitt, 2009; Jäckle & Wenzelburger, 2014).

It is possible, however, that this immersion in one's main religious text does not necessarily lead to homonegativity, but essentialist beliefs about marriage. Marriage is often defined in the bible as a bond between man and woman, and an institution created by a divine being. Such biblically-based definitions of marriage are often reflected in essentialist views, which see marriage as non-arbitrary, considering these aforementioned features essential and unchangeable. Such

essentialist views of marriage have been demonstrated to account for the relationship between religiosity and attitudes toward same-sex marriage (Duncan & Kimmelmeier, 2012). It thus seems plausible that reading sacred texts can have an impact on same-sex attitudes through two possible paths: homonegativity or essentialist views of marriage. Future work can further distinguish the role of each one in influencing attitudes toward same-sex marriage.

Although our study has further elucidated links among same-sex marriage attitudes, religion, and moral foundations, there are certain limitations in the current research. For one, only a single item was used to measure attitudes toward same-sex marriage. Greater accuracy may be obtained with multiple items, particularly those that distinguish between unions in religious and civil settings. Moreover, the use of student samples may have skewed attitudes toward the more positive end – after all, university students tend to be lower on homonegativity than the general population (Jäckle & Wenzelburger, 2014). We were also unable to determine whether there were sexual minority students in the sample, as well as the extent of contact of the participants with LGBT people. Students who have existing ties with the LGBT community may be motivated to support same-sex marriage because of their relationships (Herek, 2011). Thus, future work can also investigate the impact of these relationships on attitudes. Finally, majority of participants were Roman Catholic, and almost all affiliated with a religion were Christian. Purposive sampling of non-Catholics and even non-Christians can give greater insights on the interplay of religion, morality, and same-sex marriage attitudes.

The findings of this study point to future directions for research on same-sex marriage attitudes. The impact of reading the sacred text of one's religion can be further understood by investigating the manner by which texts are read and interpreted. Particular focus can be made in distinguishing between perceptions of homosexuality and essentialist views of marriage, both of which can be influenced by reading sacred texts. Relationships between reading sacred texts and the Purity/sanctity moral foundation can also be further examined through experimental research, as the current study relied on a correlational design. On a more practical level, our findings may provide insights on strategies to influence people's attitudes toward

same-sex marriage. As our data suggests, attitude change initiatives may be more persuasive when they consider individual differences in purity intuitions and the way by which people engage religious scriptures. In doing so, we may be able to target the specific issue of marriage equality, and even broader issues of discrimination against LGBT people and other marginalized groups.

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