

4-2009

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Recommended Citation

Sherkat, Darren E.; de Vries, Kylan M.; and Creek, Stacia, "Race, Religion, and Opposition to Same-Sex Marriage" (2009). *Working Papers*. Paper 5.

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Race, Religion, and Opposition to Same-Sex Marriage

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Paper to be presented at the 2009 Annual meetings of the American Sociological Association. Data from the NORC General Social Surveys were made available through the Interuniversity Consortium for Social and Political Research.

Race, Religion, and Opposition to Same-sex Marriage

Objective: We examine racial differences in support for same sex marriage, and test whether the emerging black-white gap is a function of religiosity. We explore how religious factors play a crucial role in racial differences, and how secular factors have varying effects on attitudes for whites and African Americans. *Methods:* Using data from the General Social Surveys, we estimate ordinal logistic regression models and stacked structural equation models. *Results:* We show that the racial divide is a function of African Americans' ties to sectarian Protestant religious denominations and high rates of church attendance. We also show racial differences in the influence of education and political values on opposition to same sex marriage. *Conclusions:* Religious factors are a source of racial differences in support for same sex marriage, and secular influences play less of a role in structuring African Americans' beliefs about same-sex marriage.

The success of California's Proposition 8 in 2008 was a stunning blow for progress on marital equality for same-sex couples. In the wake of this renunciation of marriage rights established by a decision of the California Supreme Court, activists, pundits, and scholars have pondered various factors which may have contributed to the success of Proposition 8. Perhaps the most controversial explanation has been that African American opposition to same-sex marriage combined with high voter turnout in the Presidential election supporting Barack Obama to seal the passage of Proposition 8. The Associated Press 2008 California General Election Exit Poll showed that 70% of African Americans voted in favor of Proposition 8, though subsequent investigations suggest that African American support was considerably lower (Egan & Sherrill, 2009). Still, it is clear that African Americans were more supportive of Proposition 8, and African American opposition to same-sex marriage could be even more decisive in future political contests in locales where African Americans make up a larger fraction of voters. We explore why African Americans are less supportive of marriage rights for same-sex couples.

Many activists and commentators have argued that African American religiosity is primarily responsible for their conservative views about homosexuality and same-sex marriage, and a recent analysis of Proposition 8 voting supports that conclusion (Egan & Sherrill, 2009). The majority of African Americans hold affiliations in Baptist and other sectarian denominations such as the Church of God in Christ, and African Americans have the highest rates of religious participation of any subgroup of the American population (Sherkat, 2002; Ellison & Sherkat, 1990, 1995; Hunt & Hunt, 2001). Yet, compared to white conservative Protestant denominations, African American denominations play a quite different political role, and this may alter the relationship between religious factors and support for same-sex marriage. Further, prominent secular

African Americans, particularly in entertainment and sports, have also been noted to express disapproval of homosexuality and hostility towards gays and lesbians (Collins, 1995). This largely secular opposition to same-sex relations may render religious factors less important for African Americans.

Only a handful of studies have asked questions about same-sex marriage in the United States. Most of the polls that have investigated same-sex marriage are small opinion polls (cf. Avery, Chase, Johansson, Litvak-Montero, & Wydra, 2007; Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006; Egan, Persily, & Wallstein, 2008), which have low response rates and too few African American respondents to systematically examine racial differences. Fortunately, the General Social Survey (GSS) asked questions about same-sex marriage in 1988, and in 2004-2008. We examine the emergence of racial differences between 1988 and 2008, and go on to examine whether religious factors can help explain racial differences in opposition to same-sex marriage using a series of ordinal logistic regression models and structural equation models stacked by race. We find that religious factors help explain black-white differences, and that the predictors of support for same sex marriage vary considerably by race.

Religion and Opposition to Same-Sex Marriage

The issue of same-sex marriage is relatively new and social movements seeking civil rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) persons have been mobilized more prominently around issues of non-discrimination, against police harassment, hate crimes, and HIV prevention and mitigation (Chambers, 2000; Egan & Sherrill 2005). While there have been longstanding legal challenges against limiting marital rights to opposite sex couples, widespread mobilization for same-sex marriage was rare until recently (Becker, 1995). Religious denominations play a strong role in structuring attitudes about the morality of homosexuality, and support for specific policies of

toleration and non-discrimination (Van Geest, 2007; Cadge, Olson & Wildeman, 2008; Ellingson, Tebbe, Van Haitmat, & Laumann, 2001; Djupe, Olson, & Gilbert, 2006). Members of sectarian Protestant denominations—like the Southern Baptist Convention, the Church of God in Christ, and the Assembly of God—tend to view sacred texts as literally true (Hoffmann and Bartkowski, 2008), and these beliefs undergird opposition to civil rights for GLBT persons and others (Burdette, Ellison, & Hill, 2005; Edgell et al., 2006; Ellison & Musick, 1993; Fulton, Gorsuch, & Maynard, 1999; Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005; Hunsberger, 1996).

Studies show that members of sectarian Protestant denominations tend to believe that homosexuality is morally wrong, and are considerably less tolerant of civil liberties for persons who have same-sex relations (Bolzendahl & Brooks, 2005; Burdette et al., 2005; Davis & Robinson, 1996; Finlay & Walther, 2003; Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982; Hertel & Hughes, 1987; Hunsberger, 1996; Peterson & Donnerwerth, 1998; Smith & Windes, 2000; Loftus, 2001; Donovan, Talbert, Smith, & Perry, 2005; Hoffman & Johnston, 2005; Olson, et al., 2006). Some research has suggested that conservative Protestants are liberalizing on personal and political issues (Peterson & Donnerworth, 1998; Reimer & Park, 2001). Still, Loftus (2001) shows that sectarian Protestants have substantially lower levels of liberalization on attitudes towards homosexuality.

Conservative Protestant opposition to civil rights for homosexuals has been associated with their high rates of religious participation, which is also linked to conservative positions on a variety of social concerns (Beatty & Walter, 1984; Brewer, 2003; Roof & McKinney, 1987; Herek & Glunt, 1993).

In contrast to sectarian Christians, members of mainline Protestant denominations and Catholics are markedly more supportive of granting civil liberties to gays and lesbians, including support for same-sex marriages (Burdette et al., 2005; Roof & McKinney, 1987; Finlay & Walther, 2003; Lewis, 2003; Loftus, 2001; Olson et al., 2006). Studies

have found that Catholics became substantially more tolerant over the last two decades (Hoffmann & Miller, 1998). This might be a function of declining acceptance of Papal authority on moral issues in the wake of Vatican II (D'Antonio, 1999). Studies consistently find that Jews and people with no religious affiliation are the most tolerant of homosexuality (Burdette et al., 2005; Lewis, 2003; Loftus, 2001; Roof & McKinney, 1987). A few major religious groups have conveyed same-sex marriage rights, and many denominations have large movements affirming the equality of GLBT persons. In 1997, the Unitarian Universalist Association endorsed same-sex marriage, and the United Church of Christ followed suit in 2005. The Commission on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly recognizes same-sex unions, though not on an equal plane with traditional marriages (Cohen & Heller, 2007). Prior research suggests that opposition to same-sex marriage will be rooted in conservative Protestant communities, and will be strongest among active churchgoers.

Race, Religion, and Same-sex Marriage

African Americans are heavily involved in religious organizations, and theologically conservative Baptist and Pentecostal denominations hold the commitments of the majority of African Americans (Ellison & Sherkat, 1990; Roof & McKinney, 1987; Sherkat, 2002). Indeed, 63% of African Americans report affiliation with Baptist or other sectarian Protestant denominations compared to 30% for white Americans (Sherkat 2001, 2002). African American religion was indelibly marked by the experiences of slavery and of living as disenfranchised occupants of a hostile nation; and, these experiences have an enduring influence on the social and political nature of African American sectarian Christianity (Frazier, 1964; Lincoln, 1974; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Much of African American religion is conducted in racially homogeneous Christian churches, in denominations that are also racially segregated (Emerson & Smith, 2001).

African Americans are significantly more likely to view homosexuality as wrong, in keeping with their conservative Protestant origins and high rates of religious participation (Loftus, 2001; Lewis, 2003). Yet, while much folk wisdom points to African American conservatism regarding GLBT rights, some research suggests otherwise (Lewis, 2003). The two highest quality studies investigating racial variations in attitudes towards civil rights for homosexuals show that African Americans are more supportive of rights than are whites (Loftus, 2001; Lewis, 2003). The split in African American sentiment between the morality of homosexuality and rights for GLBT persons is important, since it suggests that opinion on marriage rights may be pliable.

African Americans are far less likely to be Catholic, or attend liberal Protestant churches where GLBT rights are promoted. While 32% of whites report a Catholic affiliation, fewer than 10% of African Americans are Catholic (Hunt, 1998). Indeed, Catholicism could work differently for whites and African Americans, and African American Catholics may well embrace the conservative stances on sexuality taken by the Catholic Church. Few African Americans attend mainline liberal Protestant Churches, and Methodism dominates “mainline” attachments accounting for 12% of African American adherents compared to 3.5% for other mainline denominations. Methodism is highly segregated by race, with separate denominations like the African Methodist Episcopal Church, AME-Zion, and Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. Given this, “mainline” Protestantism may also have different effects on support for same-sex marriage among African Americans compared to whites or others.

While the weight of evidence suggests that religious factors likely play a strong role in African Americans’ attitudes towards GLBT rights, there is also a strong secular undercurrent of hostility towards same-sex relations among African Americans. African American writers from the sixties and seventies claimed that homosexuality was primarily a white phenomenon and therefore was antithetical to a black identity (Clever,

1968; Rhodes, 2008; Collins, 2005). Several notable African American entertainers and sports celebrities have made disparaging comments about GLBT persons. In 2007, NBA basketball star Tim Hardaway was quoted saying “I hate gay people, so I let it be known. I don’t like gay people, and I don’t like to be around gay people....It shouldn’t be in the world or in the United States” (Associated Press, 2007). Explicit and often violent anti-gay themes have been pervasive in black theater, as well (Clayborne, 1974). Anti-gay lyrics in rap and hip hop music are so ubiquitous and contain such direct calls for violence against GLBT persons that successful anti-gay rappers like Ja Rule and Chamillionaire are actively militating against legislation banning commercialized hate speech (La Puma, 2007; Chamillionaire, 2007). Notably, the hostility towards gays and lesbians expressed in entertainment genre is a secular cultural orientation viewing homosexuality as contradictory of African American identity (Collins, 2005).

Additionally, African Americans’ social status and demographic characteristics may be responsible for racial differences in support for same sex marriage. First, African Americans have lower rates of educational attainment, which is among the most powerful predictors of support for GLBT rights (Burdette et al., Loftus, 2001; Lewis 2003). Importantly, Lewis (2003) finds substantial differences in the effects of educational attainment on attitudes towards GLBT rights, with education having less of an impact among African Americans. African Americans are also more likely to reside in the socially conservative South, where intolerance of various minority groups is low (Ellison and Musick 1993). African Americans are also more likely to have children living the household, which might spur conservative orientations regarding sexuality (Sherkat and Ellison, 1997).

Finally, generational differences in support for same sex marriage and GLBT rights are considerable, and younger generations have experienced a cultural environment which is much more open about sexuality and more tolerant of GLBT persons (Brewer

2003). Examinations of cohort differences in attitudes towards sexuality have shown that later cohorts are much more tolerant of civil rights for gays and lesbians, and more permissive about homosexual relations (Scott 1998; Andersen & Fetner 2008). Recent work also shows marked intra-cohort shifts over time (Andersen & Fetner 2008; Treas 2002; Scott 1998), yet research has not addressed whether these generational shifts occurred among African Americans.

In this paper we first explore racial differences in beliefs about same-sex marriage rights over time. To presage our findings, these differences only appear after 2004. Next, we will see if racial differences are explained by demographic factors like educational attainment, or whether they are primarily a function of African Americans' high rates of affiliation with conservative Protestant denominations, and church attendance. Finally, we explore how the predictors of opposition to same sex marriage work differently for whites and African Americans.

Data and Measures

We analyze data from the 1988, and 2004-2008 General Social Surveys (GSS), when the GSS asked questions about same-sex marriage. The GSS is the only high quality nationally representative survey which has asked questions about same-sex marriage across a substantial period of time. The Gallup organization has conducted polls regarding same-sex marriage from 2000-2004 (Avery et al., 2007; Egan et al., 2008), however these surveys contain limited demographic, political, and religious information, and suffer from low response rates. A Greenberg, Quinlan, and Rosner survey provided better detail on religious factors, however it was only conducted at one time point, and obtained a 15% response rate (Olson et al., 2006), compared to the 77% (1988) and 71% (2004-2008) response rates for the GSS. We restrict some of our analyses to the 2006-2008 GSS, since not all items are available in the 2004 data.

Support for Same-Sex Marriage

We examine a single ordinal indicator of support for same-sex marriage. Respondents are asked to what extent that they agree or disagree with the statement, “Homosexual couples should have the right to marry one another,” with possible responses ranging from (5) strongly agree, (4) agree, (3) neutral, (2) disagree, and (1) strongly disagree.

Religious Factors

Our investigation examines the impact of religious affiliation and religious attendance. We compare sectarian Protestants, Catholics, and those with no religious affiliation to a comparison group mostly comprised of mainline Protestants. As is conventional in the sociology of religion, sectarian Protestant groups include Baptists, Churches of Christ, Church of God in Christ, Assembly of God, Nazarenes, and a variety of smaller Pentecostal and conservative Protestant bodies (cf. Roof and McKinney, 1987; Sherkat 2002). Frequency of *religious attendance* is measured by a single item indicator in which respondents are asked, “How often do you attend religious services?” Respondents chose their response from eight items increasing in frequency from (0) Never to (8) several times a week.

Political Beliefs:

We examine the impact of a liberal-conservative self-rating, which is only possible using the 2006-2008 GSS. This item asks respondents whether they “think of themselves as liberal or conservative” with responses ranging from (1) extremely liberal, to (7) extremely conservative. Because of the limited number of Republican African American respondents, political affiliation cannot be examined.

Cohorts

We compare six broad birth cohorts in our analyses, comparing respondents born before 1940, with those born between 1940-1945, 1946-1950, 1951-1955, 1956-1964, and those born in 1965 and later. Preliminary analyses (available on request) revealed that a finer breakdown of the older cohorts yielded no differences among them. Notably, there is a considerable shift in the cohort composition from the 1988 GSS to the 2008 GSS because of cohort replacement. Appendix A shows that in 1988, 38% of GSS respondents were born before 1940, while this figure declines to 16% in 2006. At the other end, respondents born after 1965 constitute 10% of the 1988 sample, yet they make up 40% of the 2006 GSS.

Sociodemographic Variables

We control for a variety of demographic characteristics. Most centrally, we compare whites, African Americans, and those of “other” races. We examine a binary indicator of gender comparing females to males. Dummy variables are used to compare separated or divorced respondents, and respondents who have never married, to married and widowed respondents. We include a measure of the number of children living in the household at the time of the survey. Family income is examined using a standardized z-score to account for the different distributions in 2006 and 2008. Educational attainment is assessed using the highest degree earned at the time of the survey, ranging from (0) less than high school degree, to (4) graduate degree. We also employ dichotomous indicators for respondents who are residents of rural areas, and for respondents who are lifelong Southerners.

Figure 1 about here

Figure 1 presents the trend in opposition to same-sex marriage by race from 1988-2008. In 1988, whites, African Americans, and persons of other races were uniform in

their opposition to same-sex marriage. Indeed, there is almost no difference across racial groups, with 68% in each expressing opposition or strong opposition to same-sex marriage. By 2004, we see considerable liberalization among whites and persons of other races, and this liberalization continues for whites in 2006 and 2008. Between 1988 and 2004, white opposition to same-sex marriage declined to under 54%, and it dipped to under 46% by 2008. Opposition to same-sex marriage also declined substantially for those of “other” races, decreasing to under 40% in the 2004 survey, and fluctuating between 45% in 2006 and 43% in 2008 (relatively small numbers and shifts in GSS sampling frames probably account for the fluctuations between 2004 and 2006). Yet, African American opposition did not decline substantially between 1988 and 2006. In 2006, 64% of African Americans remained opposed to same-sex marriage. Data from 2008 show that opposition did lose ground between 2006 and 2008, falling nearly 6 percentage points—a larger shift in two years than was observed in the previous 18 years.

Table 1 About Here

A number of demographic factors may influence the racial gap in support for same-sex marriage, particularly educational differences, regional concentrations and childrearing responsibilities. Our multivariate analyses estimate a set of ordinal logistic regression models to see how controls for demographic factors and religious commitments influence the racial gap in support for same-sex marriage. Because the racial gap was not manifest until 2004, and because the indicator for political values was on a separate GSS interview schedule in 2004, we limit our analyses to the 2006 and 2008 GSS. Our models are developed in a way that presents baseline demographics, and follows with religious affiliations, participation, and finally political values. In model 5, we also explore the impact of the interaction between race and political values. The logic of this modeling strategy is guided by the expected influence of religious affiliations on

rates of religious participation, and of religious affiliations and participation on political values. These relationships will be explored directly using structural equation models.

Model 1 of Table 1 presents the baseline model controlling for basic demographics. It is clear that demographic factors alone do not explain African Americans' opposition to same-sex marriage. Net of other factors, African Americans compared to whites have a 40% lower odds of being in a more supportive category ($\exp(-.51)=.60$). Controlling for demographics, there is no significant difference between respondents of other races and whites. Notably, several demographic covariates have a substantial and significant impact on support for same-sex marriage. First, women are consistently more supportive than men. Second, rural residents and lifelong Southerners are substantially more opposed to same sex marriage when compared to people from other locales. Third, divorced and never married respondents are significantly more willing to grant marital rights to same sex couples when compared to married and widowed persons. Fourth, education has a consistent positive impact on support for same sex marriage, and the positive effect of income becomes significant after controls for religious factors. Finally, generations born after 1946 are substantially more supportive of same sex marriage than are older generations.

Model 2 adds controls for identification with Catholicism, conservative Protestant sects, and non-affiliation (with a mostly mainline Protestant comparison category). Net of other covariates, we find that conservative Protestants are significantly less supportive of same-sex marriage. Affiliating with these sects reduces the odds of being in a more tolerant category by 52% ($\exp(-.74)=.48$). Catholics are not significantly different from the comparison group, and non-affiliates are even more supportive of same-sex marriage than the mostly mainline Protestant comparison group. Respondents with no religious affiliation have a much greater odds of choosing a more supportive position on same-sex marriage, nearly doubling the odds compared to mainliners ($\exp(.69)=1.99$).

Controls for denominational ties have a substantial effect on the black-white difference in support for same-sex marriage. The racial gap is almost cut in half—to 22% lower odds of being more supportive ($\text{exp}(-.25) = .78$). Still, even after controls for denominational ties, African Americans remain significantly more opposed to same-sex marriage when compared to whites.

In Model 3, we examine the impact of religious participation. We find that each unit of increase on the 9-point scale produces a reduces the odds of being in a more supportive category by 16% ($\text{exp}(-.17) = .84$). Controls for church attendance reduce the negative impact of conservative Protestant ties, and low rates of church attendance are partly responsible for the supportive positions found among persons with no religious affiliation.

Model 3 also shows that controls for church attendance reduce the difference between whites and African Americans to insignificance. Hence, religious differences between whites and African Americans are primarily responsible for African American opposition to same-sex marriage, and this finding echoes recent analyses of Proposition 8 voting (Egan and Sherrill, 2009).

In Model 4, we examine an additional political covariate which strongly predicts support for same-sex marriage—self-rated liberalism-conservatism. The introduction of political values only slightly reduces the impact of religious factors on support for same sex marriage. The difference between non-affiliates and mainliners becomes insignificant, suggesting that non-affiliates are supportive of same sex marriage primarily because of commitments to political liberalism. However, the effect of church attendance and sectarian affiliation are largely unchanged from Model 3.

For our purposes, what is interesting about Model 4 is that once political values are taken into account, the black-white difference reemerges and attains about the same magnitude found in Model 1. African Americans are more prone to report that they are

liberal, yet their view of liberalism does not translate into support for same-sex marriage. In model 5, we test this relationship by adding an interaction between race and political values. The interaction is substantial and significant, showing that among African Americans the relationship between conservative political values and support is significantly more positive—and conversely political liberalism is more negatively associated with support for same sex marriage among African Americans.

Table 2 and Figure 2 about Here

The significant interaction between race and political values requires that models of the relationships among religious and political factors be stacked by race (Hayduk, 1987). This also enables a more direct comparison of the relative influence of other predictors for whites and African Americans. The full model estimated endogenous equations for same sex marriage support, political values, church attendance, educational attainment, income, and number of children in the home. Because our interest is primarily on the sources of disparity between whites and African Americans on the issue of same sex marriage, we present a reduced set of standardized direct effects in Figure 2, along with a full range of standardized total, direct, and indirect effects on support for same sex marriage in Table 2. In our modeling, we allowed the estimation of several insignificant paths. This gives the opportunity to directly compare estimated effects by race, and overall model fit is good despite this lack of parsimony (Chi-square 84, 50 df, GFI=.99).

Figure 2 presents the path model for the direct effects of selected covariates by for whites (dotted lines) and African Americans (solid lines). Figure 2 shows that the direct effects of sectarian Protestant affiliation and church attendance on support for same sex marriage are approximately the same for whites and African Americans. However, the relationship between religious factors and other important predictors of support for same sex marriage are quite different. First, as was evident from the results in Model 5 of Table 1, the influence of political values has no significant effect on support for same-sex

marriage among African Americans. In contrast, among whites, political conservatism has a strong negative influence on support for same sex marriage, with a standardized coefficient almost twice as large as church attendance. A formal comparison of the slopes for whites and African Americans shows that the difference in the effect of political values is statistically significant ($t=6.47$).

Notably, while church attendance and sectarian Protestant affiliation foster political conservatism among whites, they have no significant relationship to political values among African Americans. The racial difference in the effects of church attendance on political values is statistically significant ($t=2.74$), but the difference in the effect of sectarian affiliation is not significant. As a Table 2 shows, while church attendance produces a significant negative indirect effect on support for same sex marriage among whites, there is no significant indirect effect for African Americans. Table 2 indicates that the total effect of sectarian Protestant affiliation is much more negative for whites. White sectarian Protestants hold more conservative political values, are more avid church participants, and are less educated when compared to white mainline Protestants. Additionally, because of their low rates of church attendance and political liberalism, white non-affiliates are more supportive of same sex marriage than mainline Protestants, while among African Americans the indirect effect of non-affiliation is much smaller.

Educational attainment is another key factor predicting support for same sex marriage, and the racial difference in the effect of education is substantial. Among whites educational attainment has a significant positive effect on support for same sex marriage, while among African Americans the direct effect of education is small and not significant. A comparison of the direct effects for education by race does not reach statistical significance ($t=1.61$), however the total effects are significantly different ($t=5.12$). A similar difference is found for income. Among whites, income has a significant positive direct and total effect on support for same sex marriage, while among

African Americans income is not significantly associated with views on same sex marriage. The racial difference in the total effect of income on support for same sex marriage is statistically significant ($t=2.03$).

Racial variation in the gender difference in support for same-sex marriage is also evident, with white women being significantly more supportive than white men, while there is no gender difference among African Americans. The racial difference in the direct effect of gender reaches modest significance ($t=1.73$), and the racial difference is even greater for the total effect of gender ($t=4.97$). This is largely because of exceptionally high rates of religious participation among African American women relative to African American men, which contributes to a strong negative indirect effect of being female on support for same sex marriage among African Americans. In contrast, the indirect effect of being female is positive among whites, owing largely to white women's heightened political liberalism relative to white men.

The stacked models show that generational factors are roughly equal for whites and African Americans, and cohorts born since 1946 are significantly more willing to grant same-sex couples the right to marry. Notably, the stacked models also show that the trend in liberalization on same sex marriage is stronger among African Americans. Among whites, 2008 respondents were not significantly different from 2006 respondents, while for African Americans 2008 respondents were significantly more supportive (though the racial difference in the slope for 2008 is not significant, $t=1.2$).

Discussion and Conclusions

African Americans are more opposed to same-sex marriage than whites or persons from other ethnicities, and religious commitments play a crucial role in solidifying opposition to marital rights for gays and lesbians. Only twenty years ago, there were no racial differences in support for same sex marriage. The gap in support between whites

(and others) and African Americans is a product of shifting opinion among whites and others, and relative stability among African Americans. Religious factors play more of a role for African Americans in large part because secular commitments associated with support for GLBT civil rights among whites have almost no impact on African Americans' opinions about same sex marriage. Political values, educational attainment, income, gender, and rural residence play no significant role in structuring African Americans' views. We find that denominational ties and religious participation explain the racial gap in support for same-sex marriage, and this finding is in concert with recent examinations of Proposition 8 voting in California (Egan and Sherrill, 2009).

African American religion is overwhelmingly sectarian Protestant, and denominational ties play a strong role in producing black-white differences in support for same-sex marriage. While under 30% of white Americans identify with conservative Protestant denominations, over 63% of African Americans affiliate with Baptist or other sectarian groups (Sherkat, 2002). About half of the difference between whites and African Americans in their support for same-sex marriage is explained by differences in religious affiliation, while high rates of religious participation among African Americans accounts for the remainder of the gap. Indeed, African American non-affiliates are also less supportive of same-sex marriage than whites with no religious affiliation.

The issue of sexuality in African American religion looms large, and has been the topic of considerable theological and denominational discussion (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Homosexuality is a particularly difficult subject in African American culture because of the dominance of conservative Christianity (Collins, 1995). Still, as prior research shows, on issues of basic civil rights to speech and employment African Americans are just as willing to extend rights to GLBT persons as are whites (Lewis, 2003; Loftus, 2001). Yet, for marital rights, African Americans have only begun to shift their views since 2004. Given the centrality of religion in African American

communities, a change in public opinion will require some religious institutional support—as we have seen in mainline liberal Protestant denominations.

Our results also push forward the importance of interpretation for political identifiers like “liberal” and “conservative.” As Miller and Hoffmann (1999) pointed out, these political identifications shifted in meaning over the course of the last two decades—with cultural factors associated with conservative religion coming to define conservatism. However, as our results suggest, this shift in definitions of liberalism and conservatism is not evident for African Americans—who openly proclaim political liberalism while viewing homosexuality as morally wrong and denying marital rights to same-sex couples. Like any set of movements rooted in identities, liberal identities are contest and fractured (Gamson, 1996; Taylor & Whittier, 1992; Cohen, 1999), and GLBT rights will continue to be an issue of contention in liberal movements mobilizing both whites and African Americans.

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Figure 1:

**Percentages Opposed or Strongly Opposed to Same-Sex Marriage by Racial Group:
1988-2006 General Social Surveys**

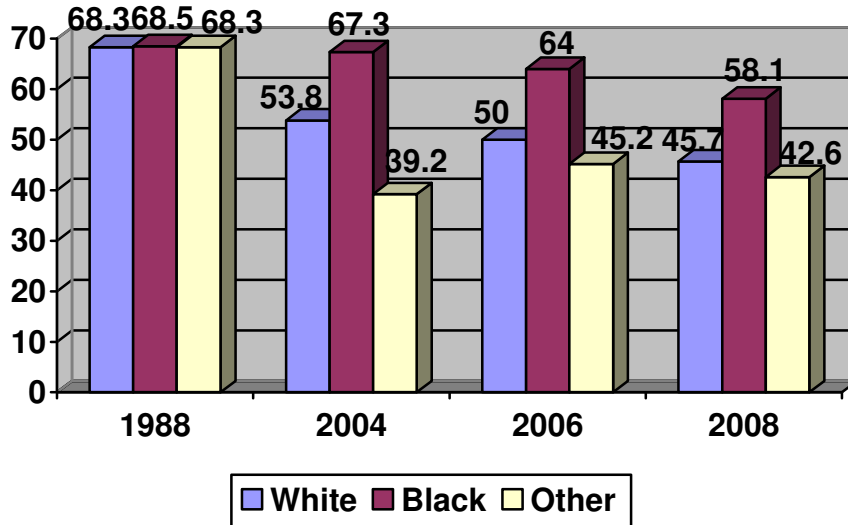


Table 1: Ordinal Logistic Regression Predicting Support for Same-sex Marriage

	Model 1 B Exp(B)	Model 2 B Exp(B)	Model 3 B Exp(B)	Model 4 B Exp(B)	Model 5 B Exp(B)
GSS 2008	0.15 * (1.16)	0.17 ** (1.18)	0.19 ** (1.21)	0.17* (1.18)	0.16 * (1.17)
Black	-0.51 *** (0.60)	-0.25 * (0.78)	-0.13 (0.88)	-0.40 *** (0.67)	-2.27 *** (0.10)
Other Race	-0.18 (0.84)	-0.25 * (0.78)	-0.23 * (0.79)	-0.30 ** (0.74)	-0.31 ** (0.73)
Female	0.42 *** (1.53)	0.53 *** (1.69)	0.59 *** (1.81)	0.53 *** (1.70)	0.52 *** (1.68)
1940-1945 Cohort	0.08 (1.08)	0.11 (1.11)	0.03 (1.03)	0.08 (1.08)	0.10 (1.10)
1946-50 Cohort	0.56 *** (1.76)	0.57 *** (1.76)	0.53 *** (1.70)	0.55 *** (1.73)	0.55 *** (1.74)
1951-55 Cohort	0.50 *** (1.64)	0.51 *** (1.67)	0.44 *** (1.56)	0.43 ** (1.54)	0.45 ** (1.56)
1956-64 Cohort	0.46*** (1.58)	0.46 *** (1.58)	0.34 ** (1.41)	0.34 ** (1.40)	0.34 ** (1.41)
1965+ Cohort	0.95 *** (2.58)	0.88 *** (2.40)	0.78 *** (2.17)	0.76 *** (2.14)	0.76 *** (2.14)
Rural	-0.52 *** (0.60)	-0.43 *** (0.65)	-0.42 *** (0.65)	-0.44 *** (0.64)	-0.45 *** (0.64)
South	-0.65 *** (0.52)	-0.44 *** (0.65)	-0.37 *** (0.69)	-0.30 *** (0.74)	-0.30 *** (0.74)
Separated/ Divorced	0.43 *** (1.53)	0.43 *** (1.53)	0.32 *** (1.38)	0.25 ** (1.28)	0.25 ** (1.28)
Never Married	0.67 *** (1.95)	0.58 *** (1.78)	0.48 *** (1.62)	0.39 *** (1.47)	0.37 *** (1.45)
# Children	-0.11 ** (0.90)	-0.09 * (0.92)	-0.07 * (0.93)	-0.05 (0.96)	-0.04 (0.96)
Education	0.18 *** (1.19)	0.15 *** (1.16)	0.20 *** (1.22)	0.16 *** (1.17)	0.16 *** (1.17)
Income	0.06 (1.06)	0.06 (1.06)	0.07 (1.07)	0.10 * (1.10)	0.11 ** (1.11)
Catholic		0.08 (1.08)	0.15 (1.16)	0.08 (1.08)	0.08 (1.08)
Conservative Protestant		-0.74 *** (0.48)	-0.58 *** (0.56)	-0.56 *** (0.57)	-0.56 *** (0.57)
No Religion		0.69 *** (1.99)	0.27 ** (1.32)	0.13 (1.14)	0.10 (1.11)
Religious Attendance			-0.17 *** (0.84)	-0.15 *** (0.86)	-0.14 *** (0.87)
Liberalism-Conservatism				-0.46 *** (0.63)	-0.53 *** (0.59)
African American*Lib. Conservatism					0.49 *** (1.63)
X2, d.f	512.4, 16 df	685.6, 19 df	840.2, 20 df	1160.7, 21 df	1207.2, 22 df

N	3288	3288	3288	3288	3288
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* p < .05, two tailed. ** p < .01, two tailed. *** p < .001, two tailed.

* p < .05, two tailed. ** p < .01, two tailed. *** p < .001, two tailed.

Table 2

Standardized Total, Direct, and Indirect Structural Equation Coefficients on Opposition to Same Sex Marriage Stacked by White and African American: 2006-2008 GSS

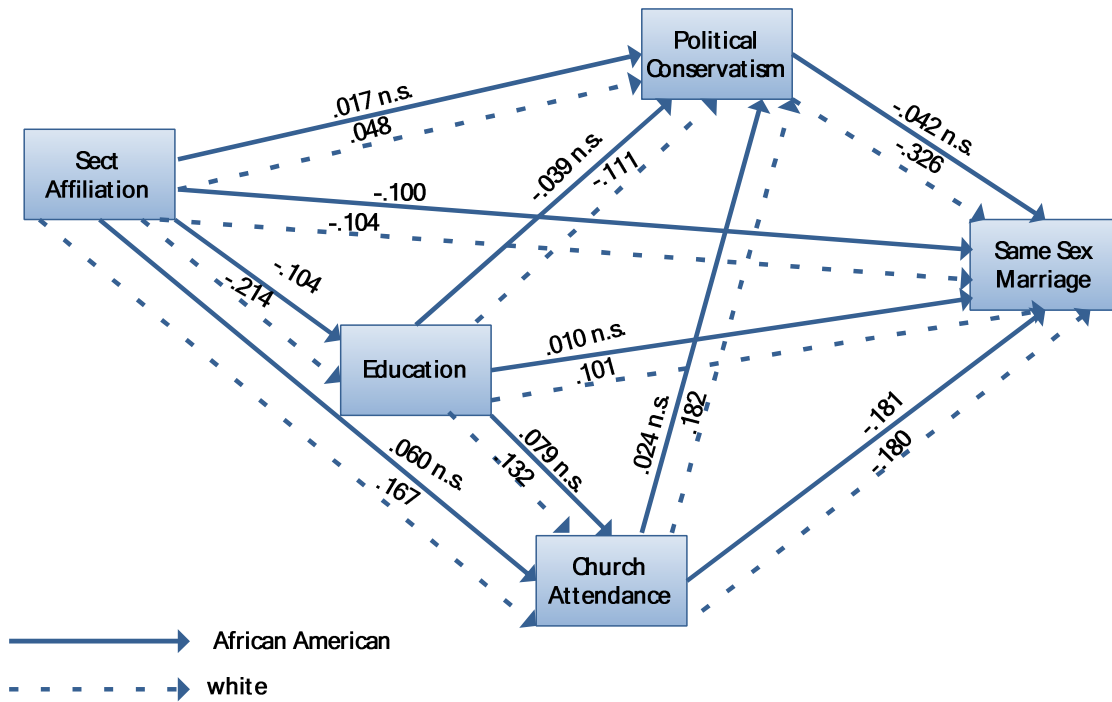
	White	White	White	African American	African American	African American
	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect
Liberal-Conservative	-.326***	-.326	---	-.042	-.042	---
Church Attendance	-.239***	-.180***	-.059***	-.182***	-.181***	-.001
Education	.120***	.101***	.018	-.009	.010	-.019
Income	.042*	.055**	-.014*	-.018	-.021	.002
Children in Home	-.026**	---	-.026**	.001	---	.001
2008 Respondent	.020	.020	---	.053**	.053**	---
Female	.157***	.137***	.020*	.037	.064	-.027***
1940-1945 cohort	-.005	---	-.005	-.002	---	-.002
1946-1950 cohort	.071***	.065***	.006*	.067***	.069***	-.001
1951-1955 cohort	.063***	.045*	.017**	.064**	.055**	.009
1956-1964 cohort	.066***	.037	.029***	.051*	.043*	.009
1965+ Cohort	.183***	.146***	.037***	.207***	.192***	.015*
Rural resident	-.065***	-.053**	-.012	.019	.013	.007
Southern resident	-.110***	-.069***	-.041***	-.088***	-.064*	-.023***
Divorced/Separated	.075***	.045**	.029**	.062**	.042	.020***
Never Married	.141***	.093***	.048***	.060*	.028	.032**
Catholic	.019	.029	-.009	.018	-.008	.026***
Sectarian	-.187***	-.104***	-.083***	-.112***	-.100**	-.012*
No Religion	.150***	.032	.117***	.042*	-.022	.064***
Chi Square	50, 25df			35, 25 df.		
GFI	.998			.992		

* p < .05, two tailed. ** p < .01, two tailed. *** p < .001, two tailed.

Figure 2

Edraw Trial Version

Path diagram with direct effects for selected covariates



All paths significant at the .05 level, two-tailed unless indicated by n.s.

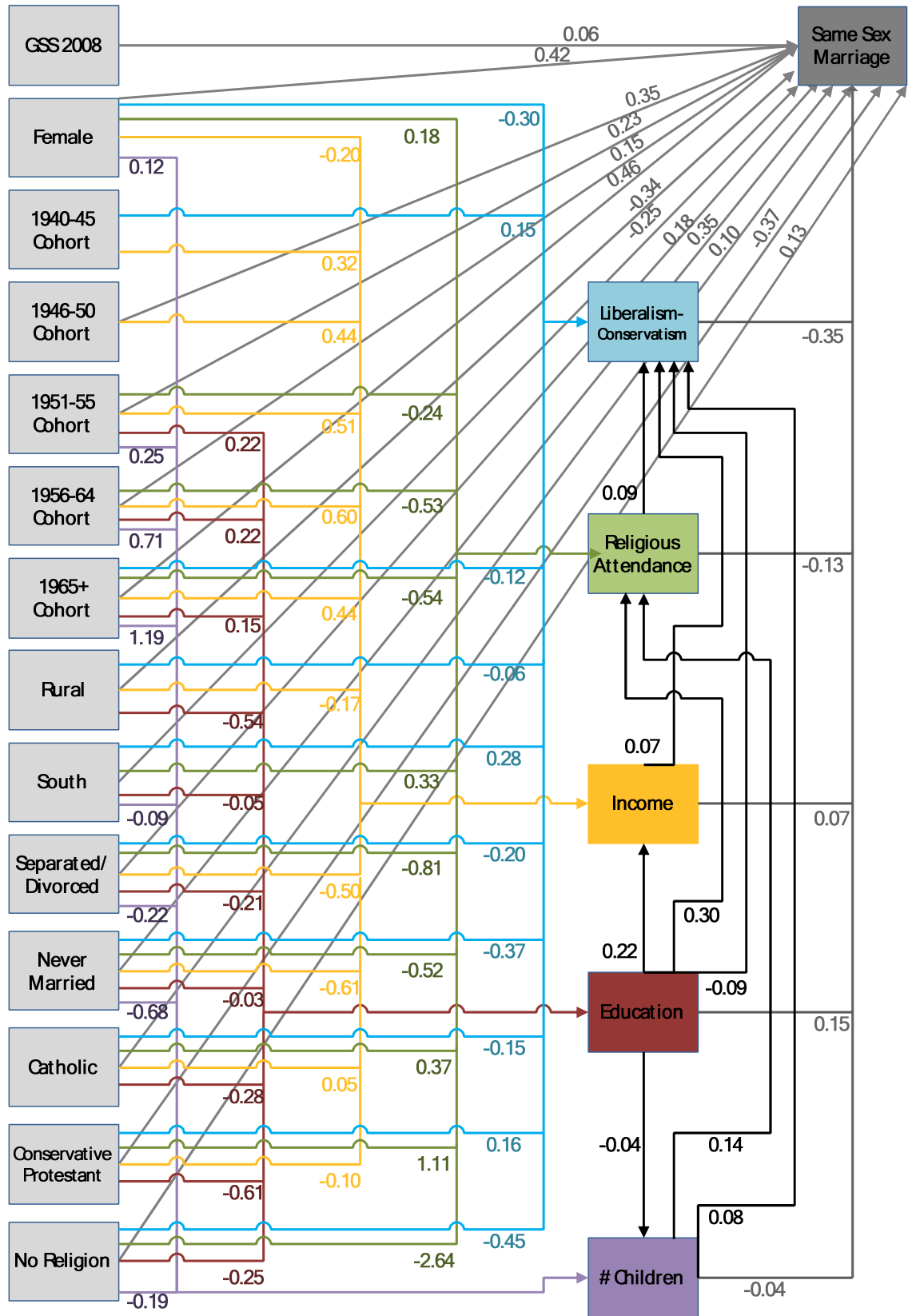
Appendix A.

Means and Standard Deviations for Covariates

	Mean 2006	Std. Dev. 2006	Mean 2008	Std. Dev. 2008
Pre-1940 Cohort	.16	.36	.14	.34
1940-1945 Cohort	.07	.26	.07	.25
1946-50 Cohort	.09	.28	.08	.27
1951-55 Cohort	.09	.29	.10	.30
1956-64 Cohort	.19	.39	.18	.39
1965+	.40	.50	.43	.50
Female	.57	.49	.54	.50
Black	.14	.34	.14	.35
Other Race	.13	.34	.09	.29
Rural	.23	.43	.22	.41
South	.27	.45	.25	.44
Separated/Divorced	.19	.40	.17	.38
Never Married	.25	.43	.26	.44
# Children	.61	1.06	.62	1.06
Education	1.55	1.19	1.58	1.21
Income	.00	.92	.02	.96
Conservative Protestant	.24	.43	.26	.44
Catholic	.24	.43	.23	.42
No Religion	.17	.37	.16	.37
Religious Participation	3.58	2.80	3.59	2.78
<i>Liberalism-Conservatism</i>	4.15	1.40	4.11	1.41

Appendix B:

Edraw Trial Vers Model of Same Sex Marriage, Stacked by Race



Chi-Square = 83.77, df = 50, P-value = 0.00195, RMSEA = 0.022

