

# Sacred Rites and Civil Rights: Religion's Effect on Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Unions and the Perceived Cause of Homosexuality\*

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*Objective.* Past research reveals how religion and opinions about the cause of homosexuality influence attitudes concerning same-sex unions. No study to date contains a comprehensive collection of religion measures while also accounting for views of the cause of homosexuality. Therefore, this study investigates the extent to which religion predicts certain attribution beliefs as well as attitudes toward same-sex unions while controlling for attribution beliefs. *Method.* The Baylor Religion Survey (2007) is used to estimate binary logistic models predicting the effects of religion and attribution beliefs on attitudes toward same-sex unions. *Findings.* First, religion is strongly associated with the belief that homosexuals choose their sexual orientation. Second, religion maintains a significant association with attitudes toward same-sex unions despite inclusion of an attribution variable. *Conclusion.* Even if a biological explanation for homosexuality is ultimately proven, unfavorable attitudes toward same-sex unions will most likely endure due to religion's persistent effect.

The topic of same-sex unions has been a key political issue for many Americans since the 2004 presidential elections. Consider that in 2008 alone New Hampshire passed legislation allowing for homosexual civil unions, California's supreme court ruled that homosexuals have the constitutional right to marry, Massachusetts' House and Senate allowed for same-sex marriages for out-of-state couples, and in the November elections of 2008 voters in Arizona, Florida, and California all elected to amend their state constitutions to legally define marriage, thus outlawing same-sex unions.

Considering all the attention given to the legality and morality of same-sex unions, the key follow-up question for social researchers is what determines individuals' views toward those unions. More specifically, who is most likely to support or oppose same-sex unions? Recent research demonstrates the

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importance of religion (Olson, Cadge, and Harrison, 2006) as well as the perceived cause of homosexuality (Haider-Markel and Joslyn, 2005, 2008; Wilcox and Norrander, 2002) when predicting attitudes toward homosexual marriage and civil unions. Regrettably, while Olson, Cadge, and Harrison (2006) employed a broad collection of religion measures, they were not able to account for individuals' attribution of the cause of homosexuality. Conversely, the Haider-Markel and Joslyn (2008) and Wilcox and Norrander (2002) studies accounted for attribution but their religion measures were not as extensive as Olson, Cadge, and Harrison's (2006) and, interestingly enough, despite the inclusion of the perceived cause variable, the religion measures were still significantly associated. Additionally, none of the aforementioned studies were able to include religious belief measures in their studies. Due to religion's persistent influence, it is important to discover what is taking place in greater depth and breadth than previously allowed.

Therefore, to fill the voids of past research, a wider range of religion variables was utilized to discover religion's effect on individuals' beliefs concerning the cause of homosexuality as well as attitudes toward same-sex unions. In this study, past findings implying the strength of an individual's belief as to the cause of homosexuality on attitudes toward same-sex unions is supported. Beyond this, a more complete explanation of the effects of religion on the issue is provided. Namely, I find a persistent and pervasive influence of religious belief, behavior, and affiliation on attitudes toward the cause of homosexuality and same-sex unions.

### **Attribution of the Cause of Homosexuality**

Whether individuals choose to be gay or are gay by disposition is essential in debates concerning their right to marry. At the crux of the argument is the controllability of homosexuality and whether responsibility for the orientation can be attributed to the individual. Attribution theory was first proposed by Heider (1944, 1958) and later furthered by Weiner (1979, 1985). The theory holds that individuals work to predict and control their environment by attributing others' behaviors as the result of internal or external factors. The idea that behavior can be viewed as either controllable or uncontrollable was added to attribution theory by Weiner. For those behaviors that are labeled controllable, the person exhibiting the behavior can be held personally responsible. Those attributing personal responsibility to a certain individual or group tend to view them more negatively if the behavior in question is stigmatized in some way. A number of studies find support for attribution theory applied to obesity (Crocker, Cornwell, and Major, 1993; DeJong, 1980), poverty (Griffin and Oheneba-Sakyi, 1993; Zucker and Weiner, 1993), and when comparing certain stigmas believed to be controllable (AIDS) versus uncontrollable (Alzheimer's) (Weiner, Perry, and Magnusson, 1988).

Past research that investigated attitudes toward homosexuality supports attribution theory (Aguero, Block, and Byrne, 1984; Herek, 2002; Herek and Capitanio, 1995; Sakalli, 2002; VanderStoep and Green, 1988; Whitely, 1990). In fact, in their study of African Americans, Herek and Capitanio concluded that “the single most important predictor of attitudes [toward homosexuals] was the attribution of choice to sexual orientation” (1995:95). Studies focused on attitudes concerning same-sex unions find support for attribution theory as well. Specifically, individuals believing that homosexuality is the result of natural or biological forces are more likely to support gay rights or same-sex unions, while those attributing homosexuality as the result of a choice are less likely to support same-sex unions (Haider-Markel and Joslyn, 2005; Tygart, 2000; Wilcox and Norrander, 2002; Wilcox and Wolpert, 2000; Wood and Bartkowski, 2004). In their latest study Haider-Markel and Joslyn (2008) continued to demonstrate the importance of attribution. The authors found that those viewing homosexuality as nonbiological are much less likely to support same-sex unions. Haider-Markel and Joslyn concluded that “attributions” of the cause of an individual’s sexual orientation “are in fact the strongest predictor of support” for same-sex unions (Haider-Markel and Joslyn, 2008:291), coinciding with Herek and Capitanio’s (1995) suggestion in their previous study.

### **Religion and Homosexuality**

A great deal of research focuses on the intersection of religion and views concerning homosexuality. Type of denomination (Cochran and Beeghley, 1991; Finlay and Walther, 2003; Gay and Ellison, 1993; Greeley and Hout, 2006; Herek, 1988; Koch and Curry, 2000; Olson and Cadge, 2002; Smith et al., 1998), religious tradition (Loftus, 2001; Smith et al., 1998), rate of attendance (Froese, Bader, and Smith, 2008; Herek, 1988; Herek and Capitanio, 1995; Larsen et al., 1980), literal views of the Bible (Bader and Froese, 2005; Froese, Bader, and Smith, 2008; Rowatt et al., 2009), and images of God (Bader and Froese, 2005; Froese and Bader, 2007, 2008; Unnever and Cullen, 2006; Unnever, Cullen, and Applegate, 2005; Unnever, Cullen, and Bartkowski, 2006) all affect attitudes toward homosexuality. This research shows Christians, conservative denominations, frequent attendees, biblical literalists, and those with active or angry images of God tend to be the most condemning of homosexual behavior.

In addition to being significantly associated with views about homosexuals as well as their civil rights, religion is a strong predictor of attitudes regarding same-sex unions. Specifically, non-Protestants are more likely to be favorable toward homosexual civil unions and marriage (Haider-Markel and Joslyn, 2008; Olson, Cadge, and Harrison, 2006; Wilcox and Norrander, 2002; Wood and Bartkowski, 2004). Religiously active individuals are also

less likely to agree with same-sex marriage and civil unions (Brumbaugh et al., 2008; Haider-Markel and Joslyn, 2005, 2008; Olson, Cadge, and Harrison, 2006; Wilcox and Norrander, 2002).

These studies provide insight into the general effect of religion but none have been able to fully account for religious behavior, belief, and affiliation. In fact, no study to date has measured the association of religious belief with same-sex unions while accounting for attribution. Due to the amount of research supporting the claim that individuals' religious beliefs (images of God, biblical literalism) are significantly associated with their views toward homosexuals (Bader and Froese, 2005; Froese and Bader, 2007; Froese, Bader, and Smith, 2008), research dealing with attitudes toward same-sex unions should take religious beliefs into account. Additionally, the present study utilizes the RELTRAD (Steenland et al., 2000) typology to examine the effects of religious affiliation. This measure of religious affiliation will allow for a more comprehensive view of affiliation's importance when measuring attitudes toward same-sex unions. This is important, as Steenland et al. point out, because measuring religious tradition poorly can influence not only religious affiliation coefficients, but also other coefficients more central to the analysis (2000:20). The RELTRAD typology will be an improvement over the Protestant dummy variable or the mainline, Catholic, fundamentalist, unaffiliated typology used in prior research (Haider-Markel and Joslyn, 2008; Wilcox and Norrander, 2002; Wood and Bartkowski, 2004).

It is safe to say that religion and attribution are both significantly associated with attitudes toward same-sex unions. Using a more comprehensive collection of religion measures, some of which have not previously been utilized, as well as being able to account for beliefs concerning the cause of homosexuality, this study hopes to provide a more thorough description of religion's relationship with attitudes concerning homosexual marriage and civil unions. This endeavor will be a modest but important step toward understanding to a greater extent what is significantly associated with beliefs toward the cause of homosexuality and same-sex unions. In light of past research, I expect religious belief, behavior, and affiliation to be significantly associated with believing homosexuals choose their orientation. I also expect religious belief, behavior, and affiliation to maintain significant association with unfavorable attitudes toward same-sex unions while controlling for attribution's effect.

## Data

Data for this study were taken from the second wave (2007) of the Baylor Religion Survey (BRS). The 2007 BRS is a random, national sample of 1,648 U.S. citizens administered by the Gallup Organization and it compares favorably to similar items on the General Social Survey (Bader,

Mencken, and Froese, 2007). The BRS is ideal for this study because of its focus on gaining deeper insight into the religious beliefs, behaviors, and identities of the general public. This focus will allow for more breadth as well as depth in our understanding of religion's association with the attribution of homosexuality and same-sex unions.

### ***Dependent Variables***

The first dependent variable of interest was constructed using a question on the BRS that asked for a level of agreement (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree) with the statement: "People choose to be homosexuals." The strongly agree and agree responses were paired to construct a dichotomous variable. Over the entire sample, 38.5 percent believe that homosexuals choose their orientation. The "choice" variable also serves as an independent measure once attitudes toward same-sex marriage and civil unions are investigated. The second dependent variable of interest uses the question asking for the respondent's level of agreement with the statement: "Homosexuals should be allowed to marry." The strongly agree and agree responses were paired and a dichotomous variable was constructed, with 32.2 percent of the sample agreeing with same-sex marriage. Likewise, the question "Homosexuals should be allowed civil unions" was similarly dichotomized, with 53.8 percent of the sample agreeing with this statement (see Table 1).

### ***Religion Variables***

The religious variables of interest account for behavior (attendance), belief (biblical literalism and images of God), and affiliation (RELTRAD). To control for religious affiliation, a modified RELTRAD typology was used. In accordance with Steensland et al. (2000), individuals are placed in the categories black Protestant, evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, other religion, and no religion. An additional item is considered on the Baylor Religion Survey that asks respondents to provide the name and location of their church (for a description of this modified version of RELTRAD and its value in research, see Dougherty, Johnson, and Polson, 2007). The evangelical Protestant group will be the contrast group throughout the analysis because of its propensity to be the most conservative of the religious groupings (Finlay and Walther, 2003; Greeley and Hout, 2006; Haider-Markel and Joslyn, 2008; Koch and Curry, 2000; Olson and Cadge, 2002; Olson, Cadge, and Harrison, 2006; Smith et al., 1998).

The attendance measure utilizes an item asking for how often the respondent frequented a place of worship, with higher scores indicating higher levels of attendance. The first measure of religious belief utilized in this

TABLE 1  
Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Percent
Support same-sex marriage	32.17
Support same-sex civil unions	52.83
Believe homosexuals choose orientation	38.48
Attend weekly	30.31
Biblical literalists	23.54
RELTRAD	
Evangelical Protestants	33.09
Black Protestants	4.79
Mainline Protestants	20.69
Catholic	22.14
Jewish	1.90
Other	6.06
No religion	11.34
	Mean (SD)
Active God	27.07 (6.62)
Angry God	16.99 (6.39)

SOURCE: Baylor Religion Survey (2007).

study is how literally the Bible is interpreted by each individual. To measure biblical literalism, a question was used asking respondents to choose which statement comes closest to their personal beliefs about the Bible: “The Bible means exactly what it says. It should be taken literally, word-for-word, on all subjects”; “The Bible is perfectly true, but it should not be taken literally, word-for-word. We must interpret its meaning”; “The Bible contains some human error”; and “The Bible is an ancient book of history and legends.” Higher scores correspond with increasing levels of biblical literalism.

Another measure of religious belief is how individuals view God. The Baylor Religion Survey contains many measures of beliefs about God beyond beliefs about God’s existence. The two most important images, Froese and Bader (2007) argue, are the extent to which God is angry and active. An angry image of God focuses on judgment, retribution, and wrath. An active view of God refers to whether God is removed from or directly involved with human affairs. The active view of God is an additive scale made up of seven different questions, where higher scores represent a view of God as more active in the world. Respondents are asked what they think God is like using a five point Likert scale. Included are the descriptions: “Is God ‘removed from worldly affairs’, ‘concerned with the well-being of the world’, ‘concerned with my personal well-being’, ‘directly involved with worldly affairs’, and ‘directly involved in my affairs.’” The survey then asks if the adjectives “ever-present” or “distant” describe God “very well, somewhat well, not very well, not at all, or undecided.” Each of these questions was flipped as needed and summed to create the active view of God scale. The

resulting scores ranged from 7 to 35, with a mean of 27.07. This scale is hereafter referenced as the active God scale ( $\alpha = 0.882$ ).

The angry view of God scale combines questions asking for level of agreement, using a five-point Likert scale, with the idea that God is “angered by human sin,” or “angered by my sins,” and with how well the words “critical,” “punishing,” “severe,” and “wrathful” describe God (very well, somewhat well, undecided, not very well, or not at all). These six responses were flipped as needed to coincide with higher scores equating to a more angry view of God. The results were then summed to create the angry God scale ( $\alpha = 0.850$ ). The resulting scores ranged from 6 to 30, with a mean of 16.99.

### ***Control Variables***

The control variables used in this analysis include age (in years), gender (male = 1), race (white = 1), marriage status (married = 1), income (<\$10K, \$10,001–\$20K, \$20,001–\$35K, \$35,001–\$50K, \$50,001–\$100K, \$100,001–\$150K, and \$150,000+), education (<8th, 9–12th no diploma, HS graduate, some college, trade/technical/vocational training, college graduate, postgraduate work/degree), region (South = 1), and political views (extremely conservative, conservative, leaning conservative, moderate, leaning liberal, liberal, extremely liberal). The responses were ordered so higher scores correspond to more conservative political views. Each has received support in previous literature concerning its effect on attitudes toward homosexual issues.

### ***Analytic Model***

Due to the nature of the dependent variables, binary logistic regression is used for each test. In the first test, the demographic controls and religion variables are regressed on the choice variable. Haider-Markel and Joslyn (2008) performed the same test. This test extends their findings by using a wider array of religion measures to allow a fuller explanation of what is associated with believing homosexuality is the result of a choice.

The second and third tests regress the attribution, religion, and demographic variables on agreeing with same-sex marriage and civil unions, respectively. Two separate models are reported for each same-sex union dependent variable. The first model contains each of the demographic and religion variables. This allows for a close replication of Olson, Cadge, and Harrison’s (2006) study. The second model adds in the attribution variable (choice). This results in a test similar to that performed by Haider-Markel and Joslyn (2008) and Wilcox and Norrander (2002). In this way the conclusions offered by the Olson, Cadge, and Harrison (2006),

Haider-Markel and Joslyn (2008), and Wilcox and Norrander (2002) studies can be directly compared. This ultimately provides a more definitive explanation regarding the association of religion and attribution with same-sex unions.

## Results

Table 2 displays the results from the first test. The results show that males are significantly more likely to agree that homosexuality is a choice compared to females. Similarly, individuals who label themselves as politically conservative are more likely than their less politically conservative counterparts to believe homosexuality is the result of a choice. As education increases, the odds of believing homosexuals choose their orientation decreases. People who exhibit high levels of religious behavior are more likely to agree that homosexuality is a choice. Compared to evangelical Protestants, mainline Protestants and Catholics are 54 percent and 43 percent less likely to believe homosexuals choose their orientation, respectively. Finally, as individuals view the Bible more literal they are 25 percent more likely to believe homosexuality is the result of a choice. In the same way, as individuals view God as more active in the world they are more likely to agree that homosexuality is a choice.<sup>1</sup>

In Table 3, I find that older individuals are less likely to support same-sex marriages. The same is true for more politically conservative individuals and those from the South. Conversely, as income increases, the odds of agreeing that homosexuals should be allowed to marry increase by 16 percent. Turning to the religion variables, I find that as people attend worship services more frequently their odds of agreeing with same-sex marriage decrease 13 percent. Mainline Protestants, Catholics, the religious "other" grouping, and the religiously unaffiliated are all more likely than evangelical Protestants to support same-sex marriages. I also find that as individuals view the Bible more literally the odds of agreeing with homosexual marriage decrease dramatically.

<sup>1</sup>Missing cases in each model are mainly due to the large number of religion variables included. The greatest number of missing cases results from the inclusion of the active God and angry God measures. The reason these belief scales cause so many missing cases is because those individuals who do not believe in God (atheists) are omitted. One must believe in God to have a God image. While including atheists in the discussion would be ideal, there are two reasons their omission is not fatal to this discussion. First, the overarching focus of the article is to investigate how religion, while accounting for beliefs about the cause of homosexuality, affects attitudes toward same-sex unions. Since atheists usually are not religious, this investigation does not directly concern them. Second, atheists are a very small portion of the adult population. The Baylor Religion Survey (2007) is almost identical to the General Social Survey and other national surveys in its estimation of the number of atheists. Usually, atheists make up only 4 to 5 percent of the adult population. Due to these issues, additional analyses were conducted to ensure there are no systematic biases present in the missing cases compared to those cases included in each model. No systematic bias was found concerning each dependent variable of interest.



TABLE 2

Logistic Regression of Choice as Cause of Homosexuality on Demographic Controls and Religion Variables

Variables	Choice		
	Estimate	Standard Error	Odds Ratios
<i>Sociodemographic</i>			
Age	- 0.004	0.005	—
Male	0.927***	0.158	2.528
White	0.705	0.624	—
Married	0.122	0.167	—
Education	- 0.108*	0.052	0.898
Politically conservative	0.360***	0.057	1.433
<i>Religious Behavior</i>			
Attendance	0.115***	0.034	1.122
<i>Religious Tradition</i>			
Mainline Protestant	- 0.776***	0.206	0.460
Black Protestant	0.845	0.772	—
Catholic	- 0.558**	0.202	0.572
Jewish	- 0.640	0.684	—
Other	- 0.375	0.322	—
None	0.335	0.353	—
<i>Religious Belief</i>			
Biblical literalism	0.226*	0.099	1.254
Active God	0.042*	0.017	1.043
Angry God	0.007	0.013	—
Constant	- 4.766***	0.835	
Pseudo $R^2$	0.339		
PRE	21.48%		
N	1,073		

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

SOURCE: Baylor Religion Survey (2007)

The proportional reduction in error (PRE) in Model 1 of Table 3 is 41.72 percent compared to the 43.47 percent PRE of Model 2 with its inclusion of the attribution variable. Generally, this means that taking attribution into account when discussing attitudes toward homosexual marriage reduces error in the model. Unsurprisingly, the choice variable was significant in the model. Individuals who believe homosexuality is a choice are almost 67 percent less likely to support homosexual marriage compared to those who do not. With the inclusion of the attribution variable, the religious “other” group as well as the mainline Protestant group failed to achieve statistical significance compared to the results from Model 1. Religious behavior and belief continued to significantly predict negative attitudes toward same-sex marriage despite the presence of the attribution variable. Similarly, Catholics and the religiously unaffiliated are still significantly more likely to support homosexual marriage compared to evangelical Protestants net of attribution’s effects.

TABLE 3  
Logistic Regression Analysis of Support for Homosexual Marriage

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	Estimate	Standard Error	Odds Ratio	Estimate	Standard Error	Odds Ratio
<i>Sociodemographic</i>						
Age	-0.022***	0.006	0.978	-0.022***	0.006	0.978
Male	-0.227	0.197	—	-0.030	0.204	—
White	-0.203	0.734	—	-0.111	0.702	—
Married	-0.378	0.215	—	-0.335	0.218	—
Income	0.147*	0.074	1.158	0.128	0.074	—
Education	0.036	0.066	—	0.016	0.068	—
South	-0.460*	0.223	0.631	-0.415	0.227	—
Politically conservative	-0.760***	0.073	0.468	-0.717***	0.075	0.488
<i>Religious Behavior</i>						
Attendance	-0.142***	0.042	0.868	-0.127**	0.042	0.880
<i>Religious Tradition</i>						
Mainline Protestant	0.576*	0.259	1.779	0.465	0.263	—
Black Protestant	0.742	0.895	—	0.788	0.918	—
Catholic	0.678**	0.260	1.970	0.561*	0.264	1.753
Jewish	0.603	0.589	—	0.493	0.608	—
Other	0.792*	0.381	2.207	0.757	0.393	—
None	1.464***	0.415	4.325	1.579***	0.427	4.849
<i>Religious Belief</i>						
Biblical literalism	-0.709***	0.120	0.492	-0.687***	0.121	0.503
Active God	0.024	0.020	—	0.030	0.020	—
Angry God	0.001	0.018	—	0.004	0.018	—
<i>Attribution</i>						
Choice	—	—	—	-1.094***	0.230	0.335
Constant	4.341***	0.999	—	4.160***	0.982	—
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.574	—	—	0.592	—	—
PRE	41.72%	—	—	43.47%	—	—

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

SOURCE: Baylor Religion Survey (2007);  $N = 1,031$  (M1);  $N = 1,030$  (M2).

Table 4 presents the results of the logistic regression analysis concerning attitudes toward civil unions. In Model 1, the analysis reveals that increasing income and education lead to a greater likelihood of supporting homosexual civil unions, whereas politically conservative individuals are less likely to show support. Similarly, as religious service attendance increases, individuals are less likely to agree. The religiously unaffiliated are much more likely than evangelical Protestants to support homosexual civil unions, while those who interpret the Bible literally and view God as active are much less likely to agree to civil unions.

The PRE of Model 1 of Table 4 is 33.81 percent, with a PRE in Model 2 of 37.36 percent. As with homosexual marriage, including a variable that accounts for individuals' attribution of controllability reduces the error in the model. In Model 2 we find that the attribution variable is again statistically significant. Those who believe that homosexuals choose their orientation are almost 60 percent less likely to agree to same-sex civil unions compared to

TABLE 4  
Logistic Regression Analysis of Support for Homosexual Civil Unions

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	Estimate	Standard Error	Odds Ratio	Estimate	Standard Error	Odds Ratio
<i>Sociodemographic</i>						
Age	-0.007	0.005	—	-0.0098	0.005	—
Male	-0.273	0.172	—	-0.038	0.182	—
White	0.608	0.683	—	0.760	0.646	—
Married	-0.003	0.200	—	-0.008	0.205	—
Income	0.227***	0.065	1.254	0.255***	0.062	1.290
Education	0.233***	0.060	1.263	0.222***	0.066	1.249
South	-0.302	0.182	—	-0.283	0.188	—
Politically conservative	-0.342***	0.062	0.710	-0.268***	0.064	0.765
<i>Religious Behavior</i>						
Attendance	-0.127***	0.035	0.880	-0.107**	0.037	0.899
<i>Religious Tradition</i>						
Mainline Protestant	0.405	0.221	—	0.211	0.229	—
Black Protestant	1.228	0.832	—	1.417	0.822	—
Catholic	0.382	0.220	—	0.236	0.228	—
Jewish	1.780	1.420	—	1.551	1.427	—
Other	-0.035	0.345	—	-0.088	0.359	—
None	1.145*	0.522	3.141	1.525**	0.555	4.594
<i>Religious Belief</i>						
Biblical literalism	-0.675***	0.108	0.509	-0.644***	0.110	0.525
Active God	-0.043*	0.019	0.958	-0.034	0.019	—
Angry God	0.006	0.015	—	0.008	0.015	—
<i>Attribution</i>						
Choice	—	—	—	-1.286***	0.182	0.395
Constant	2.849**	0.918	—	2.390**	0.900	—
Pseudo $R^2$	0.499	—	—	0.539**	—	—
PRE	33.81%	—	—	37.36%	—	—

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

SOURCE: Baylor Religion Survey (2007);  $N = 1,029$  (M1);  $N = 1,028$  (M2).

those who do not believe homosexuals exert a choice. Similarly, increasing levels of income and education make one more likely to support homosexual civil unions. Conversely, those who are more politically conservative are less likely to agree. The more active one is in attending religious services and the more literally he or she views the Bible, the less likely the person is to support same-sex civil unions. Only the religiously unaffiliated are significantly different from evangelical Protestants regarding religious tradition. The active God measure also fails to achieve statistical significance in the second model.

## Discussion

The results from this study support many of the general findings found in previous research. One key finding brought to the surface is the differences

between attitudes toward homosexual marriage and same-sex civil unions among religious traditions. For homosexual marriage, I find that even with the attribution variable in the model, distinct differences exist between evangelical Protestants and Catholics and the religiously unaffiliated, respectively. When looking at same-sex civil unions, though, these differences disappear in the presence of the attribution variable. Thus, for homosexual marriage, how individuals' view the cause of homosexuality does not account for religious affiliation's effect. Attitudes toward civil unions operate differently concerning religious tradition.

A possible fundamental difference in how attitudes concerning same-sex marriages and same-sex unions operate inside different religious traditions could be at work here. For evangelical Protestants, the question of homosexual marriage elicits a strong, unfavorable view regardless of their views toward the cause of homosexuality. There is something about belonging to an evangelical Protestant community that influences attitudes toward homosexual marriage beyond the effects of religious belief, behavior, or even attitudes about the controllability of homosexuality. For civil unions, though, there are no such distinctions. It is possible that the marriage question refers to a more "sacred" rite, while civil unions refer to a more "legal" standing and as such might not push the same buttons for those identifying as evangelical Protestants.

In support of past research, attribution is strongly associated with views concerning same-sex unions. If individuals view the cause of homosexuality as controllable they will be much more likely to disagree with allowing homosexuals the right to obtain legal marriages or even civil unions. As Haider-Markel and Joslyn explain, "[c]ontrollability suggests personal responsibility for behaviors," which results in "negative affect toward gays" and a "lack of support for gay rights" (2008:306). The findings presented here do not negate the similar claims made in past studies that "the single most important predictor of attitudes was the attribution of choice to sexual orientation" (Herek and Capitano, 1995:95) and "attributions were by far the strongest predictors of attitudes" (Haider-Markel and Joslyn, 2008:306). Thus, in comparing Olson, Cadge, and Harrison's (2006) study with Haider-Markel and Joslyn (2008) and Wilcox and Norrande (2002), I find that when considering attitudes toward same-sex unions, excluding the attribution variable weakens the model. In support of Olson, Cadge, and Harrison's general conclusion, this study maintains that religion is still vitally important when discussing these issues.

Beyond these findings, this study also demonstrates that it is not enough to account for just one aspect of religiosity but for all. This is evidenced by religious belief, behavior, and affiliation maintaining a significant association with opinions about the cause of homosexuality and same-sex unions in spite of each other. Indeed, each casts a separate and distinct light on attitudes toward same-sex unions. Despite the effect of attribution, through a triangulation of religious belief, affiliation, and behavior, we understand to

a greater extent religion's association with attitudes toward same-sex unions. This study adds depth to previous research in three ways. First, evangelical Protestants differ from other religious traditions and by using a more nuanced and powerful measure of religious affiliation, the true effects of religious affiliation were controlled for as well as discovered. Second, religious behavior measured through rates of attendance is still important when discussing beliefs concerning same-sex unions. Third, individuals' religious beliefs are strongly associated with attitudes toward same-sex unions and should not be neglected in future research.

## **Conclusion**

Past research has stressed the explanatory power of both religion and attribution in explaining attitudes toward same-sex unions. In previous studies, there were shortcomings that did not allow for a complete statement to be made concerning the interrelationships of the two. In this study, a new data set was utilized to give greater breadth and depth to the religion side of the story while accounting for the ever-important attribution variable. Religious belief, behavior, and affiliation were found to be strongly associated with individuals' attributions of the cause of homosexuality. Religious belief, behavior, and affiliation were also observed to play a significant role in explaining attitudes toward same-sex marriages and civil unions despite accounting for individuals' views toward the cause of homosexuality. Most importantly, this study provided a more thorough description of religion's effect on attitudes toward the perceived cause of homosexuality and same-sex unions. Despite these strengths, not being able to account for whether a respondent personally knows someone who is homosexual is a noteworthy weakness of the data set used in this study.

Olson, Cadge, and Harrison concluded that "the tide is not likely to turn in favor of same-sex marriages or civil unions without some reframing of the issue" (2006:356). The importance of attribution could be the "reframing" of which the authors spoke. If a natural explanation of homosexuality is found, views of homosexuals and homosexual civil rights could become more affirming. Haider-Markel and Joslyn state: "If homosexuality comes to be largely viewed as a result of genetics, our results predict greater support for gay and lesbian civil rights" (2008:308). Some activists might believe that finding a gene responsible for homosexual orientation is the key to gaining equal standing in the public's eye. Haider-Markel and Joslyn offer a different outcome if homosexuality is ever shown to be the result of genetics: "the next step may not be tolerance but intervention. If the homosexual gene can be altered or manipulated in some way, the notion that homosexuality can be 'cured' will surely be considered" (2008:308). In fact, the possibility of a biological explanation of homosexuality tends to further polarize previously held beliefs (Boysen and Vogel, 2007). Individuals who had positive

views of homosexuals accepted biological explanations as a more persuasive reason to accept homosexuals, while those with negative views toward homosexuals actually became more negative toward them once the biological explanation of homosexuality was introduced. The authors conclude that “learning about the biological explanations of homosexual behavior is interpreted through the lens of preexisting attitudes” (Boysen and Vogel, 2007:755).

Could it be possible, then, that attribution may not actually be the engine that drives attitudes to be more positive or negative when considering homosexuality? Previous research points to the importance of “preexisting attitudes” and religion undoubtedly plays a significant role in the formation of these. There is countless evidence pointing to certain religious beliefs, behaviors, and affiliations being strongly associated with negative views toward homosexuals. It is possible that certain views toward attribution are co-opted, in a sense, by religious individuals to provide supplementary support to their previously held beliefs. This would also help explain their likelihood of retaining negative views of homosexuals despite being confronted with the possibility that homosexuals are not responsible for their behavior. In essence, they would simply stop using attribution as support for their beliefs. Thus, religion will continue to play a central role in the formation and maintenance of attitudes toward homosexuality in the presence of and possibly even beyond the influence of attribution. As such, continuing to research religion’s effect on these issues is of the utmost importance.

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