



Article

Religiosity, Religious Fundamentalism, Heterosexism, and Support for Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights: A Moderated Mediation Approach

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Abstract: Support for lesbian and gay (LG) civil rights has increased in recent decades, but heterosexism is still prevalent, particularly among highly religious populations. Evidence suggests, however, that it may not be affiliation, but rather conviction in one's beliefs that relates to prejudicial attitudes. The aims of this study were to examine the relationships among religiosity, heterosexism, and level of support for LG civil rights, as well as potential moderating effects by religious fundamentalism. This study used Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mturk) to recruit a U.S. national sample ($n = 407$) to participate in an online survey. A mediation model was constructed with religiosity leading to heterosexism, which diminished support for LG civil rights. This mediation model was expanded into moderated mediations with three types of religious fundamentalism as moderators. Heterosexism fully mediated the relationship between religiosity and support for LG civil rights. A moderated mediation was observed for aspects of religious fundamentalism reflecting external authority and worldly rejection (but not fixed religion) such that the mediation was present only when participants had high levels of these types of religious fundamentalism. Despite the belief that religious people endorse higher levels of heterosexism and that this influences their support for LG civil rights, this is only true when religiosity is also coupled with fundamentalist belief systems reflecting external authority and worldly rejection.

Keywords: gay; lesbian; heterosexism; religiosity; fundamentalism; legal rights



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1. Introduction

Support for lesbian and gay (LG) civil rights, especially same-sex marriage (SSM), has been generally increasing in recent decades. According to the Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life (Lipka and Gecewicz 2017), in 2001, 57% of Americans were opposed to SSM versus 35% in favor. In the 2019 Pew Research Center poll (Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life 2019), these numbers were nearly reversed, with 61% of Americans in support and 31% opposed. In the years between 2001 and 2015, there were several major events that took place in the long and highly contested fight for legalizing SSM. In 2004, the first legal SSM in the U.S. took place in Massachusetts (Chamie and Mirkin 2011). In California, in 2008, the state Supreme Court ruled that limiting marriage to opposite-sex couples is unconstitutional; but later that same year, voters approved Proposition 8, which made SSM illegal (Warren and Bloch 2014). Proposition 8 was found unconstitutional by a federal judge in 2010, and it continued to work its way through the court system until reaching the Supreme Court of the U.S. (SCOTUS) in 2013, who dismissed the case, allowing the lower judge's ruling to stand (Warren and Bloch 2014). Additionally, in the 2013 decision *United States v. Windsor*, Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act was struck down, ruling that same-sex couples are entitled to federal benefits (Supreme Court 2013). Finally, in June of 2015, SCOTUS ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that state-level bans of SSM were unconstitutional and violated the Due Process and Equal

Protection clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (Yoshino 2015). While the legal question of SSM may have been answered with the ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, nearly one-third of all Americans in 2019 still did not support SSM and LG civil rights, a number which has been relatively stable after the initial increase following the ruling (McCarthy 2019). These legal battles have been taking place in an increasingly polarized political environment (Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Valdesolo and Graham 2016; van Baar and FeldmanHall 2021). However, slightly more people supported other forms of LG civil rights such as employment non-discrimination protections. In a Williams Institute Study (Sears et al. 2019), only 27.3% of individuals thought employers should be able to refuse hiring an LGBTQ person if it went against their religious beliefs (11.4% reported they did not know). Understanding the underlying motivations and psychological correlates of these discriminatory beliefs is a critical area for research to develop strategies to intervene (Herek 2000).

1.1. Heterosexism

Heterosexism is a broad, multidimensional system of oppression, made up of a constellation of attitudes, beliefs, bias, and discrimination against those who do not conform to a traditional heterosexual relationship style (i.e., one male and one female). Heterosexism has further been defined as “an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship or community. . . [H]eterosexism is manifest in both societal customs and institutions, such as religion and the legal system. . . and in individual attitudes and behaviors” (Herek 1992, p. 89). Heterosexism may manifest on many levels, from interpersonal interactions to legal and policy levels that govern society (Anti-Defamation League n.d.). Heterosexism is one component of the collective experiences of LGBTQ individuals and their ongoing fight for civil rights in the U.S. and elsewhere (Ghaziani et al. 2016; Herek 2006; Nadal 2013). Heterosexism is often measured along a continuum from condemnation to tolerance (Ryan and Blascovich 2015). This exemplifies a hostile form of heterosexism, which is conceptually and empirically distinct from aversive, amnestic, paternalistic, and positive stereotypic heterosexism (Walls 2008). Even though attitudes towards LG individuals have been shifting over time (Herek 2015), there still exists high levels of stigma, hostility, and discrimination (Haas et al. 2011). Political affiliation/support for a particular politician, local laws, gender, age, education, and religion have been demonstrated as important demographics related to changing attitudes toward LG individuals (Dodge et al. 2016; Flores 2014; Kaufman and Compton 2020). Greater visibility and outness of LG individuals, increasing numbers of LG characters on TV and in movies, and living in areas with larger LG populations have been suggested as important factors in prompting changes in attitudes (Flores 2014). Despite the shift in attitudes, there remains a consistent, and often vocal, minority of individuals who do not support LG individuals and civil rights. Heterosexism has profound negative consequences for the individuals experiencing it and has been linked with depression, anxiety (Gilman et al. 2001; Pachankis et al. 2015), increased risk for substance use (McCabe et al. 2010; Rosario et al. 2009), suicidal ideation (King et al. 2008; Stone et al. 2014), and suicide attempts (Gilman et al. 2001; King et al. 2008; Stone et al. 2014). In addition, higher prejudice in the larger population has been associated with lower support for LG civil rights (Badgett et al. 2014).

1.2. Religiosity

There has long been interest in the relationship between religion and prejudice (Spilka et al. 2003). Religion's role in producing prejudice has been described by some as “paradoxical,” as many stress the ideal of brotherhood while simultaneously being divisive (Allport et al. 1954). One of the many ways religion has been operationalized in pursuit of this line of research is via religiosity (Whitley 2009). Religiosity is “the degree to which a person adheres to his or her religious values, beliefs, and practices and uses them in daily living” (Worthington et al. 2003). It is thought that people who endorse a high level of

religiosity will view the world through a religious lens according to their religious values (Worthington et al. 2003). This religious perspective is thought to be informed by three sources: the authority of ecclesiastical leaders, authority of scripture or sacred text, and the degree to which the individual identifies with the religious group (Worthington et al. 2003). While there is a growing body of literature that documents the impacts of religiosity on physical and mental health (Ano and Vasconcelles 2005; Gonçalves et al. 2015; Hackney and Sanders 2003; Holt et al. 2017; Son and Wilson 2011), it has also been linked to heterosexist attitudes (Cragun and Sumerau 2015; Jäckle and Wenzelburger 2015; Roggemans et al. 2015) and lack of support for SSM (Yen and Zampelli 2017).

1.3. Religious Individualism and Identification

The U.S. is considered to be a majority Christian nation (Pew Research Center 2014), albeit one in decline (Pew Research Center 2019). In 2019, 65% of American adults identified as Christian, down from 70.6% in 2014 and 12% over the previous decade (Pew Research Center 2014, 2019). While Christian religious identification is in decline, religious individualism appears to be on the rise. Religious individualism is a shift in moral decision making that removes authority from a church, state, or community and has one look inward to the self to be the moral arbiter (Uecker and Froese 2019). In this way, external authorities may not impose norms upon individuals, and rather individuals must find truth for themselves (Hervieu-Léger 2001). This allows religious believers to “hold progressive moral attitudes because their understanding of morality comes directly from their personal understanding of God rather than an institutionally prescribed understanding” (Uecker and Froese 2019). Indeed, a study by Uecker and Froese (2019) found that individuals with greater religious individualism tended to hold more progressive attitudes. Despite the decline in Christian religious identification and the increase in religious individualism, there is still a preponderance of evidence that religiosity is related to both increased heterosexism (Cragun and Sumerau 2015; Jäckle and Wenzelburger 2015; Roggemans et al. 2015) and decreased support for LG civil rights (Yen and Zampelli 2017). However, whether it is strictly religiosity or some other mechanism (i.e., religious fundamentalism) that drives these relationships has been contested (Johnson et al. 2011; Whitley 2009).

1.4. Religious Fundamentalism

One commonly explored mechanism is fundamentalism. Religious fundamentalism is characterized by the beliefs that: (1) there is single set of religious teachings, doctrines, and texts that is true; (2) this truth is fixed and unchanging; (3) there are evil forces in the world that oppose this fundamental truth and must be fought against, and (4) those who adhere to the tenets of these fundamental truths have a special relationship with a greater power (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1992; Bendroth 2017). These characteristics are often measured in terms of ‘external authority’, ‘fixed religion’, and ‘worldly rejection’ (Liht et al. 2011), which are often seen on a continuum. External authority is considered obedience to an outside authority and the degree to which an individual feels their actions to be moral based on this outside authority (Liht et al. 2011). Fixed religion is the idea that religion exists independent of historical, social, and cultural conditions, that religious traditions are handed down from the past and should not be reinterpreted relative to the times and conditions in which an individual lives (Liht et al. 2011). Worldly rejection taps into the value one places on science, secular society, human diversity, and the natural world on one hand and otherworldly sacredness on the other (Liht et al. 2011). Fundamentalism is common among many different religions; however, the expression of fundamentalism varies (Hunsberger 1996). For example, Christian fundamentalists have an absolute, literal belief in the Bible, Jewish fundamentalists attempt to establish orthodox culture and strict adherence to halacha—Jewish law, and Islamic fundamentalists attempt to establish adherence to sharia law and believe in an absolute, literal interpretations of the Quran (Nag 2017). Religious fundamentalism differs from religiosity in that religiosity is focused on the individual’s commitment to a religion, whereas religious fundamentalism is more related

to the structure or system in which beliefs are organized (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1992). This observation about structure suggests that fundamentalists are less concerned about the content of the beliefs, but rather the organizing structure they provide (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1992). It has also been found that religious fundamentalism, not religiosity, is more strongly correlated with various types of prejudice, including against racial/ethnic minorities and LG individuals (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1992; Hill et al. 2010; Hunsberger 1996). A possible explanation for this is that individuals found to have higher levels of religious fundamentalism often reported beginning religious training earlier—sometimes informally in the family context—which may have helped instill ‘us–them’ discrimination (Altemeyer 2003; Emerson and Hartman 2006; Lehrer 1999).

1.5. Religious Fundamentalism, Cognitive Rigidity, and Prejudice

Individuals high in religious fundamentalism also tend to demonstrate cognitive rigidity, which has been implicated in associations with a variety of prejudices (Hill et al. 2010). Cognitive rigidity has theoretical roots that can trace back to the end of World War II—and rigidity itself even further—and has been defined in a variety of ways (Schultz and Searleman 2002; Zmigrod 2020). One definition of cognitive rigidity has been defined as a personality trait, one characterized “by a strong resistance to changing one’s behavior, opinions, or attitudes or by the inability to do this” (American Psychological Association n.d.). Currently, cognitive rigidity is thought to be the inability to switch between thinking modes or adapt to changing and novel environments (Zmigrod 2020). Individuals who show greater partisanship have demonstrated higher degrees of cognitive rigidity (Zmigrod et al. 2020), and cognitive rigidity has been associated with perfectionism, compulsions, aggression, and anxiety (Coplan 2016). Prejudice is also thought to be intertwined with mental rigidity (Zmigrod 2020). It has been contended that it is the cognitive rigidity in fundamentalism that may help account for more prejudiced attitudes, not just religiosity generally (Hill et al. 2010; Johnson et al. 2011). Indeed, a study by Fulton et al. (1999) found that when religious fundamentalism was controlled for, religiosity predicted tolerance or acceptance of homosexuality. Furthermore, it appears that fundamentalism, rather than one’s religious identification, may be associated with prejudice. The Christian Orthodoxy scale (Fullerton and Hunsberger 1982), which measures belief in Christian teachings, was found to be non-significantly correlated with prejudice against racial-ethnic minority groups (Altemeyer 2003; Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1992). This suggests that it may not be affiliation, but rather conviction in one’s beliefs that relates to prejudicial attitudes. A study by the Pew Research Study attempted to create religious typologies to classify religiosity, finding that highly and somewhat religious groups are mostly Christian (Morin et al. 2018). This suggests that certain religions may be more prone to attract certain typologies of members.

1.6. The Current Study

Bivariate relationships have been shown to exist among religiosity, heterosexism, and lack of support for LG civil rights. However, no research to date has tested these constructs in a theoretical chain whereby religiosity exerts its effects on support for LG civil rights through heterosexism, and how religious fundamentalism plays into this series of relationships. The current study seeks to add to the literature by examining the relationships among religiosity, heterosexism, and support for LG civil rights. It is a common assumption that religion is the primary driver behind the lack of support for LG individuals (Roggemans et al. 2015); however, the mechanism to explain this relationship is not well understood (Hunsberger and Jackson 2005). Further, no research has examined how religious fundamentalism may play a moderating role in this series of relationships. It may not simply be that an individual is religious, which drives these relationships, but instead religious fundamentalism (Hunsberger and Jackson 2005). As a result, the aims of this study were to examine whether heterosexism mediates the relationship between religiosity

and support for LG civil rights, as well whether the effects in this mediation are moderated by religious fundamentalism.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

Using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mturk; www.mturk.com), participants (initial $n = 416$) living in the U.S. were recruited. Mturk tracks how many times an individual completes a survey, and as a result it was detected that seven individuals had completed the survey twice, which resulted in their second set of data being removed. This left 409 participants, of which only two failed to correctly respond to at least 6/7 attention check questions which were randomly inserted throughout the survey (ACQs, e.g., "Please select 'Strongly agree' for this item"). Those two participants' responses were also excluded. There is evidence that using ACQs on Mturk can help improve data quality ([Buhrmester et al. 2011](#)). The resulting final sample size was 407 participants with 49 U.S. states and territories represented.

In the sample, participants identified as women ($n = 235$), men ($n = 164$), transmen, and transwomen, intersex, or other ($n = 8$). Participants further identified as 87.5% heterosexual, 5.7% bisexual, 4.4% gay or lesbian, and 2.5% queer. Ages ranged from 18 to 77 ($M = 36.72$; $SD = 12.75$), with most of the sample indicating some education beyond high school/GED: 2.7% held a doctorate degree, 14.5% reported a Master's degree, 43.2% had a 4 year college degree, 20.9% had completed some college (no degree), 9.6% completed a 2 year/technical school degree, 8.6% graduated high school or obtained a GED, and 0.5% only had finished grade school. Participants' race/ethnicity were as follows: 77.4% White/European American (non-Latino), 7.4% Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander, 6.1% Black/African American (non-Latino), 5.2% Latino/Hispanic, 3.4% Multiracial/Multiethnic, and 0.5% American Indian/Native American. Information on religious tradition or denomination was not collected.

2.2. Measures

Participants completed a survey comprised of demographic questions, the Multi-Dimensional Fundamentalism Inventory to assess religious fundamentalism, the Religious Commitment Inventory to assess religiosity, the Revised Short Version of the Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale to assess heterosexism, and the Support for Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights scale to assess support for LG civil rights.

The Multi-Dimensional Fundamentalism Inventory (MDFI). Religious fundamentalist ideology was assessed using the 15-item MDFI ([Liht et al. 2011](#)). This scale has three subscales (external authority, fixed religion, and worldly rejection). For each item, responses were recorded using a 4-point Likert-type scale, and higher scores indicated greater religious fundamentalism. External authority deals with religious locus of control and the extent to which religion guides one's conduct. An example of external authority is: "Obeying God is the most important ingredient in order to grow as a person". Fixed religion reflects how stable or adaptable one views religion and one's beliefs. An example of fixed religion is: "As society changes, religion should change too". Finally, worldly rejection deals with the distancing one feels is needed to keep from external influence. An example of worldly rejection is: "It is important to distance oneself from movies, radio, and TV". In the current study, internal consistency ranged from questionable to excellent for external authority ($\alpha = 0.91$), fixed religion ($\alpha = 0.64$), and worldly rejection ($\alpha = 0.76$).

The Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10). The 10-item RCI-10 ([Worthington et al. 2003](#)) evaluates religiosity or the strength of one's religious belief and actions. The 10 items are responded to on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with higher scores reflecting higher religious commitment. An example item is: "My religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life". The RCI-10 has two subscales tapping intrapersonal and interpersonal religiosity, although the total score was used in the current study, as the two are highly correlated. In the current study, internal consistency was excellent ($\alpha = 0.96$).

The Revised Short Version of the Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (ATLG-R-S5). Individuals' heterosexist attitudes were measured by the ATLG-R-S5 (Herek 1997). Item responses were on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with higher heterosexism corresponding to higher scores. An example item is: "Sex between two men is just plain wrong". There are two subscales: attitudes toward lesbians and attitudes towards gay men, although the total score was used in the current study, again due to high correlations between the two subscales. In the current study, internal consistency for the total score ($\alpha = 0.96$) was excellent.

The Support for Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights (SGLCR) scale. The SGLCR is a 20-item measure that uses seven response options ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" to assess participants' support for various civil rights for LG individuals (Brown and Henriquez 2011). Higher scores indicate higher support for LG civil rights. An example item is: "Immigrant partners of gays and lesbians should receive the same immigration rights as partner of heterosexuals". In the current study, internal consistency was excellent ($\alpha = 0.94$).

2.3. Procedure

Participants were recruited via Mturk and compensated \$1 (US) as a token gesture for completing this online survey. On Mturk, participants are recruited to complete human intelligence tasks (HITs), including online self-report surveys such as the one used in the present study. Participants self-select which HITs to complete for compensation. Once a HIT is chosen, participants are given a preview of the HIT and the instructions. After participants have satisfactorily completed a HIT, they are compensated by the researcher. No identifying information (e.g., names and social security numbers) are allowed to be collected through Mturk, so this study was anonymous. The university Institutional Review Board approved this study's protocol prior to participant recruitment.

3. Results

3.1. Data Screening and Preliminary Analyses

Prior to running any analyses, the data were screened for missingness. No data were found to be missing. The data were also screened for univariate outliers. The worldly rejection subscale had one outlier, and the support for LG civil rights subscale had two. As this accounted for less than 2% of the data, these values were retained (Cohen et al. 2003). Seven multivariate outliers were also detected ($D^2 > 22.46$); however, because this compromised such a small portion of the overall sample (1.7%), they similarly were retained (Finch 2012). Data were also checked for normality via skewness and kurtosis, with all values falling below the ± 2.0 critical value. A bivariate correlation matrix was run to assess for multicollinearity (Table 1). All the variables correlated between $r = 0.17$ and 0.68 , except one pairing, which exceeded the desired cutoff of 0.70 (0.77) but was less than the conventional cutoff of 0.80 .

Table 1. Correlation Matrix.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	Mean (SD)
1 RFS External Authority						10.1 (4.3)
2 RFS Fixed Religion	0.515 **					11.1 (3.2)
3 RFS Worldly Rejection	0.641 **	0.464 **				9.5 (3.3)
4 Heterosexism	0.634 **	0.600 **	0.609 **			17.0 (9.8)
5 Religiosity	0.765 **	0.411 **	0.683 **	0.575 **		21.7 (12.0)
6 Support for LG Civil Rights	−0.645 **	−0.638 **	−0.628 **	−0.926 **	−0.565 **	109.5 (26.1)

Note. RFS = Religious Fundamentalism Scale. ** $p < 0.01$.

3.2. Mediation

A mediation model was developed using the PROCESS macro (Hayes 2014). In the initial model, religiosity was specified to have a direct effect on support for LG civil rights,

as well as an indirect effect through heterosexism, using 5000 bootstrap samples. The direct paths from religiosity to heterosexism ($b = 0.53, p < 0.001$) and from heterosexism to level of support for LG civil rights ($b = -2.19, p < 0.001$) were both statistically significant. Further, the indirect effect of religiosity on support for LG civil rights through heterosexism was statistically significant ($b = -1.17, 95\% \text{ CI } [-1.35, -0.97]$), indicating a full mediation because the direct path from religiosity to level of support for LG civil rights was not statistically significant in the model ($b = 0.02, p = 0.685$). A sensitivity analysis was performed excluding the LGBTQ participants. Results did not deviate from the sample including the LGBTQ participants.

3.3. Moderated Mediation

External authority. In order to determine whether the mediation effect from religiosity through heterosexism to support for LG civil rights differed as a function of participants' level of religious fundamentalism external authority (i.e., moderated mediation), a conditional process model was conducted. The overall model was significant, $F(5, 401) = 513.14, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.86$. Table 2 presents the b -weights, standard errors, p -values, and 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals for each of the paths included in the moderated mediation model. There was a significant direct effect of religiosity to heterosexism when external authority was included in the model ($b = 0.15, p = 0.019$). External authority was positively associated with heterosexism ($b = 1.15, p < 0.001$). The religiosity \times external authority interaction with heterosexism as the criterion variable was significant ($b = 0.03, p < 0.001$). There was also a negative direct effect of heterosexism on support for LG civil rights ($b = -2.17, p < 0.001$) when external authority was included in the model. Religiosity was not significant when external authority was included in the model ($b = 0.05, p = 0.478$). The interaction between heterosexism and external authority was not significant ($b = -0.003, p = 0.827$), nor was religiosity \times external authority ($b = -0.004, p = 0.715$).

Table 2. Moderated Mediation Model Summary with External Authority.

	Estimate (SE)	95% Bias-Corrected Bootstrap Confidence Interval
External Authority		
Model 1: DV = Heterosexism		
Religiosity (<i>a path</i>)	0.15 (0.06) **	0.04 to 0.25
External Authority	1.15 (0.15) ***	0.86 to 1.44
Religiosity \times External Authority	0.03 (0.001) ***	0.02 to 0.05
R^2	0.44 ***	
Model 2: DV = Support for LG Civil Rights		
Heterosexism (<i>b path</i>)	-2.17 (0.15) ***	-2.29 to -2.05
Religiosity (<i>c' path</i>)	0.05 (0.06)	-0.08 to 0.17
External Authority	-0.15 (0.01)	-0.03 to 0.02
Heterosexism \times External Authority	-0.003 (0.18)	-0.51 to 0.22
Religiosity \times External Authority	0.004 (0.01)	-0.02 to 0.03
R^2	0.86 ***	

Note. DV = dependent variable. ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

There was no conditional direct effect of religiosity onto level of support for LG civil rights by external authority (Table 3). A conditional indirect effect of religiosity through heterosexism was observed: heterosexism was a significant mediator of religiosity in predicting diminished support for LG civil rights when religious fundamentalism external authority was high (50th percentile and above), but not when external authority was low (10th–25th percentile; Table 3). These findings are reflective of a moderated mediation, such that heterosexism mediated the effect of religiosity on level of support for LG civil rights only when participants were high in external authority (50th–90th percentile), but not when participants were at low levels of external authority (10th–25th percentile).

Additionally, the mediational effect demonstrated a linear increase in magnitude as external authority increased.

Table 3. Conditional Direct and Indirect Effects in Model with External Authority.

External Authority Percentile Range	Effect	Estimate (SE)	95% Bias-Corrected Bootstrap Confidence Interval
Direct Effects			
10th	0.02	0.10	−0.17 to 0.21
25th	0.03	0.09	−0.14 to 0.20
50th	0.05	0.07	−0.08 to 0.17
75th	0.06	0.07	−0.07 to 0.19
90th	0.07	0.08	−0.09 to 0.23
Indirect Effects			
10th	0.03	0.17	−0.32 to 0.35
25th	−0.04	0.16	−0.37 to 0.26
50th	−0.31 *	0.13	−0.58 to −0.06
75th	−0.51 *	0.14	−0.79 to −0.26
90th	−0.72 *	0.17	−1.05 to −0.41

Note. Effects are considered statistically significant if the * p value is <0.05 and the 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval does not contain zero.

Fixed religion. In order to determine whether the mediation effect from religiosity through heterosexism to support for LG civil rights differed as a function of participants' level of religious fundamentalism fixed religion (i.e., moderated mediation), a conditional process model was conducted. The overall model was significant, $F(5, 401) = 514.94$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.87$. Table 4 presents the b -weights, standard errors, p -values, and 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals for each of the paths included in the moderated mediation model. There was a significant direct effect of religiosity to heterosexism when fixed religion was included in the model ($b = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$). Fixed religion was associated with heterosexism ($b = 1.38$, $p < 0.001$). The religiosity \times fixed religion interaction with heterosexism as the criterion variable was significant ($b = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$). There was also a negative direct effect of heterosexism on level of support for LG civil rights ($b = -2.16$, $p < 0.001$) when fixed religion was included in the model. Religiosity was not significant when fixed religion was included in the model ($b = 0.03$, $p = 0.616$). The interaction between heterosexism and fixed religion was not significant ($b = -0.01$, $p = 0.395$), nor was religiosity \times fixed religion ($b = 0.01$, $p = 0.356$).

Table 4. Moderated Mediation Model Summary with Fixed Religion.

	Estimate (SE)	95% Bias-Corrected Bootstrap Confidence Interval
Fixed Religion		
Model 1: DV = Heterosexism		
Religiosity (a path)	0.31 (0.04) ***	0.24 to 0.39
Fixed Religion	1.38 (0.14) ***	1.11 to 1.65
Religiosity \times Fixed Religion	0.05 (0.01) ***	0.03 to 0.07
R^2	0.52 ***	
Model 2: DV = Support for LG Civil Rights		
Heterosexism (b path)	−2.2 (0.06) ***	−2.28 to −2.04
Religiosity (c' path)	−0.03 (0.05)	−0.07 to 0.12
Fixed Religion	−0.19 (0.19)	−0.05 to 0.02
Heterosexism \times Fixed Religion	−0.01 (0.02)	−0.58 to 0.19
Religiosity \times Fixed Religion	0.01 (0.02)	−0.02 to 0.05
R^2	0.87 ***	

Note. DV = dependent variable. *** $p < 0.001$.

There were no conditional direct effects of religiosity onto level of support for LG civil rights by fixed religion (Table 5). A conditional indirect effect of religiosity through heterosexism was observed: heterosexism was a significant mediator of religiosity in predicting diminished support for LG civil rights at all levels of religious fundamentalism fixed religion (Table 5). These findings do not reflect a statistically significant moderated mediation, although the magnitude of the mediational effect did show a linear increase as fixed religion increased, as would be seen in a moderated mediation.

Table 5. Conditional Direct and Indirect Effects in Model with Fixed Religion.

Fixed Religion Percentile Range	Effect	Estimate (SE)	95% Bias-Corrected Bootstrap Confidence Interval
Direct Effects			
10th	−0.02	0.07	−0.16 to 0.12
25th	−0.01	0.06	−0.13 to 0.12
50th	0.02	0.05	−0.07 to 0.12
75th	0.05	0.06	−0.06 to 0.17
90th	0.10	0.09	−0.08 to 0.28
Indirect Effects			
10th	−0.33 *	0.12	−0.58 to −0.09
25th	−0.45 *	0.11	−0.66 to −0.23
50th	−0.67 *	0.09	−0.84 to −0.50
75th	−0.90 *	0.09	−1.08 to −0.73
90th	−0.1.26 *	0.14	−1.54 to −1.01

Note. Effects are considered statistically significant if the * p value is <0.05 and the 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval does not contain zero.

Worldly rejection. In order to determine whether the mediation effect from religiosity through heterosexism to support for LG civil rights differed as a function of participants' level of religious fundamentalism worldly rejection (i.e., moderated mediation), a conditional process model was conducted. The overall model was significant, $F(5, 401) = 521.50$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.87$. Table 6 presents the b -weights, standard errors, p -values, and 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals for each of the paths included in the moderated mediation model. There was a significant direct effect of religiosity to heterosexism when worldly rejection was included in the model ($b = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$). Worldly rejection was significantly positively associated with heterosexism ($b = 1.33$, $p < 0.001$). The religiosity \times worldly rejection interaction with heterosexism as the criterion variable was significant ($b = 0.03$, $p = 0.005$). There was also a negative direct effect of heterosexism on level of support for LG civil rights ($b = -2.13$, $p < 0.001$) when worldly rejection was included in the model. Religiosity was not significant when worldly rejection was included in the model ($b = 0.10$, $p = 0.081$). The interaction between heterosexism and worldly rejection was not significant ($b = -0.01$, $p = 0.681$), nor was religiosity \times worldly rejection ($b = -0.01$, $p = 0.526$).

There were no conditional direct effects of religiosity onto levels of support for LG civil rights by worldly rejection (Table 7). A conditional indirect effect of religiosity through heterosexism was observed: heterosexism was a significant mediator of religiosity in predicting support for LG civil rights when religious fundamentalism worldly rejection was medium to high (25th–90th percentile), but not when worldly rejection was low (10th percentile; Table 7). These findings are reflective of a moderated mediation, such that heterosexism mediated the effect of religiosity on level of support for LG civil rights only when participants were high in worldly rejection (25th–90th percentile), but not when participants were at low levels (10th percentile). Additionally, the mediational effect demonstrated a linear increase in magnitude as worldly rejection increased. Sensitivity analyses were performed for all moderated mediations excluding the LGBTQ participants. Results did not deviate from the sample including the LGBTQ participants.

Table 6. Moderated Mediation Model Summary with Worldly Rejection.

	Estimate (SE)	95% Bias-Corrected Bootstrap Confidence Interval
Worldly Rejection		
Model 1: DV = Heterosexism		
Religiosity (<i>a path</i>)	0.23 (0.05) ***	0.13 to 0.33
Worldly Rejection	1.33 (0.17) ***	0.99 to 1.68
Religiosity × Worldly Rejection	0.03 (0.01) **	0.01 to 0.05
<i>R</i> ²	0.43 ***	
Model 2: DV = Support for LG Civil Rights		
Heterosexism (<i>b path</i>)	−2.05 (0.21) ***	−2.25 to −2.01
Religiosity (<i>c' path</i>)	0.20 (0.17)	−0.01 to 0.22
Worldly Rejection	−0.11 (0.38) *	−0.91 to −0.05
Heterosexism × Worldly Rejection	−0.01 (0.02)	−0.04 to 0.03
Religiosity × Worldly Rejection	0.01 (0.02)	−0.04 to 0.02
<i>R</i> ²	0.87 ***	

Note. DV = dependent variable. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 7. Conditional Direct and Indirect Effects in Model with Worldly Rejection.

Worldly Rejection Percentile Range	Effect	Estimate (SE)	95% Bias-Corrected Bootstrap Confidence Interval
Direct Effects			
10th	0.15	0.10	−0.05 to 0.35
25th	0.13	0.08	−0.02 to 0.28
50th	0.11	0.06	−0.01 to 0.23
75th	0.08	0.06	−0.05 to 0.20
90th	0.06	0.08	−0.11 to 0.22
Indirect Effects			
10th	−0.20	0.21	−0.64 to 0.19
25th	−0.33 *	0.17	−0.70 to −0.03
50th	−0.46 *	0.14	−0.76 to −0.22
75th	−0.67 *	0.13	−0.92 to −0.42
90th	−0.81 *	0.15	−1.10 to −0.51

Note. Effects are considered statistically significant if the * p value is < 0.05 and the 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval does not contain zero.

4. Discussion

The current study found that heterosexism fully mediated the relationship between religiosity and level of support for LG civil rights, suggesting that the effect of religiosity on support for LG civil rights can be explained through heterosexism. Two conditional indirect effects were observed: heterosexism mediated the effect of religiosity on diminished support for LG civil rights only when participants were high in the aspects of religious fundamentalism tapping external authority and fixed religion. Further, these overall models explained a very high percentage of the variance in level of support for LG civil rights.

The finding that religiosity predicted heterosexism is supported by a wealth of previous literature (Cragun and Sumerau 2015; Jäckle and Wenzelburger 2015; Roggemans et al. 2015). Furthermore, religiosity was found to be negatively correlated to level of support for LG civil rights. This is supported by previous literature (Yen and Zampelli 2017) which found a bivariate negative relationship between religiosity and support for SSM, along with conditional effects of the importance of faith and certain religious practices. However, there is a growing number of religious individuals, particularly young adults, who also support LG civil rights (Taylor and Pew Research Center Staff 2013). Additionally, similar to previous studies (Badgett et al. 2014), heterosexism was found to inversely predict support

for LG civil rights. Individuals who hold and report heterosexist beliefs are unlikely to support social or legal protections for LG individuals.

The current study's finding that heterosexism fully mediated the relationship between religiosity and diminished support for LG civil rights suggests that it is not necessarily one's religious beliefs, but how those beliefs drive heterosexism, which influence an individual's level of support for LG civil rights. The moderated mediations clarified these effects, such that they were mostly only present when participants endorsed high levels of religious fundamentalism. The moderated mediation effect by external authority fundamentalism resonates with previous research findings that individuals who believe their actions should be based on an external moral authority are less likely to support LG civil rights (Liht et al. 2011). For individuals who rely on external authority to inform their stance on spiritual or moral issues, many interpretations of religious texts and authorities still do not support LG civil rights (Masci and Lipka 2015). This is shifting, however, as, for example, on 21 October 2020, Pope Francis made comments supporting civil unions for same-sex couples. The Catholic Church was quick to clarify that official doctrine had not changed. Taken together, these findings suggest that for individuals high in external authority, the religious doctrine and teachings of spiritual leaders and sacred texts supersede cultural conversations about LG civil rights, resulting in higher heterosexism and lower support for LG civil rights. However, for those low in external authority, they may be able to reevaluate or question teaching and doctrine that does not fit with their personal sense of social justice, morality, or the perspectives of many LG individuals living openly and proudly.

Similarly, the moderated mediation effect by worldly rejection fundamentalism resonates with previous research findings that individuals high in worldly rejection are less likely to support LG civil rights; rather, they value a sacred, otherworldly dimension, and the human or worldly experience is lesser by comparison (Liht et al. 2011). Since homosexuality is considered sinful to many mainstream religions, those who value sacred, otherworldly dimensions may devalue LG civil rights (Bosetti et al. 2011). For example, in the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, held sacred by many followers of Judaism and Christianity, homosexuality is condemned in no uncertain terms: "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them" (Leviticus 20:13). For individuals high in worldly rejection, their adherence to religious scripture and respective beliefs about morality may supersede cultural movements toward increasing LG civil rights, resulting in higher heterosexism and lower support for LG civil rights. However, for those low in worldly rejection, they may be able to reevaluate their beliefs in a way that allows them to reconcile their faith with support for LG civil rights.

Why religious fundamentalism and specifically external authority and worldly rejection appear to moderate the relationship between religiosity and diminished support for same-sex marriage is a not yet well understood. Trying to understand the complex relationship among religion, religious fundamentalism, and prejudice has been posited to be so vexing, especially in the case of LG individuals, because many religions simultaneously condemn homosexuality, while preaching tolerance towards those of different group memberships (Fone 2000; Toulouse 2002; Whitley 2009). A previous study documented the empirical differences among orthodoxy and fundamentalism (Krikpatrick 1993), suggesting that items used to measure fundamentalism appear to tap into authoritativeness of the Scripture, boundary maintenance, and anti-modernity, and that examination into these features of fundamentalism may provide insight into the mechanisms driving the relationship between fundamentalism and prejudice.

To date, there has been limited or no empirical intervention work on ways to increase support for LG civil rights among religious people, especially those high in religious fundamentalism. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force did conduct a related study (Lindsay and Stern n.d.) examining religious groups committed to the inclusion of LGBT+ individuals. They found that these organizations were often spiritually motivated (not politically), had a diverse constituency, and included people of all viewpoints. They noted

that people in these organizations often saw political expression as “unspiritual,” and the authors argued that these organizations can be a great resource regarding justice—but that negative stereotypes regarding religion may be a huge barrier for LGBT+ religious coalition and allyship. There are in fact many religious organizations (e.g., the Unitarian Universalists, Episcopal Christian Church, and some Presbyterian and Reformed Judaism branches) which are accepting and supportive of LG individuals (Masci and Lipka 2015), and many that do not (e.g., American Baptist, Catholicism, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Islam, Orthodox Judaism, Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Southern Baptist Convention) support same-sex marriage and sexuality (Liu 2012). Through the underlying principles of the organizations which accept LG individuals, it may be possible to replicate their success or modify it to a specific church community.

Limitations and Future Implications

The current study has several limitations, and as a result, areas for future research. The first limitation is that, although the sample was geographically diverse and had a wide age range, participants were fairly well educated and 57.7% of the sample identified as women. This may be partially due to self-selection, as these participants—particularly among an online sample—might be more willing to participate in research about gay and lesbian issues. One way to address this in future studies would be to recruit participants in other venues, such as churches, community centers, community health centers, and a mix of rural, suburban, and urban areas. By using a mix of recruitment strategies, a wider range of education backgrounds might be obtained, including those who are technologically illiterate or without internet access. Additionally, a small portion of the sample identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, and/or transgender. Not all LGBT+ individuals support marriage initiatives for a variety of reasons, and perhaps even more so among those high in religious fundamentalism. Furthermore—while not explicitly measured—individuals in the LGBT+ community may experience internalized oppression, which may manifest as prejudice toward one’s own group (Pietkiewicz and Kołodziejczyk-Skrzypek 2016). Additionally, many LGBT+ individuals are religious and struggle with reconciling their faith and identity (Pietkiewicz and Kołodziejczyk-Skrzypek 2016; Taylor and Pew Research Center Staff 2013). As a result, this small LGBT+ subgroup was included in the current analyses and study.

Another fairly substantial limitation is that demographic data about participants’ religious tradition or denomination affiliation was not captured. Several demographic studies of MTurk workers have found there was an over-representation of secular (e.g., atheist or agnostic) individuals (Burnham et al. 2018; Levay et al. 2016; Lewis et al. 2015). With religious affiliation information, it might be possible to examine whether these findings hold across different religious groups, or if there are differences between adherents of different religions. For example, would there be difference among someone who subscribed to an Abrahamic religion versus a non-Abrahamic religion? Would there be differences among those who identify as spiritual, but not religious? Additionally, would the context in which people practice their faith matter? For example, would it make a difference if an individual were a member of the dominant faith group versus a minority faith group? Given the high degree of Christian identification in the general U.S. population (Pew Research Center 2014, 2019) as well as the finding that highly and somewhat religious groups are mostly Christian (Morin et al. 2018), knowing the religious affiliation of the sample would have helped demonstrate the representativeness of it. Further, as religious fundamentalism looks differently in different faith traditions (Hunsberger 1996), there may be important subgroup differences. Finally, with the rise of religious individualism (Hervieu-Léger 2001; Uecker and Froese 2019), it is possible that one faith tradition is seeing this to a higher degree than others, and thus followers are endorsing progressive beliefs at higher levels. Examining levels of fundamentalism and if the study results hold among various religions would suggest a potential area for intervention.

While data on the state participants live in were collected, laws regarding LG civil rights can vary even within a state by county or city. For example, as of 2019, 20 states have laws addressing hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity, 11 based on sexual orientation only, 15 with hate crime laws lacking sexual orientation or gender identity inclusion, and 5 without any hate crime legislation ([Human Rights Campaign n.d.](#)). Pennsylvania (PA) is one of the 15 states with hate crime laws that are not inclusive of sexual orientation or gender identity. However, the city of Philadelphia, PA added sexual orientation and gender identity to its hate crime laws ([Miller 2014](#)). While the state does not have an inclusive hate crime law, the city of Philadelphia does. This is just one of many possible examples. Future research on heterosexism and civil rights will need to consider the evolution of and current historical progression. Marriage equality was passed in the U.S. in 2015, followed by same-sex adoption in 2016, a ruling that same-sex couples must be treated equally when issuing birth certificates in 2017, the first case regarding fair housing laws in 2017, and also in 2017 an employment discrimination case working its way to SCOTUS. These changes in LG civil rights may have a reciprocal relationship with prejudice and other variables of interest. Future studies should attempt as well as possible to account for the effect of these laws on the patterns observed in the current study.

Finally, while the current study focused on LG civil rights generally, using the SGLCR and its single-factor structure, future research may wish to test these models across different classes of civil rights (e.g., employment rights, adoption, and immigration). It would also be important to include other diverse sexual and gender identities (e.g., bisexuals or gender-diverse individuals in same-sex/gender relationships). Additionally, future studies may wish to include additional co-variables or using gender-stratified models to explore subgroup differences.

5. Conclusions

This study aimed to examine the relationships among religiosity, heterosexism, and LG civil rights, and whether these relationships vary as a function of religious fundamentalism. Support for LG civil rights has generally increased in recent decades. However, a significant portion of the population still does not support LG civil rights, and there still exists high levels of stigma, hostility, and discrimination ([Haas et al. 2011](#)). Heterosexism was found to mediate the relationship between religiosity and level of support for LG civil rights, and this relationship was found to be further moderated by external authority and fixed religion. This is an important area for research, and studies such as this can help identify directions for future research regarding areas of intervention for reducing heterosexism and increasing support for LG civil rights among religious populations.

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