

Attitudes toward Parental Involvement Clauses in Minor Abortion Laws and Individual Differences in Religion, Political Affiliation, and Attribution Style Among College Students

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ABSTRACT - The U.S. Supreme Court currently upholds a minor's right for abortion, albeit with limitations, such as requiring parent notification or consent. Individual differences, such as religious affiliation, can influence an individual's support for abortion and abortion laws, especially when a religion forbids women to have abortions. The current study explores the relationship between attitudes toward parental involvement clauses and individual differences among 267 college students at a western university in the United States. Findings reveal that religious affiliation, quest, and devotionism did not predict support for any of the parental involvement clauses. The strongest predictors of support for parental involvement clauses were identifying as Republican, and making situational attributions; lack of support was predicted by those who were likely to practice their religion privately. Implications of these findings on psychology, religion, public opinion, and future policy are discussed.

In 2005, approximately 6.4% of all women who received abortions in the U.S. were minors (Ventura, Abma, Mosher, & Henshaw, 2009). Among minors who elect to have abortions, many share the decision with their parents, whereas others do not, often fearing parental disapproval or abuse (Griffin-Carlson & Mackin, 1993). Since the U.S. Supreme Court decisions in *Planned Parenthood v. Danforth* (1976) and *Bellotti v. Baird* (1979), states may constitutionally require parents' involvement in their children's abortion decision, either by requiring the minor to *notify* or obtain written *consent* from one or both parents. Laws that require parental notification or consent can be thought of as structural constraints put in place to influence social norms about abortion decisions (Adamczyk, 2008). As of 2009, 18 states require one-parent consent, 2 states require two-parent consent, 10 states require one-parent notification, and 1 state requires two-parent notification (Guttmacher Institute, 2009). Each of these states has an alternative process (e.g., judicial bypass, grandparent consent) and most offer exceptions to the law under certain circumstances (e.g., medical emergency, assault, incest; Guttmacher Institute, 2009). While past studies have investigated how individual differences predict attitudes

toward abortion in general, this is one of the first to investigate attitudes toward restrictions on minors' abortions.

The purposes of this study were to (1) gauge opinion of college students regarding parental involvement clauses, and (2) explore whether factors (e.g., religious characteristics, political and religious affiliations, attribution style, demographics) predict support of these clauses.

In a review of studies measuring abortion attitudes, Jelen and Wilcox (2003) argued that religion is one of the most powerful predictors of abortion attitudes. In this section we review literature on the relationships between affiliation, devotionism, and orthodoxy and abortion attitudes; as well as the relationships between abortion attitudes and evangelism, quest, and religiosity-spirituality factors, which have yet to be explored.

Religious affiliation refers to the title of the religious group with which an individual identifies (e.g., Hindu). Some researchers have found that affiliation predicts abortion attitudes (Jelen & Wilcox, 2003), which may be explained by strong positions taken by particular religious groups (e.g., Catholic Church officially opposes abortion; Luker, 1985). However, other research has found no difference between Catholics and Protestants (Sullins, 1999). Sullins explains that this finding is based on a steep decline in church attendance by Catholics, but not among Protestants. He also contends that, over time, young, highly devoted Protestants have become more opposed to abortion while young, highly devoted Catholics have become more supportive, closing the gap regarding differences in abortion attitudes. Another possible explanation for the lack of discrepancy between religious affiliations is greater variation within Protestants and within Catholics than between them (Alwin, 1986). Thus, religious *characteristics* (e.g., devotionism) may be more predictive of abortion attitudes than affiliation.

Devotionism refers to how religious someone perceives herself to be and is often measured by how often one performs religious acts (Putney & Middleton, 1961). Devotionism is a strong predictor of pro-life attitudes toward abortion (Emerson, 1996). Specifically, individuals who pray or attend services often are more likely to hold pro-life attitudes than individuals who pray or attend services less often (Adamczyk & Felson, 2008). Among college students, those highly involved in their religion were less likely to support laws legalizing abortion than students who were less involved in their religion (Hess & Rueb, 2005). In sum, individuals high in devotionism may be more supportive of parental involvement for minors who seek abortions compared to individuals low in devotionism.

Orthodoxy is a religious characteristic that reflects traditional beliefs and values and is measured as the importance of orthodox Christian beliefs (Putney & Middleton, 1961). Orthodoxy has a significant relationship with support for pro-life attitudes (Medoff & Lee, 1992) and negative attitudes toward abortion (Mavor & Gallois, 2008). In sum, individuals high in orthodoxy may be more supportive of parental involvement in abortions for minors compared to individuals low in orthodoxy.

Evangelism refers to the belief in the importance of converting others (Young, 1992). No research has explored the relationship between evangelism and abortion attitudes. Young (1992) suggests evangelists may hold liberal attitudes toward social issues because evangelism is thought to express compassion or concern for the souls of others. This suggests that evangelists may have compassion for a woman choosing to have an

abortion and may hold more positive abortion attitudes; alternately, evangelists may consider a fetus to have a soul and, therefore, hold more negative abortion attitudes. This study explores if any relationship exists between evangelism and support for abortion laws with parental involvement clauses.

Quest is a religious characteristic that describes openly searching for answers to life's existential questions instead of accepting traditional, agreed-upon explanations (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991b). In one study, quest has been associated with positive abortion attitudes (Mavor & Gallois, 2008). However, with so little existing research, it is difficult to predict the effect of quest relative to support for parental involvement clauses for minors seeking abortions; thus, this relationship will be explored.

Religiosity and spirituality consist of multiple dimensions and are complex issues that are not well understood (Hill & Hood, 1999). The Fetzer multidimensional measure (1999) consists of several religiosity and spirituality constructs (i.e., value, history, belief, forgiveness, private practice, and organizational practice). Some of these constructs are useful in predicting physical and mental health outcomes (Neff, 2006), but none have been tested on abortion attitudes. In sum, religiosity-spirituality dimensions have been measured differently in the literature and a multidimensional measure is needed to clarify past research. This study may yield innovative findings relative to abortion attitudes and parental involvement clauses because this study utilizes a multidimensional religiosity-spirituality inventory (i.e., value, history, belief, forgiveness, private practice, and organizational practice constructs).

Self-identified Democrats and Republicans differ in their beliefs about the morality and legality of abortions (Hess & Rueb, 2005). Among college students, Democrats and liberals had stronger pro-choice views than Republicans and conservatives (Hess & Rueb, 2005). This relationship suggests that self-identified Republicans will be more supportive of parental involvement clauses compared to self-identified Democrats.

Some scholars argue that variation between Republicans and Democrats can be accounted for by attribution theory. Stitka and colleagues (2002) showed that the causes of social problems can be predicted by individuals' strength of political ideology and the attributions they make about others. For example, attitudes toward social welfare consistently correlate with attributions about the causes of poverty (Sniderman, Hagen, Tetlock, & Brady, 1986). Political conservatives often attribute the causes of poverty to be *within* the individual (e.g., they are poor because they are lazy); in contrast, political liberals are likely to attribute the causes to be *outside* the individual (e.g., because the economy is structured to financially reward males more than females, leading single mothers to be poor). Attribution theory proposes that the degree to which people perceive others have control over the negative events in their lives affects how they emotionally react to and judge the intentions of others (Weiner, 1993). Sympathy and pity are elicited when a perceiver judges an event to be caused by situations outside an individual's control. Anger and apathy are elicited when a perceiver judges an event to be caused by an individual's own character. For instance, participants were most sympathetic when they perceived situational factors to be the reason a woman got an abortion and least sympathetic when they perceived the woman's dispositional factors to be why she got an abortion (Zucker, 1999). Thus, it is possible that perceivers who believe that women seek abortions because of situational factors (e.g., birth control failed) will be more

sympathetic than perceivers who believe that women seek abortions because of internal dispositional factors (e.g., low morals). This literature suggests that individuals who make situational attributions will be less supportive of parental involvement clauses than those who make personal attributions.

Race and gender have been studied in relation to abortion attitudes. Early research found that African Americans were more conservative in their abortion attitudes than Caucasians (Peterson & Mauss, 1976). Over time, researchers reported that racial differences appeared to be diminishing (Wilcox, 1990). Researchers found no difference between males and females on abortion attitudes (Jelen, Damore, & Lamatsch, 2002). Though, some research found that race interacts with gender in influencing abortion attitudes (Hall & Ferree, 1986). These findings provide mixed results for both gender and race, and establish the need to provide current research examining their relationships with support for parental involvement laws.

Studies examining age in relation to abortion attitudes also found mixed results. Some studies demonstrated that younger individuals were more likely to support lenient abortion laws (Hollis & Morris, 1992), whereas other research found no differences in abortion attitudes among four age groups of women ranging from 19 years of age to older than 55 years (Schnell & McConatha, 1996). In sum, past research provides mixed results about age effects and this research will seek to clarify whether age relates to support for parental involvement clauses.

In sum, a variety of individual factors might be related to support for parental involvement clauses. The current study investigates whether the opinion of college students differs depending on the type of parental involvement clause (Research Question 1). The study also determines whether religious affiliation and characteristics, political affiliation, attribution style, and demographics predict attitudes toward parental involvement clauses (Research Question 2).

Method

Participants

Participants were 267 undergraduate students in a western university in the United States who completed an online survey; 61.4% were female and they ranged in age from 18-57 years ($M = 20.8$, $MD = 20$). Participants were 74.6% Caucasian, 12.3% Hispanic; they were 35.4% Catholic, 7.9% Protestant, 9.5% Atheist/Agnostic, and 25.6% had no particular affiliation ('Religious Nones'). Participants self-identified as 40.1% Democrat, 26.8% Republican, and 9.3% Independent.

Four dependent variable questions, rated on a five-point Likert scale with 1=no, strongly oppose, and 5=yes, strongly support, measured support for the four clauses that are currently written into states' minor abortion laws: "When a minor girl is pregnant, some states require her to (get written consent from/notify) (one parent/both parents) in order to have an abortion. Do you support such laws?"

Participants selected their religious affiliation from a proposed list. Three religious groups were dummy-coded: Catholics, Protestants and Atheists/Agnostics; the reference group was all the other selected affiliations (i.e., Eastern Orthodox, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Mormon, a non-listed affiliation, and no particular affiliation).

Measures

Putney and Middleton's (1961) scales measured devotionism, orthodoxy, and evangelism using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. Six items measured devotionism (e.g., "I very often think about matters relating to religion"), six measured orthodoxy (e.g., "I believe there is a Divine plan and purpose for every living person and thing"), and six measured evangelism (e.g., "I have a duty to help those who are confused about religion"). Inter-item reliability was adequate: Cronbach's alpha = .87 (devotionism), .86 (orthodoxy), and .72 (evangelism). The three subscales demonstrated external validity with measures of authoritarianism, status concern, and conservatism (Putney & Middleton, 1961).

Batson and Schoenrade's (1991b) 12-item scale was used to measure quest, using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 9=strongly agree. Four items measured willingness to face existential questions without reducing their complexity (e.g., "My life experiences have led me to rethink my religious convictions"), four items measured self-criticism and perception of religious doubt as positive (e.g., "For me, doubting is an important part of what it means to be religious"), and four items measured openness to change (e.g., "There are many religious issues on which my views are still changing"). Reliability was satisfactory: Cronbach alpha = .81. Batson and Schoenrade (1991a) reviewed the validity of the quest scale, showing that over 50 studies demonstrated the distinctiveness of the quest construct from intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity, as well as its pragmatic validity as a religious instrument.

Fetzer's multidimensional measure (Fetzer Institute, 1999) assessed value, history, belief, forgiveness, private practice, and organizational practice. The value sub-scale included three questions (e.g., "My whole approach to life is based on my religion"), using a five-point Likert scale from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. The history sub-scale asked, "Did you ever have a religious or spiritual experience that changed your life?" coded as 0=no and 1=yes. The belief sub-scale included two questions (e.g., "How much is religion a source of strength and comfort to you?") that were coded as 1=none, 2=a little, and 3=a great deal. The forgiveness sub-scale included three questions (e.g., "I have forgiven myself for things that I have done wrong") using a four-point scale from 1=never to 4=almost always/always. The private practice sub-scale included four questions (e.g., "How often do you pray privately in places other than at church or synagogue?") on an eight-point scale from 1=never to 8=several times a day. The organizational practice sub-scale included two questions (e.g., "How often do you attend religious services?") using an eight-point scale from 1=never to 8=several times a week. Cronbach alphas ranged from .62 to .82 for sub-scales. The Fetzer Institute (1999) extensively documented internal, external, and construct (content, face, predictive, concurrent, convergent, discriminant) validity for the sub-scales.

Participants selected their political affiliation from a proposed list, and were dummy coded as 0=Republican and 1=Democrat. We measured attribution style by creating eight items to distinguish between personal and situational attributions. Items measuring personal attribution included "Most people act because of their personality," "Most criminals commit crimes because of who they are," "A person's behavior is affected more by the person's character than by the people or events around the person," and "How wealthy a child's parents are will strongly determine whether he becomes a criminal."

Items measuring situational attribution included "Most people act because of the influence of their situation," "Most criminals commit crimes because of their environment," "People can achieve anything they want to, no matter what their life situation," and "A person's family and life situation can limit a person's choices (e.g., job choice)." Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. We summed scores and recoded so lower scores indicated personal influence and higher scores indicated situational influence.

This study added the control variables of race, gender, and age that past research (Jelen, Damore, & Lamatsch, 2002; Pew Research Center, 2004) has shown to be related to the variables of interest in this study. Participants selected their race from a proposed list and race was dummy coded as 1=Caucasian, 0=ethnic minorities. Gender was a categorical variable coded as 0 = male and 1 = female. Age was measured as a continuous variable.

Results and Discussion

A repeated measures analysis of variance indicated that participants did not equally support all four clauses ($F [3,256] = 11.82, p < .0001, \eta_p^2 = .044$); however, the means indicated that participants were generally supportive of all four clauses. Participants were most supportive of a one-parent consent clause ($M = 3.04, SD = 1.43$), significantly more than the two-parent consent and notification clauses, and marginally significantly more than the one-parent notification clause ($M = 2.87, SD = 1.30$). Participants were least supportive of two-parent consent ($M = 2.69, SD = 1.44$) and two-parent notification ($M = 2.59, SD = 1.26$) clauses, which did not differ from one another. Thus, in our sample, opinions from college students indicate that the consent of one parent is most desirable—notification is not enough. Further, involving one parent is more desirable in abortion decisions than allowing the involvement of both parents. Policy makers could use this finding to shape laws that the public will be likely to support and avoid certain clauses that would meet greater opposition from the public.

A series of multiple linear regressions using the least squares method analyzed whether the individual differences variables significantly predicted participants' support. The omnibus regression model contained age, gender, race, political and religious affiliation, attribution style, value, history, belief, forgiveness, private practice, organizational practice, questism, devotionism, orthodoxy, and evangelism. All variables were entered simultaneously, after non-normally distributed variables were transformed. For variables with missing values, cases were excluded listwise. No multicollinearity was observed. For univariate results regarding support ratings for each clause, see Table 1.

The overall regression model significantly predicted participants' support ratings for the two-parent consent clause ($R^2 = .342$; adjusted $R^2 = .249$; $F [18,127] = 3.665, p < .001$), the one-parent consent clause ($R^2 = .304$; adjusted $R^2 = .206$; $F [18,129] = 3.124, p < .001$), and the two-parent notification clause ($R^2 = .207$; adjusted $R^2 = .096$; $F [18,128] = 1.860, p < .05$); and marginally predicted support for the one-parent notification clause ($R^2 = .183$; adjusted $R^2 = .068$; $F [18,128] = 1.589, p < .10$).

In general, univariate findings provide insight into the relationship between each of the individual difference variables and support for abortion laws involving minors.

Political affiliation was a strong predictor, as self-identified Republicans were more supportive than self-identified Democrats. Interestingly, the one model in which political affiliation only marginally predicted support is one-parent notification, the most lenient of all clauses. Democrats and Republicans were not as disparate in their level of support when the clause was lenient. However, in general, the more restrictive clauses became, the more Republicans and Democrats differed.

Table 1
Multiple Regressions of Predictor Variables on Support Ratings

Predictors	Abortion Consent, Both Parents			Abortion Consent, One Parent		
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	β
Age	-.001	-.039	-.003	-.007	-.203	-.016
Female	-.650	-2.501	-.203*	-.203	-.774	-.064
Caucasian	-.150	-.514	-.042	-.190	-.643	-.054
Democrat	-.651	-2.397	-.210*	-.711	-2.594	-.232*
Catholicism	.009	.035	.003	.052	.192	.017
Protestantism	.150	.316	.028	.359	.745	.067
Atheist/Agnostic	-.261	-.604	-.056	-.315	-.721	-.068
Attribution	1.466	.549	.048	2.275	.848	.076
Value	.357	1.572	.185	.266	1.167	.141
History	.054	.199	.017	.068	.246	.022
Belief	.075	.810	.081	.010	.103	.010
Forgiveness	.005	.129	.011	-.001	-.040	-.003
Private Practice	-2.098	-2.351	-.330*	-2.701	-2.988	-.431**
Organizational Practice	1.144	1.820	.221 [†]	1.080	1.692	.211 [†]
Quest	-.042	-1.184	-.095	.005	.146	.012
Devotionalism	.196	.863	.119	.144	.631	.089
Orthodoxy	.282	1.112	.164	.468	1.821	.276 [†]
Evangelism	-.030	-.134	-.015	.052	.236	.026

Note. *N* = 146-148 [†]*p* < .10 **p* < .05 ***p* < .01

Table 1 (continued)
Multiple Regressions of Predictor Variables on Support Ratings

Predictors	Abortion Notification, Both Parents			Abortion Notification, One Parent		
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	β
Age	-.031	-.966	-.082	-.028	-.851	-.073
Female	-.325	-1.313	-.116	-.051	-.195	-.018
Caucasian	.022	.080	.007	.124	.418	.038
Democrat	-.766	-2.934	-.282**	-.516	-1.874	-.183 [†]
Catholicism	.035	.137	.013	-.099	-.362	-.035
Protestantism	.119	.261	.025	-.033	-.068	-.007
Atheist/Agnostic	-.314	-.758	-.077	-.393	-.900	-.092
Attribution	7.677	3.014	.289**	7.953	2.957	.287**
Value	-.244	-1.131	-.147	-.376	-1.649	-.217
History	-.096	-.366	-.035	-.015	-.055	-.005
Belief	-.005	-.056	-.006	-.089	-.959	-.105
Forgiveness	.012	.356	.032	-.018	-.525	-.048
Private Practice	-1.531	-1.788	-.276 [†]	-1.335	-1.477	-.232
Organizational Practice	.779	1.287	.172	1.021	1.597	.217
Quest	-.032	-.937	-.082	-.001	-.028	-.002
Devotionalism	.054	.251	.038	.048	.212	.033
Orthodoxy	.265	1.086	.177	.428	1.659	.274 [†]
Evangelism	.293	1.403	.166	.239	1.086	.130

Note. *N* = 146-148 [†]*p* < .10 **p* < .05 ***p* < .01

Attribution style was another strong predictor, as participants who made situational attributions were more supportive of notification clauses compared to participants who made more dispositional attributions; however, this factor did not affect support for consent clauses. This indicates that individuals who believe that situational factors control life outcomes are supportive of parents being notified, in comparison to requiring written consent, about events in their child's life. Policy makers could use this research by focusing on the situational or dispositional aspects of a minor's decision to have an abortion in their solicitation of support from others. Emphasizing situational factors that may contribute to teen pregnancies should increase community support for parental involvement.

Gender was only predictive of support for the two-parent consent clause. Being the most restrictive clause, females may be better able than males to identify with the heightened burden that this would impart upon minors seeking abortions, and thus, females were less likely to support the law than males.

Findings from this study indicate that religious characteristics are more important than religious affiliation in predicting support for parent involvement clauses of abortion laws for minors. Similar conclusions regarding the importance of religious characteristics compared to religious affiliation have been made by other researchers (e.g., Alwin, 1986). Orthodoxy marginally contributed unique variance, as higher scores indicated more support for such laws. Fetzer's private practice sub-scale had a significantly negative relationship with support ratings. Perhaps people who practice their faith on their own believe that individuals ought to be able to make their own decisions without outside influence. Interestingly, this factor significantly predicted support for the more restrictive *consent* clauses, but not the less restrictive *notification* clauses, perhaps because the minor's choice is fully controlled by the parent. Another Fetzer sub-scale, organizational practice, exhibited a marginally significant relationship with support ratings (meeting the .10 alpha level, but not our .05 level); the more individuals practiced organized religion, the more supportive they were of the parental consent clauses. Perhaps individuals who are active in organized religion believe that trusted others (e.g., church leaders) should influence one's decisions; thus, they also believe that a minor should be guided by others, such as parents. This was the first study to investigate relationships between the Fetzer multidimensional religiosity-spirituality scales (Fetzer Institute, 1999) and support for abortion laws. Future research should expand the application of the Fetzer measures to other sexual and reproductive health issues.

Other religious characteristics were not as strong of predictors regarding support ratings. Devotionalism, evangelism, and quest were not significant predictors for any of the clauses. Religious affiliation did not predict support for any of the clauses. The sample was a relatively homogenous (e.g., few Southern Baptists, Jews) sample from one area of the U.S., which may have led to the null findings. Additionally, college-age individuals are less likely to attend church and subsequently integrate religious teachings with their moral and political beliefs than other older age groups (Sullins, 1999). The null findings do, however, comport with other studies' findings that religious characteristics are stronger predictors of attitudes than affiliation (e.g., Alwin, 1986).

Limitations

This study has some limitations. First, the sample only consisted of college students. Although the intent of this research was to specifically study this group as an initial step before dedicating further resources to studying a representative adult sample, this limits the generalizability of the findings to other groups. It could be the case that the opinions of parents could differ from our presented findings. Future research should be carried out on a community sample that includes a substantial number of parents. Second, the sample was taken from one university in a western state. To the extent that support for these laws varies by geographical region, the results may not generalize. Third, we did not test for interactions among variables, as the intent of the study was exploratory and we were interested in understanding which religious, political, attribution style, and demographic variables predict attitudes toward parental clauses before exploring how any of the relationships are moderated. Finally, participants were not given any information about the laws and were only surveyed at one point in time. Because sentiment tends to be transient (Finkel, 1995), participants' level of support may be different if they had more information or were asked at a different time period.

Conclusion

Abortion laws continue to be a topic of much debate in politics and among religious groups. This study is one of the first to examine opinion from one subset of the public toward parental involvement in abortion laws for minors. Also, this research is one of the most comprehensive studies of religious characteristics and parental involvement clauses. The findings show that religious characteristics, attribution, and political affiliation all serve as strong predictors for support of these laws and should all be considered in future research on morally-charged social and political issues.

Author Note

We thank Alane Thomas for her assistance in conducting this study.

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