Invisible Strings: The Impacts of Race on Attitudes Toward Abortion Among the Highly Religious

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INVISIBLE STRINGS: THE IMPACTS OF RACE ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS ABORTION AMONG THE HIGHLY RELIGIOUS

by

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B.A Miami University, 2020

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Political Science in the College of Sciences at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

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ABSTRACT

Following an influential Supreme Court decision regarding the legality of abortion, America seems to be split now more than ever on their attitudes towards this care. At the same time, researchers have shown that America has been shifting towards a more diverse and liberal population on social issues. With the increased presence of diverse groups, cross-pressures have grown in individuals belonging to multiple social groups that may hold conflicting opinions about political issues such as abortion care. Race and frequent religiosity have been salient identities in predicting attitudes towards abortion. This research set out to test whether these identities can interact and impact individuals' opinions about abortion care. I theorized that in the absence of a minority racial cross pressure, that frequent religious attenders who are white were less likely to support abortion for any reason. Using binary logistic regression, I estimated whiteness, frequent religious attendance, and an interaction term of the two against support for abortion under any circumstance. While initial patterns in the data suggested a small interaction, the effect in the model was not statistically significant. However, the findings presented here provide initial results and a path forward in this emerging, and relevant field of research. Though this research was completed prior to the decision that overturned Roe, its impact will undoubtably shift future work in this field.
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INTRODUCTION

America’s population has been growing more diverse since the passage of Roe v Wade in 1973. Even now, as Roe has been overturned, Americans are unwavering in their general support for the legality of abortion care (Pew Research…2022). This growing diversity is reflected in several additional ways: increased racial diversity, increased numbers of Millennials and Gen Z’ers in the workforce, and a growing post-secondary education gap between women and men (Gramlich 2020). Changes in broader demographics are not the only shifts that increased diversity can create. As demographic characteristics in a population change, ideas can change as well. Indeed, as America has become more diverse in population characteristics, researchers have noted many changes in social attitudes towards ideas and groups. In the Fall of 2020, the Pew Research Center released a report indicating that more Americans now are accepting of a non-white majority than they had been four years earlier (Budiman 2020). More Americans believe that households headed by same sex partners are just as successful as households headed by heterosexual partners (Thomas 2020). Diversity in demographic characteristics produce diverse thoughts on social issues, and in turn can explain increases in diversity of thoughts about social issues.

This shift in diversity creates a population where individuals hold many memberships or identities across social groups. Some of these identities overlap and create an intersection. Intersecting identities can uniquely inform how individuals arrive
at their opinions on social issues, and abortion care is no exception. Scholars are increasingly studying these interacting identities and how they influence social opinions. My research examines the phenomenon of intersectionality and its influence on opinions related to abortion care. While previous research focused on single characteristics as influencing abortion opinion, my research aims to explore the interaction between two significant predictors, racial identity, and frequent religiosity, to explain how individuals form opinions about this particular social subject.

Existing scholarship emphasizes sole traits as determinants of individual abortion opinion. Abortion opinion, unlike other policy areas, has largely remained stable since its legalization (Mouw 2001). This stability of opinion is attributed to the fact that the political debate around abortion care is highly moralized (Adams 1997). Because many organized religions hold anti-abortion stances, religion and religiosity have long been studied as characteristics likely to impact abortion opinion. Blank and Shaw (2015) along with others have established religiosity as a key determinant of views on abortion, as well as other highly moralized issues (Blank and Shaw 2015).

My research studies the impact of the interacting identities of race and religion in determining individual support for abortion care. My theory asserts that individuals belonging to different racial groups will arrive at varying conclusions in their thoughts on abortion care despite similarities in religiosity and religious service attendance. This phenomenon occurs as a result of differences in experiences through identifying with
different racial groups. This paper studies how race can impact religiosity when individuals are considering social issues.

Using the most current GSS data, the analysis was conducted with the most demographically diverse population ever to participate in the survey, which increases the likelihood that participants would hold multiple identities and would experience cross pressures. The results of my quantitative analysis demonstrate two key findings that advance the current understanding of abortion opinion formation. First, racial groups within the frequent religious attenders category of General Social Survey (GSS) data hold significant differences in their approval of abortion care under any of the circumstances provided. Second, white identifying individuals within the frequent religious attenders category are significantly less likely to approve of abortion care under any of the circumstances surveyed compared to their non-white counterparts. The findings would suggest that while religious attendance serves as a strong predictor of abortion opinions, there is a nuance to individual opinions uncaptured by single characteristics alone. Intersectional approaches to examining social attitudes, particularly complex ones such as abortion, need to be implemented in future studies to gain a more complete understanding of the population responding to social opinion surveys. More specifically, regarding abortion politics, a more complete understanding of factors leading to abortion opinion formation will better inform research moving forward. Future goals should include intersectional data collection, and data collection more specifically geared towards abortion opinions.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Shifting Social Identities

Scholars have observed that demographic shifts over time have led to changes in national opinion on social subjects. The impacts of these shifts can be seen manifested in current national opinion. Loftus (2001) found that shifts in population demographics explained nearly one-third of increased tolerance of other social groups (Loftus 2001). Increased tolerance as a result of increased diversity has led to a positive shift in social attitudes as the public has become more liberal leaning on social issues (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). Specifically, increased diversity of racial and religious groups can lead to an increase in diverse, progressive opinions (Whittaker, Segura, and Bowler 2005). Bruce (2020) reached similar conclusions by showing differences in approaches to abortion opinions among racial groups based on the distinct experiences within each group over time. Beyond specific group experiences, Barringer, Sumerau and Gay (2020) also observed variations in opinions on social issues within generational cohorts. Howard, Cervone and Motyl (2021) similarly concluded that generational understandings of “diversity” and other lingo related to social issues contribute to opinion formation on these issues (Howard, Cervone and Motyl 2021). Many of these observations converge in intersectional ways within individuals. Race, age, educational attainment, and other factors can all contribute to personal identities.
Shifting Attitudes Grow Cross-Pressures

The convergence of diverse identities within individuals creates cross-pressures within the individual. Cross-pressuring is a term traditionally applied when analyzing voter behavior. Within the context of this current study, I adopt the use of cross-pressures shared by Hansen and Dolan (2021), who noted that political and social identities can converge in individuals and pull their opinions in opposite directions on certain social issues. Brader, Tucker and Therriault (2014) adopt a similar definition of cross-pressures that describes them as "...the cumulative impact of pressures regardless of mechanism…those that arise from one’s social strata and group memberships." (25). Their definition is intentionally expanded to encompass a variety of settings outside the realm of political participation.

Increased numbers of certain demographic groups grow the number of individuals with memberships to those groups, and individuals who belong to more than one diverse social group. These individuals who identify with multiple, diverse social groups are prone to experiencing cross-pressuring identities. Cross-pressures are distinct from intersectional identities as defined by Crenshaw (1991), who coined the term intersectionality to describe how “groups within groups” can reconcile their lived experiences within each. Cross-pressures arise when multiple influential group identifiers provide conflicting messaging on opinion formation or behavioral choices. A religious feminist might struggle to reconcile the inherently liberal opinions associated with their gender-equality beliefs and the generally conservative views advocated by
their organized faith institutions. Cross-pressures can impact opinion formation in a few ways. The present research seeks specifically to examine the cross-pressures that arise from racial and religious identities. Racial and religious identities have both been established as salient personal identities that shape individuals’ opinions about social issues.

Berg (2010) examined interactions between race, class and gender on immigration attitudes and found that, due to respondents’ positions within their respective sociodemographic cultures, opinions on the social issue of immigration varied. Black male individuals with no college education were the least likely to respond that immigrants were good for the economy, attributed to the comparable threat Black men feel they face in most pockets of society today. Berg concluded that different backgrounds produce different perspectives which influence the way that individuals view political issues. Savaş et al (2021) found that views on social issues are complex and can explain why social opinions vary in discussions with different people. Bramlett (2012) studied the impact of religious influences on LGBTQ+ attitudes based on cross-pressures of religiosity, race and contact with LGBTQ identifying-individuals. For white evangelicals, these cross-pressures have no bearing on their anti-LGBTQ positions. However, for non-white groups who have historically been marginalized themselves, the outcomes are different. Bramlett found that Black and Latino evangelicals are more likely than their white counterparts to support pro-LGBTQ policies. Shapira, Liang and Lin (2022) studied the formation of opinions on guns and concluded that an
intersectional approach to studying public opinion formation is necessary because most social issues are formed over time and through socialization of group memberships. Salient group memberships, such as race and religion, can have more profound impacts on the socialization and opinion formation in individuals.

These salient cross-pressures can also influence political attitudes and views on particularly salient political issues. Gay (2013) examined partisan attitudes among Black individuals and found a pro-Democratic bias within the Black community. She attributed this to the salience of political issues dealing with race among Black individuals and the emphasis that the Democratic Party has placed on addressing these concerns (Gay 2013). This finding provides evidence that salient identities can mitigate decision making when individuals possess cross-cutting pressures. Cassese and Barnes (2018) assessed cross-pressures among partisan women in the 2016 election and found that both education and party identification served as cross-pressuring factors that influenced women’s vote choices. White women without a college education were found to be more likely to vote for Trump via the endorsement of hostile, sexist views in order to maintain privileges associated with their racial identities (Cassese & Barnes 2018). Morgan and Lee (2019) similarly found that cross-pressures of race and class were evoked more strongly for working class white folks in the 2016 election, of which these authors attribute Trump's win. Cassese (2020) identified the more cross-pressures experienced by an individual, the less partisan they are. They found the most pressuring identities are those with contradictory messaging, like the findings of Brader, Tucker and
Therriault (2014). Religious cross-pressures are thought to be the most impactful, likely due to the overt stances on social issues presented by institutions of faith (Cassese 2020). Huddy et al (2016) found that identifying as Latino is strongly correlated to identifying as a Democrat, likely because the Democratic Party has had a longer and louder history of promoting policies to combat racism and discrimination. This speaks to Latino cross-pressures of race that may be more prominent than other identities when determining political behavior (Huddy et al 2016).

Race operates within the context of religion in unique ways. Calhoun-Brown (2000) wrote that Black churches were places of inclusion when the Black community felt excluded. They were civil rights promoting institutions and this legacy carries on today. Cross-pressures of religion and racial group affiliation may be particularly prominent among Black Americans as a result (Calhoun-Brown 2000). Whittaker, Segura, and Bowler (2005) suggested that the cross-pressure of race produces unique pressures because of shared experiences as a minority group in America. Minority groups are historically associated with lower educational levels and lower incomes as a result of being denied access to schools and better wage opportunities. This shared struggle manifests itself, according to the authors, in higher levels of concern or investment in social outcomes compared to their majority group counterparts.

Mason and Wronski (2018) found evidence racial and religious identities strengthen political opinions. Carsey and Layman (2006) discovered that issue knowledge and salience are the key influences on individuals forming social opinions.
Racial and religious group memberships serve as important sources for individuals to gain issue knowledge and gauge whether an issue is significant to their personal social identities (Carsey & Layman 2006). Bruce (2020) studied the impact of race among religious individuals in the context of abortion attitudes and finds differences in opinions as a result of lived experiences via racial identities. While white participants of the conducted study saw similarities in their religious beliefs and racial experiences, Black and Latino respondents faced many contradictions as a result of their lack of experienced privilege outside their religious institutions. Hall et al (2020) supported that intersectionality within religious organizations is important for considering that experiences outside religion likely impact how individuals practice their religion which in turn shape social attitudes. Hempel and Smith (2020) concluded that religious identifying individuals are not monolithic, and their own adherence and interpretation of their religious teachings also contributes to their opinion formations. This finding highlights the complexities that cross-pressures can introduce to opinion formation. Yang and Charles (2021) discovered that cultural differences associated with each racial group produce variations in social opinions among religious sects. This is how, according to the authors, Asian Christians and Black Christians may have differing opinions on issue areas such as abortion or LGBTQ+ equality despite both groups being cross-pressured by race and Christian religion.
Converging Influences on Abortion Opinions

My interest in how race and religion can produce cross-pressuring identities converges in how these individuals form opinions about abortion. Race and religion have been established as salient identities individually, and interactively. The salience of these identities is maintained across the spectrum of social issues. Abortion care, however, is situated uniquely within this spectrum. Debates around it involve disagreements over ethics, healthcare and gender equality simultaneously. Earlier scholars, like Adams (1997), connect these properties as meaning that abortion opinions are not conducive to change, either through time or when presented with new information. Individuals tend to retain their beliefs on this issue. Mouw’s (2001) research supports trends that Americans are generally unopposed to abortion restrictions and supports observations that aggregate opinion about abortion has remained stable. Jalen and Wilcox (2003) furthered this conclusion, noting that trends have remained relatively stable despite the negative way that abortion has been discussed in the public and media.

In a comprehensive study on how individuals may arrive at forming these generally unchanging opinions, Fried (1988) conducted a multi-stage qualitative survey. To those who attach salience and morality to it, abortion is a political issue is symbolic of larger social ideas. It encompasses attitudes towards extra-marital sex, sexuality, gender roles and the importance (or lack thereof) of religion. Fried identified three types of individuals in their study. The “pro-life” type opposed to abortion formed their opinions
around the idea that a fetus is a human life and that it should not be sacrificed for the sake of the person who was pregnant; the “pro-choice” type emphasized women’s bodily autonomy. The neutral, “undecided” type encapsulated the middle 60% of Americans who reported to Pew that they believe abortion should be legal “in most cases.” These individuals do not see abortion as a moral issue, nor have they invested many personal emotions into the debate. They are the most likely type to feel that both “sides” of the political debate should be taken seriously.

Recent research on abortion care opinions has further examined religiosity and race as explanatory variables for abortion opinion formation. Barkan (2014) found that religiosity acts as a suppressor variable, indicating that if it weren’t for strict adherence to religious teachings, there may be differences in abortion opinions between men and women. Pacheco (2016) added to this intersection of strength of religious values including traditional gender roles to the explanation for individuals’ abortion opinions, where frequent religious attenders are more likely to hold strong religious beliefs that direct individuals to morally oppose abortion. Jozkowski, Crawford and Hunt (2018) adopted a view like Savaş et al (2021) and stated that the pro-choice/pro-life binary is too simple to encompass individuals’ opinions on abortion. Their research aimed to predict attitudes based on lived experiences and found that a variety of identities may impact opinions on the political issue of abortion including educational attainment, political party identification, and living in a rural versus urban setting (Jozkowski, Crawford & Hunt 2018). Barringer, Sumerau and Gay (2020) also emphasized the need
for sub-aggregate analyses to understand the complexities of abortion related opinions. They found that abortion opinions vary due to generational differences, likely as a result of “coming of age” context, as well as through control variables such as religiosity (Barringer, Sumerau & Gay 2020). Emerging research, such as that published by Dutta, Giddings, and Sobel (2021), aim to measure underlying cultural trends associated with certain identities as explanatory factors for abortion attitudes.
THEORY

The literature presented here reveals several trends in America’s history with forming abortion opinions. As a social issue, abortion opinion has both shifted and stabilized as America has diversified. Growing diversity as a result of these emerging, diverse identities have produced cross-pressures in individuals that influence their formation of opinions on social issues in various ways. The more salient an identity is to an individual, the more influence the associated views of that group membership are to forming attitudes towards social problems. Some group memberships such as religious affiliation provide clear-cut cues on how individuals should articulate their beliefs. Other group memberships such as racial groups pass influence through a shared filter of experiences. Extremely cross-pressured individuals are less likely to participate in political activity and tend to fall along in-group lines when confronted with specific issues such as abortion care.

As a social issue, abortion opinion has both shifted and stabilized as America has diversified, and the interaction of race and religion serve as prominent predictors of opinion. Religious institutions provide havens for racially discriminated minority groups to find community and organize under a set of shared beliefs. In addition to religion being notable features of many racial identity groups, many of these groups possess minority statuses that introduce historical experiences and trauma. These factors introduce unique cross-pressures that converge at the issue of abortion. The disadvantages experienced by racial minorities have produced varying opinions within
religious sects on the subject as a result of the varying cultural and social experiences held by these groups. While national abortion opinion has remained relatively stable over time, recent research has aimed to emphasize the cultural pathways created by adopting group identities. Abortion attitudes are complex and often solidified early as a result of its highly moralized and highly salient nature to most social groups.

The presence of more identity groups through increased diversity provides more opportunities for individuals’ identities to increase in complexity. As the salience of group membership increases, the ability of that group to socialize individual members does as well. Socialization occurs through the adoption of group behaviors and opinions and is the process by which identities manifest themselves in individuals. Klandermans (2014) explained that group membership involves more than adopting the group’s label but adopting the group’s beliefs. Carsey and Layman (2006) also found group memberships to be important sources of information for individuals. Established in the literature as intersectionality, multiple group identities can converge within individuals and interact in various ways to influence the way individuals view and interact with their surrounding environment. In other words, increased diversity leads to increased intersectionality in individuals’ identities.

Intersecting identities can create cross-presures. Cross-presures appear in individuals who belong to multiple social groups that conflict with one another, either in associated group culture or in group messaging. Examples may include a gun owner who is highly educated or the child of an active-duty military member who resides in an
urban setting (Brader, Tucker & Therriault 2014). Differences in the socialization of members can be at odds with one another and individuals may be forced to reconcile the beliefs they have adopted from one group with the experiences they gain from another. Cassese (2020) confirmed this in discussing that increasing the number of cross-pressuring identities in individuals undermines their abilities to clearly describe their personal values.

This describes the experience of cross-pressured individuals. It is during this process where these cross-pressuring identities can inform individual opinions on social issues. Recall from Bruce (2020) who found that religious individuals belonging to varying racial groups approached the political issue of abortion differently based on the experiences gained from their racial group membership. While their religious affiliations produced generally anti-abortion views, the participants identifying as members of a racial minority were more likely than their white counterparts to display empathy towards individuals seeking abortion care (Bruce 2020).

Race and religion are salient identities individually. Racial identity is associated with certain lived experiences. Scholars have established that cultural differences associated with varying racial groups contribute to the way individuals belonging to those racial groups view their social worlds (Berg 2010; Bramlett 2012; Gay 2013; Bruce 2020; Antkowiak, Allen & Layman 2021; and so on). Individuals belonging to racial minorities experience impacts of their specific racial group membership as they encounter distinct circumstances associated with their racial group memberships. These
lived experiences produce lessons learned by individuals who experience the consequences of being associated with groups that lack social privileges (Whittaker, Segura & Bowler 2005). Historically being denied access to certain social goods informs skepticism, optimism or empathy in racial minority groups when faced with questions about social issues (Huddy et al 2016). On the other hand, religious identity provides a rigid filter through which ideas are presented and adhered to by members. Antkowiak, Allen and Layman (2021) described religious affiliations as more prominent than other identities because religious institutions often make clear, moral stances that conflict with ideas coming from other perspectives. Yang and Charles’s (2021) findings supported this in their study showing how respondents of the same religious background arrived at different opinions when asked their perspectives on social issues.

These identities converge uniquely in abortion opinion formation. As far as political issues go, abortion is a peculiar one. It is a moralized political issue where religious institutions have historically taken a firm, anti-abortion stance (Casesse 2020). Anti-abortion policies also disproportionately disadvantage less privileged groups (including racial minorities) from seeking care. This aspect may trigger an empathetic response in their opinions from individuals who are disadvantaged from receiving care themselves, or who are disadvantaged from receiving other social goods as a result of their social group identities.

These qualities make opinions on abortion emotionally charged. These types of opinions, as suggested by the literature, form rock solid—and unlikely to change. This
truth is evident in the observation by scholars that national opinion on abortion has largely remained unchanged since the passage of Roe in the 1970s (Adams 1997; Mouw 2001).

Therefore, race and frequent religious attendance are predicted to interact in distinct ways when it comes to opinion formation on the political issue of abortion. Highly religious, racial minorities experience an extreme cross-pressure where their religious preferences pull them in the anti-abortion direction but their experiences in belonging to a racial minority pull them towards accepting abortion care. On the opposite end, highly religious, racial majority members (white-identifying people) should not experience cross-pressure from their religious affiliation and their racial identity. A lack of racial disadvantages and privileges will lend towards less empathetic views on abortion care with regards to racial identity in white people. The absence of this cross pressure on frequent religious service attendees will more firmly instill an anti-abortion attitude on these individuals.

This leads to my hypothesis:

**H1**: Among those who frequently attend religious services, white individuals will be less likely to approve of abortion for any reason compared to individuals from other racial groups.

The hypothesis developed captures my observations and questions based on my understanding of the literature. Those observations are as follows: first, abortion opinion is complex and influenced by multiple informational sources. These informational
sources may contradict one another and inform individuals in the opinion formation process differently. Two potentially conflicting informational sources arise through the social identities of race and religion. For individuals belonging to a racial minority group, subscribing to a religious group will present them with contradictory messaging with regards to abortion care. Identifying with a group that has had their civil rights oppressed throughout history may invoke empathy for individuals seeking abortion care, leading to racial minorities holding more “pro-choice” views than their racial majority counterparts (Cassese 2020). On the other hand, white people will not experience the cross-pressure of race and their religiosity. Their whiteness and corresponding experiences will not influence their views on abortion. Further, white folks identifying with a religious group will likely have their views solidified by their religious practices—unhindered by racial cross pressures. The hypothesis above will aid in demonstrating that a difference can be seen amongst the highly religious not only with regards to racial grouping, but because of a lack of racial cross-pressuring in white folks. In other words, holding whiteness serves as the primary predictor of less supportive views towards abortion care among the highly religious.
DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Data

Data used for this analysis include GSS survey responses captured in 2018, the most recent, available data set that recorded respondents’ thoughts on the range of issues addressed in my research. Leading researchers have established that the US has diversified with the passage of time. Therefore, choosing the most recent year of complete data from GSS increases the likelihood that the sample of respondents would hold multiple identities and potentially experience cross pressures. Individuals included in the survey are adults living in the United States aged 18 and up. Survey questions are administered over the phone or in person. GSS does not indicate how every survey sample associated with each question is collected. Each survey question asked of respondents during the survey is associated with a variable represented by the crux of the question. The sample sizes for the models included here are around 2,000 based on the availability of responses for the desired variables.

Variables

Dependent Variable

Approving of a person’s right to obtain a legal abortion for any reason. This binary variable captures whether respondents would approve (1) or disapprove (0) of an individual seeking abortion care for any reason. The GSS question is worded as:
“Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if the woman wants it for any reason?”

Independent Variables

White racial identity: A binary variable signifying whether a respondent identified as white (1), with all other racial identities collapsed into a non-white group (0).

Frequent religious attender identity: A binary variable signifying whether a respondent indicated they frequently attend religious services (1) or not (0). Calculated by collapsing responses from GSS’s “attend” variable into a binary where respondents indicating that they attended religious services 2-3 times a month or more were marked as a frequent attender (1) for purposes of this study.

White x Frequent Religious Attendance Interaction: An interaction term created to differentiate between white-identifying respondents who frequently attend religious services (1) and respondents from all other racial identities who frequently attend religious services (0).

Control Variables

Several interval and binary variables are included as control variables within the study.
**AgeX**: An ordinal variable indicating the age of respondent relative to the mean age of all survey respondents, calculated by subtracting the average age in years (49) of the sample population from the respondent’s reported age.

**EducationX**: An ordinal variable indicating the number of years of schooling completed by a participant relative to the mean of years of schooling completed by all survey respondents, calculated by subtracting the average years of schooling completed (14) in the sample population by the respondent’s reported years of education.

**Female**: A binary variable that identifies a respondent’s reported gender as either female (1) or not (0).

**Marital status**: A binary variable that identifies a respondent’s reported marital status as either married (1) or not (0).

**Republican**: A binary variable that identifies a respondent’s reported political party as Republican (1) or not (0).

The control variables used in this study represent additional factors that current research identifies as contributing to abortion care opinion formation. Though gender
has long since been established as an insignificant predictor of abortion opinions, I include a female identifier as a control variable. The assumption that women are more likely than men to support a person choosing abortion for any reason is outdated, however, gender is associated with several of the other controls I include in the analysis. Antowiak, Allen and Laymen (2021), for example, found that gender can be an influential cross-pressuring identity when individuals consider their party affiliations. Identifying as a Republican has been firmly established as a predictor of negative opinions on abortion care (Jockowski, Crawford & Hunt 2018). Similar to positions held by most established religions, the GOP platform has taken a firm anti-abortion stance, and strong partisans would likely integrate this position into their personal values. Jelen and Wilcox (2003) and others have found that older generations are less likely to support abortion care, or the legalization of abortion. For older people, the availability of abortion care symbolizes a departure from the traditional family structures that were the norms of their time. It is expected that older individuals would be less supportive of mechanisms that encourage this change. Similarly, Barringer, Simmerau and Gay (2013) and others found support that married individuals held fewer positive views on access to abortion care than their single counterparts. More educated individuals are theorized to have higher levels of support for abortion as a result of liberal values associated with post-secondary institutions. Dutta, Giddings and Sobel (2021) found that the more educated an individual is, the more likely they are to accept that abortion care should be accessed for any reason.
There are a few notable control variables missing from my analysis. Two other factors, income and opinions on gender roles, were also excluded. Low-income individuals and individuals accessing abortion care overlap heavily. Social class or income status have traditionally been used as predictors for a myriad of social opinions. However, the limited nature of the data I utilized did not allow for an accurate capture of social class. While a range of incomes was listed on the surveys for respondents to choose from, I could not provide proper justification for grouping these ranges into usable variables. Where would the cutoff for upper, middle and lower class be? Would an ordinal level variable capture the nuance of social classes? Because I felt the variables I did include would best represent the picture of the relationship I sought to find support for, a variable identifying personal finance was left out. Additionally, gauging individuals’ thoughts on traditional gender roles has been used as a predictor of abortion opinion. Given that individual support for traditional gender roles would have correlated with religiosity, it was also left out of the analysis.

Hypothesis

**H1:** Among those who frequently attend religious services, white individuals will be less likely to approve of abortion for any reason compared to individuals from other racial groups.

Figure 1 demonstrates my hypothesis.
Figure 1: Race as a Filter for Attitudes Towards Abortion Among the Highly Religious

Methods

As described above, the dependent variable is support for a person seeking abortion care for any reason, with approval indicated by a value of 1, and disapproval indicated by a value of 0. The goal is to estimate whether differences exist between individuals who approve and disapprove of abortion care based on their identifiers within racial and religious groups. My hypothesis is that white participants who reported frequently attending religious services would be less likely than others to indicate approval of abortion under any circumstances. These conditions lead me to select a binary logistic regression analysis to test my hypothesis.

Binary logistic regression models are a type of regression model that predict the probability of discrete outcomes occurring (i.e., a value of 1 or 0). They are best suited
for testing dependent variables of the binary type. Coefficients associated with independent variables represent the change in the likelihood of an event occurring based on the value of those variables. My research seeks to predict the likelihood of a person approving of abortion care. My independent variables, race and frequent attendance at religious services, will produce coefficients indicating whether these factors are associated with increases or decreases the likelihood of approving of abortion care.

Finding support for my hypothesis would require a few indicators from my regression output. There are three main independent variables of interest: white (binary; $1 = \text{respondent identifies as white}$), frequent religious attendance (binary; $1 = \text{attends religious services at least 2-3 times a month or more, 0 = attends less than 2-3 times a month}$), and an interaction term of the two. The coefficient for frequent religious attendance ($\text{freqattend}$) is expected to be negative, indicating that individuals who reported attending religious services frequently would be less likely to approve of abortion under the tested circumstance. The coefficient for the variable identifying whiteness ($\text{white}$) is also expected to be negative. This result would indicate that white-identifying individuals are less likely than other racial groups to approve of abortion under the tested circumstance. Finally, the interaction term ($\text{WhitexFreqAttend}$; calculated by multiplying the variable White by the variable FreqAttend) is also expected to be negative. This would indicate that among frequent religious attenders of all racial identities, that whiteness would act as a negative predictor of attitudes towards abortion
compared to other racial identities. These results would have to reach significance with 95% confidence to support my hypothesis.

Models

The desired outcome is examining abortion opinion through the analysis of approval of abortion under the circumstances provided. The best available data on abortion opinion is provided by GSS and are limited to asking respondents specific questions about approval under certain conditions. Attempting to create and code a variable representing opinions on abortion would have been irresponsible based on the data obtained from GSS for my research. The questions measure approval rather than opinion, and none of the circumstances would have been suitable to extrapolate into a proxy for opinion on abortion care. Combining these questions into a single, categorical measure would have been challenging to interpret: what would someone’s opinion on abortion be if they approved of 5 out of the 7 circumstances? Disapproval of which circumstances would make an individual “anti-abortion”? Given that combining these variables would limit interpretation and given that none of the 7 variables individually captures a person’s attitude towards abortion care adequately, I chose to construct a logistic regression model estimating only opinions across a single dependent variable “abany”.
CONCLUSION

Results

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the variables included in the constructed logistic regression model.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Variables in the Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abortion support</td>
<td>2348</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2348</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent Attender ID</td>
<td>2348</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White x Frequent Attender ID</td>
<td>2348</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (mean centered)</td>
<td>2341</td>
<td>-31</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>-15</td>
<td>48.98</td>
<td>18.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (mean centered)</td>
<td>2341</td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>13.76</td>
<td>2.922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2341</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>2348</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>2348</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.472</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As demonstrated by Table 1, a significant majority (72%) of survey participants identified as white, and a smaller majority identified as female (55%). Just under half of the participants (43%) were married, and one-third (33%) identified as republican. For the mean-centered variables, age and education, the minimums and maximums can be interpreted by adding (maximum) or subtracting (minimum) the value from the average.
of the sample. The minimum age of the sample, for example, is 18 years of age \((49 - 31 = 18)\). The maximum years of acquired education of the sample is 20 years of education, roughly a post-bachelor’s degree \((14 + 6 = 20)\). Most of the sample had around 12 years of education, roughly a high school diploma \((\text{Mode is -2}; 14 - 2 = 12)\). Just over one-fourth of the participants \((26\%)\) were coded as frequent religious attenders, and only 18% of the participants were white frequent religious attenders. The first step in testing my hypothesis was to construct a table and examine the frequencies of the variables of interest. Table 2 displays the constructed crosstab of white and frequent attendance variables’ interactions against support for abortion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Supportive</th>
<th>Supportive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nonwhite, Infrequent Attender</strong></td>
<td>67.1%</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(310)</td>
<td>(152)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nonwhite, Frequent Attender</strong></td>
<td>78.8%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(152)</td>
<td>(41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White, Infrequent Attender</strong></td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(783)</td>
<td>(495)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White, Frequent Attender</strong></td>
<td>81.7%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(339)</td>
<td>(76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>66.5%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1,584)</td>
<td>(764)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Frequencies are displayed in parenthesis

As demonstrated above, and illustrated in Figure 2 below, frequent religious attendance is associated with lower support for abortion among both nonwhite and white
participants. Support for abortion is higher among whites (38.7%) than nonwhites (32.9%) among participants who do not attend religious services frequently.

![Figure 2: Interaction of White and Religiosity Against Support for Abortion](image)

However, among participants who frequently attend religious services, support for abortion is lower among whites (18.3%) than nonwhites (21.2%). These descriptive statistics supported the theoretical assumptions presented in my thesis, and represented what I expected to see in my logistic regression model.

I created two logistic regression models in the final analysis. The first model included all control variables and the two independent variables, the white and frequent religious attendance identifiers, regressed on support for abortion for any reason. The purpose of this model was to establish a baseline of significance in my primary variables of interest, and to assist in the interpretation of the interaction term. Table 3 provides the results of the first logistic regression model.
Table 3: Output Results for Model 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.338</td>
<td>9.464</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>1.402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent Attender ID</td>
<td>-0.753</td>
<td>39.257</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (mean centered)</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>11.785</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (mean centered)</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>48.281</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>1.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.046</td>
<td>0.243</td>
<td>0.622</td>
<td>0.955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>-0.207</td>
<td>4.621</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>-0.756</td>
<td>49.550</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.485</td>
<td>18.866</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.615</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DV = Support for Abortion for Any Reason  
N = 2,334  
Nagelkerke R² = 0.113

Within the first model, the effects of the control on the independent variables and the dependent variable are all significant. Negative coefficients in the table are associated with a decreased likelihood of support for abortion, and positive coefficients are associated with an increased likelihood of support. The odds ratios can be used to interpret the relationships between the variables and the outcome in practical terms. When a variable’s coefficient is negative, the change in likelihood can be calculated by subtracting the odds ratio from 1. For example, being married has a negative coefficient and an odds ratio value of 0.813, which means that married participants were roughly 19% less likely to support abortion than non-married participants. The direction of the effects among variables was, for the most part, as expected: being older (age), being
married (marital status) and identifying as republican were all associated with a decreased likelihood in the probability of support for abortion. As expected, identifying as republican had the strongest negative effect on the change in the likelihood of abortion support, relative to the other control variables. Equally as expected, gender did not cross the threshold for significance in predicting support for abortion. Interpreting the odds ratio for the republican control variable suggests that the effect of republican party identification is a decreased likelihood of support for abortion by roughly 53%.

Education had a positive, relatively small effect on the dependent variable. The independent variables, white and frequent attender ID, had a somewhat expected significance and directionality. Frequent attendance of religious services was significant and negative, with frequent religious attenders being about 53% less likely to support abortion for any reason. The variable for whiteness was statistically significant and positive. The positive directionality was contradictory to my theoretical expectation. Recall from Figure 2 that white, infrequent attenders had higher rates of support for abortion compared to nonwhite infrequent attenders. Here, the relationship between whiteness and support for abortion also indicates that white participants are roughly 1.4 times more likely to support abortion than nonwhites. This result was unexpected, as my theory predicted that white individuals in general would support abortion at any rate compared to nonwhite individuals. Overall, the model captured about 11.3% of the variation in the variable measuring support for abortion for any reason (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.113$).
Now that a baseline has been established, I add the interaction term to the model. Table 4 presents the results of the full model, Model 2, with controls and all three independent variables, regressed on support for abortion for any reason.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.400</td>
<td>10.726</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>1.492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent Attender ID</td>
<td>-0.548</td>
<td>6.917</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White x Frequent Attender ID</td>
<td>-0.298</td>
<td>1.405</td>
<td>0.236</td>
<td>0.742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (mean centered)</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>11.735</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (mean centered)</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>48.290</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>1.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.047</td>
<td>0.250</td>
<td>0.617</td>
<td>0.955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>-0.208</td>
<td>4.686</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>-0.747</td>
<td>48.153</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.533</td>
<td>19.982</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.587</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DV = Support for Abortion for Any Reason  
N = 2,334  
Nagelkerke R² = 0.114

The results are largely the same as the first model, with a disappointing caveat. The model still captured roughly the same variation in the dependent variable (Nagelkerke R² = 0.114). Being a Republican, older, and married individual still yielded decreased likelihoods of supporting abortion for any reason; education is associated with an increased likelihood of support; and gender remained insignificant. While the effects of these variables were slightly altered from the previous model, they did not change.
enough to impact their interpretations. The variables for white and frequent attendance also displayed the same statistical significance and directionality. However, their effects on the dependent variable changed noticeably. Whiteness, which was previously calculated as increasing the likelihood of support for abortion by 1.4 times, now predicts an increased likelihood by 1.5 times. The directionality of the white variable still ran contrary to my theory, even after adding the interaction term to the model. Similarly, frequent attenders were around 53% less likely to support abortion in the first model, yet in Model 2 they appear to be only around 42% less likely. These results are related to the presence of the interaction term, which was expected to be significant and negative. The interaction term failed to reach statistical significance in the model. This null result indicates that being a white person who frequently attends religious services does not significantly affect a participant’s likelihood of supporting abortion beyond the existing effects of race and religiosity. This group, white frequent religious attenders, were being compared to all other groups in the model.

Discussion

The research conducted here set out to test the effects of cross-pressuring identities on individuals in their opinion formation of social issues. More specifically, I was interested to see if individuals’ racial and religious identities impacted the way they responded to the political issue of abortion. While these two characteristics have been tested and upheld as solo predictors of opinion on abortion care, the field has yet to
examine them as potentially cross-pressuring one another and interacting in unique ways within individuals. The literature presented here suggested that varying racial identities would correspond with varying social opinions, as a result of the presence (or lack thereof) of social privileges associated with certain racial groups. The literature also suggested that religious pressures would be similar across the board with regards to abortion opinion, as religious institutions have historically touted anti-abortion stances. Interacting together, I theorized that individuals who frequently attend religious services and who also belonged to a racial majority group would not experience a cross-pressure between their religious and racial identities. The absence of this cross-pressure would lead them to be less supportive of abortion for any reason. Using GSS survey data, I created an interaction term that captured this group to see if their attitudes towards abortion were less likely to be supportive compared to all other racial and religious groups. The results of my models were not supportive of my hypothesis, as the interaction term failed to reach statistical significance.

Despite the null results from the interaction, the model did show that the interaction impacted the relationship between my two independent variables and the dependent variable, to an extent. The effects of whiteness and frequent religious attendance were altered by the presence of the interaction. In the case of religious attendance, the effect was even magnified. Frequent religious attenders were even less likely in the second logistic regression model to support abortion for any reason, compared with the first logistic model, which did not contain the interaction term. The
negative coefficient of the interaction term in the second logistic regression model supported my expected directionality of the term. This suggested that, had the variable reached significance in the model, frequent attenders who are also white would have been less likely than other groups to support abortion care for any reason. With the support of both the literature and initial findings, the null result was disappointing. Had the interactions between racial identity and religiosity identified in Figure 2 been larger, I believe the result would have been significant in the model.

Another possibility is that my results produced outcomes that were exactly expected given another school of thought. Scholars have also observed, in addition to those presented in the literature here, that nonwhite individuals tend to be more conservative on social issues than white individuals. It is possible that underlying cultural trends would lend more support to this alternative theory. White individuals, having not experienced oppressions because of their racial identity, may show more sympathy toward those seeking abortion care because this is one tangible way that they do feel oppressed. Particularly when considering class differences, poor white individuals may be the most likely to show support for abortion care because of the absence of a racial cross-pressure on their socio-economic identities. Though this alternative theory provides another possible interpretation of my results, the literature reviewed here suggests that a greater presence of my interaction term may have also influenced the results.
One thing that may have improved the chances of showing a larger interaction would have been a larger data set. The interaction term captured frequent religious attenders who were also white and tested their survey responses against everyone else in the sample. As reported in Table 2, this was a total of 416 individuals in the sample of over 2000. A larger sample of these individuals, or a more representative sample, may have succeeded in capturing the interaction. The data I had access to limited me in other ways throughout the construction of my methods. As previously discussed, the variable measuring abortion opinion could not adequately reflect the full range of opinions on the subject. This could have been remedied with a better measure of abortion opinion, or a better data set specifically collected around the topic of abortion. Including a GSS question in a post-Roe era asking people to identify themselves as pro-choice or not, and to self-rank their scale of “pro-choiceness,” could be a valuable addition for future researchers.

Concluding Remarks

Though the results of my model failed to support my theory, they did provide promising ground for future research. Another theoretical explanation was raised, incorporating other observations of differences in racial groups, that provides

As previously stated in the Discussion, the scale and nature of data used in this study were limiting. In a future study, scholars should aim to build more comprehensive datasets around abortion. Incorporating more survey questions asking respondents to
explain their opinions on abortion care would be the best measure. This could be accomplished through a mixed methods analysis, with some qualitative data collected. Qualitative studies, like those shared in the literature review, could also be effective at gauging individuals’ views on the subject. Asking more direct questions, like about how individuals’ social upbringings influenced them, could also aid in making connections between interacting identities as discussed here.

Beyond collecting more comprehensive data, more response data should be collected. Utilizing older GSS data was not doable because of survey nonresponse. Though the use of one year of data was sufficient for the purposes of this study, a longitudinal study of interacting identities could have provided the larger numbers I needed to see my interaction term on a better scale. A future goal, given more time and resources, would be to build a bigger dataset for researchers specifically interested in analyzing this topic. As stated previously, the unique nature of abortion as a political issue requires a more unique approach to analyzing. Collecting data for the intentional use of studying opinions on it could allow for more of the uniqueness of the political issue to be captured.

Overall, enough of the research presented here suggests that identities are interacting to inform social opinions, particularly on salient issues such as abortion care. Future research across disciplines should continue to incorporate an interacting or intersectional approach to analyzing opinion through social identities. This project started and was largely written before the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Dobbs* decision
overturning *Roe* was released. Given the very significant impacts the *Dobbs* decision is already having on abortion care access across the country, there is little doubt that Americans’ opinions on abortion care will be a worthwhile subject of research for many years to come.
REFERENCES


