

Investigating Moral Underpinnings of Attitudes About Abortion

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Abstract

The present study examines the ways in which moral values, specifically purity and fairness, may influence individual attitudes about abortion. Participants were asked to complete the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ) and read a scenario created for the purposes of this study about a hypothetical woman who decides to have an abortion. After reading this, participants rated how warmly they felt towards this woman, how they perceived her moral character, to what extent they believed she deserved blame, and lastly, whether they believed abortion access today should remain the same or to what extent they felt it should be increased or decreased.

We hypothesized that those who endorsed purity values would be more likely to feel less warmly toward the woman in the story, rate her moral character negatively, think she deserved more blame, and support a decrease in abortion access. Conversely, we expected those who endorsed fairness would feel more warmth, report higher rankings of moral character, attribute less blame, and support an increase in abortion access. The results supported these predictions and interestingly, the moral values of purity and fairness remain the main predictor of one's attitudes on abortion, even when controlling for political ideology. This study could have implications for weakening the partisan divide regarding abortion debates and suggestions for future studies on this topic.

Investigating Moral Underpinnings of Attitudes About Abortion

Around the world, abortion remains a divisive and controversial issue. In America, it is rare to find a person who feels neutrally about this polarizing topic, as attitudes have not shifted much over time. According to the Pew Research Center, over the past twenty years, attitudes regarding abortion have remained surprisingly consistent. Approximately 60% of Americans think abortion should be legal. However, Americans are evenly split regarding whether abortion is morally permissible with 48% saying it is morally wrong to have an abortion (Lipka & Gramlich, 2019). Perhaps unsurprisingly, people's views of the abortion debate often coincide with their religious and political identification. In 2019, 77% of people who identified as evangelical and 62% of self-identified Republicans said that abortion should be illegal in most or all cases. By contrast, only 17% of people who identified as religiously unaffiliated and 17% of self-identified Democrats said that abortion should be illegal (Lipka & Gramlich, 2019).

Similarly, recent research on moral values demonstrates that political liberals and conservatives also differ in the way they conceptualize what types of values count as "moral" versus simple preferences (Graham, Haidt & Nosek, 2009). Liberals tend to define morality in terms of concerns about harm/care and fairness to individuals; whereas, conservatives construe morality more broadly and weigh concerns about harm/care and fairness equal to concerns about purity, respect for authority, and ingroup loyalty (Graham et al., 2009). Analyzing the ways in which people define their moral values may help to explain these stark divides in contrasting attitudes regarding abortion and the moral domain. The present project

takes up this question and tests whether people's stance on the abortion debate can be explained via their moral values, independent of political or religious orientation.

Below I provide a brief history of the debate surrounding abortion in the United States (U.S) and theorize different ways diversity in moral values contribute to these conversations. I review existing research regarding moral psychological foundations and how these connect to culture war issues. Finally, I propose a novel experiment to test the impact of moral values on perceptions of abortion.

A Brief History of the Abortion Debate

To understand moral positions on either “side¹” of the abortion debate, it is helpful to analyze the history of abortion and how different viewpoints regarding this controversial topic have been shaped in the United States over time. Although there are reports showing that abortion has existed in ancient Egyptian societies as early as 1550 BCE, it seems abortion did not become heavily politicized in the U.S. until around the 19th-century with the advent of new medical technologies and the rise of women's rights movements (Potts & Campbell, 2009). Leslie J. Reagan, author of *When Abortion Was A Crime*, covers the period between 1867 to 1973 in her book and explains specific moves and moments within this period that targeted women's access to abortion procedures. She recognizes that the criminalization of abortion began “at the same time as a backlash against the women's movement's critique of male sexual behavior and feminist claims to political power”

¹“Side” will often be in quotes to reflect the pro-life/pro-choice” dichotomy seen in the US; however, it is in quotes as this is somewhat of a problematic and false dichotomy as often there are more opinions that go unrepresented as a result of this framing.

(Raegan, 1992, p. 12). With these social advances came the first instances of explicit criminalization of abortion and an increase in the stigmatization of reproductive health procedures and methods. Her work highlights that pro-life arguments about wanting to prevent harm to the fetus may be based on a broader spectrum of sexism extending beyond a mere claim of safety and protection of a fetus.

During this period, Planned Parenthood opened its first birth control clinic in 1916 (Our History, Planned Parenthood). Birth control methods at this time were not just seen as taboo, but also illegal to discuss under strict legislation such as the Comstock Act. These restrictions commonly referred to as “Chastity Laws,” were originally passed in 1873 and are still in effect today with some modifications from the original like legalizing contraception in 1936 (Lewis, 2019). However, it was not until the 1960's and 70's that Planned Parenthood clinics became some of the first federally funded providers of contraceptives. They were among the first able to provide clients with contraceptive pills and abortions thanks to President Nixon signing Title X into law in 1970 (Title X, Planned Parenthood). Title X made important advances as a federal grant program dedicated solely to providing individuals with comprehensive family planning and related preventive health services.

Around this same time, California governor Ronald Reagan signed one of the most progressive abortion bills America had ever seen, allowing abortion on the premise of protecting a woman's physical and mental health, though as president, he would come to champion of the pro-life shift in the Republican Party. More generally, the Republican Party once treated abortion as a private matter of individual freedom believing that the government

should not be involved in such personal decisions (Tourek, 2018; Brock & Kiriakos, 2014), but now pro-life stances are a part of the national party platform and Republican-controlled state legislatures have aggressively pursued restricting abortion compared to Democratic-controlled state legislatures. For example, in the Summer of 2019, Alabama Republicans proposed anti-abortion legislation but “Democrats vowed to challenge the law, calling it an outrageous and unconstitutional attack on women” (Williams & Blinder, 2019).

The concept of morality has also become increasingly involved in the abortion debate, especially around issues of religion in America. People have gone to extreme measures to make their views known, even to the point of violence; bomb threats to clinics and murders of abortion providers, like the shooting of Dr. George Tiller in 2009, have been present throughout U.S. history post-*Roe v Wade* (Stumpe & Davey, 2009). The prevalence of religion, specifically Christianity, in these conversations also contributes to the sharp divide between the two sides, particularly used with the conservative right that tends to prioritize tradition, family values, and be more pro-life. Meanwhile, the pro-choice “side” tends to align with liberal and feminist values under the dogma that all people should have equal rights. However, feminism has had a complex history in the U.S. and the movement itself did not always focus on reproductive access and has been critiqued for excluding women of color’s contributions. For example, the second wave of feminism is known for the implementation of Title X and the famous *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973 among many other things.

Despite landmark successes like *Roe v. Wade*, organizations like SisterSong, a reproductive justice collective spearheaded by Black women, acknowledge that “women's movements and reproductive rights movements often did not recognize the accomplishments and leadership of indigenous women, poor women, women of color, and trans people” (Reproductive Justice, SisterSong). Organizations like SisterSong and its members have been doing this work since 1997, although women of color’s contributions to these movements have been going on long before this date at the same time as the women’s rights movements of the first and second waves. However, a third wave of feminism was coined as an attempt to correct lack of recognition and disparities in representation as a push for intersectionality.

It is crucial to note that women of color have always been at the forefront of reproductive justice movements, exemplifying that the wave model can be misleading as progress and activism are not linear or always representative of the realities or experiences of all groups, particularly those most marginalized. The topics of abortion access and reproductive justice illustrate this well as it is evident that, despite legal victories in the past, access is continually being restricted today and certain groups of people face more limitations and restriction when trying to acquire these procedures based on race, gender identity, employment and healthcare plans, and socio-economic status.

The famous U.S. Supreme Court Case *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion up until the twelfth week of pregnancy, has been continually threatened by subsequent lower court rulings and U.S. and state legislation. For example, in 1976 Congress passed the Hyde Amendment, which effectively bars federal funds from being used to pay for abortion

services (Access Denied, ACLU). Similarly, this allows for state legislatures to pass increasingly restrictive laws to limit how abortions can be obtained, like requiring mothers to view ultrasounds, listen to “heartbeats,” and endure mandatory waiting periods before being able to have an abortion. In addition, this amendment allows states to continually restrict abortion access today. For example, during the summer of 2019, states like Alabama and Mississippi began discussion of implementing the most stringent abortion restrictions since before the Roe decision that could potentially ban abortion altogether or, in some cases, re-criminalize abortion.

Furthermore, within the past few months, Title X, an act of legislation guaranteeing healthcare to women in low-income situations, has been hit with limitations of a “gag rule” preventing any funding from being given to healthcare clinics that provide abortion services. Even more recently, the *New York Times* reported that around two hundred Republican congressmen and senators have filed a brief asking the Supreme Court to revisit the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 2020 with the hopes of possibly overturning it (Stolberg, 2020). This is already happening as recently as March 4th, when the Supreme Court heard a case that could potentially leave only one abortion provider in the entire state of Louisiana (Totenberg, 2020). Even more recently, in light of the 2020 Coronavirus outbreak organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union are having to file lawsuits against states like Kentucky who have attempted to deem abortion as an inessential procedure during this time of pandemic and quarantine (Abortion Care is Healthcare, 2020).

Together, these recent legislative and legal actions demonstrate that, rather than viewing the issue of abortion as settled after the Roe decision more than 40 years ago, the public and lawmakers have become increasingly divided on this issue. Moral values may be one source of origin in this contentious and ongoing debate. The present study hopes analyzing these issues through the lens of moral psychology may lead to a better understanding of why this issue seems to be historically and contemporarily volatile.

Moral Psychological Foundations Theory and Abortion

Graham, Haidt, Koleva, Motyl, Iyer, Wojcik, & Ditto (2012) proposed the Moral Foundations Theory to explain the emergence, diversity, and sometimes opposition in human moral judgment. They juxtapose their pluralist theory against a monist view of morality. Whereas moral monists believe that all human moral concerns derive from a single basic value—for example, care (Gilligan, 1982) or harm (Kohlberg & Kramer, 1969)—pluralists argue that human morality is informed and driven by many different (even sometimes opposing) moral values. Graham and colleagues suggest that although human morality is multi-faceted and varies depending on cultural contexts, there are five basic moral foundations that remain constant across cultures: care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation.

According to the Moral Foundations Theory, the first foundation of care/harm represents ideas about kindness and nurture, specifically originating from human relationships evolutionarily with animals as well as our capacity for empathy and sensitivity to feeling the pain of other living creatures. Fairness/cheating represents justice, rights, and

autonomy, or more evolutionarily, the process of reciprocal altruism. Reciprocal altruism happens when one does something for the benefit of another, even if it is inconvenient for them with the expectation the other will return the favor if needed. Loyalty/betrayal reflects the prioritization of one's group and can indicate levels of characteristics like patriotism. Authority/leadership taps into individual values relating to tradition following and hierarchical notions of leadership. Lastly, sanctity/degradation can stem from a religious emphasis on purity and also involves the psychology of disgust and fear of contamination.

Furthermore, Graham, Haidt, & Nosek (2009) theorized that although socio-political beliefs and identification can impact what values individuals prioritize most, all five values are nonetheless present; however, the intensity of individuals' endorsement for each value varies depending on different aspects of their beliefs or identities. For example, people who identify as politically conservative often hold values such as sanctity, authority, and ingroup loyalty more strongly; whereas, people who identify as politically liberal value care and fairness most (Graham et al., 2009).

The present study adopts this pluralistic view of morality and focuses on the impact of three moral values for predicting attitudes about the morality of abortion: care, fairness, and sanctity.² Because moral values of care and fairness focus on promoting the welfare, agency, equality, inclusion, and bodily autonomy of individuals, it suggests that people who more strongly endorse these values would hold more permissive views on abortion. By

²In early iterations of their model Graham et al used the terms "sanctity" and will from here on out be referred to interchangeably with "purity." Likewise, we employ both terms to refer to the same moral value.

contrast, endorsement of purity values is strongly associated with the policing of sex and with heteronormative ideas of sexuality. For example, purity has been seen across many different studies as being heavily tied to moral judgments of sexual outgroups. Cunningham, Forestell, and Dickter (2013) showed this through using disgusting smells to effectively alter judgments of gay men in negative ways. The present study will examine the degree to which one endorses purity versus fairness and investigate whether these two values will predict attitudes about abortion equally and oppositely.

Morality Psychology and Culture War Issues

Work from Koleva, Graham, Iyer, Ditto, and Haidt (2012) suggest the degree to which one values purity is actually a bigger predictor of an individual's position on hotly contested social issues, more so than political orientation, age, gender, or religious affiliation. They also found moral values predict people's positions on policy decisions (e.g. abortion, immigration, and same-sex marriage). Thus, it is reasonable to infer this extends to attitudes about abortion. Purity becomes explicitly connected to views on abortion through relations to sex and sexuality and the degree to which individuals think that the government, as well as religion, should be involved in the regulation of both.

Monroe and Plant (2018) took these connections of sex and sexuality to purity and put them to the test by giving participants the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ)—a questionnaire that tests people's endorsement the care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and sanctity moral values—followed by a hypothetical description of an individual from one of several different sexual outgroups (i.e., gay men, trans women, people with AIDS, sex

workers). They then had people rate the degree to which they felt warmth toward these hypothetical individuals as well as if they would support policies helping these communities. In a particularly relevant part of the study, they surveyed people on the religious holiday of Ash Wednesday to see if the saliency of purity concerns on this religious day would increase negativity toward sexual outgroups. They found this manipulation did, in fact, increase endorsement of purity values, which led to a subsequent decrease in positive evaluations of sexual outgroup community members. In a follow up study, Monroe & Plant (2019) also demonstrated the converse—increasing endorsement of care values increased positive evaluations of sexual outgroups and increased support for policies that would help these groups.

This work suggests that making certain moral values more salient than others can have differential effects on the amount of prejudice people have towards these outgroup members. I plan to extend this methodology (the target example and feelings thermometer ratings) to a new kind of sexual outgroup: people who decide to have an abortion. Similar to Monroe and Plant (2019), I predict that moral values of care and fairness and moral values of purity drive people's moral judgments of abortion in powerful and opposite ways. Specifically, endorsement of care and fairness over endorsement of purity will predict more positive judgments of people who have abortions; whereas, greater endorsement of purity over endorsement of care and fairness will predict more negative judgments.

Interestingly, these predictions diverge from common rhetoric surrounding abortion debates. Oftentimes, these debates are framed in terms of conflicts between moral concerns

about harm to the fetus versus fairness to the mother. However, this study will test whether concerns about harm actually map on to more anti-abortion attitudes or if harm-based rhetoric is a way people repackage purity-based feelings into more culturally acceptable arguments.

Other Psychological Research and Attitudes About Abortion and Morality

Previous psychological research specific to abortion is scant, but there have been a few scholarly studies that approach these issues. Much of this work has been aimed at trying to determine the origins of attitudes about abortion as well as ways to ameliorate the contentious divide between opposing sides of these debates as tensions heighten. One recent study in particular by Pacilli, Giovannelli, Spaccatini, Vaes, and Barbaranelli (2018) examined the social and moral perceptions of people who decide to get abortions as well as their partners. They discovered that people dehumanized women who had an abortion substantially more than women who decided not to have an abortion. Dehumanization reflects the practice of viewing or treating people, in this case particularly women, as less human and instead more like objects or animals. Pacilli et al. (2018) note, however, that this effect could reflect moral outrage at having an abortion as well as negative perceptions of women who decide to be childless. They conclude these women are perceived as violating their role as potential mothers which makes others perceive them as cold and heartless so, therefore, “future research could test and compare whether it is the act of ending life versus not-ending life that leads to outrage or the violation of societal expectations in terms of motherhood” (Pacilli et al., 2018, p. 299).

Some scholars have also contemplated whether or not abortion is a question of public opinion or personal morality. Are attitudes about abortion something private and personally ingrained? Are society and public opinion most impactful on an individual's views on abortion? What else would contribute to personal morality if it is not public opinion? Some researchers attempt to answer these questions and conclude “we cannot establish that abortion is a question of personal morality without knowing something about the status of the fetus...it is unlikely that we will ever get through to the other side. Nevertheless, the abortion question deals with the issue of fundamental moral concern and must, therefore, be considered and debated in the public domain” (Kirsch, 2013, p. 98).

From a social psychological and feminist theoretical perspective, the personal and the public are always connected in interesting ways. Within social psychology, individuals are always influenced by the social contexts in which they live, and similarly, feminists have long asserted the phrase “the personal is political³” indicating these entities are rather impossible to separate from one another. Both of these perspectives blur the lines of public and private, and abortion is an example of one place where these distinctions difficult. Abortion, historically a private and taboo matter, is often talked about in the public domain as seen through passionate protests and activism around either “side” of this issue. Having conversations about something seen as such a private issue in the public domain, as Kirsch

³The “personal as political” is so common and frequently used throughout feminist work, it is hard to cite specific texts and origins on this phrase. Carol Hanisch is often credited with the phrase but has admitted she did not come up with this herself. Black feminists like Audre Lorde have also long used the phrase and overall it is unclear from where it originated due to its ubiquitous presence. (Napikoski, 2020; Olson, 2000)

said, may help in further reducing abortion stigma and create a dialogue between the two “sides” of this issue as we push toward change and more reproductive access for all.

The Present Study/Predictions

The present study will focus on the specific moral values of purity and fairness and how they influence one’s views about abortion, unlike other psychological research done on this topic. This study will analyze the extent to which moral values act as underpinnings of an individual’s stance on abortion by collecting a U.S. national sample, assessing their self-described moral values, and then examining their moral judgments of a hypothetical woman who decides to have an abortion. I predict that the extent to which individuals endorse purity moral values will make them more likely to evaluate someone who has an abortion more negatively, rate their moral character more harshly, think they deserve more blame, and be more favorable toward restricting abortion access. By contrast, I predict that individuals who endorse fairness values more strongly will hold more positive views of someone who has an abortion, rate their moral character more positively, think they deserve less blame, and be more favorable toward expanding abortion access. Lastly, I also speculate people’s moral values may predict their stances on the abortion debate, independent of political or religious orientation, something seemingly under-represented in previous research.

Methods

Participants

In total, responses from 295 participants were collected. The sample was comprised of individuals who self-identified as female ($n = 121$), male ($n = 169$), transgender ($n = 2$), or non-binary ($n = 3$). The majority of the sample identified as White ($n = 223$), with smaller numbers of participants identifying as Asian American ($n = 32$), African American ($n = 31$), Latinx ($n = 21$), Native American ($n = 1$), or Middle Eastern ($n = 1$). The sample was politically moderate ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.85$) based on a 1 (*very liberal*) – 7 (*very conservative*) scale, and participants reported being moderately religious on average ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.49$) on a 1 (*not at all religious*) – 5 (*very religious*) scale. The sample ranged from 18 to 78 years old ($M = 36.86$, $SD = 11.35$).

Procedure

Participants were recruited through Prolific and paid \$1.00 for their participation. Participants began by reading over the informed consent page. They then started the survey by completing the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ, Graham et al., 2011). This 30 item questionnaire measures people's endorsement of each of the five moral foundations: care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation.

The MFQ is divided into two 15-question portions. In the first portion participants respond to a series of general statements asking them to define what they believe are relevant rules for right or wrong (e.g., “*Whether or not someone conformed to the traditions of society*” or “*Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights*”) on a 0 (*not at all relevant*) to 5 (*extremely relevant*) Likert scale. The second portion of the scale asks people to respond to more specific moral instances (e.g., “*Justice is the most important requirement*

for a society” and “*It can never be right to kill a human being*”) and whether they agree or disagree with them using a scale of 0 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*) Likert scale.

After responding to the MFQ items, participants were given a story about a person named Jordan who unexpectedly becomes pregnant, deliberates about her choices, and ultimately decides to have an abortion (see below for exact text).

“Jordan is a 21-year-old undergraduate college student. She is single and not in a committed relationship, but like many college students she goes on a few occasional dates. She works a part-time job to help pay for her college tuition, resulting in long hours as she is enrolled in a full-time course load.

Recently, she was feeling ill and nauseous frequently but figured it may just be due to stress and being tired. She decided to go to the on-campus Wellness Center to make sure there were no other causes behind why she was feeling badly. The nurse ran several tests and one of them showed Jordan was pregnant.

Over the next couple of days Jordan contemplated all her options and ultimately decided to have an abortion.”

Following reading the scenario, participants rated how warmly they felt toward Jordan using a feelings thermometer on a scale of 0 (*coldest*) to 10 (*warmest*). Following this task, participants responded to a few follow-up questions regarding whether or not they thought Jordan deserved blame (“*How much blame do you believe Jordan deserves for her decision?*”) on a Likert scale of 1 (*No Blame*) to 7 (*Max Blame*) as well as what they thought about Jordan’s moral character (“*Thinking about Jordan’s behavior, how would you rate her moral character?*”) on a scale of -5 (*Extremely Bad Moral Character*) to 5 (*Extremely Good Moral Character*).

They also reported their feelings on legality of and access to abortion procedures through answering the multiple choice question, “*Do you think access to abortion should be increased or decreased?*” and picking between various options to either extend, maintain, or restrict abortion access (“*Greatly increased, abortion should be accessible to anyone who wants the procedure,*” “*Increased, access to abortion procedures should be less restricted,*” “*Fine as is currently,*” “*Decreased, access to abortion procedures should be more restricted,*” and “*Severely decreased, abortion should be illegal*”). Finally, participants were presented with a suspicion check and a general demographic form. After completing these, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Results

To test the hypothesis that fairness and purity would predict attitudes about a woman who had an abortion, we ran a series of multiple regressions with participants’ fairness and purity values predicting (a) their reported warmth on a feelings thermometer, (b) the amount they blamed the woman, (c) their overall judgments of her moral character, and (d) participants beliefs about abortion access in general.

The analyses revealed that fairness and purity significantly predicted each of our dependent measures. Fairness values predicted warmer ratings of the woman as measured by the feelings thermometer, $\beta = .233$, $t(269) = 4.08$, $p < .001$; whereas, purity values predicted colder feelings toward the woman, $\beta = -.275$, $t(269) = -4.81$, $p < .001$. Similarly, fairness values predicted participants blaming the woman less, $\beta = -.225$, $t(292) = -4.403$, $p < .001$, but purity values predicted harsher judgments of blame, $\beta = .454$, $t(292) = 8.873$, $p < .001$.

Additionally, endorsing fairness values more strongly predicted more positive ratings of the woman's overall moral character, $\beta = .199$, $t(292) = 3.499$, $p < .001$; whereas, endorsing purity values more strongly predicted more negative ratings of her moral character, $\beta = -.154$, $t(292) = -2.69$, $p < .001$.

Finally, stronger endorsement of fairness values predicted participants' beliefs that access to abortion should be increased, $\beta = -.271$, $t(291) = -5.274$, $p < .001$; whereas, if participants endorsed purity values more strongly, they were more likely to believe their access to abortion should be more restricted, $\beta = .416$, $t(291) = 8.108$, $p < .001$. Importantly, all of these effects remained statistically significant after controlling for participants' political ideology, $\beta s > .18$, $p < .001$. This indicates that people's moral values explain unique aspects of their attitudes regarding abortion, separate from their political views.

General Discussion

The present study tested the prediction that people who endorse moral values associated with fairness would evaluate a woman who chose to have an abortion more positively than people who strongly endorse purity moral values. My findings confirmed this prediction; endorsing fairness values was associated with feeling more warmly toward a person who had an abortion as well as blaming them less, viewing them as having more positive moral character, and being more supportive of increasing access to abortion in general. By contrast, people who valued purity more strongly were more likely to feel colder towards a person who had an abortion, blame them more, judge them as having worse moral character and to believe that abortion access should be restricted. Furthermore, although

participants' political identification often strongly predicts abortion views, the present data demonstrated that the predictive effect of fairness and purity values held even when controlling for people's political views.

The finding regarding political ideologies is important as it is a new discovery, as most research shows that political ideology is a strong predictor for how one feels about abortion (Barroso, 2019; Lipka & Gramlich, 2019). Whereas one's moral values and political views can often become intertwined, this finding may indicate that there is a possibility of reframing this issue in less partisan terms as we move toward more conversation and dialogue among the opposing viewpoints on this topic. For an issue that is so contentiously divided such as this one, this could be a revolutionary new perspective for how to frame dialogue around the topic of abortion. Although political partisans still hold divergent moral values (Graham et al., 2009), the fact that morality and politics are separate and unique drivers of abortion attitudes could be beneficial in helping make abortion less partisan.

Currently, 56% of people who identify as Republican or as leaning Republican say that abortion should be *illegal* in most or all cases; whereas, 76% of Democrats and people who lean Democratic say that abortion should be *legal* in most or all cases (Barroso, 2019). The association in the present data between care values and positive evaluations towards abortion and people who have them suggest that reframing targeted voter messaging about abortion in terms that activate care values may be an effective way to bypass the extreme partisanship on this issue.

One way that a moral framing of these issues rather than a political framing could increase access and compromise between “sides” regarding abortion debates could be to reframe voter messaging in efforts to make the issue less partisan and attempt to bridge the divide between pro-choice and pro-life rhetoric. This is a strategy that has been used in other movements, such as those working within environmentalist and climate change activist movements. Researchers like Feinberg and Willer (2012) discuss that liberals conceptualize the environment through care values and that this framework is often not an effective way to bring conservatives, who typically value purity values, into these movements.

However, they found that using purity language to talk about environmental issues, such as focusing on how lakes and streams need to stay beautiful and pure, made those who identify as politically conservative more likely to be moved to do something about climate change issues more so than typical liberal care value narratives. These results from Feinberg and Willer (2012) may suggest that similar strategies could be helpful for restructuring and reconceptualizing rhetoric and movements about abortion. Figuring out ways to use purity centered messaging to convey pro-choice goals could be difficult to generate but potentially effective and perhaps worth further contemplation from those doing this work.

No matter where one finds themselves on their opinions regarding abortion, using morality as a frame rather than politics may also help show that this issue is on a spectrum rather than a dichotomy. Of course, politics can be seen as on a spectrum as well, particularly in other countries. However, the history and tradition of a two-party system tends to prevail in the U.S., and it is often difficult for the public and legislatures to make change outside of

these binary politics. Rather than working to redo an entire political dynamic and hope that abortion access progress follows suit, maybe stepping outside of a political frame as a whole and thinking in terms of morality instead could potentially be effective. This may be an optimistic hope and difficult to execute due to the complex history of abortion in the U.S. as well as the current political climate surrounding the issue. Nevertheless, abortion access is under attack more today than it has been since its legalization in 1973; attempting to reconceptualize and restructure the dialogue and movements around this issue could be more crucial now than ever before as new restrictions are occurring in increasing frequency.

Some limitations in this study include that the majority of our sample was made up of White participants. Ideally, it would be more representative of different races, especially since women of color face increased obstacles to abortion access as well as higher rates of maternal mortality and a myriad of other disproportionate risks when it comes to issues of reproductive health (Roberts, 1997). Furthermore, we also had to limit the scope of our study to focusing on the issue of women having abortions, even though we recognize that not only women have and need access to abortion procedures. After much deliberation, we decided limiting the scope was necessary as we were anticipating the possibility of a lack of understanding of pronouns by the audience (ex. not being familiar with they/them pronouns) as well as potential confounds (ex. transphobia) that could complicate the results of finding people's attitudes about abortion specifically.

However, this issue deserves more attention as transgender and non-binary individuals often face increased discrimination and limitations when it comes to accessing

these procedures. Non-cisgender people are often not included in fights for reproductive justice as it is typically seen as an issue faced only by women. Furthermore, trans and non-binary individuals face a unique set of issues when it comes to reproductive health and abortion, such as the risk of discrimination or being “outed” and dysphoria around pregnancy. It is also hard to estimate the exact amount of trans and non-binary individuals that receive abortion procedures because this is not always documented, but approximately 500 people with these identities got abortions in 2017 (Jones, Witwer, & Jerman, 2020). These folks would benefit from gender-specific services catered to those with these identities but facilities with those in place are rare, being offered by about 27% of abortion providers (Jones, Witwer, & Jerman, 2020).

Overall, further work should be done in reproductive justice movements to advocate for abortion for all people, not just women, and acknowledge the unique challenges faced by these communities, as well as the similarities in struggles for access to abortion faced by all to make these movements more inclusive and intersectional. Future research and studies on this topic should also explore the ways in which morality may intersect with attitudes toward transgender individuals, such as transphobia, and abortion access as this is a complex issue that lacks attention in current research.

Lastly, another study should be done to analyze the ways in which people’s attitudes on abortion may change in more extreme situations such as in the case of incest or rape and the ways in which moral values may flex more in those scenarios. At some points in history when abortion was illegal, it was still allowed in these specific situations and result in some

flexibility within pro-life identifying individuals today. A study analyzing this may differ from our study as it may show the views of those who typically do not support abortion access often change when the circumstances are extreme enough to make them consider what they find to be most immoral or who is to blame for acquiring an abortion procedure in these situations.

While the aforementioned limitations exist and there are multiple directions recommended for future research, the present study is unique in analyzing the ways in which morality and abortion intersect. Overall, more research should be done regarding the issue of morality, abortion, and the debates surrounding this topic. Although 1 in 4 women acquire abortion procedures in their lifetimes (Induced Abortion, Guttmacher Institute), there is still a great deal of stigma associated with having an abortion. This stigma results from the history around this procedure being something private and taboo, perhaps stemming from continuing attitudes from legislation like the Comstock Acts, as well as the ways in which this issue is so controversial and divisive. Furthermore, research shows women who have abortions are more likely to be dehumanized as they are often seen as violating prescribed gender roles and norms of being mothers (Pacilli et al., 2018).

This violation of a norm centered around what is typically conceptualized as a traditional family structure could also explain why from a moral psychological perspective, our results show that abortion may be seen as antithetical or violating purity in those who hold this value to be a priority. One way folks are working to combat this stigma is through making this issue more tangible and personal through normalizing being able to talk about

abortion more openly. Campaigns like Shout Your Abortion have encouraged those who have had abortions to tell their stories and talk about their experiences have been an effective way to work against the historical silence around these procedures. Reducing the stigma as well as tensions surrounding abortion could be an important step in the right direction for making more conversations and change happen.

The inspiration for choosing this topic for this study originated at a Starbucks in Boone, North Carolina. I have always been passionate about increasing access to abortion procedures for all; items like my laptop and my water bottle reflect my opinions and have “I stand with Planned Parenthood” and “Stop banning abortion” stickers on them. I was sitting at a table doing homework when a pregnant woman and her partner approached me, immediately confronting me about my “pro-abortion” stickers and asking what they meant.

I explained briefly about the abortion bans over the summer and my views on them, but she immediately became defensive about her pregnancy, telling me my stickers and beliefs made her upset and scared for herself and future child. She told me she questioned my morals and could not understand how I could be in support of something so “cruel” like the “murder of innocent babies.” I was caught off guard but responded as calmly as I could, explaining I was happy for her and her family and that she was able to make the choice to carry a child. However, I also explained not everyone wants to carry a child or is able to make the same choice. Furthermore, I told her that from my perspective, banning abortion went against my own morals and that it is okay that we feel differently on the topic as

everyone is allowed to have their own beliefs and opinions. She was obviously angry but also unsure of how to respond. She and her partner walked out the door.

A few days later, I was at a different coffee shop when I saw her again. I was bracing myself for more arguments to ensue when she walked up to me and said, “I just wanted to say I am sorry. I can’t stop thinking about how I acted the other day and have regretted it ever since.” I was flabbergasted at this unexpected exchange and apologized as I may have come across as very defensive as well. She explained to me that she realized she had never thought about anyone’s perspective outside of her own pregnancy and experiences, and I explained that I do not often talk to people with opposing views to my own either. She eventually said, “maybe people should have conversations like this more often” and walked away.

That day, I realized that this was the first civil conversation I had ever had with somebody with an opposing view on this topic. I could not stop thinking about trying to figure out what it is about abortion that causes folks to be so angry and volatile and how morality was used in both of our arguments to support our opinions. I am not naive enough to believe either of our views or opinions changed that day, however, I saw that progress does not always look like getting people to agree with you or be on your “side.” When it comes to topics like abortion, the first step in creating sustainable change regarding this issue could be to change arguments to conversations. Analyzing conflicts in moral values may help understand why individuals are so passionate about the issue of abortion, but it could also help us understand how to reframe dialogue in less volatile ways. The present study shows

potential for a weakening of the divide between those on opposing “sides” of the issue of abortion by using a moral lens to provide much-needed understanding on this topic.

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