

Understanding the Effect of Empathy on Decision-Making Within
Extremist Issues Framed Around the Exception for an Abortion in
the Instance of Rape

Chandler Ciernia

April 4th, 2017

Thesis Advisor: Vanessa Baird – Political Science

Honors Council Representative: E. Scott Adler- Political Science

Committee Member: Jamie Skerski- Communication

Abstract

What causes pro-life people to support an exception for an abortion in the case of pregnancy by rape? Given the arguments that usually surround protecting the fetus, support for the exception is logically inconsistent; what seems to matter, then, is whether women are guilty. After striving to understand why this exception exists and controlling for variables like sex, biblical fundamentalism, church attendance, education, and age, I find that the presence of empathy ultimately allows individuals within an extreme issue to compromise on their beliefs. Further it was established that other beliefs or behaviors such as authoritarianism and sexism were found to reinforce this extreme belief. This has implications for a broader understanding of how empathy works to soften the extremity of some viewpoints and how authoritarianism strengthens them.

Keywords: abortion, authoritarianism, sexism, empathy, extremism, democracy

Introduction

One of the most highly contended social issues in American politics, abortion has embedded itself in the partisanship of the United States and has drawn a strong line in the sand between political parties since its rise to the national stage with the ruling in *Roe v. Wade*. Since landmark decision on January 22nd, 1973, the debate on abortion has produced rather cut and dry opinions: the pro-choice and the pro-life. However, within this debate, an interesting paradox exists, begging the question: among those who oppose abortion, why does an exception for rape exist? This question sparks substantial interest by the logic that if those who are pro-life believe abortion is murder; the procedure is murder on all fronts, regardless of the circumstances by which a woman becomes pregnant. Since the exception highlights circumstances under which a woman is not responsible for her pregnancy, the exception is made. In fact, former Republican President Ronald Reagan stated “I believe a mother has the right to protect her life & I’ll include her health against even her own unborn child if it is threatened by anyone including her own unborn child. I go so far as to say that just as she has the right to protect herself against rape she has the right to protect herself against the result of that rape & therefore can rid herself of a child or refuse to have a child resulting from rape”(Reagan, Skinner, Anderson, and Anderson 2001). Interestingly enough, pro-life people including Reagan’s greatest supporters, strictly and confidently advocate against abortion under any circumstance by which a woman could have, arguably, better prevented her pregnancy.

While this paradox has been discussed on public forums and in various political opinion pieces, scholarly efforts toward trying to explain and understand the exception

for rape are rather lacking. That being said, I feel that the causal relationship that I strive to prove will be a rather sizeable departure from any existing work in the area. In formulating and testing my hypothesis I will be looking at a broader range of literature on topics such as authoritarianism, sexism, extremism and empathy in an attempt to understand the causal relationship in question. Through a wide lens I will be looking to understanding what human characteristics contribute to or allow for a breach in logical thought and behavior. I believe that more extreme or strict human beliefs or tendencies will reinforce logical action while the presence of compassion or empathy may cause a change in one's beliefs. Such a belief has lead to the development of three hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 states that the more authoritarian people are, the less likely they will be to give an exception for an abortion in the case of a pregnancy as the result of rape. Hypothesis 2 similarly states that the more sexist one is, the less likely one will be to grant the exception. Finally, hypothesis 3 suggests that people exhibiting high levels of empathy are increasingly more likely to afford an exception to for a woman looking to terminate a pregnancy after sexual assault.

Interest, Importance, and Background Information

As previously mentioned, attempting to understand what causes defenders of prenatal life to give an exception for abortion under circumstances by which a woman has been raped is particularly interesting in the sense that allowing an abortion for any reason is a necessarily illogical behavior. Following the pro-life belief that life begins at conception and that abortion is murder, believing in exceptions for an abortion must be caused by a unique human characteristic within this specific population. Searching for an

answer to this conundrum, I am swayed to wondering if perhaps this pattern of behavior is not exclusive to an abortion issue. I am thereby tempted to infer that my hypotheses and findings will suggest an instance of weakness within extreme opinions in that on cut and dry issues similar to abortion, people who hold the generally more extreme position on an issue will act illogically when they have empathy. This would thereby teach us that empathy is a unique human quality with the ability to alter and or inhibit one's ability to act and legislate with perfect logic. By the same logic, people expressing noticeably authoritarian or sexist behaviors would thus have their beliefs reinforced, continuing the linear thought that abortion is always murder. Therefore, while this paradox is interesting on its face because of the illogical nature of the behavior, research in the topic may in fact reveal an important finding regarding to practice of logical thought and human characteristics that either impede or reinforce people's ability to hold strong to their beliefs.

Abortion as a topic is regarded differently by a variety of populations; to simplify, it is considered a religious issue, a political issue, and a moral issue. While a debate around the procedure is not one exclusive to the United States, according to statistics provided by the National Abortion Federation on incidents of violence and disruption against abortion providers from 1977-2014, "the United States has had 6,984 violent incidents another 194,615 incidents of disruption to clinical services including things like bomb threats, and 801 incidents of clinic blockades since 1977" (Kumar, 2015 and NAF Violence and...). Based on such observations and the extensive political and judicial attention the issue receives, abortion attitudes are typically strictly one way or the other.

The history of abortion in the United States is mostly characterized by the

criminalizing of the procedure until the first proposal aimed at reforming criminal abortion laws in the United States was adopted in 1959, introducing the exception for cases of rape into the discussion forever (McBride, 2008, 164). For the first time, the termination of a pregnancy was justifiable in a government in which an abortion was considered a felony. The American Law Institute introduced a model penal code that outlined that physicians were permitted to perform abortions under a few exceptions, one being if the pregnancy resulted from rape (McBride, 2008, 164). States gradually applied the proposal until the decision of *Roe v. Wade* on January 22nd, 1973 when abortion was officially protected under the 14th Amendment and the right to privacy. Then, in 1993 President Bill Clinton mandated that Medicare in all states cover the cost of abortions resulting from rape (Congressional Record). Thus, an exception in the case of sexual assault has been discussed and permitted throughout the history of the evolution of abortion laws and attitudes in the United States. Understanding what it is that causes defenders of prenatal life to give the exception in a time when abortions are legal, however, is what this paper ultimately strives to ascertain.

Previous Literature

Extremism

As a highly contentious and vastly debated topic, abortion and abortion attitudes may easily be described as extreme. Defining extremism and extremists for that matter, David A. Lake specifies that there are two distinct attributes of extremism (2002). The first of these two distinctions is that extremists hold political beliefs or preferences that, “in any distribution of opinion, lie in one of the ‘tails’”(Lake, 2002). Secondly, Lake

claims that extremists lack the, “means or power to obtain goals”(2002). While the issue of abortion– being pro-choice or being pro-life– quickly seems to be a black and white debate, there are certainly degrees of extremism behind the various conditional opinions held in regard to this particular medical procedure.

There are a variety of conditions under which one may choose to support a woman’s right to choose to terminate her pregnancy, but there is certainly a population of people who do not support an abortion despite these circumstances; this “always no” preference is considered to be a pro-life extremist belief. Thinking of Lake’s two extremist attributes, both can easily be applied to pro-life extremists. In relation to his first point about holding a position at the “tail” of an opinion spectrum, it is easily seen how the “always no” populations fall toward the more extreme “tail” of the abortion scale. When it comes to a lack of power to obtain their goals, pro-life extremists can be seen feeling out of control in a situation involving a potential abortion because of their preexisting convictions. Lake also states that extremists typically push for goals far beyond reach, refuse to “bargain or settle for less,” and ultimately hope to change what is perceived as acceptable to align with their beliefs (2002). These tendencies may explain the extremist attempts to pass anti-abortion legislations and refuse to make any exceptions to their pro-life beliefs, as people must feel powerless to a woman’s legal right to choose to end her pregnancy and seek to establish some control over a situation they believe to be murderous and wrong.

Extremism is commonly considered one of the most dangerous threats to democracy. We see instances of extremism in political issues such as terrorism. In his discussion of violent extremism and terrorism, David Lake states that extremists

generally seek to utilize fear and terror, and defines terrorism as, “the irregular use of violence by non-state groups against nonmilitary targets and personnel for political ends”(2002). Another important goal of extremists laid out by Lake is that they try to convey to moderates the idea that the target of their extremism, namely those who have opposing opinions, are in fact the extreme ones (2002). This particular distinction seems to align with the pro-life extremist tendency to perpetrate the fallacy that all pro-choice advocates are “pro-abortion.” Further, Lake distinguishes that terrorists ultimately lack empathy, specifically stating that they lack, “moral strictures against the use of violence”(2002). Presumably agreeing with this assertion, Wagdy Loza clarifies that extremist people are more likely to radicalize toward terrorism because extremists lack empathy and have a pre-occupation with power (2007).

In their large study on extremism and empathy, Aly, Taylor, and Karnovsky reassert the position that extremists lack empathy (2014). Their study worked to highlight the way in which empathy can be used to combat what is known as moral disengagement theory, a theory that allows extremist people to “cognitively reconstruct the moral value of violence and carry out inhumane acts”(Aly, Taylor, and Karnovsky, 2014). The authors characterize extremism and extremists who utilize moral disengagement theory as justifying violence, dehumanizing victims, and absolving themselves of blame (2014). Finally, another branch of extremism, white supremacy, is discussed by Kathleen M. Blee who found an overwhelming lack of empathy among former Ku Klux Klan members that she interviewed in her piece “Evidence, empathy, and ethics: Lessons from oral histories of the Klan” (1993). In this larger discussion of extremism I return to my hypothesis on empathy and wonder if perhaps the negative relationship between extremism and

empathy may provide a greater insight into human behavior beyond the question of abortion.

Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism is commonly understood as a strict following of conventional behaviors, obedience to traditional authority, and disdain for visibly distinct out-groups (Duncan, 2006). Approaching an exception to abortion in instances of rape, an obvious breach in logic is brought to light. Given this realization, I hypothesize that a certain punitive sense of authoritarianism and a need for control among pro-life people will dictate whether or not the exception is given. People's opinions on power, hierarchy, and control can be greatly understood by their stances on obedience, specifically in regards to children's relationship with their parents and other elders or superiors. Studying authoritarian versus authoritative parenting styles, Coplan, Hastings, Laguscé-Séguin, and Moulton (Coplan et. al) assert that authoritarian parents value power assertion and obedience and, "attempt to control...the behaviors and attitudes of their children with an absolute set of standards" (2002). When considering "authoritarian style[s] of parenting" and the way in which some parents advocate for "physical punishment, forcing children to obey and the breaking of children's will" it becomes increasingly more interesting to understand the relationship between these styles of parenting and the exception for rape (Berliner, 1997).

Literature on the concept of authoritarianism as it pertains to opinions on social issues might afford a great deal of insight into how it affects people's tendency to give the exception. In fact, various studies have indicated strong relationship between

authoritarianism and instances of support of traditional gender roles, family structure and values and “sexual mores” (Duncan, 2006). Such findings lend themselves to predict the way in which authoritarianism may also dictate people’s tendency to give an exception for an abortion in the case of rape. Those high on authoritarianism feel increasingly distant from out-groups and tend to feel aggression toward groups or individuals who they perceive to be violating such social mores (Duncan, 2006). Further highlighting the relationship between authoritarianism and the exception, Duncan’s research shows that general authoritarianism is related to pro-life attitudes on the basis of, “conventional morality, submission to traditional authorities, and aggression or punitiveness toward women seeking abortions” and that authoritarian people advocated for restrictive laws against women who acted irresponsibly by their standards (Duncan, 2006).

When attempting to define a relationship between disgust sensitivity and political conservatism, Inbar, Pizarro, Iver, and Haidt come across an interesting finding that states that those who score high on measures of authoritarianism are increasingly more likely to tolerate social inequality and be more generally disgusted and disapprove of people who act against traditional sexual and moral norms (Inbar, Pizarro, Iver, and Haidt, 2012). Understanding such a relationship with Duncan’s research on authoritarianism and traditional social norms, a hypothesis regarding authoritarian pro-life people takes shape. Might a correlation between disgust and authoritarianism explain pro-life opinions and perhaps why people may either allow or refuse the exception?

Empathy

Discussing the role of empathy in diplomatic negotiations, Holmes and Yarhi-

Milo define empathy as understanding the position of others without necessarily agreeing or sympathizing with them as expressed through both words and actions (Holmes and Yarhi-Milo, 2016). A study conducted by Stevenson, Malik, Totton, and Reeves (Stevenson et al.) specifies that dehumanization predicts a general lack of empathy (2015). Such a conclusion may in fact suggest that those with lower measurable empathy either actively or tacitly dehumanize pregnant rape victims in order to disallow for the except as to not contradict their pro-life perspective. From the other end, Stevenson et al.'s finding may imply that highly empathetic people allow themselves to give the abortion exception on the ground that they can understand the position and act empathetically in the face of their preconceived attitudes towards abortion.

Empathy, among other constructs like perspective-taking and theory-of-mind are said to be negatively affected by age, suggesting that as one ages, his capacity to see things through someone else's point of view greatly diminishes, making it vastly more difficult for older people to express empathy (Bailey and Henry, 2008). Under an analysis of respondents who do and do not allow for the exception for abortions in the case of rape, it would be rather interesting to investigate into the ages of respondents who do not give the exception. Given the findings of Bailey and Henry I hypothesize that the portion of my population high on empathy will both give the exception and be relatively younger than those low on empathy who would, by the logic and findings of the researchers, be older and would therefore not allow for the exception.

Understanding the effect of empathy as a human emotion has proved helpful at high levels of international relations and in the resolution of international conflicts. Megan Boler in her piece, "The Risk of Empathy: Interrogating Multiculturalism's

Gaze,” discusses the importance of empathy on democracy and conflict resolution. Boler states, “We find empathy advocated as the foundation for democracy and social change,” thereby suggesting that a lack of empathy among state actors and/or individuals may threaten democracy (1994). She also asserts that empathy can be seen as a, “bridge between differences,” and a way to engage in democratic dialogue (Boler, 1994). Further, in their study on the effects of hope and empathy on the resolution of conflicts, namely the Israeli-Palestinian disputes, Rosler, Cohen-Chen, and Halperin (Rosler et al.) establish that empathy is the act of relieving the suffering of the other group and emphasize that studying empathy in nations experiencing similar intractable conflicts can allow for an expanded understanding of the “psychological underpinnings of conflict resolution processes” (2015). Paralleling such logic to align with the providing of an exception for an abortion in instances of rape, Rosler et al.’s findings underline the psychological process of understanding groups that act against everything one may believe in much like a pro-choice advocate may ultimately find himself empathizing with a victimized woman despite his convictions against abortion. One might hypothesize that militant behavior and actions against nations that the authors describes in fact may symbolize the punitive and aggressive nature by which authoritarian people tend to exercise control over others (Rosler et al., 2015 and Berliner, 1997).

For so many within the pro-life population, abortion stands as a breach of their moral convictions. Putting where one develops her moral backing aside, issues of emotions and morality tend to conflict with professional, political, and legal proceedings, exemplified by many judges who instruct jury members to make their judgments without emotional influences (Pizarro, 2000). However, Pizarro argues that information about the

emotional processes experienced by humans suggest that emotions are detrimental to moral judgments is without bearing (2000). The author discusses the ways in which empathetic responses are catalyzed by an emotional response to something similar (Pizarro, 2000). He specifies that people have the capacity of drawing and defining their own boundaries for what feels similar whether it be based on their social, biological, or religious predispositions and that if empathy is precipitated by a feeling of closeness or familiarity to a set of circumstances, it may be possible to draw out such feelings when an empathetic response is not initially stimulated (Pizarro, 2000). A comparison to the abortion debate is then outlined and the author distinguishes the different ways in which both sides of the issue may invoke specific rhetoric tactics to elicit an emotional response that may in fact serve as a channel for moral change (Pizarro, 2000). Applied to the exception for sexual assault there is a potential for the discovery of empathy and empathetic responses to particular situations may allow for the alteration of people's moral fixations allowing those who aggressively defend and believe in the sanctity of prenatal life to experience a shift in their original moral position. Thus the studies and research of a multitude of scholars seem to support the overall hypothesis that high scores of empathy will predict an increased willingness to afford an exception to abortion for a pregnancy resulting from violent sexual assault.

Authoritarianism and Empathy

In the study of personality traits, the relationship between authoritarianism and empathy is widely discussed. As it pertains to my project and hypotheses, this relationship is particularly interesting in that I predict high levels of authoritarianism will

correlate with a refusal of any exceptions for an abortion and that high levels of empathy will correlate with support for an abortion in the case of pregnancy by rape. Studying the alliance between parenting styles and empathy in both authoritarian versus authoritative mothers, Coplan et. al found that when it comes to childhood disobedience, authoritarian mothers are more likely to respond with anger and punishment and less likely to experience empathy (2002). These findings highlight a much discussed and thought over relationship between a lack of empathy or perspective taking and highly authoritarian people.

Conducting a study on doubt, skepticism, and religious fundamentalism in patients with prefrontal cortex damage, Asp, Ranchandran and Tranel found that of the healthy individuals in their study, “individuals high in authoritarianism demonstrate diminished empathy and guilt, increased punitive judgments, and increased endorsement of immoral, hurtful actions” (2014). A negative correlation between authoritarianism and empathy aligns with suppositions that a certain degree of punitiveness may exist among the more authoritarian or extreme subset of individuals who would deny a woman the opportunity to terminate her pregnancy even in the “immoral” or “hurtful” case of a pregnancy by sexual assault. Beyond the scope of these two traits as they relate to the abortion question, this relationship seems to be one discussed in a magnitude of circumstances to understand human behavior.

Prejudice and discrimination is another social and political dimension in which a disconnect between authoritarian behavior and empathy has been studied. In his chapter from *The Oxford Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology*, “Antisocial Behavior in Individuals and Groups: An Empathy-Focused Approach,” Emanuele Castano finds

that authoritarianism, specifically right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), can be seen mitigating the effects of empathy on prejudice (2012). Castano's findings also show that the higher levels of empathy people have, the lower their levels of RWA (2012). The logic thus follows linearly in showing that the lower people's level of RWA, the lower were their levels of prejudice (2014). Similarly, a study performed by Case, Fishbein, and Ritchey on the effect of empathy and authoritarianism on people's attitudes toward homosexuals reports a positive relationship between empathy and favorable opinions on homosexuals, and, as one might assume, a negative relationship between empathy and authoritarian and social dominance orientation (SDO) (2008). While the concepts of authoritarianism and SDO have been defined and distinguished from one another, many general tendencies still apply, reinforcing the idea that the more comfortable people are in hierarchies and with dominant authoritative rules of life, the less empathy they will feel toward groups or individuals acting in opposition to their beliefs.

Sexism

Thinking of a relationship between support for traditional gender roles and authoritarian beliefs and behaviors, the concept benevolent sexism describes ideologies that favor women who adhere to traditional gender roles comes to mind (Huang, Davies, Sibley, and Osborne, 2016). Similarly relevant, hostile sexism praises women who conform to such gendered expectations and punishes those who at anytime deviate from their roles as women (Huang, Davies, Sibley, and Osborne, 2016). Gendered hierarchies ultimately dictate anti-abortion attitudes based on opinions regarding motherhood (Huang, Davies, Sibley, and Osborne, 2016). Ultimately, in considering the relationship

between authoritarian people supporting traditional gendered exceptions, benevolent and hostile sexism and the reasons they affect abortion attitudes may help explain people's hesitation to grant the exception for abortion. Those who live by the values outlined by benevolent or hostile sexism may very well be the same kind of people who say no to an abortion exception for rape out of their authoritarian tendencies and their adherence to strict gendered societal and social roles.

In a study on the relationship between ambivalent sexism, right wing authoritarianism, and what they refer to as rape myth acceptance, Manoussaki and Veitch discuss the vilification of female sexuality in relational to sexual assault (2015). Relating to previously discussed concepts of traditional gender roles and gendered constraints by which many individuals operate, the authors further hypothesize that the degree of rape myth acceptance is a reflection of deep rooted patriarchal values which in turn influence cross-cultural and cross-generational attitudes towards women's sexuality (Manoussaki and Veitch, 2015). Ambivalent sexism and the adherence to such gendered expectations in turn allow for the rise of concepts such as the rape myth which expresses a reluctance to describe rape as violence and generally places blame upon victims due to her appearance or behavior (Manoussaki and Veitch, 2015). Ultimately the endorsement of such a perspective relies on the supposition that the victim is either directly or indirectly responsible for her sexual assault (Manoussaki and Veitch, 2015). Results proved the authors hypotheses that ambivalent sexism and authoritarianism predicted the acceptance of the rape myth (Manoussaki and Veitch, 2015).

In summation of the consideration of sexism's effect on the decision among pro-life advocated to allow or disallow for an exception to their anti-abortion stance in the

case of rape, it is particularly interesting to consider the fusion of concepts related to gendered societal expectations and authoritarianism. The existence of a rape myth as mentioned by Manoussaki and Veitch highlights a subset of beliefs that parallel and are likely influenced by authoritarianism. Ultimately one may hypothesize that a tendency to adhere or believe in traditional gender roles will exhibit a positive relationship with authoritarianism. With that in mind, the people who score high on both scales are predicted to withhold an exception for the termination of a pregnancy resulting from rape and strictly and punitively advocate for the preservation of prenatal life.

Data and Methods

There are a set of variables in the General Social that reflect a sense of authoritarianism, sexism, empathy, and my dependent variable. By eliminating the data from respondents who answered “Yes” to the statement, “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,” I will define my population as exclusively pro-life individuals.

Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion: G. If the woman wants it for any reason?	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Yes	746	45.13	45.13
No	907	54.87	100.00
Total	1,653	100.00	

This distinction is pertinent in that those who believe women should be allowed to have an abortion are not within the scope of people who would give an exception. After the exclusion of those who always allow for abortion, I will be able to better understand the population of people who responded to the question I will use to represent my dependent variable, “Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if she becomes pregnant as a result of rape?”

Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion: E. If she became pregnant as a result of rape?	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Yes	529	61.51	61.51
No	331	38.49	100.00
Total	860	100.00	

In answering my research question I intend to group my various hypotheses into the categories of authoritarianism, sexism, and empathy, predicting that those high on authoritarianism and sexism will be less likely to give the exception and those high on empathy will be vastly more likely.

Using variables from the General Social Survey, I will test for causality between likelihood of affording the exception for rape and three distinct independent variables. By asking respondents to rank how important they believe children learning obedience, the survey measures to a sense of authoritarianism based on individual responses pertaining to the belief that children should above all things obey.

If you had to choose, which thing on this list would you pick as the most important for a child to learn to prepare him or her for life? To obey	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Most Important	74	16.48	16.48
2 nd Important	70	15.59	32.07
3 rd Important	80	17.82	49.89
4 th Important	172	38.31	88.20
Least Important	53	11.80	100.00
Total	449	100.00	

Respondent opinions about women in politics is recorded by asking for responses to the statement, “Tell me if you agree or disagree with this statement: Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women,” which I ultimately believe will reflect a sense of sexism within my population.

Tell me if you agree or disagree with this statement: Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women.	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Agree	95	22.35	22.35
Disagree	330	77.65	100.00
Total	425	100.00	

Finally, support for compassionate choices at the end of one’s life is measured by recording yes or no responses to the question, “When a person has a disease that cannot be cured, do you think doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient’s life by some

painless means if the patient and his family request it?” reflecting respondents’ level of empathy.

When a person has a disease that cannot be cured, do you think doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient's life by some painless means if the patient and his family request it?	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	192	43.84	43.84
Yes	246	56.16	100.00
Total	438	100.00	

In addition to testing the connection between these concepts and my dependent variable I will be controlling for certain factors that tend to contribute to the formation of one’s abortion attitudes; these factors being one’s age, sex, degree of biblical fundamentalism, frequency of church attendance, and education levels. Tables describing responses to questions of biblical fundamentalism, church attendance, and education are as follows.

Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible? The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word; the Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything should be taken literally, word for word; the Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history and moral precepts recorded by man.	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word	406	45.93	45.93
The Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything should we taken literally, word for word	371	41.97	87.90
The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history and moral precepts recorded by man	107	12.10	100.00

Total	907	100.00	
--------------	------------	---------------	--

How often do you attend religious services?			
	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Never	176	19.45	19.45
Less than once a year	52	5.75	25.19
Once a year	99	10.94	36.13
Several times a year	93	10.28	46.41
Once a month	60	6.63	53.04
Two-three times a month	76	8.40	61.44
Nearly every week	50	5.52	66.96
Every week	200	22.10	89.06
More than once a week	99	10.94	100.00
Total	905	100.00	

Do you have any college degrees? (If yes: what degree or degrees?) Code highest degree earned			
	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Less than high school	173	19.07	19.07
High school	493	54.36	73.43
Junior College	54	5.95	79.38
Bachelor's	114	12.57	91.95
Graduate	73	8.05	100.00
Total	907	100.00	

Hypothesizing about the causal relationship between the aforementioned concepts and believing in having an exception to abortion in the case of rape, I ran a logit regression. However, when the survey was conducted in 2014, three separate ballots of responses were generated, and I thus had to generate a missing data variable to ensure that all my responses were valid for Ballot C specifically. Since the measures of people's

opinion of women in politics was asked only on Ballot A, I made the variable equal to -1 if respondents were not valid for Ballot C. Then to control for that effect, I controlled for whether the person was valid. This controlled for the nonsensical value of -1 and allowed me to test the remaining hypotheses for all valid responses. I repeated this same procedure for variable measuring respondents' level of empathy measured by their support for compassion toward end of life decisions, making the variable equal to -1 to control for Ballot A and make the responses valid for Ballot C. Further, the variable describing opinions on the importance of child obedience was asked only on Ballot C, so to control for that I created a variable representing Ballot A and one representing Ballot C. While of course there may be better methods such as multiple imputations, Alison says, "While the dummy variable adjustment method is clearly unacceptable when data are truly missing, it may still be appropriate in cases where the unobserved value simply does not exist. For example, married respondents may be asked to rate the quality of their marriage, but that question has no meaning for unmarried respondents. Suppose we assume that there is one linear equation for married couples and another equation for unmarried couples. The married equation is identical to the unmarried equation except that it has (a) a term corresponding to the effect of marital quality on the dependent variable and (b) a different intercept. It's easy to show that the dummy variable adjustment method produces optimal estimates in this situation" (2002).

Results

In analyzing the results produced by the application of my methods and the running of a logit regression, I have come to reject the null hypothesis. Results depict the

relationships between my dependent variable, three previously described independent variables, and five different control variables all while controlling for the validity of responses in Ballot C.

Concept	b (slope coefficient)	Standard error	t	p
Belief that children must obey	-.27	(.09)	-2.99	0.003**
Support for compassionate end of life decisions	1.35	(.22)	6.07	.000***
Belief that women can be in politics	.66	(.25)	2.65	.008**
Age	.01	(.00)	2.08	0.037*
Female	-.32	(.16)	-2.04	0.041*
Biblical fundamentalism	-.43	(.13)	-3.27	0.001
How often one attends church	-.17	(.03)	-5.60	0.000***
Whether a person has a college education	.14	(.07)	1.97	0.049*
BallotC	5.18	(.97)	5.31	0.000
Other sources	-.55	(.77)	-.71	0.480

Ultimately I have found that people who believe the most important thing for children to learn is to obey are the same people who will deny the termination of a pregnancy as the result of sexual assault. Individuals who indicate being more supportive of compassion toward end of life decisions, being thus, more empathetic, are more likely to support an abortion exception. Results suggest that those who disagree with the statement that men are better suited for politics than women are more likely to give the exception, the inverse of which suggests that those who believe men are more politically capable than women will not afford an exception for rape. Older populations are more likely to provide an exception, while pro-life women are actually less likely to support such an exception. Religiosity as measured by people's unique degrees of biblical fundamentalism and the frequency with which one attends church is correlated with general refusal to give an exception for abortion. Lastly, people's levels of education are

related to supporting an exception in the sense that higher levels of education indicated a higher willingness to give the exception and lower levels a tendency to deny the exception.

Given such results, questions of conditionality between variables arose.

Wondering if perhaps each variable's effect were dependent upon one another, I tested different interactions. After interacting measures of empathy, gender, and sexism, I am able to conclude that the effect of empathy does not depend on gender or sexism.

Running a similar interaction between measures of authoritarianism, gender, and sexism, I was also able to conclude that the effect of authoritarianism is independent of gender and sexism. I then began to wonder if perhaps these variables had an impact on the entire population rather than the narrowed population of exclusively pro-life respondents.

Looking to analyze the entire population, I developed a six-point ordered scale to quantify respondents' various levels of support for abortion.

Support for Abortion	Percent
Never, not even if the life of the mother is endangered	12.30
Only if the mother's life is in danger	5.42
Only in the case of rape or incest, but not if the mother's life is endangered	5.30
Only if there is a serious birth defect, but not in any of the following cases: if the mother is poor, the mother does not want more kids, or for any reason at all	19.92
Any one, but not all of the remaining conditions: if the mother is poor, the mother does not want more kids, or for any reason at all	19.17
Responded yes to all conditions: if the mother is poor, the mother does not want more kids, or for any reason at all	37.89
Total	100

The scale shown above displays the varying levels of support for abortion and outlines the different exceptions made. Of 1,586 respondents, 12.3% say they will never allow for

an abortion, even in life threatening situations, 5.42% say only under life threatening conditions for the mother will they allow for an abortion, and 5.3% say only in cases of rape or incest will they allow for the procedure to take place; we consider these three rankings to be of the strictest abortion attitudes. On the more lenient side, 19.9% of respondents believe in abortions in the case of a seriously birth defect, but do not accept exceptions for financial reasons or for women who simply do not want more children. 19.17% allow for the procedure under just about all circumstances except for times when the mother is too poor, does not want more children, or wants an abortion for any reason at all. Finally, the remaining 37.9% reported supporting a woman's choice to have an abortion under any and all circumstances.

In order to further test the greater effect of my independent variables on the entire population rather than the originally designed population of exclusively pro-life respondents, I ran an ordered logit for the various levels of abortion support.

Concept	b (slope coefficient)	Standard error	t	P
Belief that women can be in politics	.12	.11	1.07	.284
Compassion for end of life decisions	.57	.09	6.18	.000
Belief that children must obey	.15	.03	-4.58	.000
ballotc	1.18	.40	2.92	.003
Belief that the Bible is a book of fairytales	.31	.05	-6.62	.000
How often one attends church	-.10	.01	8.39	.000
Sex	.04	.06	.71	.480
Age	.00	.00	2.11	.035
Whether a person has a college education	.19	.03	7.51	.000

Searching for variation between the restricted and inclusive populations, the substantive

conclusions suggest little dissimilarity. Such a discovery allows us to generalize our findings to the entire population, ultimately teaching a potentially valuable lesson in human behavior.

Measured results of a relationship between sexism and the exception or feminism and the exception reinforce findings highlighting that the more an individual agrees that men are better suited for politics the less supportive of an exception for the termination of a pregnancy resulting from rape that individual will be. Conversely, the data suggests that the more feminist people's beliefs are, namely the more they disagrees that men are better suited for politics than women, the more supportive those people will be of the exception. As earlier reported when analyzing only a restricted sample, people reporting higher levels of empathy as measured by their level of compassion for end of life decisions are more likely to believe in an exception in the case of rape. A negative relationship between the strict belief that children must, above all, learn to obey and granting the abortion exception supports the finding that the more authoritarian the practices and opinions, the less willing one will be to make an exception to their pro-life convictions. Relationships between people's various levels of biblical fundamentalism rather than the word of God and how frequently people attends church are used as a measure of religiosity and continually suggest that overall the more strictly people believe the Bible is the word of God and the more people attend church the less likely they are to allow for an abortion exception. Comparing the differences in opinion on the exception between men and women, the data demonstrates again that men are more likely to go against their original abortion attitudes and allow the exception than women. Finally, as previously reported, the data shows that older people are comparatively more likely to allow for the

exception than younger people and that higher levels of education indicate higher levels of support for a rape-specific abortion exception.

Discussion

As hypothesized, given the relationship between people's belief that children must above all else obey, it appears that the degree to which people are authoritarians has a negative relationship with giving an exception to allow an abortion in the instance of rape. Specifically, the more authoritarian behavior people exhibit, the less likely they will be to believe in an exception to their pro-life beliefs. Based on the variety of literature pertaining to authoritarian styles of parenting and forcing children to obey, the degree to which a person believes in the importance of obedient children is considered a clear measure of individuals' levels of authoritarianism. Since authoritarians tend to feel disdain and animosity toward out-groups that operate beyond their personal conception of proper behavior, findings that show authoritarians do not believe in giving an exception seems to fall right into line. This is especially significant considering documented relationships between authoritarianism and social inequality and a need to control others. By this logic, one may infer that an authoritarian is likely to look at a pregnant woman and disregard the circumstances by which she became pregnant based on their strict pro-life beliefs and their desire to exercise control over those they feel superior to. Similarly, the literature points to the relationship between authoritarian behavior and a strict adherence to sexual inequality and traditional gender roles which would explain the rather punitive act of refusing the exception on the grounds that a woman's duty in life is to be a mother; in fact, this relationship seems to blend with the negative relationship

between giving the exception and sexism.

The data represents a positive relationship between disagreeing that men are better suited for politics than women and giving the exception, thus suggesting that those who in fact do believe that men are politically superior to women will not give an abortion exception. Using this measure, I was able to draw the conclusion that the more sexist a person is, the less tolerant they will be of an exception. This relationship, while not entirely surprising, is particularly interesting because many attitudes pertaining to sexism or gendered social expectations are related to previously discussed authoritarian behaviors. Literature on the rape myth phenomenon, which hesitates to consider rape to be a violent act against women and typically shift blame onto the victim, suggests that the tendency for sexist individuals to deny an exception may stem from the thought that the woman is to blame for her rape, and thus her pregnancy. Previously discussed concepts such as benevolent and hostile sexism also seem to explain why people would deny an exception for rape in that they may feel the woman has violated the strict gendered guidelines outlined by their specific way of life.

Measuring compassion for end of life decisions as they relate to the excusing of an abortion for a woman who is the victim of rape suggests that the originally hypothesis that higher levels of empathy will correlate with the granting of the abortion exception is in fact a valid supposition. Analysis of the literature on the effects of empathy and empathetic behavior suggests that in consideration of issues of much contentious debate, that empathetic language and tendencies actually have the ability to facilitate moral change or compromise (Pizarro, 2000). This observation thus may be applied to the question as to why people with strict pro-life convictions may ultimately be swayed into

allowing for an abortion under a unique and tragic situation, such as rape. An individual with empathy is able to imagine and understand the position of the victim thus providing a conditional exception to their beliefs without necessarily agreeing with or supporting the act of obtaining an abortion. Ultimately the idea that empathy is shaped by people's own social and biological boundaries and allows for the altering of their deep rooted moral beliefs seems to explain the breach in logic displayed by pro-life advocates when they go against their issue position and grant an exception for an abortion.

Although various hypotheses were proven true, there are certainly a few that my findings ultimately disproved. While my hypotheses on authoritarianism and sexism seem to align with my findings, and even interact with one another in the sense that the literature supports a strong relationship between the two suggesting that authoritarian behavior may contribute to the reinforcement of sexist gendered societal expectations that cause individuals who share these behaviors and beliefs to say no to an abortion no matter the circumstances. However, when formulating my hypotheses relating to empathy, there were a few surprising findings contrary to my original postulation. Based on the study conducted by Bailey and Henry on the diminishing capacity for empathy as one ages, I hypothesized that younger people would therefore be more likely to give the exception than older people. While higher levels of empathy did show higher willingness to provide the exception, when I controlled for age, I was surprised to find that older people are in fact more likely to support an exception for the termination of a pregnancy resulting from rape. Further, while I did not formally make a hypothesis based on gender, I generally assumed that women would overwhelmingly afford the exception over men. It was therefore rather interesting to find that women reported less support for an exception

for rape than men. Overall, putting these two unique findings aside, my hypotheses seem to have been properly substantiated by the data.

Ultimately my findings have provided me a unique insight regarding human behavior that seems to stretch beyond the discussion of abortion. It appears that when it comes to issues that evoke strong emotional and moral opinions that certain social and political predispositions can have either reinforcing or altering effects. These findings are also considerably interesting when looking at their relationship to extremism, and on a larger scale, perhaps the potential state of democracies. As previously stated, extremism may be one of the most important threats to democracy, and the attitude we have observed and discussed, the attitude that a woman, through no fault of her own, must be forced to see through a pregnancy because of the belief that a bundle of cells– put inside of her brutally and violently– is the most important consideration in such a case, serves as a window to extremism. A plethora of research and literature has connected extremist views and actions such as terrorism and white supremacy with an overall lack of empathy. It has also been established that authoritarian regimes are the most likely forms of government to host extremist groups and individuals (Wintrobe, 2006). Additionally it has been shown that authoritarians lack empathy. Suddenly it seems as if empathy, or a lack there of, may be one of the most important traits for protecting democracies.

Looking through a narrow scope to analyze the unprincipled exception for an abortion in the case of rape among pro-life people, we have seen that empathy is the driving factor in this breach of logic behind the belief that abortion is murder. We have also seen that extremists and authoritarians foster a lack of empathy; so perhaps the real focus here is on empathy and the way it affects human behavior. While my findings are

specific to a particular question on an extreme issue, it is plausible to assume that many human behaviors may be indicative of a general lack of empathy. Previous research combined with the findings pertaining to the abortion question may ultimately have implications for understanding how to bridge together those with purist ideals who feel threatened by the beliefs and behaviors of their fellow citizens.

Caveats

Undoubtedly, of course, there are certain limitations regarding variables I was able to test and control for. These factors might ultimately affect my overestimation of the impact of my independent variables. While there is clear statistical significance within my findings, related elements may have a greater impact had the data allowed for such analysis. A particularly niche branch of analysis would have been understanding the impact of social networks among religious people. Of course, I was able to control for biblical fundamentalism and church attendance, I would have liked to have been able to understand what kind of exchange of ideas is happening within social groups. It is easy to assume that looking at religious groups within a pro-life population that much of the same ideologies are shared, however a certain degree of ambiguity may exist as to people's upbringing and backgrounds. Another measure to consider is the mobilization that exists within religious groups. As like minded people gather at church, they find other commonalities that unite them and share opinions and discuss other social movements, perhaps making them more extreme in their beliefs. Further, had the data allowed for a confident measure of extremism and given the connections between extremism and my independent variables illuminated by the literature, I would imagine

such a measure may affect the overall impact of my other variables.

Other potentially impactful details that may have caused me to overestimate my findings are personal experiences and attributes on an individual level. Most obviously, personal connections to either rape or abortion may impact the way an individual evaluates a situation involving a woman seeking an abortion for a pregnancy resulting from rape. If given the opportunity to expand my research, I imagine conducting a survey that gets at much more personal questions, specifically pertaining to experiences with sexual assault and abortion. These distinctions, along with an understanding about what kind of schooling people received, whether they grew up in a small conservative town or a large liberal city, or nuanced details that may sway their opinions on certain issues is something I would look to test for in a more elaborate and detailed sort of survey as a way to most confidently state the impact of my independent variables.

Implications

As aforementioned above, what my findings and the literature have suggested may be a window to something larger. Given the relationship between extremism, authoritarianism, and empathy, it seems that there may be implications for something beyond the abortion question. Perhaps the exception for an abortion in the case of rape serves as a medium for understanding variability in life and the way in which people's opinions are shaped. Considering the effect of empathy as it relates to extremism, one may wonder what these findings mean on a more global scale.

It has been established that empathy is a rather powerful human trait; a trait generally lacking among extremists, and one that has been used in conflict resolutions in

the past. Understanding that my findings may teach us about something beyond abortion, I wonder if perhaps what we have learned about the power of empathy can evolve and progress peacekeeping efforts across democracies. However, maybe invoking or teaching empathy may be more effective within democracies. Through this study, empathy has proven to be a characteristic capable of causing somewhat nonlinear beliefs, even within potentially extremist issues. Perhaps efforts toward establishing empathy within the divided social justice issues such as gay rights, reproductive rights and protections, and minority and immigration rights may facilitate a more understanding and open dialogue thus allowing empathy to mitigate deeply rooted disagreements. Once given the tools and the opportunity to walk a mile in the shoes of their adversaries, extreme or rigidly authoritarian groups may find a new level of respect and understanding for outside opinions, alleviating some of the longest held pain and animosity that divides human populations everyday.

Conclusion

The original aim of this paper focused on understanding a niche section of a highly contended social and political issue with the intent of understanding a puzzling thought process, but what research and findings has taught us has gone far beyond. Sexism and authoritarianism are traits characteristic of reinforcing preconceived beliefs that abortion is always murder, and empathy allows for a conditional exception to the belief. Given research on authoritarian, extremism, and empathy in their own and interacting regards however, a new understanding of the powerful effect of empathy comes to light. The literature and findings seem to suggest that what we have learned

about making exceptions for an abortion in the case of pregnancy by rape by in fact be a window to extremism and provide insight into ways to understand and improve human interactions moving forward.

Reiterating that extremism is a crucial threat to democracy, and that extremists and authoritarians lack empathy, it appears that empathy may be an important foundational piece for democracies around the world. While a debate exists among scholars and cognitive scientists whether empathy is genetic or can be taught, there has been work done in the area of conflict resolution through the use and appeal to the empathy of adversaries. Ultimately it appears that empathy is a key tool that can be used in the protection and upholding of democracies and in the productive communication between political oppositions.

Work Cited

- Alison, Paul D. *Missing Data: Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002.
- Aly, A., Taylor, E., & Karnovsky, S. (2014). Moral disengagement and building resilience to violent extremism: An education intervention. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 37(4), 369-385.
- Asp, E., Ramchandran, K., & Tranel, D. (2012). Authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism, and the human prefrontal cortex. *Neuropsychology*, 26(4), 414.
- Bailey, P. E., & Henry, J. D. (2008). Growing Less Empathic With Age: Disinhibition of the Self-Perspective. *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 63(4), P219–P226.
- Berliner, David C. (1997) “Educational Psychology Meets the Christian Right: Differing Views of Children, Schooling, Teaching, and Learning.” *ResearchGate* 98, no. 3
- Blee, K. M.(1993). Evidence, empathy, and ethics: Lessons from oral histories of the Klan. *The Journal of American History*, 80(2), 596-606.
- Boler, M. (1997). The risks of empathy: Interrogating multiculturalism’s gaze. *Cultural studies* 11,(2), 253-273.
- Case, K. A., Fishbein, H. D., & Ritchey, P. N. (2008). Personality, prejudice, and discrimination against women and homosexuals. *Current Research in Social Psychology*, 14(2), 23-38.
- Castano, E. (2012). Antisocial behavior in individuals and groups: an empathy-focused approach. In *The Oxford handbook of personality and social psychology* (pp. 419-445). Oxford University Press. Chicago

- Congressional Record. (n.d.). [legislation]. Retrieved December 13, 2016, from <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/1995/3/31/senate-section/article/S4961-5>
- Coplan, R. J., Hastings, P. D., Lagacé-Séguin, D. G., & Moulton, C. E. (2002). Authoritative and authoritarian mothers' parenting goals, attributions, and emotions across different childrearing contexts. *Parenting*, 2(1), 1-26.
- Duncan, L. E. (2006) VII. What Feminist and Political Psychologists Can Learn from Each Other: The Case of Authoritarianism. *16 (1)*, 58-64. doi:10.1177/0959-353506060821
- Eatwell, R. (2006). Community cohesion and cumulative extremism in contemporary Britain. *The Political Quarterly*, 77(2), 204-216.
- Holmes, M., & Yarhi-Milo, K. (2016). The Psychological Logic of Peace Summits: How Empathy Shapes Outcomes of Diplomatic Negotiations: Table 1. *International Studies Quarterly*, sqw034. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqw034>
- Huang, Y., Davies, P. G., Sibley, C. G., & Osborne, D. (2016). Benevolent Sexism, Attitudes Toward Motherhood, and Reproductive Rights A Multi-Study Longitudinal Examination of Abortion Attitudes. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 42(7), 970–984. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167216649607>
- Inbar, Y., Pizarro, D., Iyer, R., & Haidt, J. (2012). Disgust Sensitivity, Political Conservatism, and Voting. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 3(5), 537–544. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550611429024>
- Kumar, A. (2015, December 19). Why Is Anti-abortion Extremism Normalized? It Shouldn't Be. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anu-kumar/why-is-antiabortion-extre_b_8828084.html
- Lake, D. (2002). Rational Extremism: Understanding Terrorism in the Twenty-first Century.

Dialogue OI, 1 (1), 15-28. doi:10.1017/S7777777770200002X

Loza, W. (2007). The psychology of extremism and terrorism: A Middle-Eastern perspective. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 12(2), 141-155.

McBride, D. E. (2008). *Abortion in the United States: A reference handbook*. Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO. 164.

NAF VIOLENCE AND DISRUPTION STATISTICS INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE & DISRUPTION AGAINST ABORTION PROVIDERS. 1st ed. National Abortion Federation, 2016. Web. 13 Dec. 2016.

Pizarro, D. (2000), Nothing More than Feelings? The Role of Emotions in Moral Judgment. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 30: 355–375. doi:10.1111/1468-5914.00135

Reagan, R., Skinner, K. K., Anderson, A. G., & Anderson, M. (2001). *Reagan, in His Own Hand: The Writings of Ronald Reagan that Reveal His Revolutionary Vision for America*. Simon and Schuster.

Rosler, N., Cohen-Chen, S., & Halperin, E. (2015). The Distinctive Effects of Empathy and Hope in Intractable Conflicts. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002715569772>

Stevenson, M. C., Malik, S. E., Totton, R. R., & Reeves, R. D. (2015). Disgust Sensitivity Predicts Punitive Treatment of Juvenile Sex Offenders: The Role of Empathy, Dehumanization, and Fear. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 15(1), 177–197.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/asap.12068>

Wintrobe, R. (2006). Extremism, Suicide Terror, and Authoritarianism. *International Centre for Economic Research Working Papers 8-2006*.