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Efficacy, Distancing, and Reconciling: Religion and Race in Americans' Abortion Attitudes

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Abstract: Religion and race together inform Americans' abortion attitudes, but precisely how remains contradictory and unclear. Presumptions of shared religious or secular "worldviews" dividing abortion opinion mask variation among racially diverse adherents within the same tradition. Theoretical gaps compel a deeper, qualitative exploration of underlying processes. This article uses close analysis of a religiously and racially diverse, ideal–typical subset of in-depth interviews from the National Abortion Attitudes Study to identify three processes operating at the intersection of religion and race in abortion attitudes: *efficacy*, *distancing*, and *reconciling*. While religion's effect on abortion opinion remains paramount, accounting for social location illuminates meaningful variation. Findings offer an important corrective to overly-simplified narratives summarizing how religion matters to abortion opinion, accounting more fully for complex religion and religion as raced.

Keywords: abortion; religion; race; attitudes

1. Introduction

Religion matters to abortion attitudes, whether measured as affiliation, belief, importance, attendance, or otherwise (Gay and Lynxwiler 1999; Hess and Rueb 2005; Jelen and Wilcox 2003; Adamczyk and Valdimarsdottir 2018). Scholars frequently depict religion's impact as mediated through "worldviews" predisposing people to particular ways of making sense of their environments (Luker 1984; Emerson 1996).

Race also matters to abortion attitudes, albeit demonstratively less so than religion (Bolks et al. 2000; Wilcox 1990; Combs and Welch 1982; Carter et al. 2009). Religion is itself "raced," lending "cultural repertoires that people draw on and act upon very differently depending on their social location" (Yukich and Edgell 2020, p. 7). Religion and race are not neatly separated in how Americans form opinions on complex social issues, their interactions often contradictory. Abortion opinion attributed to religious differences can render invisible the intersecting influence of race, while attribution to race can render invisible that of religion. Religion is complex (Wilde 2020) and abortion attitudes multidimensional; religion and race work together to situate and complicate how Americans feel about myriad social issues including abortion.

This paper aims to generate new theory in the realm of religion, race, and abortion attitudes, remedying scant and contradictory conclusions drawn to date. Accordingly, it employs a close reading of in-depth qualitative interviews to assess interactions of religion and race in the ways that ordinary Americans understand abortion. The paper narrows in on a religiously and racially diverse group of nine ideal–typical interviewees chosen for theoretical reasons from among more than two hundred interviews in the National Abortion Attitudes Study (NAAS). Findings identify processes of *efficacy*, *distancing*, and *reconciling* to describe ways that white, Hispanic, and black Americans variously form abortion attitudes within their racially diverse religious (non)affiliations. Conclusions affirm

the relevance of religion to abortion attitudes while magnifying the ways that race mitigates *how* religion matters.

2. Linking Religion, Race, and Abortion Attitudes

Americans are ambivalent about abortion (Cook et al. 1992; Cowan and Hout 2019; Bruce 2020). Theories of abortion attitudes, however, frequently explain not ambivalence but predictability born of coherent and mutually opposed cultural frameworks in which religion is a central player. "The pro-life world view . . . is at the core one that centers around God," writes Luker; "the pro-choice world view is not centered around a Divine Being" (Luker 1984, pp. 186–88). Whether under the guise of "worldviews," "schemas," "symbolic politics," or otherwise, cultural frameworks purport to reveal implicit assumptions regarding the world as it is and should be (Berger 1967; Luker 1984; Sewell 1992; Welch et al. 1995). Frameworks translate personal values into public policy preferences. Cultural conceptions get internalized, protected, and reinforced within similarly oriented networks of people—religious and nonreligious groups among them (Bartkowski et al. 2012; Guenther et al. 2013). Religious engagement lends itself to more conservative viewpoints on abortion, in part by excluding alternatives (Bartkowski et al. 2012; Adamczyk and Valdimarsdottir 2018; Luker 1984). Nonreligious involvement in liberal socio-political organizations may foster more progressive viewpoints on abortion (Scheitle and Corcoran 2020; Manning 2015).

Operationalizing worldviews to assess abortion attitudes for ordinary (i.e., non-activist) Americans, however, is ill-equipped to attend to racially diverse perspectives among (non)religious adherents presumed to share a common worldview. If worldview intervenes between religion and abortion attitudes to make religion's influence more indirect (Emerson 1996), how does this vary by racial subgroup? Worldviews can generate meaningful differences along racial lines (Bartkowski et al. 2012). Qualitative interviewing reveals a complex and even contradictory patchwork of thinking on abortion that runs counter to more coherent arguments articulated by activists (Munson 2018; Bruce 2020). Ordinary Americans hold multiple identities—racial and religious among them—that are not easily consolidated nor measured by mutually exclusive worldviews.

With few exceptions, Americans affiliated with any religious denomination express higher levels of opposition to the legalization of abortion, on average, than those religiously unaffiliated (see Table 1). However, variation therein is wide: Hindu Americans, for example, are more supportive of abortion's legality than Mormons; Catholics are relatively split; Mainline Protestants are more supportive than Evangelical Protestants (Pew Research Center 2015). Abortion attitudes held by members of a faith tradition are frequently inconsistent with vocal leaders representing traditions with which they affiliate (Hoffsmann and Johnson 2005). Across all religious groups, attitudes toward sexual morality and human life correlate closely with abortion attitudes (Jelen 2014).

Table 1. Views on Abortion Legality by Religious Group (Adapted from Pew Research Center 2015).

Religious Tradition	Legal in All/Most Cases	Illegal in All/Most Cases
Jehovah's Witness	18%	75%
Mormon	27%	70%
Evangelical Protestant	33%	63%
Catholic	48%	47%
Orthodox Christian	53%	45%
Historically Black Protestant	52%	42%
Muslim	55%	37%
Mainline Protestant	60%	35%
Hindu	68%	29%
Unaffiliated (religious "nones")	73%	23%
Buddhist	82%	17%
Jewish	83%	15%

Evangelical Protestants hold some of the strongest opposition to abortion (Hoffsmann and Johnson 2005; McTague and Pearson-Merkowitz 2013; Silber Mohamed 2018). The longstanding gap between evangelical and nonevangelical attitudes on this issue has widened in recent decades, garnering attention as a sign of polarization within the social and political worlds of Americans more broadly (Hoffsmann and Johnson 2005; Lewis 2017). A more conservative view on abortion may itself attract some Americans to evangelical churches (Hoffsmann and Johnson 2005). Evangelical differentiation in abortion attitudes holds even among younger Evangelicals, who remain conservative on abortion even while their attitudes on other issues become more liberal (Farrell 2011).

But Evangelicals do not hold homogenous attitudes on social issues (Peifer et al. 2014). Among African Americans, attitudes toward abortion look more similar to Catholics and mainline Protestants than to other Evangelicals (Evans 2002; Steensland et al. 2000). Surveys reveal black Protestants to hold "significantly more liberal attitudes on abortion and sexual morality than evangelical Protestants"—a difference made more transparent upon categorizing black Protestant religious traditions separately to account for race (Steensland et al. 2000). Younger generations of black Protestants show no major shifts in attitudes toward abortion when compared to their older counterparts (Smith and Olson 2013).

Catholics exhibit a high degree of internal variation with regard to attitudes toward abortion, an intragroup polarization that has increased over time (Evans 2002). Divergence among Catholics' attitudes toward abortion lends evidence to the tradition's historic capability to absorb high levels of diversity and dissent (Bruce 2017; Dillon 1999). Highly committed Catholics are more likely to agree with Catholic teaching regarding abortion and say that the Church's opposition to abortion is very important to them personally (D'Antonio et al. 2013). White and Hispanic Catholics hold dissimilar views on abortion (D'Antonio et al. 2013). Catholicism's unidirectional influence on abortion attitudes shows signs of decline amid Catholic pro-choice movements, demographic change, and political leadership amplifying Evangelical voices (Strickler and Danigeli 2002; Lewis 2017; Miller 2014).

Growth in the proportion of religiously unaffiliated Americans—nearing par with that of U.S. Catholics and Evangelicals—compels their inclusion among any assessment of religion on attitudes towards abortion. Compared to the religiously affiliated, unaffiliated Americans exhibit more progressive positions on socio-moral issues, in general (Smith and Olson 2013; Cook et al. 1992; Lim et al. 2010). However, even as the more acutely religiously unaffiliated character of the youngest Americans has liberalized overall attitudes, abortion bucks this trend. Younger religiously unaffiliated Americans are more conservative in their views on abortion than older religiously unaffiliated Americans (Smith and Olson 2013).

Religious (non)affiliation, in other words, insufficiently explains differences in abortion attitudes. Religion's influence is multidimensional, complex, and intertwined with other personal and structural variables (Smith and Olson 2013; Dillon 2014; Bartkowski et al. 2012; Wilde 2018). Within the same religious tradition, Americans who consider religion "important" in their lives are less likely to support abortion's legality than those who say that religion is "not important" to them (Pew Research Center 2015; Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2014). Attendance at religious services increases the likelihood of conservative views toward abortion (Bartkowski et al. 2012). Lay Catholics readily dissent from stances taken by bishops on sexual ethics (D'Antonio et al. 2013; Dillon 2018). Affiliates within the same tradition often distinguish between abortion type and circumstance in evaluating personal positions (Hoffsmann and Johnson 2005).

Attending to racial variation among religious adherents can help to demystify differences in abortion attitudes, while also introducing further contradictions. Scholarship on abortion attitudes and religion too often ignores racial variation entirely, or presumes as normative the experiences of white Americans (Jelen and Wilcox 2003; Yukich and Edgell 2020). This runs counter to a robust literature that makes transparent linkages between race and religion, such as the overwhelmingly—albeit slowly declining—monoracial character of U.S. congregations (Edwards et al. 2013; Chaves and Anderson 2014). Americans who share a religious identity remain unlikely to practice their religion alongside

those who do not also share their racial identity. Religious congregations frequently reinforce racial exclusivity, even when unintentional (Oyakawa 2019).

Quantitative assessments hint at variation in abortion attitudes within and across racial groups linked to religiosity (Combs and Welch 1982; Wilcox 1992; Bolks et al. 2000; Davenport 2018). Black Americans once assessed as less supportive of legal abortion than whites (Combs and Welch 1982; Hall and Feree 1986; Wilcox 1992) were subsequently found more supportive when accounting for church attendance, Biblical literalism, religiosity, and doctrinal orthodoxy (Gay and Lynxwiler 1999; Wilcox 1992). Hispanic Americans exhibit a somewhat higher overall opposition to abortion when compared to white Americans, but are themselves internally varied (Bolks et al. 2000; Holman et al. 2020). Religiously devout Evangelical Protestant Hispanics hold stronger opposition to abortion than religiously devout Hispanic Catholics (Bartkowski et al. 2012). Bartkowski et al. (2012) attribute differences among Hispanics to the influence of evangelical subcultures and dilution of Catholic pro-life messaging, filtered through different levels of worship service attendance. Asian Americans, too, exhibit splits in abortion views not dissimilar from Americans overall, but with marked differences religiously and ethnically (Wu and Ida 2018). Religiosity holds a higher influence on the abortion attitudes of non-Catholic Christian Asian Americans, and is particularly salient for Vietnamese and Filipino Americans who attend church regularly (Wu and Ida 2018). Biracial Americans express more liberal views toward legal abortion than either monoracial black or white Americans, and are significantly less religious Davenport (2016, 2018).

In sum, we are left with a rather contradictory set of findings regarding abortion attitudes: religious explanations that vary upon accounting for race, and racial explanations that vary upon accounting for religion. None fit neatly into conceptions of abortion opinion divided by oppositional worldviews. These complexities and contradictions highlight the need to break down presumptions of coherent religious or secular frameworks predicting abortion attitudes and explore more fully the intersecting influence of race among religious (non)adherents. This requires a "complex religion," approach acknowledging multidimensionality (Wilde and Glassman 2016; Wilde 2018; Wilde 2020). Religion does not stand alone to inform abortion opinion, but in concert with personal and structural variables including race (Dillon 2014). Rather than seeking to pinpoint independent effects, a complex religion approach adapts methodology to recognize that religion does not operate independently (Wilde 2018). Attending to interactions among influences on abortion attitudes sheds light on diversity observed within religious groups rather than treating them as monolithic wholes (Evans 2002; Dillon 2014). Seeing complex religion, in other words, lets us see complex abortion attitudes.

3. Methods

To formulate a new theory on religion and race in Americans' abortion attitudes, I analyze qualitative data from the 2019 National Abortion Attitudes Study (NAAS), the largest known in-depth interview study of "ordinary" Americans' views on abortion. As principle investigator, I led a team of researchers who interviewed 217 American adults residing in six United States locales (California, Colorado, Indiana, Pennsylvania, North Dakota, and Tennessee). After an initial pilot (n = 20), potential interviewees were selected using a two-stage sampling process. First, a letter was sent via post to a random set of mailing addresses within 173 zip code areas. Abortion was not disclosed as the topic during initial outreach. Recipients were invited to complete an online pre-screener requesting birthyear, sex, race, Hispanic origin, marital status, number of children, religious preference, religious service attendance, education, political party, and ideology (as measured by the General Social Survey (GSS) scale of 1 "extremely liberal" to 7 "extremely conservative"). A final question in the pre-screener disclosed abortion as the research topic. Responses (n = 671) were used to construct an interviewee sample approximating diversity across the U.S. population as a whole.

The semi-structured interviews lasted 73 min on average and were conducted in-person, with limited exceptions made for telephone interviews upon request. Most took place in public, semi-private locations such as public libraries; others were conducted at the interviewee's home, workplace,

or another mutually agreeable locale. The interview protocol queried an interviewee's "big picture," personality, and values before moving into a series of semi-structured questions about abortion attitudes (first thoughts; memories; connections to religion, politics, family, and more; views on legality and morality; and issue engagement via media, politics, or movements). The NAAS protocol additionally replicated, verbatim, several questions used by the General Social Survey (GSS) and Gallup to assess abortion attitudes. All NAAS transcripts were systematically coded in Atlas Ti using thematic codes as well as grouped by race, religion, and more.

For the theory-generating purposes of the current paper, I created a 3 × 3 subsample matrix consisting of three ideal–typical Catholic interviewees (one white, one black, and one Hispanic), three ideal–typical Evangelical Protestant interviewees (one white, one black,[1] and one Hispanic), and three ideal–typical interviewees with no religious affiliation (one white, one black, and one Hispanic). Read the opposite direction, the 3 × 3 matrix consists of three white interviewees (one Catholic, one Evangelical, and one unaffiliated), three black interviewees (one Catholic, one Evangelical, and one unaffiliated), and three Hispanic interviewees (one Catholic, one Evangelical, and one unaffiliated). A profile of characteristics for all nine interviewees can be found in Table 2.

This subsample of ideal–typical interviewees was chosen for theoretical reasons to enable in-depth exploration of personal viewpoints, comparisons across religious and racial self-identities, and theoretical discoveries within an underdeveloped area (Swedberg 2018; Weber 2012). I do not control for potential variation in age, class, gender, education, ideology, relationship or parental status, abortion history, region, or other patterns beyond race and religion. No one interviewee (and no one person) represents an entire group—religiously, racially, or otherwise. This analytical technique harnesses the explanatory power of qualitative data to illuminate the "how" and "why" of interactions between race and religion observed in Americans' abortion attitudes, nestled within broader categories and patterns.

[1] Following Steensland et al. (2000), this interviewee is protestant, evangelical or born-again, and African American.

Table 2. Interviewee Subsample Characteristics.

Interviewee	Religion	Race	Religious Attendance	Gender	Legality of Abortion (Gallup)	Morality of Abortion (GSS)	Most "Pro-choice" (1) to Most "Pro-life" (10) Scale (NAAS)
Trent	Catholic	White Non-Hispanic	Weekly	Male	Legal only under certain circumstances	It depends	10
Marcus	Catholic	Black	Several times a year	Male	Legal under any circumstances	It depends	1
Alondra	Catholic	Hispanic	About once a month	Female	Legal only under certain circumstances	Not morally opposed	3
Nancy	Evangelical	White Non-Hispanic	Weekly	Female	Legal only under certain circumstances	Morally opposed	10
Neesha	Evangelical/ Black Protestant	Black	Several times a week	Female	Legal under any circumstances	Morally opposed	4
Marco	Evangelical	Hispanic	Weekly	Male	Legal only under certain circumstances	Morally opposed	10
April	Nonaffiliated	White Non-Hispanic	Never	Female	Legal under any circumstances	Not morally opposed	1
Louis	Nonaffiliated	Black	Never	Male	Legal under any circumstances	Morally opposed	4
Consuelo	Nonaffiliated	Hispanic	Less than once a year	Female	Legal under any circumstances	Not morally opposed	2

4. Findings

Like any random set of nine Americans, the interviewees in this subsample matrix showcase the interplay of personal and cohort experiences, embeddedness in social structures and inequalities, and the tenor of both predictable and unpredictable moments across a lifespan. Three of these nine interviewees disclosed personal abortion experiences themselves; all nine knew someone personally who had had an abortion.

The ways that race operates to inform abortion attitudes among this religiously diverse subsample of nine Americans can be described in terms of *efficacy*, *distancing*, and *reconciling*. All three words signal *processes* in action and interaction more than *outcomes* or fixed attitudes. White interviewees from different (non)religious affiliations engage in *efficacy* by emphasizing felt agency to manipulate structures that enable higher levels of control over abortion decisions and subsequent outcomes. Religiously diverse Hispanic interviewees engage in *distancing* by moving away from highly institutionalized religious schemas in favor of more nimble and voluntaristic religious decision-making. Black interviewees of different (non)religious affiliations engage in *reconciling* by reckoning with religious schemas held in conflict with on-the-ground realities of inequality and inefficacy. The three processes of efficacy, distancing, and reconciling cut across religious perspectives included in this subsample (Catholic, Evangelical/black Protestant, and religiously nonaffiliated).

In what follows, findings are grouped by religious tradition to reveal contrasting processes informing abortion attitudes within shared religious affiliations. A subsequent section revisits the collective characterization of racially diverse interviewees' efficacy, distancing, and reconciling.

4.1. Three Catholic Americans

Our three subsampled Catholic interviewees are Trent, Marcus, and Alondra.[2]

Trent (white, weekly-attending Catholic) is in the "Baby Boomer" generation at 58-years-old and the oldest of four children from a Catholic family raised in a predominantly Catholic neighborhood. His parents were teenagers when they got pregnant unexpectedly with him; his mom dropped out of high school to raise him. Trent says that he is not particularly "outgoing" but has a strong network of friends and considers himself a leader, having commanded multiple sports teams and high-level positions throughout his career. He has a bachelor's degree and considers himself somewhat conservative and an Independent, politically. Though Trent has never married and has no children of his own, he has cared for nieces and nephews we well his ailing parents. Asked what is most important to him, Trent says "my faith, obviously," evidenced by regular Mass attendance. Truthfulness, trustworthiness, and honesty are among Trent's core values, he tells us.

Marcus (black, sporadically-attending Catholic), a 53-year-old Gen Xer, is remarried with two adult children from his first marriage and two younger stepchildren from his second. He grew up in a low-income neighborhood in New Orleans in an actively Catholic family and attended all-boy, predominantly African American Catholic schools. He has an associate's degree, considers himself moderate, and is a Democrat. Marcus describes himself as "fair" and committed to hearing all people's opinions, whether "right, wrong, [or] sideways." He tries to stay positive, take care of his family, and "treat others as I wanna be treated . . . At the end of the day, we all just wanna be treated like human beings—as people, you know? Not numbers, not whatever title we put on each other." Marcus attends Mass several times a year but finds himself "struggling a bit with it, with the faith." He believes in God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, but is concerned about "what our humans have done in the faith" and wonders aloud where the Church is going.

Alondra (Hispanic, semi-frequently-attending Catholic) is a 23-year-old Millennial without children who lives at home with her parents and three siblings. She enjoys seeing concerts and movies

[2] All names are pseudonyms.

in between a full-time job and attending college part-time on the road to her bachelor's degree. Alondra considers herself moderate and identifies with no particular political party. Alongside family, staying "respectful" and being generous are among her core values. She says she wants "to be a good person, you know, in order to live a good life." A lifelong Catholic, Alondra says "I try to go to church every Sunday" but makes it about once a month. She was involved in her parish youth group as a teenager, but does not currently participate in non-Mass activities at her parish.

The way that each of these three Catholics initially responds to the word "abortion" offers a preview of feelings and associations the topic conjures, both personal and political. Trent (white, weekly-attending Catholic) offers a succinct summation resonant with Catholic teaching on abortion when he says that his first thought upon hearing the word is "the willful and intentional termination of human life in the womb." His early memories of exposure to the concept came in the context of Catholic schooling, where "the nuns did not hesitate to discuss [Roe v. Wade] while the Supreme Court was hearing the case." He recalls hearing sermons about abortion from the pulpit and being asked to sign form letters provided by the school and archdiocese to petition local lawmakers. "I was taught we were opponents of abortion." Trent conjectures that his own birth to his 17-year-old mom back in 1960 likely "would have been an abortion" were it to have occurred in today's climate. "I would not exist, very likely, if I were conceived in, let's say, 2010 instead of 1960."

Sharing a Catholic self-identification with Trent, Marcus (black, sporadically-attending Catholic) offers an alternative first reaction to the word abortion: "Old white guys." Asked to elaborate, Marcus says that while he has "a lot of feelings around abortion," issues of race, gender, and class rank high among them:

> What I see in the news and what I see on TV is a lot of old, old white people trying to place their beliefs upon other people. I truly believe that, and I say it directly. It's not my body, I can't tell you what to do with it. I'm a dude. I'm a guy, you know? Well, I have a portion in the conception process, right? I truly believe that a couple, whoever conceives this baby, the man and the woman, they could sit down and have real life discussions. 'Can we afford it? Am I gonna die? You know, what's this gonna look like? What's—how's this gonna be in five, 10, 15, 20 years? What is this gonna look like for all three of us, you know, if we decide to have this child?' And then, if we don't decide, if we say, 'Well, I live in the projects, I don't have a job,' you know, all these different things. 'Am I going to be able to come out of it to help this child?' Okay?

Marcus explains how "some people know that they will be exactly where they will be for the rest of their lives. Good, bad, or otherwise. And so, you have to make, you know—they need to be able to make decisions based on what they have going on and what they think they can do." The prospect of not being able to provide for a child "in a way that's going to be healthy and happy and sustainable" means needing to "figure out what to do." Like Trent, Marcus recalls Roe v. Wade being a "big thing" and hearing about it while attending all-boy Catholic schools, where the sanctity of life was a prominent message. However, Marcus also describes mixed messages from teachers about being "a man growing up in this community," such as "your first responsibility is: don't have sex before marriage. Your second responsibility is: if you choose to do so, make sure that you are taking care of your business and being protected."

Alondra (Hispanic, semi-frequently-attending Catholic) struggles to articulate her initial reactions to the word "abortion," searching for words to convey her feelings. "I mean, taking—I mean—I wouldn't say taking, but, like, I'm trying to think of the word, but I can't. I mean, just—ending a pregnancy. That's what I think of abortion. I think that's the thing, I guess." Her earliest encounters with the concept came when watching a show in which a young Latina has unprotected sex, gets pregnant, and navigates conversations and decisions that eventually lead to an abortion. This sticks with Alondra not only because of the storyline but also because of what she hears about the actress afterward—that the woman's own Catholic faith and disagreement with her character's abortion decision subsequently compelled her to leave acting altogether. Alondra shares that abortion is a topic

she generally avoids, because "I just feel like if I say something, they might end up, like, taking it the wrong way or something."

As a Millennial, Alondra's own associations of Catholicism and abortion come not through lived memories of Roe v. Wade but formal messages from organizers in the pro-life movement. She recalls once receiving a pamphlet on her way out of Mass that contained a footprint pin representing that of a six-week-old baby. Her reaction to it suggests an affirmation of discretion more than a hardline Catholic stance: "When I saw it, I was like—'Oh, like this is—I mean, this is nice to see.' I mean, maybe some people would lean toward [abortion], but, I mean, like, for me, I, like, I lent towards [having the baby], because, personally, I wouldn't have [an abortion]. But I know there's other people who probably would have an abortion."

All three Catholic interviewees distinguish between their personal views and those of the Catholic Church, to varying degrees. Trent continues to agree with the Church's stance against abortion learned in his youth, seeing it as "a type of murder." He evaluates a "pro-choice" label as "blather," "vacuous," and "trivializing human life." When asked where he would put himself on a scale from 1 (most "pro-choice") to 10 (most "pro-life"), Trent quickly chooses "10," almost as a given. However, he openly dissents from Catholic teaching regarding birth control and sex outside the context of marriage, saying that he engages in sex as a single person, himself, and encourages women he is with to use birth control ("I'm thankful for them when they use it. I did not want to have a child out of wedlock").

Marcus talks openly about the conflict he feels between his Catholic faith and views on abortion, something that, for him, circles around issues of family, economics, and philosophies of life. He affirms the view that "life is precious," while at the same time acknowledging challenges in building positive family environments. He speaks fondly of his Dad working to provide for his family and how hard he and his wife have worked to provide for their children such that "they never went through a time where they didn't have a roof over their head, or didn't have food in their mouths, or didn't have clothes on their back." But, Marcus says, "it's hard to do all this stuff":

> I believe life is precious. I do. But I also believe that you have to be able to make that life precious. Life doesn't—isn't just precious all by itself, you know? Just the idea of breathing and waking up each day doesn't make life precious. What makes life precious is what we do with it every day.

Marcus offers the example of situations where children are born from nonconsensual sex or face a lack of family support or financial and mental health resources—conditions where a loving family environment is made difficult. "Not everybody grew up the same way . . . for some people, family means, you know, dad beat them up every day, mom drinking every night, you know—dad beating their mom every day." Having "good" parents is paramount. Unlike Trent, who alludes magnanimously to his own parents who raised him "without anything," Marcus instead talks of mothers who suffer from postpartum depression, poverty, or "daddy is out of the picture." "Raising a child requires not only love, it requires patience, it requires peace, but it also requires the ability to earn income and earn a sustainable income."

All this is what, to Marcus, complicates a "life is precious" Catholic framing in opposition to abortion. Further, Marcus says that the Catholic Church does not do enough to support positive family environments: "After the baby's about six months old, [the Church] start[s] basically pulling themselves away from that situation" rather than assisting with housing, food, and other forms of support. He adds: "I feel like they spend so much time in talking about the abortion piece of it, we don't even talk about what happens after a baby is born, you know?"

Alondra does not name Catholicism as a primary source of authority or morality with regard to her own feelings on abortion, privileging instead the specific person and situation at hand. She regards the Church as a potential support system for those who opt to continue their pregnancies, which is not everyone: "What if someone needs [an abortion] because in case they get pregnant, um, but they can't—how do you say it, they can't support the child they have?" Alondra lauds birth control for

reducing someone's chances of needing an abortion and describes no tension between her religious views and support of contraception.

None of these three Catholic interviewees say that they are "morally opposed" to abortion in all circumstances. Trent (white, weekly-attending Catholic) expresses the strongest moral dissension but leaves still room for exceptions by saying, "It depends." "For someone who is healthy and learns that she is pregnant, you're killing human life. To me, it's morally wrong. I don't decide whether it's legally right or wrong. Again, Roe v. Wade says that it's legal, but a lot of things that are legal are also wrong. Morally wrong, socially wrong." He does not, by contrast, morally oppose abortion if the mother's health is at risk.

Marcus (black, sporadically-attending Catholic) asserts once again how much the individual situation matters to morality, attending to differences in personal circumstance and experience:

> It's not a moral position, because to me, again, I still believe it's a deeply individual thing. For me, you know, it has more to do with how it all came about. . . . For me, it's not right or wrong, it's, you know, it is—it is what happens in real life. But, like I said, I believe in the sanctity of life, but there's also a quality of life. So, if the child is not gonna be brought up in a way that is healthy and loving, then I don't know if there's a point. So that's kind of where—that's why I say 'It depends.'

Marcus presumes that his views are not shared by everyone, because people grow up differently: "Morality is really the personal idea of right and wrong, you know? It's different for everybody, because we all grew up in different ways, you know?"

Alondra (Hispanic, semi-frequently-attending Catholic) indicates that she is not morally opposed to abortion, saying, "I think it's like—to each their own. Like, it all depends like on, how do you say, the situation." She mentions rape as one situation in which abortion would be morally acceptable. Timing in the pregnancy is what evokes moral trouble for Alondra: the later, the more morally unsettling abortion feels. "I mean, it depends, like, how far along someone would be in their pregnancy . . . I don't think they should have the abortion." She says that she does not know where exactly to draw that line during pregnancy, though.

Our three Catholics are also internally varied in their responses to abortion's legality. Trent (white, weekly-attending Catholic) is the most legally restrictive, opposed to abortion's legality except in instances of rape and health risk to the mother. He incorporates critiques of abortion-seekers as "selfish" and "reckless," needing to "accept the consequences" and "make the best of it." Abortion is, to Trent, "trying to rid yourself of a problem which you caused yourself. I don't think it should be legal. I think that's murder." Trent personalizes his legal rationale with repeated reference to his own parents: "I was that child in the womb to two teenagers who didn't have anything." Regarding cases of severe defects, Trent says he has "dozens of friends with children like that"; "They're the best parents." He wishes to use the law to restrict immorality because he dislikes the idea of having to "pay" for someone else's mistake:

> Particularly when they force society, others in society, to pay for that abortion . . . so we have to pay to rid you of a problem which you did yourself, generally? Most of the time it is consensual. You know, maybe it's careless or reckless or bad luck, but even teenagers now know the consequences of such behavior, or the potential consequences of such behavior.

Trent thinks that abortion today comes "on demand" and is troubled by doctors and nurses being "required to perform abortions."

Marcus (black, sporadically-attending Catholic) holds the most legally permissive views of the three Catholics, open to legality under "any" circumstances and for "any" reason, identifying as "pro-choice" and a "1" on the scale of most pro-choice to most pro-life. He reasserts concern for the life a child will encounter following birth: "Every child that's born should be loved and cared for every day," something not all potential parents are prepared to provide. Regarding the use of the law to

guide moral decisions, Marcus says, "it's a personal view," giving examples of sex before marriage and even his son's aversion to wearing shoes. "Doesn't mean it should be illegal, you know?"

Alondra (Hispanic, semi-frequently-attending Catholic) expresses ambivalence regarding the legality of abortion, occasionally even changing her own responses midstream. She identifies as pro-choice, but not completely, putting herself as a "3" on the scale. Alondra's preference to limit abortion's legality to "certain circumstances" stems from her desire to include the husband or boyfriend in the decision, along with her discomfort with later-term abortions. But making abortion illegal will not prevent them, she suspects:

> It's like, you shouldn't—you shouldn't just have an abortion just because you don't like the gender you're having. *[Interviewer: Sure, right. And do you think that should be legal, though? Even if you don' agree with it morally?]* I don't know [laughs]. It's like one of those hard questions. Because, like, even if they do make a law like that, I don't think they'll be able to go through, like . . . .[. . .] . . . Like, even when marijuana was illegal, people were still smoking it [laughs], sort of thing.

Trent, Marcus, and Alondra are three Catholics with three racially diverse perspectives and three divergent attitudes toward abortion.

4.2. Three Evangelical Americans

Our three subsampled Evangelical interviewees are Nancy, Neesha, and Marco.

Nancy (white, weekly-attending Evangelical), 47, is an "empty nester" married for 27 years with two adult children. She has a bachelor's degree and marked "other" as her racial identity in the online prescreener. Asked to clarify in person, Nancy explained, "I know I'm primarily 'Anglo,' if that's what you want to call me . . . I just don't like labels, because I feel like we all—especially in America—are so mixed, and I don't like racial confines; I don't even like the word 'race' . . . I think color of your skin should never enter into a conversation." Nancy also claims "other" when it comes to political party identification but considers herself conservative. She has "a heart for kids and helping"—"I've always been, like, a helper"—something she applies to teach children who face emotional and behavioral issues. Nancy's nondenominational church is a big part of her life: a predominantly white congregation with Baptist roots but no official denominational ties. She was raised in a strict conservative missionary Baptist family and saved at 13, "but there has been a lot of, like, growth areas and realizations since then"—and, though she says that she does "align with Evangelical doctrine," she bristles at the label "Evangelical."

Neesha (black, weekly-attending Evangelical/black Protestant) is a 36-year-old single mom of three young children who aspires to start a business online, because "I'm trying to be rich. I'm going to be rich." In the meantime, she works up to 56 h a week as a store manager and leads worship at her predominantly black nondenominational church. She has a high school diploma, is a Democrat, and identifies as a moderate. Neesha says that her friends would describe her as "silly, outgoing, spontaneous," but that she is also quiet, shy, and humble. She talks about God as "definitely important to me" and wishes for "world peace"—specifically, an end to bullying, which brings her to tears. Like Nancy, Neesha agrees that she belongs within the "Evangelical" category but isn't a huge fan of the word. "People call me that, but the fact that I haven't actually stepped out to do [evangelization] completely . . . ?"

Marco (Hispanic, weekly-attending Evangelical), age 63, was raised Catholic as one of eight siblings but "came to the Lord" several years ago and now identifies as an Evangelical. He marks this as the time he became a Christian, "meaning, I developed a relationship with Jesus, as opposed to just believing in God and the Holy Spirit and the Son of God, and all those kinds of things." He has a high school diploma, identifies as conservative, and is a Republican. Marco is in his second marriage and has no children, describing himself as introverted and "generous with my time." He fishes, hunts, and does not travel much, saying that he is more of a "couch potato" with a close-knit circle of friends.

Marco's church is very important to him and a big part of his weekly routine. He attends Bible studies multiple times a week and maintains a close relationship with his pastor.

First thoughts and early memories conjure politics for two of our three Evangelical interviewees, alongside sensitivity and hesitancy to engage a conversation about abortion. Before Nancy (white, weekly-attending Evangelical) begins her interview, she requests reassurance that the exchange will not become a debate, and that the questions will not be exercised as a tool to judge or convince her to think otherwise. This association carries into the way Nancy describes her initial response to the word "abortion":

> I don't know what comes to mind. I mean, it's kind of a trigger word for a lot of people, but it's not necessarily a trigger for me—but it makes me sad to think about people that are both in that situation or feel like that's their only choice. Yeah.

Nancy says that the topic is both relational and personal to her as the child of a single mother:

> I was raised in a single-mother household and so I'm not immune to the difficulties of those things. I know they are real and they feel very heavy on the people who experience those things. So, I don't have a lack of compassion for them, their situation, choices that they have made to put themselves there or maybe choices that were even made for them. So, I don't have a lack of that empathy, but it's just a sad situation. But we live in a world where there is a lot of sad situations.

She describes having seen "the effects" of what happens when children are not in "a safe and loving environment."

Neesha (black, weekly-attending Evangelical/black Protestant) both internalizes and extinguishes enflamed connotations with the word "abortion." She leads with personal experience when she says:

> I don't know. I guess I kind of have mixed emotions. I guess, especially experiencing it myself, you know? Because before, you know, I was like, oh my God, I would cringe—like, really? Like, I don't even want to *think* about anything like that! Until you're put in a situation, and you're faced with it, and you're like, oh my God, do I do this? I don't know. I really don't know how I feel about it, when I hear it—It's just like, I don't know. For me, it's just like—well, I don't know. It's just a word now.

And for Marco (Hispanic, weekly-attending Evangelical), abortion again intertwines with its political and personal ramifications. He says of his initial associations:

> It means the taking of a life. I think that's kind of my thought from a kind of understanding politically and practically what's happening. ... It's such a political term anymore, that whenever I hear it, I think that there's a politic attached to it. There's a political string attached to it.

Marco holds memories of a poster in his childhood Catholic school showing "the pope actually pointing his finger, saying that abortion is a 'no no'." Abortion evoked "the most horrible picture in my mind," but he was even more shocked to learn about Catholic families who would send their young daughters off to "have this taken care of." About this perceived hypocrisy, Marco says: "It's like, 'Yes, we [Catholics] believe in all this—unless it happens to us, then we are going to move the goalposts; we're going to change the rules to suit ourselves.'"

All three of these Evangelical interviewees name explicitly connections between their attitudes toward abortion and their faith commitments. Nancy evokes language about loving "the least of these" and credits her congregation for being a part of the "solution" to abortion by supporting foster families, adoption, special needs children, and more. She upholds a relationship with God who "wants to walk us through this; He wants to love us."

Neesha likewise shares in a faith perspective that discourages abortion while uplifting individual worth, dignity, and contribution. "You just never know the reason why you got pregnant," she says.

Even when "something wrong happened" like rape, "something right happened" with a pregnancy . . . "you never know why God allows things to happen." At the same time, Neesha struggles to reconcile this view with her feelings regarding a woman who faces such a situation, as Neesha herself has:

> I don't feel like it's right for anybody to force [a woman] to keep her child that she never did anything to bring a baby on in the first place. She didn't choose for that to happen. It chose her. But if she, I mean . . . it depends on the person also. If she feels spiritually, like, well, maybe God did this for a reason, maybe this will help me. Like, the girls that got kidnapped and they were raped over and over and then she had the baby. Well, of course she didn't have a choice but to be there with the baby, feed the baby. She loves the baby. It's her baby, and the baby lives with them now. I mean, she raised the child. That's my child. It came from a horrible situation, but it was a great blessing, also.

Neesha's thinking-out-loud becomes a self-monologue of sorts between her two abortion experiences and her commitment to a faith tradition that views abortion as a sin:

> I feel like what I did was evil . . . I mean, it's killing. "For the ways of sin is death," you know? I mean, to murder somebody, I mean, "Thou shalt not kill," I mean, it's a commandment, you know what I mean? People feel like, well, the baby wasn't even, didn't even come out of you yet. The baby wasn't even breathing. The baby was breathing through me, though. The baby was still connected to me, just like I'm connected to the Father. You may not see that I'm connected to the Father, but I'm still living. He's living through me. You can't see that, but he is. The baby is in me, living through me.

Neesha also juxtaposes the "evil" of killing with "choice" that comes from free will:

> I don't feel like anybody should tell someone what they should do with their body. The consequences that we face, we'll have to deal with it on our own, because that was our choice. If God wants you to handle this, you know, by—I mean, you reap whatever you sow. I definitely reaped mine, and it still hurts to this day, but I have forgiven myself.

She says that her forgiveness is "the most important thing."

Regarding his own faith-informed views on abortion, Marco says that prior to his conversion, he believed that abortion was acceptable for a young unmarried woman who was "not looking to get married, but her career, her education, all those things are in play." But, coming to the Lord meant "changing" and "softening" Marco's heart. He relayed a conversation with a friend in which he summarized a biblical stance on abortion:

> [My friend] said, "So where does it say about abortion in the bible?" I said, well, it talks about killing. And we're not supposed to do that. So, in my view, if I were to say, you know, that abortion is killing, then that's biblical. We're not supposed to do that.

Marco adds that "I have to believe in things of the Bible," including "how much we're supposed to love one another." He contrasts abortion with issues like taxes, marijuana, or liquor licenses, because abortion is "more of a spiritual problem . . . it's something more to my heart, because of my faith."

An unsurprising outgrowth of religious connections informing these three Evangelicals' attitudes toward abortion, they share the highest level of agreement when asked directly about the morality of abortion. Replicating the GSS (2018) question "Leaving aside whether or not you think abortion should be legal, are you morally opposed to abortion or not or would you say it depends," all three Evangelicals say that they are morally opposed.

Nancy (white, weekly-attending Evangelical) describes abortion on the whole as an "escape from reality" and wishes that she had had more confidence at age 19 to share her moral opposition with a best friend who sought an abortion at the time. Neesha (black, weekly-attending Evangelical/black Protestant) shares her moral opposition as a critique of others making bad choices, even if they are

legal: "Morally, I'm just, 'No.'" Marco (Hispanic, weekly-attending Evangelical) explains his moral opposition as an extension of his view that humans do not have the authority to take a life, denying a child's potential contributions. He would "like to see more people turn to the Lord" and gain "that ability to see that, yeah, [abortion]'s wrong."

These three Evangelicals also share restrictive views on abortion's legality, though not completely. Nancy supports using the law to regulate abortion access, but recognizes its limits to guide moral decisions—to her, this goes more to personal beliefs. "You either have the belief system or you don't have the belief system. I mean, it's just like drugs. Drugs are illegal. They are still going to happen if people don't have it in their morals not to do it." At the same time, Nancy fears that making abortion legal will increase its use. "With the availability of that to people in the community, if it has [increased the number of abortions], we have to ask ourselves, are we helping anything? Or are we creating a new problem?"

Both Nancy and Marco (Hispanic, weekly-attending Evangelical) say that abortion should be legal "only under certain circumstances," identify as "pro-life" and a "10" on the pro-choice to pro-life scale, and say "no" to legal access to abortion in nearly all of the GSS scenarios. The one scenario that gives both Nancy and Marco pause is that of risk to the mother's health: Marco says "yes" to legal access in this circumstance; Nancy says "I don't know." Health contingencies for the mother push both of these Evangelicals away from responding "illegal in all circumstances," albeit reluctantly so. Nancy, for example, pushes out of focus these kinds of challenging scenarios when she says "healthy pregnancies, healthy children: that would be a starting point." Marco says that "As much as I want to say 'never' . . . in this case, I don't think it can be absolute [illegality] because of medical problems, medical concerns." He leans on the expertise of medical authority rather than the autonomy of the pregnant woman, however, saying, "that decision for medical reasons has to be considered and weighed by a medical person who genuinely has all the facts and is willing to share all the facts with the person, the woman in that case, of course, for medical reasons."

Beyond this health risk, both Nancy and Marco wish to disallow legal abortion. Marco critiques "convenience"-based abortion decisions and valorizes children with disabilities as holding "real value" and, when surrounded by support and love and understanding, "overcoming those things." He considers abortion in the case of rape a form of "vengeance" against an "innocent" baby. "Why do you blame that child?" Marco asks, drawing the metaphor of a living seed that is planted, germinates, and sprouts. Nancy likewise references relationships she has fostered with persons who have special needs ("I see the value of those people").

By contrast, Neesha (black, weekly-attending Evangelical/black Protestant) talks about not restricting legal access to abortion despite her moral opposition to it. She considers herself both "pro-choice" and "pro-life" and evokes a rationale similar to what we heard from Marcus (black, sporadically-attending Catholic):

> For me, [abortion]'s immoral, I wouldn't do it. But would I make it illegal? Probably not, because that's what I feel in the world, do you know what I mean? Other people might be like, 'No, it's my body. I choose to do it. I want to do it. I don't think anything's wrong with it.' [*Interviewer: Why not?*] Oh, man, because everybody is raised differently. Everybody comes from different backgrounds, everybody comes from different religions, and just—people just don't think the same. Everybody's mindset, also, is different. Some people's mindset is up here, where they don't allow any negativity to get to them. Anything that anybody has to say that's going to go against what they believe, because they have a strong mind. I'm like, 'no.' The other people's mindset, 'you should have an abortion,' 'you shouldn't have this baby,' 'you have so much to live for,' 'you have a full scholarship' and 'dah, dah, dah.' And it's like, okay, you're right, blah, blah, blah. And then they go through with it. As opposed to—I have friends who have had kids while they were in high school, and they have college degrees. They have got homes, they have nice cars, they're married. It just depends on the person.

Different backgrounds generate different moral stances, to Neesha, and the law necessarily accommodates this. For this reason, she prefers to see abortion "legal under any circumstances" and says "yes" to a question replicated from the GSS about whether or not it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if the woman wants it "for any reason." She explains her reasoning as valuing "free will" and abortion being "her damn choice."

At the same time, Neesha responds "no" on the legality of abortion if a woman is married and does not want any more children, has a low income, or is single and does not want to marry the man, all of which she finds troubling. These reasons are "silly" or "selfish," because "the Bible says multiply and be fruitful. Get over it." About legality in instances of a severe defect in the baby, Neesha says "I don't know" and adds, while tearing up, "It's discrimination. It is a prejudice against a kid because of a deformity. They're still people."

Nancy, Neesha, and Marco are three Evangelicals with three racially diverse perspectives and three similar but divergent attitudes toward abortion.

4.3. Three Religiously Nonaffiliated Americans

Lastly, our three subsampled interviewees with no particular religious affiliation are April, Louis, and Consuelo.

Wearing a "Love the Abandoned, Respect the Mistreated" baseball cap on the day of her interview, 32-year-old April (white, never-attending nonaffiliated) is a married mom of two, the oldest of whom came from an unexpected pregnancy a few months after April met her now-husband ("Yeah; it was pretty crazy . . . and wasn't a great situation. His parents were not thrilled about it"). She describes herself as sarcastic, funny, and loyal. April is an "extremely liberal" Democrat with an associate's degree. Religion is not a big part of her life, nor was it in childhood, when her family went to church only on Christmas. "We didn't practice it. We didn't pray. We didn't do anything with that." Today, April considers herself "closer to being an atheist than anything" and exposes her own children to information so that they "can make a decision for themselves" about religion.

Louis (black, never-attending nonaffiliated), 67 and "in pretty good shape for an old man," is retired, single, and Dad to two adult children. He has a high school diploma and considers himself a moderate and Independent. Having served in Vietnam, Louis describes his personality as "up and down . . . if you rub me the wrong way, you catch a bad break." He says he is less reactive than he was as a young person and now tries to "stay away from a lot of drama and stuff like that." Louis finds it most important to "uplift other people when you can." He was not raised in a particularly religious household and dislikes organized religion, having "been through" Christianity and Islam at different points in his life. "It wasn't for me." Louis does say that he is spiritual, though, incorporating meditation and belief in nature.

Lastly, Consuelo (Hispanic, rarely-attending nonaffiliated) is a 58-year-old first-generation immigrant from Columbia whose family migrated to the U.S. when she was young. Consuelo admits being unsure what to mark as her racial identity when she completes surveys because she feels neither black nor white. She recently concluded that "I must be black, because I'm different as far as your average light-skinned person in Columbia"; nonetheless, "putting down African American still doesn't feel right" and she would prefer a "brown" category. Consuelo has a Master's degree, is a Democrat, and identifies as moderate. She is a divorced mom and shares, with a laugh, that she has more pet peeves than core values—but perhaps "peace, love, and kindness" would sum them up. Although Consuelo's family of origin was Catholic, they did not practice the faith nor teach it to her or her siblings. "I read lots of children's bible stories—that was how I first learned about religion as an adult." She belonged to a Protestant church for a while as an adult, but left after experiencing offensive treatment following a family trauma. Consuelo believes in "a higher being, but I don't know if it's God."

These three religiously nonaffiliated interviewees offer a loose array of initial associations with the word "abortion." For April (white, never-attending nonaffiliated), the word "abortion" is immediately

personal: "I had one. So, that's what comes to mind." She shares her story of being on birth control while married but getting pregnant anyway. "We just financially knew that we couldn't handle it . . . we were going through a bit of a rough patch in our marriage, as well . . . .We just were not prepared, and I just felt like we wouldn't be able to give that child, or our existing children, a good life if we did that." She cannot recall exactly when or how she first learned about abortion in her youth.

Louis (black, never-attending nonaffiliated) says right away that he "doesn't like the word [abortion]; I don't like what it represents," clarifying that the fate of a pregnancy resulting from rape is "up to her"; otherwise, "I don't really like part of it." Louis summarizes his views upfront when he says that, "[Women] are doing what they think is best for them. How can I tell somebody what to do with their body? It's their body. [. . .] That's on them. Whatever decision they make, they have to pay for. That is the way I look at it." Asked about early memories hearing about abortion, Louis recalls how "they used to call [abortion] the 'coat hanger thing'"; "The girl around the corner . . . if she was pregnant, she went down South to have a baby down there."

Consuelo (Hispanic, rarely-attending nonaffiliated) evokes talk of choice and bodily autonomy when first hearing the word "abortion." She relays that it conjures "The freedom of choice, and the ability of a woman to make decisions about her life and her body . . . . I see that as the definition rather than the ending of a fetus, or the termination of a life. I see the definition as more to do with the woman than the fetus." Consuelo discloses a personal experience with abortion, as well, and says that early encounters with the idea came through casual conversation rather than any formal instruction.

Religion operates more as a foil than as motivation for the abortion viewpoints of interviewees with no formal religious affiliation. "I'm just so anti-religion," April says, refuting any links between religion and her feelings about abortion. Louis does not connect his views to religion, either, but observes that "the whole issue is a spiritual thing . . . You are dealing with a baby coming into the world. You had the power. You have, like, a God-given power, you know, you can bring that person in or you can just eliminate them. That's the spiritual aspect of it." Reflecting upon how her own core values of "peace, love, and kindness" connect to her abortion views, Consuelo pauses and giggles while responding, "I would say that I still hold that as a core value, but [it] makes you kinda think."

These three religiously nonaffiliated interviewees also offer a mix of responses as to abortion's morality. Louis (black, never-attending nonaffiliated) is morally opposed, though he clarifies in the same breath that "that's not on me what a woman does with her body. She gets a choice to do whatever she wants to do with her body. That's not my baby. I have no connection there. And it's on her." He names slavery as an example of something that was immoral but still legal:

> It's just like slavery back in the day. That was straight legal. But it wasn't right. That whole issue was morally wrong but with the laws, they made it legal. A lot of laws now, they make it legal, but it's not morally right.

April (white, never-attending nonaffiliated) and Consuelo (Hispanic, rarely-attending nonaffiliated) are not morally opposed to abortion. Consuelo emphasizes bodily autonomy: "Because it's her body, and I think she should have the freedom to make choices for her own body. And not just the immediate nine months, but what happens after." She contrasts the birth of her son with a pregnancy she aborted years prior, saying that she felt very "maternal" with the latter but not with the former, given how early in the pregnancy she sought the abortion. Consuelo does not narrate her own abortion decision as immoral or regretful.

Our three subsampled religious "nones" offer the greatest consistency with regard to views on the legality of abortion, at least on paper. Responding to a standardized question regarding legality, all three interviewees say "legal under any circumstances." Consuelo references her personal gratitude for abortion's legality, thankful "that I had a safe place to go, and a choice that I was able to make without it being illegal. Without there being any consequences of me potentially being imprisoned over my actions . . . .I think women who have to make that choice now are—or should be grateful that they live in a country where there's good medical facilities, and still in a country where it is not illegal,

and where they have the right and the choice." Louis says similarly, "She shouldn't have to go to, like, the coat hanger."

April (white, never-attending nonaffiliated) likewise expresses gratitude for legal access to abortion, and downplays the rights a husband might have in an abortion decision. "I don't really think marriage should have anything to do with it, to be honest. I mean, I don't really know why that would play such a role in it, it's still, whether or not you're married . . . you're married, you're not married; who cares [laughs]?" For her, this was personal: "I mean, I was married. We weren't ready."

Louis complicates his otherwise legally permissive stance toward abortion when he says that abortion should not be legal when there is a "strong chance of serious defect in the baby" or when a woman "is married and does not want any more children" (GSS). His opposition echoes eugenics and references a troubling movie about "designer" babies: "I mean, you shouldn't have an abortion because of defects. Most of us are a defect." In cases where a woman does not want more children, it is Louis' consideration for the father that sways his response, particularly if the conceiving partners are married:

> Like I said, that is her choice. But it would be the husband's choice, too . . . . They would have to agree on that. If the husband and wife agree on that, she couldn't do nothing sneaking and have an abortion. And he doesn't know nothing about it and finds out like years later—"say what?" So, then they would have to move forward or not go forward. They would have to talk.

When the woman is unmarried, by contrast, Louis says that abortion should be legal: "He is not planning on marrying her to help take care of the baby. That is going to drag her down." Louis criticizes both women and men for not "think[ing] things out"—including the superior option of adoption. "The baby could be alive. I would give them that option. I would tell them that." He also critiques male politicians who make abortion laws while acting as if "they know what is best for the woman, when they don't."

About his complex and at times contradictory views on abortion, Louis says, "Even though I would make it legal, I would still have my moral issues about it." Consuelo (Hispanic, rarely-attending nonaffiliated) also separates her legal opinions from her moral ones when she says, "No, not all reasons are justified, but it's not the government's business. It's not my business. It's not anyone's business, but her business." The government's role, Consuelo says, is "to enact laws that help make society functional" but "stay out of my freedoms."

April (white, never-attending nonaffiliated) is fairly apathetic to questions linking morality and legality, because she cannot help but equate "morality" with "religion." "That's what I'm trying to, like, work through in my head right now, because I'm not a religious person. I don't think the two necessarily go hand-in-hand. I think you can raise your kids with good morals, and religion doesn't have to play a part at all. So, but yeah, since I'm not, for some reason, I'm, in my head, I'm still putting the two together, like, religion and morality, and I don't know why. But, yeah, since I'm not religious at all, I just, I can't. I don't have a lot on that." At the same time, April references situations she finds troubling—for example, "I can't say I would agree with, like, if a woman was just out there 'slutting it up' [laughs] and was just getting pregnant, you know, and she's not on birth control and just doesn't do anything about it. And she just keeps having abortion after abortion, that's a little ridiculous [laughs]." But "Ultimately, I think it's the woman's choice."

All three of our subsampled religiously nonaffiliated interviewees adopt the label "pro-choice." Their responses to the 1 ("most pro-choice") to 10 ("most pro-life") scale vary, however: Louis (black, never-attending nonaffiliated) is a "4," Consuelo (Hispanic, rarely-attending nonaffiliated) a "2," and April (white, never-attending nonaffiliated) a "1."

5. Efficacy, Distancing, and Reconciling

Resonant with prior studies, religion's effect on abortion attitudes is clear: religiously affiliated interviewees in our subsample exhibit more conservative overall views toward abortion's morality and legality than religiously unaffiliated interviewees. Evangelical/black Protestant interviewees express more conservative views than Catholic interviewees, whose views are more conservative than nonaffiliated interviewees. Religion coheres through common lexicons and reference points for articulating moral views, particularly when compared with nonreligious interviewees who draw upon different cultural repositories and use religion as a foil.

The entanglement of religion and politics emerges as a backdrop for interviewees' abortion understandings, particularly for Evangelicals. Evangelical interviewees' explicit allusions to politics (e.g., abortion as a "trigger" and "political string") and relative deftness in communicating nuanced views signal effective mobilization around abortion as central to an Evangelical political agenda (Lewis 2017). Catholic interviewees' comparatively diffused messaging on abortion signals a post-secular turn in Catholicism, marked by nonassenting lay adherents (Dillon 2018).

But findings also reveal religion's impact as complex, complicating abortion opinion through race. Social location and positionality—in which race is central, particularly in the United States—contours how different Americans draw upon religious or secular repositories and translate them into private and public life (Yukich and Edgell 2020). For our white, Hispanic, and black American interviewees, I name this active work of translation *efficacy*, *distancing*, and *reconciling*, respectively.

Efficacy, observed within the responses of religiously diverse white interviewees, refers to the presumption of agency and greater control over outcomes within religious and other institutional fields. Efficacy marks a sense of empowerment that accompanies access to opportunities, resources, and personal discretion. *Distancing*, observed among our religiously diverse Hispanic interviewees, refers to intentional movements away from normed, expected, or long-held cultural views and practices in ways that make room for higher levels of autonomy. Distancing emerges vis-a-vis institutional fields and traditions where agency is otherwise experienced as limited—specifically Catholicism, given its dominance among Hispanic Americans. Movement from Catholicism can be experienced as "costly" for Hispanics, creating "religious distance" from family, friends, and neighbors (Bartkowski et al. 2012, p. 348). Lastly, *reconciling*, observed within responses from religiously diverse black interviewees, names inequality and actively navigates felt clashes between dominant belief structures and lived and learned experiences on-the-ground as black Americans within the unequal social milieu of the United States. Reconciling allows for discretion and interpretation linked to individual circumstances.

We can see *efficacy* in the way that Trent (white, weekly-attending Catholic), for example, articulated his sense of agency and control over positive post-pregnancy outcomes such as that his mother who birthed him at age 17. Trent upholds her example as a way to say of others' "reckless [sexual] behavior" that "you must accept the consequences," superimposing his experience of efficacy on to others. At the same time, Trent subverts religious tenets that would reduce agency over his own sexuality, such as Catholic stances regarding birth control and sex outside the context of marriage. Trent sets the terms of Catholicism's applicability to him. Similarly, Nancy (white, weekly-attending Evangelical) describes her privileged networks to advance alternatives to abortion via paid and volunteer work as well as through her congregation. She evokes religion as a viable means to exert agency over pregnancy outcomes, even amid "sad" circumstances. Nancy's experience as the child of a single mother solidifies her efficacious sensibility ("Where would I be if I didn't get brought into the world?" she asks). Her vision of efficacy imputes circumstances as controllable and disparities as resolvable (or invisible, by not "seeing" race) through the distribution of resources presumed to be equally available to all Americans. April (white, never-attending nonaffiliated) exercises efficacy by challenging the very need for religion in conversations about abortion, emphasizing her agency over the basic moral terms of deliberation. Religion works as an available resource but not an inhibiting one: April controls when and whether to engage moral or "religious" thinking to understand abortion. The story of her personal

experience of abortion within the context of marriage illustrates, for her, felt agency to set the trajectory of abortion decisions and positive long-term outcomes.

We can observe *distancing* in responses from our Hispanic interviewees (one Catholic, one Evangelical, and one nonreligious), intertwined with childhood Catholic affiliations. Alondra (Hispanic, semi-frequently-attending Catholic) describes her relatively weak socialization into formal Catholic teaching on abortion. She retains her Catholic identity, but has moved away from weekly Mass attendance and parish involvement as well as the wholesale agreement with Catholic stances on abortion. Alondra's positionality as a young Latina generates heightened distance from the institutionalized anti-abortion Catholic messages internalized and communicated by older Catholics, including Trent and Marcus. Her distancing embodies the broader dilution of a contemporary Catholic antiabortion stance among young Hispanic Catholics (Bartkowski et al. 2012).

Marco (Hispanic, weekly-attending Evangelical) also exhibits distancing via strong opposition to abortion acquired during his movement to evangelicalism from the Catholicism of his youth. He distances himself from what he now identifies as hypocrisy in Catholicism, leaning into his newer evangelical faith commitments as a means of justifying a strict stance against the legality and morality of abortion. While still Catholic, Marco likewise distanced himself from formal positions of the Church on abortion; now, as an Evangelical, his views look more similar to formal Catholic ones but his justifications are more distanced from Catholic sources. Marco describes his anti-abortion position as born not of socialization into Catholicism, but re-socialization into his current evangelical religious affiliation. Consuelo (Hispanic, rarely-attending nonaffiliated), too, distances herself from the already distanced Catholicism of her youth, who never received a formal introduction to Catholic teachings. Her distancing was exacerbated upon experiencing discomfort and rejection within faith communities joined as an adult. Religion (and morality) are no longer readily transparent connections to Consuelo's personal views on abortion. She describes neither religious tenets nor government laws as meriting any role in personal abortion decisions.

Finally, we see in responses from our black interviewees a process of *reconciling*. Marcus (black, sporadically-attending Catholic) holds simultaneously—uncomfortably, even—the teachings of his faith and the perspectives he has gleaned through personal experiences as a black American. Unlike the anticipation of control (efficacy) introduced through felt agency, access to available resources, and evidence of long-term positive outcomes, Marcus instead identifies contradictions in the lived application of Catholic teachings that don't—or cannot, in practice—actualize their promises. He shares sentiments of internal conflict on abortion stances alongside cultural work to reconcile Catholic positions with lived contra-experiences. Neesha (black, weekly-attending Evangelical/black Protestant) likewise points out contradictions between her available religious repertoire and personal, lived experiences. She talks through a seeming lack of correspondence between beliefs and behavior in ways not dissimilar to how poor women interviewed in *Promises I Can Keep* describe abortion as a tragedy more than an empowered personal choice (Edin and Kefalas 2011). Neesha changes her mind and, on paper, confounds standardized measures of abortion attitudes—reconciling, in real-time, the importance she places on both religion and "free will."

Louis (black, never-attending nonaffiliated) does not convey the same moral permissibility and high levels of support for legal abortion that our other two religiously nonaffiliated interviewees do. He instead works to reconcile his personal disapproval of abortion with his awareness of what harm is experienced when access is denied or when the law is leveraged to restrict personal freedoms. Louis' reconciling does not happen within a formal religious repertoire, but a nonreligious one: he frames moral arguments on abortion as stemming from proper conceptions of gender, relationships, and government in regulating personal boundaries.

The efficacy observed among whites in different religious traditions denotes felt agency born of privilege. Efficacy filters religion through comparative racial advantage, elevating perceptions of agency to exert control over abortion outcomes. Consequently, racial privilege, for white Americans, amplifies the impact of religion on abortion attitudes. Differently allocated resources and practical

inconsistencies lead to unrealized efficacy among both black and Hispanic Americans, by contrast, distinguishing the ways that religion impacts their abortion attitudes.

Distancing among Hispanics showcases a sense of in-betweenness in both religious and racial identities. Hispanic interviewees arduously make room for increased agency vis a vis formal religion through processes of distancing from seemingly intransigent yet weakening institutional norms, Catholicism in particular.

The reconciling observed among black Americans necessarily contends with the occurrence of racism, harm, and *in*efficacy that renders abortion absolutes less tenable. Moral positioning emerges amid a complex negotiation with realities on-the-ground. Religion's impact on abortion opinion is, for black Americans, dampened by the realities of racial disadvantage. This finding helps to explain seemingly contradictory trendlines observed in black Americans' abortion attitudes over time and portends future volatility contextualized by Americans' ongoing reckoning with racial injustice.

Efficacy, distancing, and reconciling do not predict single views on abortion. They describe instead modes of intersectional thinking. Interviewees mix, synthesize, and reject personal and political stances at the nexus of (non)religious and racial vantage points. Racial privilege can intensify the impact of religion on abortion attitudes; racial disadvantage can dampen it. Seeing up close the divergent ways that this happens within shared affiliations showcases (non)religion as not merely a coherent schema or "worldview," but as a complex, negotiated repertoire for ordinary people who occupy different social locations.

The abortion attitudes of Trent, Marcus, Alondra, Nancy, Neesha, Marco, April, Louis, and Consuelo cannot stand in for those of all American Catholics, Evangelicals, or religiously unaffiliated, nor for all whites, blacks, and Hispanics. They reveal, nonetheless, processes that complicate extant summaries of religious and racial influence on abortion attitudes. Their perspectives invite fuller consideration of the efficacy, distancing, and reconciling that occurs among all subsets of Americans who share a religious affiliation.

6. Conclusions

This article introduced three processes by which white, Hispanic, and black Americans from Catholic, Evangelical, and nonreligious affiliations come to think and feel differently about abortion. Hearing intimately from a cross-section of religiously and racially diverse Americans solidifies the relevance of religion for abortion views and—more importantly—the imperative to explore how religion matters differently to different Americans. Prior research hints at variation in abortion attitudes along both racial and religious lines but says little about how the two work in interaction, or with depth beyond isolated measures of abortion opinion.

Here, religion's impact on abortion attitudes is revealed as complex: its effect on attitudes strong, but mediated through race. Efficacy, distancing, and reconciling signal active and interactive processes, not fixed or finished outcomes. Religious and racial vantage points mesh, clash, and contradict when shaping Americans' attitudes toward abortion. Seeing complex religion reveals active interpretation more than predictable schema. Qualitative evidence uncovers multilayered thinking on abortion that helps to explain contradictions and inconsistencies observed in surveys. Pairing qualitative and quantitative evidence begins to flesh out complex religion's influence on abortion opinion and how variables including race intervene.

This article is limited by its intentionally narrowly focus on nine Americans. No one interviewee represents a religious or racial group any more than one statistic captures all views on abortion. Observing these three processes within this group of interviewees, moreover, does not preclude the possibility that other groups of Americans also enact efficacy, distancing, and reconciling. Further exploration could authenticate the relevance of these modes of thinking to how religiosity shapes attitudes on many social issues. Future research could also consider the confounding influence of age, gender, ideology, abortion experience, and more.

Efficacy, distancing, and reconciling illuminate ways that white, Hispanic, and black Americans from Catholic, Evangelical, and nonreligious affiliations variously sort through their attitudes toward abortion personally, morally, and legally. These conclusions challenge homogenous depictions of views shared by "Evangelicals," "Catholics," or the "religiously nonaffiliated" without regard to complex religion and the realities of race. Complex religion offers an inroad to understand dissimilar attitudes toward abortion and other contested social issues.

Finally, attending to complexity in abortion attitudes via in-depth, qualitative exploration may help to humanize a realm of American culture often assessed as fraught, polarized, stigmatized, and depersonalized. Understanding how real people discern personal and political viewpoints through shared meaning systems and different social locations lends insight into Americans' enduring ambivalence toward abortion.

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