

**Polarization and Compromise: A Value Approach to the
Understanding of Mass Political Attitudes on Abortion**

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This research attempts to explain the sources of abortion attitudes among individuals. The proposed model moves beyond a single value-attitude formulation to a consideration of the interrelationship among core values. The result of holding equally strong and conflicted values relevant to the issue is a decrease in the strength with which abortion attitudes are held. Support for the theoretical framework comes from a survey (N=437). The results indicate that the various components of attitude strength appear to be sufficiently independent dimensions of involvement with the abortion issue, and conflict between relevant core values is associated with a decrease in attitude strength for most of the attitude strength measures.

During the past two decades abortion, one of the most controversial issues of our time, has received increasing scholarly attention. Inquiries have focused on the intricate web of abortion politics on the state and federal level (e.g., Halva - Neubauer, 1991; Woliver, 1991), on the impact of the abortion issue in national (e.g., Granberg and Burlison, 1983) and state elections (e.g., Dodson and Burnbauer, 1990), as well as on the potential of the abortion issue to mobilize a single issue public (e.g., Conover and Gray, 1983). Less context-bound analyses have examined the vocabulary and the values that come to bear in the highly-charged abortion debate (e.g., Luker, 1984, 1985). These analyses reveal that abortion is one of the most value-laden issues in contemporary American politics.

In line with this research, this paper deals with the value basis of abortion attitudes, the potential for fundamental values to come into conflict, and the impact of individual value configurations on the strength of abortion attitudes.

I begin by outlining the relationship between values, value conflict, and public opinion and by specifying the opposing world views which influence abortion attitudes. I, then, describe the impact of value

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conflict on the strength with which abortion attitudes are held that is the focus of subsequent empirical analysis. The analysis reveals that the experience of conflicting values diminishes the strength of abortion attitudes. I conclude by attempting to integrate these findings into the broader context of abortion politics.

Values, Value Conflict and Abortion Attitudes

In trying to explain the intellectual and emotional civil war which is fought over the abortion issue, core beliefs which influence abortion attitudes have to be taken into account (e.g., Tribe, 1990; Scott, 1989; Luker, 1984, 1985; Falik, 1983; Tatalovich and Daynes, 1981). Advocates of choice believe that abortion is a fundamental right. For the pro-life movement, on the other hand, abortion is equivalent to murder (Luker, 1984, 1985). Between these two positions there is little room for agreement -- and, in fact, the dialogue between the pro-choice and the pro-life movements is almost nonexistent (Dionne, 1990).¹ Luker's interviews with abortion activists clearly suggest that abortion attitudes are merely "the tip of the iceberg" (1984, 158) and are a reflection of a set of underlying values.

Despite the marked influence of normative values on abortion attitudes, empirical research has not put its primary emphasis on the value structure underlying abortion attitudes.² A few studies investigate the impact of core values, most notably religiosity and sexual morality on abortion attitudes (e.g., Harris and Mills, 1985; Sears and Huddy, 1988,

¹ There have been attempts to establish a dialogue between the pro-life and the pro-choice movement. For instance, Common Ground, a national movement consisting of pro-choice and pro-life leaders seeks to reframe the issue in a mutually acceptable way. While advocacy groups of either side are less receptive to the idea of compromise, dialogue exist between individuals who actually deal with women facing unwanted pregnancies, those who run abortion clinics or provide homes for pregnant women. Ginsburg (1989) who describes the grass-roots conflict about a Fargo, North Dakota, abortion clinic also notes that activists on both sides acknowledged their interest in helping women with unplanned pregnancies.

² There are noteworthy exceptions. Kristin Luker's (1984) research on abortion activists has produced suggestive, rich data about the clash of fundamental values that come to bear in the abortion debate. However, her insights are based on in-depth interviewing techniques and do not allow to test for particular hypotheses. Her respondents are California abortion activists. They neither represent the population of activists, nor the population at large.

Jelen, 1988; Johnson, Tamney and Burton, 1989). Yet, most of the research on the abortion issue focuses on sociodemographic and attitudinal determinants of abortion attitudes.

The importance of normative values as determinants of abortion attitudes becomes apparent if we consider that, unlike attitudes, values are stable and enduring, and often serve as the basis for attitude judgments (Katz, Wackenhut and Hass, 1986; Rokeach, 1973, Kluckhohn, 1965; Allport, 1954). Rokeach for instance, defines the value concept as an "enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end state of existence" (Rokeach, 5).

Such a reasoning is in accord with a long tradition of scholarship in American politics and public opinion that has attributed much of the distinctive character of American politics to basic values (e.g., Hofstadter, 1972; Hartz, 1955; de Toqueville, 1955). Unfortunately, this tradition had surprisingly little impact on empirical studies of political attitudes and behavior. As a result, the impact of normative values on political attitudes has not yet developed into a major research paradigm (for an exception, see Feldman, 1988, 1983).

Values have been, at least partially, ignored in studies of public opinion for two reasons. First, unlike attitudes, values have been the subject of relatively little systematic assessment in psychological and political research due to operational problems in the measurement of the highly elusive value concept (Levitin, 1973). More importantly, the functional interconnections between values, attitudes on a particular issue, and behavior are complex (McGuire, 1969, 1985) and cannot be understood by relying on the simplistic assumption that there is a one-to-one relationship between values and attitudes. In order to understand the functional interconnections between values related to the abortion issue and mass attitudes on abortion, an exact specification of the value-attitude relationship is required.

As journalist Dionne (1991) argues, many Americans are unwilling to express their preferences in "either/or" terms, but endorse both sides of the issue. The public resists simple 'yes' or 'no' answers to certain policy choices and refuses to accept one value paradigm over the other. Instead, it has a more nuanced view about the issue at stake.

Exactly this kind of reasoning about the public's sensitivity toward complex issues of public policy is the core element of Tetlock's (1984, 1986) "value pluralism" argument. Tetlock's position emphasizes that the

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effect of values on attitudes cannot be described by a simple one-to-one relationship. Any issue can activate a multitude of values, or in other words, a single attitude is determined by one's whole system of attitude-relevant values. Thus, policy preferences often embody clashes of abstract values in concrete form (Tetlock, 1986). As a result, arriving at an attitudinal position on any complex issue is inherently difficult because values themselves are very often in conflict. This holds especially if the issue at stake is a difficult one to straddle or to compromise.

Values, World Views, and Abortion Policy

Despite the fact that arguments for or against abortion are often stated in simple moral terms, there is more at stake than the controversy over fetal rights versus personal freedom. A comparison of the different reasons for the public's opposition to abortion, e.g. rape or incest versus consensual sexual behavior of a teenager, suggests that the marginals for opposition and support differ sharply. While forty percent of the public opposes abortion for teenage pregnancies, opposition shrinks to 17 percent if the pregnancy occurred because of rape or incest (Tribe, 1990). This asymmetric pattern shows that attitudes of abortion opponents are based on more than the mere desire to protect the sanctity of life. In fact, the abortion dispute involves a whole array of broad values concerning sexual morality (McCutcheon, 1987; Granberg, 1982), the role of men and women in the American society (Sears and Huddy, 1988), and broad life-style questions involving social and moral traditionalism (Luker, 1984, 1985). Aversion to abortion rights seems to reflect a "deeply held sexual morality, in which pregnancy and childbirth are seen as punishment that women in particular must endure for engaging in consensual sex" (Tribe 1990: 234). Additionally, religious variables are among the most prominent predictors of abortion attitudes (Sears and Huddy, 1988; Harris and Mills, 1985; Barnartt and Harris, 1982). The impact of religious variables can be further qualified by distinguishing between fundamentalist and nonfundamentalist denominations. Catholics and fundamentalist Protestants are least likely to give support to legalized abortions (Johnson, Tamney, and Burton, 1990; Blake and Del Pinal, 1979).

The investigation of values' direct influence on abortion attitudes is a necessary but not sufficient criterion to understand abortion attitudes and their potential to generate political action. A complex attitude object such as abortion can activate several and sometimes competing values

within a personal value system that can serve as standards in evaluating the attitude object. One person, for instance, may subscribe to religious beliefs and, at the same time, favor gender equality in all aspects of life. Therefore, abortion attitudes, are not only a function of pro-life and pro-choice values, but rather are based on a tug-of-war among multiple values.

Consequences of Value Conflict: Value Structure and Attitudinal Strength

In order to draw inferences about mass political attitudes on abortion the consequences of value conflict must be stipulated. The central hypothesis to be tested is that the experience of value conflict decreases the strength with which attitudes on abortion are held.

Assessing the strength of abortion attitudes is important because attitude strength moderates the attitude-behavior relationship (e.g., Raden, 1985; Schuman and Presser, 1981; Schwartz, 1978; Petersen and Dutton, 1975; Sample and Warland, 1973) and is a diagnostic criterion differentiating attitudes from non-attitudes (see also Converse, 1970; Abelson, 1988; Krosnick 1988).³ Past research differentiating between firmly held or strong attitudes and merely superficial expressions of an attitude has produced a rather heterogeneous and eclectic list of strength - related attitude properties. This list includes concepts such as intensity (Suchman, 1950), direct experience (e.g., Regan and Fazio, 1977; Fazio and Zanna, 1981), certainty (Suchman, 1950; Sample and Warland, 1973), importance (Krosnick, 1988, 1989), vested interest (Sivacek and Crano, 1982), crystallization (Schwartz, 1978), and memory accessibility (e.g. Fazio, Powell, and Herr, 1983).

³ Although it is common wisdom that attitudinal responses, simply operationalized in terms of responses to some object along bipolar evaluative dimensions are frequently poor predictors of behavior (McGuire, 1985, 1969), the attitude strength concept has not been widely incorporated into political science and public opinion research. Some noteworthy exceptions should be mentioned. Dahl (1956), for example, emphasizes the importance of estimating intensities in order to predict the stability of a democracy and the acceptance of a majority rule principle. The strength concept has been also utilized by Schuman and Presser (1981) and Krosnick (1988, 1989) to describe patterns of public opinions and to enhance behavioral prediction of attitudinal positions.

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In contrast to past research which conceptualized attitude strength as being unidimensional, this research develops a multidimensional attitude strength concept. Such an assumption is warranted because previous unidimensional conceptualizations do not account for the fact that individuals not only vary in the level of strength attached to an attitude, but also in the way they are involved with an attitude object (Abelson, 1988; Raden, 1985).

Multidimensional conceptualizations of attitude strength are considered by Converse (1970) and Abelson (1988). Converse and Abelson define their strength related constructs "centrality" and "conviction" as a collection of qualitatively different connections between a person and an issue. Converse, for example, defines centrality as having the two facets of motivational and cognitive centrality. Motivational centrality "has to do with the degree to which the object gears into the primary goal or need structures of the individual." Cognitive centrality, on the other hand, refers to the sheer amount of thinking devoted to the attitude object (1970, 181).

In addition to these two dimensions, there are more distinct ways in which an attitude can be related to an individual's self-concept (Johnson and Eagly, 1989). First, attitudes can be related to an individual's self concept if the issue is of personal importance or associated with one's self interest (e.g., Sivacek and Crano, 1982). The second involves the self-presentational consequence of holding a certain attitude. In other words, attitudes are strong if the individual is concerned about expressing an opinion that is socially acceptable to potential evaluators (e.g., Johnson and Eagly, 1989; Leippe and Elkin, 1987). This dimension will be referred to hereafter as impression-relevant involvement. Additionally, an attitude can be related to an individual's self-concept by perceiving the attitude as important in leading to or blocking the attainment of personal values. Value-relevant involvement increases the more an attitude is perceived to be related to one's cherished values (e.g., Sherif and Cantril, 1947; Ostrom and Brock, 1968). Lastly, my conceptualization of attitude strength includes a stability component. The underlying assumption is that strong attitudes are stable over time (Schuman and Presser, 1981).

These six components -- thinking about the issue, relating the issue to one's primary goal and need structures, having a vested interest in the issue, perceiving it as relevant to important others and perceiving the issue to be related to one's values, over an extended period of time -- capture the different psychological aspects of attitude strength.

Summary of Hypotheses

This research proposes that abortion attitudes are influenced by underlying core values. Yet, unlike prior research, the proposed model moves beyond a single value-attitude formulation to a consideration of the interrelationships among core values. It is argued that normative values can come easily into conflict. Holding conflicted values relevant to abortion is expected to diminish the strength of attitudes toward abortion. Attitude strength is a crucial component in this process because it moderates the attitude behavior relationship. This research relies on a conceptual definition of attitude strength which encompasses multiple dimensions. Such a conceptualization has the advantage of taking into account that there are different ways in which an individual can be psychologically involved with an issue. The proposed dimensions include cognitive and motivational involvement, vested interest in the issue, impression-relevant involvement, value-relevant involvement, and attitude stability.

Attitude strength is largely a function of the underlying value structure and the degree of inter-value conflict is assumed to influence the multiple components of attitude strength.

Methods and Results

In order to investigate the relationship between core values and attitude strength a survey was conducted to examine attitudes toward the abortion issue, the strength of these attitudes, and individual value structures. Four hundred and thirty-seven Stony Brook students from various political science undergraduate classes completed the abortion survey between February and August 1991 in partial fulfillment of class requirements. From an external validity point of view, subjects did not qualify as either a probability sample or were representative of any larger, national population. However, it is argued that the use of college students does not represent a threat to the internal validity of this study. Although students' experiences can differ systematically from the population at large (Sears, 1986), basic cognitive processes are not different from an adult population. Although it is possible that a student population is more interested and active in abortion politics, this particular sample of students

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includes only an insignificant minority of abortion activists.⁴ Thus, the study does provide an internally valid means through which the basic hypotheses about the relationship between value conflict and attitude strength can be tested.

The completion of the survey took approximately twenty to thirty minutes. The sample was approximately evenly split according to gender, and the average age of the survey respondent was 21 years.

Description of Key Measures

Attitudes toward abortion were assessed in two ways. First, a battery of standard abortion items was included, asking respondents whether they think abortions should be possible for a variety of reasons ranging from a serious threat to the mother's life to a woman's desire to end a pregnancy for any reason⁵. This variable will be referred to as abortion constraints hereafter. Additionally, attitudes toward abortion were measured by placing the issue into the policy domain of state regulation of abortion. Respondents were asked to indicate their support or opposition toward state laws (1) requiring parental consent for teenagers under 18, (2) prohibiting public spending on all abortions, (3) prohibiting public spending on abortions except to save a woman's life, (4) proscribing abortions in public facilities with the exception of a threat to the mother's health, and (5) prohibiting public employees from performing, assisting or advising

⁴ This information comes from a follow-up study which was conducted eight to ten weeks after completion of the initial survey. More than two-thirds of the original sample (299 students) was reinterviewed in order to assess the stability of students' abortion attitudes. Students were also asked to indicate any direct behavioral involvement they had with the abortion issue. Only six respondents indicated that they donated money to an organization whose major concern is abortion. Three of those also participated in a rally, and two wrote to a newspaper about the issue.

⁵ Abortion attitudes were measured by relying on a seven-item scale. These items are similar to the series of standard abortion items utilized by the General Social Survey. The scale assesses attitudes toward legalized abortions for the following reasons: (1) If the woman's health is endangered by the pregnancy, (2) if there is a strong chance of serious defect in the baby, (3) if the pregnancy occurred because of rape or incest, (4) if the woman is married and does not want any more children, (5) if the family has a low income and cannot afford any more children, (6) if the woman is unmarried and does not want to marry the man, and (7) if the woman desires to terminate the pregnancy for any reason. The scale was constructed by summing up affirmative responses to all seven items.

about abortions. The five state regulation of abortion items form a reliable scale, with Cronbach's alpha exceeding a .82 level. Not surprisingly for a Northern student population, 47.5% of the student sample supported abortion rights for all the specified circumstances, including abortion if desired by the woman for any reason. Support for legalized abortion seems to be somewhat less if the issue is put in the domain of state regulation than if the issue is portrayed as one of a woman's choice. The majority (58.8%) opposes or strongly opposes state regulation of abortion. Yet, most of the respondents preferred the "oppose" over the "strongly oppose" option.

The specific abortion-relevant values assessed in this survey -- the desirability of free choice, gender roles, gender equality, moral freedom, moral traditionalism, sexual morality, religiosity, and religious fundamentalism -- were measured by relying on multiple item scales. Moral traditionalism was measured by relying on a modified moral traditionalism measure first developed in Conover and Feldman (1986). This scale focuses on preferences for older and more traditional family values. Moral freedom, on the other hand, aims at assessing the extent to which individuals and not society can determine moral standards. The items used to construct this scale, the traditional gender role scale, as well as the religious fundamentalism items were drawn from Feldman (1989). Items assessing gender equality were drawn from Sears and Huddy (1988). The four sexual morality scale items are similar to those used in the General Social Survey. Religiosity was assessed by using standard National Election Study items measuring respondents' religiosity, strength of religious affiliation, and frequency of church or synagogue attendance. Some guidance for the construction of the items measuring the desirability of free and independent choice was provided by the 'Philosophy of Human Nature Scale' developed by Wrightsman (1973). Most of the items thought to measure specific values form reliable scales. Reliability coefficients are adequately high, with Cronbach's alpha exceeding a .7 or .8 level for most of the scales.

Attitude strength was measured by greatly expanding upon a list of attitude strength items proposed by Abelson (1988). As explained earlier, this study relies on a multidimensional conceptualization of attitude strength. Therefore the survey questionnaire included items measuring cognitive involvement, motivational involvement with the abortion issue, impression-relevant involvement, value-relevant involvement, vested

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interest in the issue, and attitude stability.⁶ This new conceptualization of attitude strength greatly improves upon earlier attitude strength measures in two respects. First, single dimensions are assessed by relying on multiple item scales. Second, multidimensionality of the concept is taken into account.

The Multidimensionality of Attitude Strength

Before the relationship between value structure and the strength of abortion attitudes can be explored, the assumption that attitude strength encompasses different dimensions requires further empirical refinement. In order to test the hypothesis that attitude strength is a multidimensional construct, the attitude strength items intercorrelations were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis. The resulting five factor solution corresponds closely to prior theorizing about the multiple dimensions of attitude strength.⁷ Table 1 displays the five factor solution of the attitude strength items.

As can be seen, the items thought to assess cognitive involvement with the issue load on a first factor, the motivational involvement variables load on a second factor. A closer look at the items scoring on the second factor suggests that the term "motivational involvement" may be misleading. Items such as "I think my views about abortion are absolutely correct", or "I cannot imagine ever changing my mind about the abortion issue" express an individual's perception that his or her attitude on abortion is correct and incontestable. Thus, these items are more adequately described by the term certainty than by the term motivational involvement.

⁶ All together, 25 attitude strength items were assessed (see Appendix A for the wording of the items). All items came after the attitude directionality questions, but preceded all the questions on individual value preferences. Since several items are intended to assess similar constructs, great care was taken to disperse these items across all attitude strength measures.

⁷ Since a scree test did not provide an unambiguous answer as to how many major common factors ought to be extracted, a four, five, and six factor solution was tried. The criteria used for evaluating the resulting factor solutions was to find the most parsimonious solution, i.e., the smallest number of factors it takes to reproduce the correlation matrix, that is equally satisfying from a theoretical point of view. Only the five factor solution was satisfying on the second criteria.

TABLE 1

Factor Analysis of all Attitude Strength Items (Principal Axis Factoring with oblique rotation)⁸

	Factor 1 Cognitive Involvement	Factor 2 Certainty	Factor 3 Vested Interest	Factor 4 Value Attitude Consistency	Factor 5 Attitude Stability
DISCUSSION ⁹	.83				
DISC./FRIENDS&FA	.81				
THINKING	.72		.57	.43	
IMPORTANCE/ FRIENDS	.63				
FEELING STRONGLY	.57	.43	.53	.56	.40
ATTENDING	.50				
KNOWLEDGE	.48		.43		
IMP./FAMILY	.45				
CONNECTED	.45				
NEGATIVE	.40				
CORRECTNESS		.69		.44	
MIND		.68		.41	
HARD		.66			
SURE		.65			
EXPLAIN		.53			.48
WRONG		.44			

⁸ Factor Loadings < .40 were omitted

⁹ For the exact wording of the attitude strength items, please refer to the list in Appendix A.

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Table 1 - continued

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
PERSONAL			.88		
EASY			.73		
LAW			.73		
IMPORTANT	.53		.72	.51	
DIRECT			.55		
MORAL				.69	
BELIEF				.56	
VALUES				.56	
STRONGER		.41		.50	
NO CHANGE		.43			.69
LONG			.46		.61
DISAPPOINTED				.40	
SIMILAR				.37	

The term 'motivational involvement' will be substituted by the term 'certainty' hereafter.

The self-interest items load clearly on a third factor. Factor four closely represents the self-perceived value attitude consistency of one's abortion attitudes, and the fifth factor resembles the stability and length of holding one's attitude. While these distinct dimensions correspond to prior theorizing, the social identification items do not represent a singular dimension. In fact, most of the items assessing the frequency and importance of abortion discussions within the close circle of friends and family score with the cognitive involvement items. Nevertheless, if it is taken into account that the frequency with which friends and family members discuss the issue may represent an indicator of one's own interest in the issue, this does not come as a surprise.

Overall, however, the rather crystalline results of the exploratory factor model are close to theoretical expectations and indicate that attitude strength is not one master dimension but rather a multidimensional concept. Thus, this investigation adds empirical support to prior theorizing about the multidimensionality of attitude strength (e.g., Abelson, 1988; Raden, 1988; Converse, 1970).

The results also provide a guideline for the construction of the attitude strength scales. Cronbach's alpha for unweighted and congeneric measures provides a conservative estimate of a measure's reliability. It exceeds a .8 level for the measure of cognitive involvement (Factor 1) and vested interest in the issue (Factor 3). Cronbach's alpha for the certainty scale (Factor 2) is .79; it amounts to .70 for the self-perceived stability of one's abortion attitudes (Factor 5), and to .65 for the dimension of value-relevant involvement. Not surprisingly, the measures of attitude strength are somewhat correlated and this was taken into account in the factor analysis that utilized oblique rotation. While the correlations between most of the measures do not exceed a .3 level, the correlation between perceived self-interest and cognitive involvement is rather high ($r=.51$, $p<.01$). However, since the two scales represent theoretically distinct constructs, they remained separate.

The Value-Attitude Relationship

In line with Rokeach's argument (1968, 1973) that stable and enduring values serve as the basis for people's attitude judgments, the value-attitude relationship was tested by a series of bivariate correlations. As expected, fundamental values are strongly related to both dependent variables - the abortion constraints, as well as the state regulation of abortion dependent variables.

More specifically, the correlation between religious fundamentalism and abortion constraints amounts to .523 ($p<.01$). Correlation coefficients are somewhat lower for religiosity ($r=.415$, $p<.01$), sexual morality ($r=.437$, $p<.01$), moral traditionalism ($r=.416$, $p<.01$), moral freedom ($r=.395$, $p<.01$), gender roles ($r=.337$, $p<.01$), choice ($r=.259$, $p<.01$), and gender equality ($r=.247$, $p<.01$). These fundamental values do not only influence abortion attitudes when the issue is framed in a rather general way, but are of equal importance when abortion becomes translated into an active public policy issue concerned with the rights of the state to restrict public funding of abortion and to limit the access to abortion in various ways. Zero-order correlations between fundamental values and attitudes toward state regulation of abortion amount to .23 for the choice items, .412 for sexual morality, .260 for gender roles, .501 for moral freedom, .309 for religiosity, .228 for gender equality, .47 for religious fundamentalism, and .46 for moral traditionalism. All these correlations are significant at $p<.01$. The impact of one value on the

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dependent variables, if all the other values are controlled for can be seen in Table 2.

Subscribing to value positions that endorse the pro-choice side of the abortion issue results in abortion attitudes that favor legalized abortion and oppose state regulation of abortion. The eight values explain a significant share of the variance, 33.6% for the abortion constraints variable, 32% for the state regulation of abortion dependent variable. All of the values, with the exception of moral traditionalism and gender equality, are highly significant and contribute to explaining the abortion constraints variable. Since these two values are highly correlated with all the others, the rather low beta coefficients may be caused by multicollinearity.

Consequences of Value Conflict

As outlined above, the assumption of a one-to-one relationship between values and attitudinal measures is overly simple because the presence of value conflict is not taken into account. This study operationalized value conflict as the product of two standardized value scores.¹⁰ Specifically, the original value scores were recoded so that the first value supporting a pro-choice position received the highest negative score, the pro-life position received the highest positive score. The second value was reverse coded, i.e., the pro-life position was assigned a negative score, the pro-choice position a positive score, respectively. Thus, the highest level of conflict that can be experienced -- cherishing one value that endorses a pro-choice position, and a second that inhibits exactly this position, coincides with the highest score on the newly created value conflict scale.¹¹

¹⁰ Operationalizing value conflict by using a multiplicative technique is superior to an operational measure which relies on an additive approach. Products are more influenced by the extremity of the scores than sums and create a more appropriate functional form with accelerating curvilinear relationships.

¹¹ This coding procedure can be exemplified by using, for example, the value pair gender roles and sexual morality. The gender role scale was recoded so that a negative score of -3 corresponds to a strong endorsement of equal gender roles, a value of +3, on the other hand, represents strong opposition to equal gender roles. Reversely, the sexual morality scale was recoded so that a value of -3 signifies a strong endorsement of a traditional sexual morality, and a value of +3 stands for opposition to a conservative sexual morality. Hence, the highest amount of conflict that can be experienced, e.g., favoring equal gender roles but at the same time supporting traditional sexual values, or vice versa, results in a score of 9.

TABLE 2

Value Determinants of Abortion Constraints and State Regulation of Abortion Attitudes ¹²

	DEPENDENT VARIABLE	
	Abortion Constraints	State Regulation of Abortion
Individual Choice	.299(.098)**	.056(.031)+
Sexual Morality	.426(.127)***	.074(.077)n.s.
Gender Roles	.256(.108)*	.051(.031)n.s.
Moral Freedom	.269(.118)*	.140(.036)***
Religiosity	.313(.150)*	.064(.055)n.s.
Gender Equality	.166(.114)n.s.	.030(.035)n.s.
Moral Traditionalism	.020(.124)n.s.	.076(.04)+
Rel. Fundamentalism	.496(.132)***	.122(.04)**
Constant	5.082(.289)***	1.530(.286)***
R ²	.336	.32

Note: (***) p < .001, (**) p < .01, (*) p < .05, (+) p < .1. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients.

¹² Standard errors are expressed in parentheses.

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In order to test the hypothesis of conflicting values and their impact on the different components of attitude strength, pairs of conflicting core values, as well as the value conflict measure, were regressed separately on the five attitude strength measures. In line with the theoretical framework, the mere direction of a value measure should not be related to the strength of abortion attitudes. That is, strongly favoring a traditional sexual morality or strongly opposing this value should have similar effects on attitude strength. Accordingly, the absolute scores of the standardized value measures were utilized. These scores reflect the degree to which one cherishes or opposes certain values and are independent of the directionality of one's value position.

The survey considered the values of individual choice, sexual morality, gender roles, moral freedom, religiosity, gender equality, moral traditionalism, and religious fundamentalism. Thus, there are 56 possible value pairings. Yet, specific value pairings have to make sense theoretically, and the single values also have to be strongly related to the abortion issue in a statistical sense. As displayed in Table 2, the values of gender equality and moral traditionalism were not significantly related to the abortion constraint variable. Some of the strongest predictors of abortion attitudes were the values of gender roles, religious fundamentalism, moral freedom, and sexual morality. Thus, the following analyses will be based on the value pairs of fundamentalism - gender roles, gender roles - moral freedom, and sexual morality - gender roles. These value pairs consist of values that are strongly related to the issue. Further, they represent the clashes of absolute values that characterize the abortion debate. The value of gender roles is included in all three value pairings because beliefs about the proper roles in life for men and women transcend the abortion debate in all its facets.¹³ The results of the regression equations can be seen in Table 3.

The results indicate support for the hypothesis specifying the value conflict - attitude strength relationship. For the value pair gender roles and

¹³ Cross tabulations between these conflicting values reveal that 25.1 percent of the sample can be described as conflicted on the value pair gender roles - fundamentalism. 24.6 percent of the sample falls into the category of conflicted subjects for the value pair gender roles - moral freedom. 21.3 percent have conflicting views on the value pair gender roles - sexual morality.

TABLE 3

Regressions: The Impact of Values and Value Conflict on Multiple Measures of Attitude Strength

MEASURES OF ATTITUDE STRENGTH				
CONFLICTING VALUE PAIR	cognitive involvement	certainty	self- interest	stability measure
GENDER ROLES vs. FUNDAMENTALISM				
Role	.004 (.07)	.025 (.06)	.142 (.08)	.05 (.07)
Fundamen- talism	.083 (.05)	.143 (.05)**	.147 (.056)**	.062 (.05)
Value Conflict	-.151 (.033)***	-.067 (.03)**	-.164 (.035)***	-.15 (.03)***
Constant	-.064 (.09)	-.195 (.08)*	-.28 (.09)**	-.15 (.09)
R ²	.10	.06	.12	.08

Note: Each column represents a separate regression equation. The entries are standardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. *p < .1, **p < .05, ***p < .01

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TABLE 3 - continued

CONFLICTING VALUE PAIR	cognitive involvement	certainty	self- interest	stability measure
GENDER ROLES				
vs.				
MORAL FREEDOM				
Role	-.07 (.06)	-.016 (.06)	.06 (.07)	-.025 (.07)
Moral Freedom	.08 (.065)	.09 (.06)	.096 (.07)	.05 (.06)
Value Conflict	-.132 (.043)**	-.071 (.04)*	-.133 (.04)**	-.072 (.046)*
Constant	.007 (.09)	-.078 (.08)	-.138 (.09)	-.022 (.09)
R ²	.07	.03	.05	.02

Note: Each column represents a separate regression equation. The entries are standardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. *p < .1. **p < .05, ***p < .01

Table 3 - continued

CONFLICTING VALUE PAIR	cognitive involvement	certainty	self- interest	stability measure
SEXUAL MORALITY vs. GENDER ROLES				
Sexual Morality	.08 (.06)	.05 (.05)	.02 (.07)	.03 (.06)
Gender Roles	.05 (.07)	.16 (.06)**	.12 (.07)	.13 (.07)
Value Conflict	-.14 (.036)***	-.11 (.032)***	-.13 (.03)***	-.13 (.036)***
Constant	-.08 (.09)	-.19 (.08)**	-.11 (.10)	-.15 (.09)
R ²	.08	.065	.055	.06

Note: Each column represents a separate regression equation. The entries are standardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. *p < .1, **p < .05, ***p < .01

religious fundamentalism the regression results are clear and in line with prior expectations. The value conflict coefficients are significant for all strength measures but the value-attitude consistency dimension. The value conflict coefficients are negative, indicating that conflict between the respective values results in a significant decrease in attitude strength. An increase in value conflict results in a decrease in cognitive involvement with the attitude and it diminishes the certainty with which abortion attitudes are held. Value conflict has similar effects on the measure of perceived self-interest and on self-reported attitude stability.

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The dynamics of these relationships can be exemplified by using the following three hypothetical cases. An individual who experiences extreme conflict, e.g., he or she subscribes to religious fundamentalism and at the same time favors equal gender roles, or vice versa, of course, serves as the extreme case of value conflict.¹⁴ A respondent opposing religious fundamentalism and at the same time endorsing equal gender roles exemplifies the extreme case of a compatible value structure.¹⁵ Respondents choosing the mean of the respective scales serve as a comparative baseline. For the first hypothetical case of extreme conflict between the two core values of fundamentalism and gender roles, a cognitive involvement score of -1.2 is obtained, for the case of no conflict a score of .33 can be calculated. These two hypothetical scores can be compared to a baseline, i.e., the mean response on both value scales, of -.064. Albeit hypothetical, these numbers demonstrate the dynamics of value conflict.

Similar results were obtained for the other two value pairs. For the value pairs of gender roles and moral freedom, as well as sexual morality and gender roles, value conflict has similar consequences on the attitude strength measures of cognitive involvement, certainty, vested interest, and self-perceived attitude stability.¹⁶

¹⁴ The purpose of using this rather extreme case is only illustrative. A cross-tabulation of the two value measures reveals that only 20 out of 437 respondents can be characterized as experiencing extreme value conflict. However, if less stringent criteria are used 109 cases can be characterized as experiencing value conflict. These 109 respondents score high or moderately high on a pro-choice value, and, at the same time, subscribe to a contradictory pro-life value.

¹⁵ Similar to the extreme case of conflicting values, only 51 respondents display a completely hierarchical value structure, i.e., they strongly endorse equal gender roles and strongly oppose religious fundamentalism, or vice versa. However, if we use a less stringent mode of categorization, 199 respondents can be characterized as holding compatible values.

¹⁶ R^2 for all the regression equations is rather low. However, as noted by King (1990), model performance and the value of R^2 are independent questions. Quite likely, the low R^2 can be attributed to measurement error in the dependent variable. As long as the error term is not correlated with any of the independent variables, the theoretical significance of the model is not endangered.

In sum, the regression results provide strong support for the hypothesis of conflicting values. Predicted results were obtained for all three value pairs investigated and for four out of five attitude strength measures. Thus, value conflict matters; experiencing the "tug-of-war" among contradictory core values results in a decrease in the strength with which attitudes are held.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results reaffirm the importance of values as determinants of public attitudes. Values such as gender roles, sexual morality, and religious fundamentalism undoubtedly shape abortion attitudes. More importantly, the results demonstrate that a one-to-one relationship between values and attitudes is too simplistic an assumption. Instead, the role of value conflict has to be taken into account. In contrast to abortion attitudes held by pro-life and pro-choice activists, mass political attitudes on abortion are better described by relying on a model of conflicting values. As shown, the experience of value conflict results in a decrease in the strength with which abortion attitudes are held.

The value conflict - attitude strength relationship has been demonstrated to hold for four out of the five strength dimensions investigated. Specifically, value conflict resulted in a decrease in cognitive involvement, certainty about one's position on the issue, self-interest, and self-perceived attitude stability. The hypothesized relationship between value conflict and attitude strength, however, did not hold for the dimension of value-relevant involvement. One likely explanation for the failure of this measure is that the items assessing the construct are not adequately reliable. Assessing the relatedness of one's values to one's attitudes is a rather complex task requiring knowledge about the importance of personal values, as well as information about the extent to which the values in question achieve or block one's position on a certain issue.

Overall, however, the obtained results reaffirm the notion that basic values cherished by the mass public do not always fit together into neat and coherent packages. Values are not necessarily ordered into a hierarchically organized system, but they can be contradictory, and still be valued at the same time.

It should be emphasized again that the proposed value conflict - attitude strength model can only be applied to people in the "middle ground", not to activists. Obviously, in order for the value conflict -

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attitude strength relationship to hold, a certain amount of value conflict has to be experienced. While this is the case for many citizens, activists on either side of the issue hold consistent pro-life or pro-choice positions which are based on opposing and mutually exclusive values (Luker, 1884; Granberg, 1982).

This implies that the mass public does not always share the choices offered by a small and rather extreme set of abortion activists which differ drastically in their basic frameworks, value hierarchies, and in the vocabulary they use to discuss the issue (Fried, 1988). Instead, the electorate seems to subscribe to a more complex view on the issue which is based on equally important values that can come easily into conflict. As shown, the result of endorsing equally important and conflicting values is a decrease in the strength with which abortion attitudes are held.

These findings about the relationship between value conflict and attitude strength have important implications as far as the strategies and the success of pro-life and pro-choice groups are concerned.

Although recent Supreme Court decisions such as Webster (1989) and Casey (1992) did not make abortion illegal, they gave way to further state restrictions on legal abortion. Thus, recent Supreme Court decisions constituted a backlash to the struggle of the pro-choice movement. However, the pro-choice position still attracts more supporters than the idea of outlawing abortion under all circumstances. Yet, the dilemma faced by the pro-choice movement is that public sentiments toward abortion are often based on conflicting values. As demonstrated, the experience of the tug-of-war of opposing values decreases the strength with which abortion attitudes are held, and, in turn, diminishes the potential for these attitudes to translate into politically relevant behavior.

Ironically, the pro-life movement may face the same dilemma. While the partial victory of the pro-life movement illustrates the success of an intense minority (see also Scott and Schuman, 1988; Mansbridge, 1986), the mass public, even those who take a pro-life position, shares many values with their ostensible opponents (see also Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox, 1992).

Which activist group will be more likely to involve more and more individuals by making the issue more visible? Although pro-life and pro-choice arguments may seem to be diametrically opposite, pro-choice supporters do not reverse religious and moral arguments put forward by pro-life activists (Scott, 1989, Luker, 1984). In other words, pro-choice proponents do not argue that abortion is good and desirable, but assert that

women should have the right to choose whether or not to have access to safe and legal abortions. By continuing to portray abortion as a matter of choice and by emphasizing public health concerns, pro-choice activists will continue to be able to appeal to the "middle-of-the-road" person who favors access to safe abortions. In other words, citizens who experience value conflict may feel more comfortable with pro-choice than pro-life arguments. An examination of the value structure underlying abortion attitudes suggests that the pro-life movement - because of the absolute values it appeals to - cannot easily mobilize citizens who hold ambivalent attitudes on this issue. The pro-choice movement, on the other hand, seems to be in a better position to accommodate those members of the mass public who cherish conflicting values. Nevertheless, numbers do not necessarily reflect the success or failure of a movement. The attempt to ban legal abortion has remained a lively issue because its "advocates feel so passionately about it, while many opponents are ambivalent" (Mansbridge, 1986: 34).

In summary, this micro-level analysis indicates that abortion attitudes reflect normative values and beliefs which can come into conflict. However, the success of pro-life or pro-choice positions will not only depend on the distribution and strength of public opinion, but also on the actions of courts and legislatures.

APPENDIX A: EXACT QUESTION WORDING

DISCUSSION: "How often do you discuss the abortion issue with your friends or your family?"

DISC/FRIENDS&FA: "How often do your closest friends and your family members discuss the abortion issue?"

THINKING: "I think very often about the issue."

IMPORTANCE/FRIENDS: "How important is the abortion issue to your closest friends."

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Appendix A - continued

FEELING STRONGLY: " I feel strongly about the abortion issue."

ATTENDING: "How much attention do you pay to newspaper and television reports about the abortion issue."

KNOWLEDGE: "I consider myself more knowledgeable about the abortion issue than the average person."

IMP./FAMILY: "How important is the abortion issue to your family?"

CONNECTED: "Several issues could come up in a conversation about the abortion issue."

NEGATIVE: "Have other people ever reacted negatively to your views on abortion?"

CORRECTNESS: "I think my views about abortion are absolutely correct."

MIND: "I cannot imagine ever changing my mind about the abortion issue."

HARD: "Overall, how hard was it for you to answer the questions on abortion."

SURE: "Overall, how sure or certain are you of your answers?"

EXPLAIN: "It is rather easy to explain my views on the abortion issue to other people."

WRONG: "People whose opinions about the abortion issue are different from mine are wrong or badly informed."

PERSONAL: "I think that the abortion issue affects me personally."

EASY: "It is very easy for me to think about ways the abortion issue might affect me personally."

Appendix A - continued

LAW: "A state or federal law restricting legalized abortion would affect me personally."

IMPORTANT: "The abortion issue is extremely important to me."

DIRECT: "My views on abortion are based on the issue directly affecting me."

MORAL: "My beliefs about the abortion issue are based on my moral sense of how things should be."

BELIEF: "My attitudes on abortion are based on my general beliefs about what is good and bad in the world."

VALUES: "My opinions on abortion are related to my personal values."

STRONGER: "My views on abortion have gotten stronger over the years."

NO CHANGE: "My views about abortion have not changed during the last years."

LONG: "I've held my views about abortion for a long time."

DISAPPOINTED: "Would any of your friends or family members be disappointed if you changed your views about abortion?"

SIMILAR: "My views on abortion are similar to the opinions of people I care about."

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