

Catholic Attitudes towards Condoms and Sex Education

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Catholic Attitudes Towards Condom Availability in Public Schools

Recent events have catapulted the Catholic Church's position against the use of contraceptives to the forefront of public discussion. It started with the health care mandate under the Affordable Care Act which requires employers to provide contraceptives to their employees. The Catholic Church immediately objected to this requirement as it would force Catholic organizations like hospitals and universities to provide contraceptives to their employees. With over forty Catholic bishops currently suing the Obama Administration, this issue will most likely be resolved by the Supreme Court. While the hierarchy of the Catholic Church is uniform in its views on the use of contraceptives, Catholics in the United States vary in every single category. They come from all races and from all social classes. Do Catholics have more negative attitudes towards making condoms more available in public schools? More importantly, they have varying views on contraceptives like birth control and condoms.

Literature Review

Since it is the attitudes of Catholics that is being studied, it becomes necessary to review the Catholic Church's official position on the use of condoms and other contraceptives. The Catholic Church believes that sexual acts must meet two criteria to not be sinful. The sexual act must be aimed "to procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others."(Catholic Church 2332). In other words, sexual acts must be for the purpose of bonding two individuals together and with the possibility of conception. "By safeguarding both these essential aspects, the unitive and the procreative, the conjugal act preserves in its fullness the sense of true mutual love and its orientation toward man's exalted vocation to parenthood." (Catholic Church 2369). The Catholic Church stands against the use of

contraceptives of any kind. “Every action... to render procreation impossible is intrinsically evil” (Catholic Church 2370). There are very few actions that are labeled as “intrinsically evil”. Intrinsically evil means that the action is evil regardless of the situation. For example, stealing a loaf of bread from a grocery store in New Orleans after Katrina because you do not have any food is acceptable. Rape is unacceptable under any circumstance which makes it intrinsically evil. Only natural processes like using women’s natural rhythm cycle of fertility and infertility to lessen the odds of conception are acceptable.

The Gallup Poll conducted a survey of 1,024 adults in May 3-6, 2012. It asked questions regarding the morality on many issues from the death penalty to the use of birth control. The results found that 90 percent of non-Catholics and 82 percent of Catholics found the use of birth control morally acceptable. “The level of acceptability on this issue is far greater than that of the other 17 issues Gallup asked about this year” (Newport 2012). Fifty-one percent said abortion was morally wrong, and eighty-six percent said cloning humans was morally wrong. The method of asking if these actions are morally wrong or morally acceptable may have changed some of the responses. For example some Catholics may not use birth control but do not wish to condemn others for using birth control. The author Newport concluded that “the average rank-and-file Catholic in the U.S. finds the use of birth control morally acceptable.” (Newport 2012). It is important to notice that about eighteen percent of Catholics view birth control as morally wrong compared to ten percent of non-Catholics. According to these numbers, Catholics do have more negative attitudes towards contraceptives even though the percentage is small.

The Marist-Poll survey was conducted by the Knights of Columbus May 10-14, 2012. The survey had a sample size of 1,606 and was conducted via telephone. Statistics were collected on a large number of independent variables like the race, gender, political

identification, and political ideology. Other important variables include Catholics, all adults, and a separate category for practicing Catholics. The survey asked if it is morally acceptable to use contraceptives to prevent pregnancy. Eighty-three percent of Catholics said it is morally acceptable, and seventy-seven percent of practicing Catholics said it was morally acceptable. Also, eighty-eight percent of all people surveyed believe that the use of contraceptives is morally acceptable (Marist-Poll 2012). This survey and the Gallup Poll survey indicate that Catholics have a small difference in attitudes towards contraceptives.

A 2005 and 2006 study asked people from across the nation for the opinions about abstinence only, condom instruction, or abstinence plus condom instruction. While it did not ask for the particular religion of the respondents, it did ask religiosity question. The measurement was based on how often the respondent attends religious services. This is important because many Catholics are non-practicing Catholics. Non -practicing Catholics are the second largest faith group in the United States. The results clearly show a decline in support for condom instruction and abstinence plus condom instruction for people who attend religious services once a week or more. Abstinence only support also increased for those who attend religious services once a week. (Bleakley 2006).

A survey conducted in Minnesota asked parents if they believe condoms should be made more readily available for their children in public schools. The data was collected in 2006 to 2007. The study revealed no difference between protestant and Catholic opinion on making condoms more widely available. In fact the study showed Catholics in the survey wanted condoms to be provided in public schools more than their protestant counterparts. This study clear shows religiosity as not playing a major role in public opinion. The survey revealed sharp differences across party lines. Self-identified very-liberals supported condom availability in

public schools. Those who self-identify as conservative disapproved by almost ninety percent. (Eisenberg 2007) This reveals the politically charged atmosphere that this nation lives under. Condom availability in public schools has been a big issue in the past for liberal and conservative groups battling for political points, but this has not been a very big issue for the Catholic Church until now. For the most part, the Catholic Church has attempted to avoid making this a big issue because its leaders are well aware of the political sentiment here in the United States is in favor of the use of contraceptives.

A 1995 survey conducted by the Catholic Pluralism Project interviewed 1,058 Catholics via a phone survey. Using this data, Featherstone examined the Catholic Cohort between 1961 and 1977. He is concerned with their attitudes concerning sexual and reproductive ethics (Featherstone 2001). He found that only 10 percent of “young” Catholics hold traditional views that are consistent with the Catholic Church’s teachings on contraceptives and reproduction. More importantly, “This study finds that a majority of young Catholics (72 percent) possess liberal opinions regarding sexual ethics” (Featherstone 2001). Of course, this study is old. The group of people who are called “young” are now in their fifties and forties. This study presents strong evidence that age is significant variable in studying all issues. It is no secret that young people as a whole are liberal leaning. This will be important as my study is of college age students.

It is important to look at the makeup of the Catholic population here in the United States. Featherstone’s research into the Baby-Boomer generation reveals that Catholic’s who do not adhere to the church’s official teachings are the majority; however, there still is a group of Catholic who still hold to the traditional doctrine on contraceptives. The Marist Poll and Gallop Poll both showed about an eight percent difference from Protestants on the issue of birth control;

however, other research has shown no difference between Catholics and Protestants on the issue of condoms being taught in public school. More research needs to be conducted on this issue. Finally, there is clear evidence that active religious participation increases the likelihood of favoring abstinence only sex education. Therefore, religiosity in further research should be defined more by the number of times someone goes to religious services rather than just self-identified adherence.

Methodology and Findings

The Catholic Church condemns the use of all forms of contraception. Because of this, there are several questions that need to be answered. What is the percent of Catholics who actually hold to the official Catholic doctrines involving sexuality and contraceptives? I have found far more Catholics have their own interpretations on the morality of contraceptives than those who actually hold firm to the traditional position. The actual percentages are unknown at this point as no recent research has been conducted on the subject. The research conducted in the 1990's pointed to the about 10 percent of Catholics holding the traditional position and many more in the moderate position. Most of these traditionalists would most likely be hardline social conservatives. Any survey conducted that includes a large number of these traditionalists would have results that would trend towards Catholics having more negative attitudes towards condoms available in public schools. Because of this, I hypothesized that Catholics would have a more negative attitude towards making condoms more available in public middle and high schools.

Research was conducted at Georgia State University from 2001 to the present. The survey was conducted on students taking Critical Thinking through Writing for Sociology. A survey was given to the students on the day of the first class. This class is one of the last

required course for sociology majors, so these are all students with sociology majors, and they are about to graduate. The survey consisted of 941 respondents. This survey has an over proportion of women. There are about 657 women and 279 men within this survey. Also, this survey does not have the normal racial proportions of society. There are 332 respondents who identify as white and 403 who identify as African American. Only 31 respondents identified as Hispanic. That is only 3.3 percent.

The survey asked for the person's religious affiliation. The options included Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Muslim, not religious, and other. 16.2 percent of the respondents failed to answer so they must be excluded. This accounts for 152 of the participants. Muslims and Buddhist make up one percent each with fourteen and eleven respondents. Not religious makes up ten percent with 94 respondents. Protestants make up 43.4 percent with 408 respondents. Catholics make up 10.2 percent with only 94 respondents. Interestingly, the other category made up 17.6 percent with 166 respondents. I then compared the results from the survey question "Should condoms be made more available in public middle and high schools?" The Answers available are strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. About 70 percent of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that condoms should be made more available. About 25 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed and another 5 percent did not answer.

The results showed no significant difference in Catholic Attitudes towards condoms in public middle and high schools. Only the group called other had a significant difference. The other category made up over 20 percent of the respondents which is a significant proportion. While no one can know for sure what religions the other group adheres to, most likely the majority are Christians who do not consider themselves as protestants or Catholics. The other group had significantly more negative views towards condom availability in public middle and

high school. For further research, every effort should be made to give this group a specific category. It is important to know that many protestants do not recognize themselves as protestants, and therefore they fill out the other category.

Discussions

My survey had almost no people of Hispanic origin. Only 33 Hispanics over the course of a decade is a very small number. This is important since the majority of Hispanics are Catholic. It is clear that more effort need to be made by both Georgia State University and the Sociology department to recruit more people of Hispanic origin into their programs. The survey also has a large number of African Americans. The majority of African Americans are protestant. This is a direct result of slavery. Since most white Southerners were protestant, the black slaves only had Protestantism to choice from in most cases. Only in states like Louisiana and some northern states do we find large numbers of African American Catholics. In fact, the original colonial charter of Georgia outlawed Catholicism from Georgia.

I found no difference in Catholic attitudes towards condom availability in public middle and high schools compared to protestants; however, the sample size of Catholics was very small with only 94 respondents. This constitutes about a ten percent of the participants surveyed. The Catholic population here in the United States was last estimated at about 75 million. If we assume that there are about 350 million Americans than a national representative survey should be 20 percent Catholic. The Catholic population is a diverse population just like the protestant population, so the extremes on both sides are cancelled out by each other. For example

Evangelical Christians are well known for their socially conservative positions while other Christian groups are known for more progressive left-leaning positions.

I think the Catholic traditionalists are not present in this survey. From previous research, the steadfast Catholics that hold the traditional doctrine of the Catholic Church are the minority. If this group is not represented in this study than of course Catholic attitudes towards condoms in public middle and high schools would not be more negative.

But are they the minority who regularly attend Catholic Mass? One only needs to go to an average Catholic Mass during the summer and then go on Easter or Christmas to find out just how many Catholics do not attend regularly. For example on Easter, the churches are packed and extra overflow Masses are held to accommodate the sheer volume of extra people. Basically, defining who is a Catholic is extremely difficult. Some people may even identify as Catholics even though they also call themselves Atheists. Many protestants are more than willing to go from one denomination to another. It is common to hear stories of church shopping. This is where people go to different churches to find the one they are most comfortable with. Catholics usually only do this when more than one Catholic Church is available to them. Catholics here in the United States are unlikely to convert to another faith. Usually they will stop attending church. Measuring religiosity is therefore very difficult.

The symbolic interactionism perspective can help us examine what is a Catholic. This perspective requires us to look at everything as symbols. By this logic being Catholic is therefore a symbol. Symbolic interactionism has two important aspects. They are the internal perspective and the external perspective. The internal perspective is what the individual believes or how I see myself. I am Catholic, or I am an American. This could have far reaching

consequences on upon my actions or no consequences upon my actions. Because I identify myself as a Catholic, I therefore feel compelled to attend Mass regularly, or it may only compel me to say I am Catholic when I am ask my religion. The external perspective examines how individuals and society as a whole interprets and defines meanings to symbols and individuals. Essentially how do others determine someone is Catholic and what meanings do they then attach to this symbol of Catholic. Unless I tell you I am Catholic you really cannot know. even seeing someone in a Catholic Church does not make them Catholic but many people interpret that action as automatically making someone a Catholic.

The Catholic Church will not change its official positions just because the majority of the 75 million Catholics in the United States hold contrary positions on contraceptives. American Catholics only make up 7 percent of the world wide Catholic population. There are an estimated 1.1 billion Catholics worldwide. Discovering the true views of the Catholic population can help us try and understand our society as whole. Some believe that an issue only becomes an issue when the two political parties face off against one another. Just look at the abortion debate with about an even fifty-fifty split. Contraceptives as a whole have not been a big political issue except when they are involved in schools. Finally, it is important to understand that most private schools here in the United States are Catholic schools. This means that they tech abstinence only sex education.

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Religion Breakdown for Survey Table 1.1

Religion	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Catholic	96	10.2	12.2
Protestant	408	43.4	51.7
Muslim	14	1.5	1.8
Buddhist	11	1.2	1.4
Not Religious	94	10	11.9
Other	166	17.6	21
Total	789	83.8	100
Missing/No Response	152	16.2	
Total	941	100	

Responses to Question “Should condoms be made more available for public middle and high schools?” Table 1.2

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	104	11.1	11.7
Disagree	130	13.8	14.6
Agree	328	34.9	36.8
Strongly Agree	329	35	36.9
Total	891	94.7	100
No Response	50	5.3	
Total	941	100	

Multiple Comparisons of Condom Available Table 1.3

(I) religion	(J) religion	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
not religious	Protestant	-.05491	.11273	.997	-.3770	.2671
	Catholic	-.15901	.14334	.878	-.5685	.2505
	Buddhists	-.28820	.31399	.942	-1.1852	.6088
	Muslim	.10790	.28227	.999	-.6985	.9143
	other	-.31723	.12719	.127	-.6806	.0461
Protestant	not religious	.05491	.11273	.997	-.2671	.3770
	Catholic	-.10410	.11225	.939	-.4248	.2166
	Buddhists	-.23329	.30106	.972	-1.0934	.6268
	Muslim	.16282	.26782	.990	-.6023	.9279
	other	-.26231*	.09071	.045	-.5214	-.0032
Catholic	not religious	.15901	.14334	.878	-.2505	.5685
	Protestant	.10410	.11225	.939	-.2166	.4248
	Buddhists	-.12919	.31381	.998	-1.0257	.7673
	Muslim	.26692	.28207	.934	-.5389	1.0727
	other	-.15821	.12676	.813	-.5203	.2039
Buddhists	not religious	.28820	.31399	.942	-.6088	1.1852
	Protestant	.23329	.30106	.972	-.6268	1.0934
	Catholic	.12919	.31381	.998	-.7673	1.0257
	Muslim	.39610	.39700	.919	-.7380	1.5302
	other	-.02903	.30677	1.000	-.9054	.8474
Muslim	not religious	-.10790	.28227	.999	-.9143	.6985
	Protestant	-.16282	.26782	.990	-.9279	.6023
	Catholic	-.26692	.28207	.934	-1.0727	.5389
	Buddhists	-.39610	.39700	.919	-1.5302	.7380
	other	-.42513	.27422	.632	-1.2085	.3583
other	not religious	.31723	.12719	.127	-.0461	.6806
	Protestant	.26231*	.09071	.045	.0032	.5214
	Catholic	.15821	.12676	.813	-.2039	.5203
	Buddhists	.02903	.30677	1.000	-.8474	.9054
	Muslim	.42513	.27422	.632	-.3583	1.2085

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.