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Many Voices in the Temple: Liberal Californian Religious Leaders' Responses to Proposition 8

Margaret Clendenen
College of William and Mary

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**Many Voices in the Temple:
Liberal California Religious Leaders' Responses to Proposition 8**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from
The College of William and Mary

by

Margaret Clendenen

Accepted for High Honors
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

Thomas Linneman, Director

Kathleen Jenkins

Maureen Fitzgerald

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INTRODUCTION

Four years ago, David Ackerman was rushed to the hospital. He was having a heart attack. Marc, his partner of thirty years, stood by his side. As David was hurried into the operating room for emergency surgery, hospital staff told Marc that he could not join David. Even though David and Marc were registered domestic partners in the state of California, the staff refused to recognize their status until contacting David's next of kin, a requirement that David calls "inexcusable." After contacting David's ninety-year-old mother, who told the hospital that her son's partner could join him in the operating room, Marc and David were allowed to be together. David cites this experience as one of many reasons that he should be legally allowed to marry Marc, as the law requires hospitals to allow visitation rights for married couples.

Marc and David met in church. David served the Mormon/Latter Day Saints (LDS) Church as a missionary from 1965 to 1968. He reconsidered his ties to the LDS church after administrators kicked him out of Brigham Young University because other students accused him of being gay¹. David joined the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in 1976. Troy Perry founded the MCC as an affirming religious space for gays and lesbians in 1966 after being defrocked by a Pentecostal church for being gay. The MCC now welcomes and affirms lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, as it teaches that non-normative sexual and gender identities are gifts from God (Wilcox 2003). After continued study and consideration, David became an MCC pastor, retiring this year at age 64. He and Marc moved back to the conservative California town of David's youth in time to become active in the movement against Proposition 8, a 2008 California ballot initiative that amended the California constitution to

¹ Brigham Young is an LDS affiliated university in Provo, Utah. Currently, one can be expelled for advocating that

define marriage as between one man and one woman. At the time, David was involved with a congregation affiliated with the United Church of Christ (UCC), a mainline, theologically liberal denomination. Along with the church's pastor, George Davis, David engaged in conversation with church members about the cultural meaning and potential social and political effects of Proposition 8.

David and George emerged as two religious leaders actively opposing Proposition 8. They joined religious leaders across the state, from diverse backgrounds and faith traditions, who nonetheless believe that same-sex marriage should be legal. These religious leaders preached sermons about Proposition 8, wrote letters to their local newspapers, engaged in conversations about Proposition 8 with members of their congregations, and led and participated in rallies following Proposition 8's passing. In this paper, I turn to their voices. Using in-depth interviews and content analysis of newspaper articles and letters to the editor from three distinct geographic areas across the state, I consider how liberal religion and religious beliefs were used in discussions of Proposition 8. I describe the anger that the political actions of conservative religious groups engendered among both California religious leaders and authors of letters to the editor. I detail how and why religious leaders chose whether to engage in political action against Proposition 8, in the process highlighting the institutionalized beliefs and structures that limit political participation within many liberal congregations. I conclude by discussing potential long-term effects of Proposition 8 on liberal California religious congregations, including increased action of liberal religious congregations within the political sphere.

PROPOSITION 8 BACKGROUND

Political Background

On November 4, 2008, California voters passed Proposition 8, 52% to 48%, and by so doing, ratified a constitutional amendment defining marriage as between one man and one woman. The title of the measure, as written by California Attorney General Jerry Brown, reads “Eliminates Rights of Same-Sex Couples to Marry. Initiative Constitutional Amendment.” The text of the amendment, as submitted to California Secretary of State Debra Bowen, reads:

Section I. Title This measure shall be known and may be cited as the “California Marriage Protection Act.” Section 2. Article I. Section 7.5 is added to the California Constitution to read: Sec. 7.5. Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.

By passing Proposition 8, voters simultaneously concluded a chapter in the struggle for same-sex marriage rights in California while ushering in a new, more passionate debate over same-sex marriage.

An amendment to the California Constitution in 1911 first established the California initiative process, giving voters powers equal to those of the state legislature. Populists led the movement to enact the initiative process, as many were concerned by the tendency for groups with the most money and resources--at the time, railroad companies--to control the interests of the state legislature. Following the ratification of this amendment, registered California voters gained the right to write and pass direct amendments, also known as propositions. To put a proposition on the ballot, California citizens must draft a proposed amendment and submit it to the Secretary of State, currently Debra Bowen, along with a fee of two hundred dollars.

Following the Secretary of State’s approval of the proposition², the initial submitter has 150 days

² Before approval, the Attorney General provides a name and summary of the proposition and The Office of the Legislative Analyst and Department of Finance provide an estimate of the overall cost of the measure to the state of California. Following these steps, the Secretary of State approves the proposition (Silva 2000).

to gather enough signatures to place the proposition on the ballot (Silva 2000). Constitutional amendments require signatures from eight percent of the total number of people who voted in the last gubernatorial election (statutory amendments require signatures from five percent of the same total number). In 2008, the year that Californians passed Proposition 8, submitters were required to collect 694,354 signatures for a constitutional amendment; Proposition 8 garnered 1,120,801 signatures (Secretary of State website). County election officials must then verify the signatures, subject to the final approval of the Secretary of State. Following these steps, propositions are placed on the ballot. If a majority of California voters vote “yes,” the measure becomes law (Silva 2000).

Eight years prior to the passage of Proposition 8, on March 7, 2000, California voters passed Proposition 22 61% to 39%. This initiative was titled the California Defense of Marriage Act and amended the Family Code to read that, “Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in the state of California.” Because Proposition 22 was a statute and not a constitutional amendment (Secretary of State website), it could be overturned if deemed unconstitutional. On February 12, 2004, San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom created a media firestorm by issuing same-sex marriage licenses, claiming that prohibitions against same-sex marriage violated the Equal Protection Clause of the California Constitution. Following outcry from California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and conservative groups across the country, the California Supreme Court ordered that Newsom stop issuing marriage licenses until the constitutionality of Proposition 22 could be considered in court. One year later, on March 14, 2005, the San Francisco Superior Court deemed that Proposition 22 was unconstitutional. The case was appealed, and on May 15, 2008, the California Supreme Court overturned the ban on same-sex marriages 4-3. Gay and lesbian couples could now legally marry in California.

Conservative groups began to organize to get signatures for a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage – and, of course, they succeeded by adding Proposition 8 to a list of propositions on the 2008 California general election ballot. Other propositions included parental notification of minors seeking an abortion (failed), requiring farm animals to be raised in cages in which they can freely move (passed), and requiring all California utilities to use at least fifty percent renewable energy by 2025 (failed).

Religious Background

In debates over Proposition 8, religion emerged as a point of contention and unification. In particular, stories about Mormon and Catholic support of Proposition 8 dominated news headlines across the country. San Francisco archbishop George Niederauer sent a letter to the LDS Church in May of 2008, strengthening an existing alliance between the Catholic and Mormon Churches (Kuruvila 2008). Mormons and Catholics had previously allied to mobilize their members to support a same-sex marriage ban in Nevada (Damore et al. 2007). Niederauer and Thomas Monson, President of the Mormon Church, composed letters to be sent and read in all Catholic and Mormon churches in the state of California, respectively. The Mormon Church reports spending \$180,000 in support of the measure, while individual Mormon families donated between \$12 and \$20 million (Kuruvila 2008; Garrison 2008). The Knights of Columbus, a prominent Catholic organization, donated \$1.275 million in support of the amendment (Kuruvila 2008). Following the passage of Proposition 8, a number of gay and lesbian activists protested outside of Mormon and Catholic churches. Some even disrupted religious services in protest, causing debate over both the role of religious groups within the political arena and appropriate means of political dissent.

Yet, while these stories made for popular news, they are incomplete, as they neglect people of faith, including Mormons and Catholics, who support same-sex marriage. Journalist Michael Ryan and historian Les Switzer describe the movement to pass Proposition 8 as “a campaign supported mainly by religious groups,” stating that “churches were politicized as bishops and priests, ministers, and lay preachers used the pulpit to get their message across to their congregations” (2009: 305). The implicitly conservative politicized church in Ryan and Switzer’s description overlooks actions of liberal California religious leaders to oppose Proposition 8. It is thus important for us to consider how people of faith and gays and lesbians, both religious and secular, coexist and work together for social change. In order to do so, we must examine how gay-affirming people of faith negotiate both their conceptions of the political sphere and their ultimate political identities. Doing so will shed considerable light on the complicated relationships that exist between religions, sexualities, and politics.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Peter Berger describes religion as one of the “most widespread and effective instrument[s] of legitimation” in society, with legitimation defined as “socially objectivated ‘knowledge’ that serves to explain and justify the social order” (Berger 1967: 32). In other words, religion allows abstract ideas to be treated as truth, justifies them as “natural,” and further tells us why we should believe them. For many, religion legitimates views regarding the meaning and morality of homosexuality. Why, for instance, should we think that homosexuality is immoral, or, conversely, why should we affirm gay and lesbian relationships? Religion plays a substantial role in both condemning and affirming gay and lesbian relationships and supporting and opposing gay and lesbian rights. While sociological literature has provided us with much knowledge regarding conservative Christian proscriptions against same-sex relationships, often

this research focuses on conflicts between purportedly liberal, non-religious gays and lesbians and conservative Christians. Other research centers on negotiation of faith by gays and lesbians, yet this literature focuses on individual congregations and groups instead of the larger movement for gay rights. More research is needed to problematize the assumption of hostility between religious faith and support for gay rights within sociological literature and to contextualize liberal religion within the movement for gay rights. Given the particular salience of religion within debates over same-sex marriage, developing an understanding of the relational dynamics between liberal religion and the movement for same-sex marriage becomes essential.

Gays, Lesbians, and Conservative Christians

Journalists John Gallagher and Chris Bull (2001) describe the relationship between religion and homosexuality as a battle waged between conservative Christians and implicitly non-religious gays and lesbians. Conservative Christians fight to uphold morality while gays and lesbians fight for equal rights. In this culture wars mentality (Hunter 1992) little room is left for nuanced understanding of the two social movements. Indeed, while battle imagery seizes our attention, it neglects the complexity and negotiation inherent within social movements. Furthermore, while understanding the tension between conservative Christians and the gay and lesbian rights movement tells us about current political conflicts over gay rights in United States society (Fetner 2001; Fetner 2008), it overlooks the role that religion has played in the organization of the gay and lesbian rights movement. As such, it sets the stage for the false dichotomization of religious faith and support for gay rights.

Examples of the tension between conservative Christians and the gay rights movement proliferate in sociological literature. This literature details the two movements as oppositional (Fetner 2001; Fetner 2008); explains why conservative Christians feel threatened by the success

of the gay rights movement (Erzen 2006; Linneman 2003; Wolkomir 2001; Wolkomir 2006); and discusses ex-gay movements to “cure” gays and lesbians that encourage them to develop a strong Christian identity and work towards being heterosexual or remaining celibate (Erzen 2006; Wolkomir 2001; Wolkomir 2006). This literature moves beyond the culture wars mentality espoused by Gallagher and Bull (2001) by shedding light on complexities within both movements. Linneman (2003) interviews gays and lesbians and Christian conservatives in Seattle and Spokane, Washington, to develop an understanding of how they construct and understand their movements. While Linneman demonstrates the conflict between movements, he also finds similarities between them, including desire for fairer media coverage and feelings of marginalization. Similarly, Erzen (2006) and Wolkomir (2001, 2006) demonstrate the complexity within the ex-gay movement by showing the multifaceted and seemingly contradictory conceptions of sexualities that exist within it. Certainly, the tension between conservative Christians and gays and lesbians is real and its marginalizing effects are felt strongly by gays and lesbians. That withstanding, moving beyond this body of literature, we must also consider religious beliefs that successfully integrate religious faith and gay-affirming attitudes.

Gay-Affirming Religion

Another prominent body of literature discusses how gays and lesbians negotiate religious faith (O’Brien 2004; Rodriguez and Ouellette 2000; Thumma 1991; Wilcox 2003; Wilcox 2009; Wolkomir 2001; Wolkomir 2006). Much of this literature centers on the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) (Rodriguez and Oulette 2000; Wilcox 2003; Wolkomir 2001; Wolkomir 2006), the LGBT-affirming denomination founded by Troy Perry in 1966. Rodriguez

and Oulette (2001), Wilcox (2006), and Wolkomir (2001, 2006) all study how LGBT people³ within MCC churches understand and come to define their faith. In each of these studies, LGBT people first had to dismantle their existing Christian ideologies, as many had been raised with interpretations of Scripture that condemned same-sex sexual behavior as sinful. Institutionalized spaces and groups existed in the churches to facilitate development of liberal interpretations of Scripture. In addition, in all three studies, new, LGBT Christian selves were “authenticated” by understanding non-normative sexual and gender identities as gifts from God.

In a number of studies of gay-affirming religion outside of MCC churches (O’Brien 2004; Thumma 1991; Dillon 1999), gays and lesbians negotiate their religious identities in support groups for gay and lesbian Christians, or in groups with a denominational basis, such as Dignity, an LGBT group unofficially affiliated with the Roman Catholic church (Dillon 1999). Research participants in Thumma’s (1991) study of people active in a support group affiliated with a gay-supportive, evangelical parachurch organization worked to negotiate a new understanding of religious faith, ultimately understanding their non-normative sexual identities as being a gift from God, similar to the research participants profiled in studies of MCC churches. Gays and lesbians interviewed by O’Brien (2004) identify their religious and sexual identities as being a “contradiction,” and detail how they work to integrate identities. By doing so, they successfully “live the contradiction” and demonstrate the importance of both their sexual and religious identities to their lives, as they must actively and continually work to negotiate them. Finally, Dillon (1999) conducts participant observation and interviews with people active in a Boston chapter of Dignity, an LGBT-affirming Catholic group. She details participants’ desire to integrate both Catholicism and gay-affirming attitudes, discussing how they sought change from

³ Wolkomir (2001, 2006) studies gay men, Rodriguez and Oulette (2000) study gays and lesbians, and Wilcox (2006) studies people from across the queer spectrum, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, in addition to heterosexual allies.

within the denomination, instead of seeking other religious alternatives (e.g., an MCC church or liberal mainline congregation).

Other research on gay-affirming religion focuses on people located outside of parachurch support groups and denominational-specific groups. Cadge, Wildeman, and Olson (2008) and Cadge and Wildeman (2008), for instance, detail key aspects of homosexuality in mainline Christian communities, including what factors influence whether or not congregations discuss homosexuality (Cadge, Wildeman and Olson 2008) and the role of fear within mainline, clergy-facilitated discussions of homosexuality (Cadge and Wildeman 2008). Wilcox (2009) studies the religious beliefs and practices of queer women in Los Angeles, recruiting queer women (defined as LGBT and/or queer people who have at some point identified as women) at pride events and other secular spaces. Since most sociologists who study religion and sexuality locate research participants within specific religious groups (O'Brien 2004) Wilcox's sampling methodology allows for greater religious (and non-religious) diversity than seen in previous studies of religion and homosexuality. Finally, Moon (2004) conducts interviews and participant observation in two United Methodist congregations, including one that is theologically liberal and one that is theologically conservative. While both churches took different stances on LGBT issues, a common theme emerged: both distanced themselves from potentially "political" conversations. Instead, they conceptualized their own work as "spiritual," and the work of religious bodies they disagreed with as "political." Politics emerged as antithetical to the goals of the church, suggesting hesitation to locate church members as actors within political movements. Given Moon's work, in particular, an understanding of what compels political action among religious people, and how these people understand their political identities, becomes critical.

More work remains to understand the relationships between religions and sexualities. The uniqueness of Wilcox's (2009) work, for example, underscores a deficiency of sociological literature on homosexuality and religion: very little of this literature discusses non-Christian traditions. While there is a growing body of literature on Judaism and homosexuality (Schnoor 2006; Ariel 2007; Gross 2007), discussion of LGBT pagans (Smith and Horne 2007), and work in progress by Andrew Yip on British Muslim views of homosexuality (according to Wilcox 2008), the vast majority of work on religion and homosexuality focuses on Christianity. In fact, work by Sherkat (2002) that purports to measure "religious commitment" of lesbian, gay and bisexual people defines "religious commitment" using the General Social Survey (GSS) variables of church attendance⁴, frequency of prayer, and belief that the Bible is the real or inspired word of God. By operationalizing "religious commitment" in this way, Sherkat automatically excludes any non-Christian from being considered religious. Finally, the need for literature that discusses gay affirming religious people as political actors becomes clear. While literature on conservative Christianity and homosexuality is rooted in the understanding of conservative Christianity as a social movement (Fetner 2001; Fetner 2008; Linneman 2003; Erzen 2006), literature on gay-affirming religion focuses on individual congregations and groups, failing to link them to any larger movement for gay rights. Developing an understanding of how and why religious people join the movement for gay rights emerges as necessary, particularly given Moon's (2004) understanding of congregations as apolitical.

⁴ Actually, the GSS asks respondents about "religious service attendance." However, Sherkat uses the term "church service attendance" throughout.

Same-Sex Marriage

Currently, marriage reigns as the central goal of the mainstream gay rights movement⁵ (Chauncey 2004; Graff 1999; Cherlin 2004; Graff 1999; Hull 2003; Hull 2006; Lannutti 2007; Smith 2007). Same-sex marriage looms as a particularly divisive issue in the religious sphere (Graff 1999; Olson, Cadge and Harrison 2006). Many view marriage as an inherently religious institution that unites one male and one female, while others argue that religion should compel support for gay and lesbian rights. Indeed, the movement for same-sex marriage links fundamentally to religion, as early same-sex marriage activism was primarily based in nascent MCC churches (Chauncey 2004). Yet, despite gay marriage's historic ties to religion, in Olson, Cadge, and Harrison's (2006) work, religious variables outperformed all demographic measures in predicting opposition to same-sex marriage and civil unions. Likewise, in CNN exit poll data following Proposition 8, 65% of Protestant and 64% of Catholic respondents reported voting for Proposition 8. Conversely, 90% of respondents who said they had "no religion" voted against Proposition 8. As such, sociological consideration of the relational dynamics between same-sex marriage and religion demands nuance, in particular to understand more thoroughly the role that religion plays to support same-sex marriage.

The cultural importance of marriage for gays and lesbians has evolved greatly throughout history. Gays and lesbian activists in the 1960s and 1970s rejected earlier assimilationist strategies that were designed to deemphasize gays and lesbians' differences from heterosexuals and allow gays and lesbians to fit in or hide from larger society. Instead, activists in the 1960s and 1970s argued that gay was both different and good (Chauncey 2004; Ghaziani 2008). As

⁵ While it is important not to overlook LGBTQ people who are opposed to same-sex marriage, many of whom view marriage as a patriarchal institution, (Smith 2007) I focus here on the mainstream gay rights movement that overwhelmingly supports same-sex marriage rights (and rites). Throughout the paper, I assume that the "gay rights movement" and "lgbt rights movement" support same-sex marriage.

such, they almost universally rejected marriage, arguing that to marry was to assimilate gay and lesbian relationships to a heterosexual ideal (Chauncey 2004). The fledgling movement for same-sex marriage during this time period was, as previously mentioned, mostly based in MCC Churches (Chauncey 2004). George Chauncey (2004) argues that two factors compelled greater support for gay marriage: the AIDS crisis and the “lesbian baby boom.” According to Chauncey, AIDS forced a generation of gay men to realize the importance of marriage in being allowed to make healthcare decisions for their partners. On the other hand, as lesbians started raising children, many saw the importance of marriage in adopting their children and ensuring that their partners were allowed custody of their children. As a result, gays and lesbians began to overlook the theoretical dangers of assimilation, desiring the concrete rights and privileges of marriage. This set the stage for marriage to emerge as one of the primary causes of the mainstream gay rights movement.

Recent sociological literature has demonstrated the meaning and importance gays and lesbians ascribe to marriage (Cherlin 2004; Graff 1999; Hull 2003; Hull 2006; Lannutti 2007; Smith 2007). Gays and lesbians conceptualize marriage as having the potential to increase the seriousness and/or fidelity of their relationships (Green 2006; Hull 2004; Hull 2006; Lannutti 2007), as providing them with previously unavailable legal and financial rights (Hull 2003; Hull 2006), as legitimizing their relationships in the eyes of others (particularly straight family members and coworkers) (Hull 2003; Hull 2006; Lannutti 2007), and as allowing them to serve as models for other LGBT people (Schechter et al. 2008). Hull (2003, 2006) argues that while same-sex marriages ultimately have important political meaning, married gays and lesbians view their ceremonies as primarily cultural, not political, acts. Hull conducted in-depth interviews with 71 participants, representing 38 same-sex couples, who had either had a public commitment

ceremony or been in a committed relationship of over two years. She found that many gays and lesbians had commitment ceremonies without legal recognition, suggesting that the model of marriage holds significance, even if it does not carry legal recognition. Hull argues that the law has cultural power, since gays and lesbians discuss the law as having the potential to confer social legitimacy on their relationships. Often, the cultural importance of law lies at the heart of the debate over same-sex marriage, as people on all sides of the debate point to cultural justifications for their beliefs regarding appropriate marriage laws.

As marriage rights became a central goal to the gay rights movement, gay and lesbian activists strategized to make same-sex marriage a reality through the political sphere. Brumbaugh et al. (2008: 345) note that gays and lesbians have “effectively us[ed] legislatures and courts to advance their case [of same-sex marriage].” Indeed, in the District of Columbia and the five states in which same-sex marriage is currently legal (Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont), the decision to legalize same-sex marriage was made either in the legislatures or the courts. On the other hand, “opponents [of same-sex marriage have] effectively used ballot initiatives to subvert the possibility of same-sex marriage.” Using a variety of independent variables, including whether or not a state has hate crime laws, when a state repealed sodomy laws, and the percentage of Democrats in the state’s legislature, sociologist Sarah Soule (2004) constructs a regression model to predict the probability of states developing same-sex marriage bans (her dependent variable being whether or not a state had adopted a same-sex marriage ban). One of her conclusions is that same-sex marriage bans are often a response to major gains made by gay rights groups within the state, consistent with Meyer and Staggenborg’s (1996) article that claims that countermovements arise in response to success of other social movements. Clearly, this conclusion becomes relevant in the case of

California. After becoming the third state ever to legalize same-sex marriage (following Hawaii and Massachusetts), California voters and interest groups mobilized to pass Proposition 8. To this day, voters have passed all same-sex marriage bans put on election ballots.

Debates over same-sex marriage and civil unions also shed light on how and why people get involved in the political process. Campbell and Monson (2008) demonstrate the importance of ballot measures in mobilizing Republicans during election years. Through analysis of the Campaign Communications Survey following the 2004 election, Campbell and Monson argue that the 13 states with same-sex marriage ballot propositions had high levels of Republican mobilization. Similarly, they found that secular voters were “demobilized” against George W. Bush. As such, debates over same-sex marriage in the political and religious spheres are important to understanding voters’ democratic imaginations (Perrin 2006). Perrin argues that we use our “democratic imagination” to understand how and when to get involved in politics; the democratic imagination itself is constructed through our previous experiences with politics/civil life and our understanding of politics as generated through our relationships with family, coworkers, and people in our neighborhoods (Perrin 2006: 2). Ultimately, development of democratic imaginations is fundamentally rooted in the location of people within their communities.

Considering the relational dynamics between religions, sexualities, and same-sex marriage in light of the existing literature raises important unanswered questions: How do those who support same-sex marriage use religion in their discussions of gay rights? How do gay-affirming people, both religious and secular, respond to religious groups’ condemnation of gays and lesbians and subsequent opposition to same-sex marriage? And, finally, how do liberal

religious leaders choose whether or not to involve themselves and their congregations in the larger movement for same-sex marriage?

METHODS

To begin a discussion centered on these questions, I conducted content analysis of newspaper articles and letters to the editor from local California newspapers and in-depth interviews with liberal California religious leaders. I selected five California newspapers, representing three distinct geographic areas. I conducted interviews with religious leaders who currently work within these geographic areas. I use newspaper articles and letters to the editor to develop a picture of the political and religious climate of an area. On the other hand, I use in-depth interviews to develop a more nuanced understanding of how religious leaders talk about same-sex marriage within their congregations and communities. While newspaper coverage provides a sizeable amount of data and easily accessible coverage of an issue, it alone does not allow us to develop a comprehensive understanding of individuals' views. On the other hand, while qualitative interviewing allows us to develop a thorough understanding of someone's beliefs, it necessarily lacks the ready accessibility and sheer volume of newspaper coverage. Taken together, this combination of research methods allows me both to see a wide variety of views and to devote a substantial amount of time to hearing fewer of these views in depth.

Selection of Newspapers and Geographic Areas

I endeavored to select newspapers based in California towns and cities that are diverse politically, socially, and geographically. In addition, newspapers needed to be readily accessible and searchable online. I compiled a table (see Appendix A) of all California newspapers available through LexisNexis. I added six more fields to the table: the town in which the paper is

published, the town population, the county in which the town is located, the county election office website, the county vote, and the town vote. I used current Census data for town populations. I decided to eliminate all newspapers published in towns and cities with populations below 10,000 and above 1,000,000. Next, I found county votes on the county election websites. To establish town vote, I first looked on the county election office website office for election return data by town. Frequently, these data were not available. If this was the case, I compiled all precinct-level data for the town and then calculated the town vote. I decided to use newspapers published in remaining towns with extreme votes on Proposition 8, which I defined as at least a 20% difference in town vote. Taking into account my desire to sample cities and towns from diverse geographic areas, I selected newspapers based out of five California towns: the *Contra Costa Times* and *The San Francisco Chronicle*, which are two papers from liberal cities (Walnut Creek and San Francisco, respectively), and the *Inland Valley Daily*, *Oroville Mercury Register*, and *San Bernardino Sun*, which are three papers from conservative areas (Ontario, Oroville and San Bernardino, respectively).

The five different towns in which these papers are published represent three distinct geographic areas in California (see Appendix B for map). These geographic areas informed my choice of religious leaders to interview. San Francisco and Walnut Creek are both in the Bay Area. San Francisco has a population of 808,976 and voted against Proposition 8 75.2% to 24.8%, while Walnut Creek has a population of 64,296 and voted against Proposition 8 62% to 38%. Ontario and San Bernardino are two moderately large cities (populations 170,373 and 205,010, respectively) that both voted conservatively on Proposition 8 (66.1% yes and 65.9% yes, respectively). Both cities are located in the Inland Valley area of Southern California. Finally, Oroville is a small town, population 13,004, located in Northern California; 63.8% of Oroville

voters voted yes on Proposition 8. As newspapers circulate beyond their town of publication, and as towns and the people within them exist in relation to surrounding areas, I interviewed religious leaders living within a thirty mile radius of each town. Thus, I interviewed religious leaders living in the Bay Area, the Inland Valley area, and Butte County (the county in which Oroville is located).

Content Analysis of Newspapers and Letters to the Editor

For each newspaper selected, I compiled all newspaper articles and letters to the editor that mentioned Proposition 8 from one month prior to the election to one month after, or October 4, 2008 to December 4, 2008. To do so, I used LexisNexis to search newspapers using the terms: “Prop 8” OR “Proposition 8” OR “Prop eight” OR “Proposition eight” OR “Yes on 8” OR “No on 8.” I compiled all articles and letters to the editor in a Microsoft Word document, and used SPSS to code pieces for a total of 34 different variables (see Appendix C). First, I coded each piece for a series of basic variables: whether or not the piece mentioned religion, the newspaper in which the piece was published, if it was an article or a letter to the editor/editorial, when it was published, and whether or not it referred to gays and lesbians as homosexuals. If the piece was a letter to the editor or editorial, I coded it for 17 more variables including the author’s position, whether the author made an explicitly religious argument for or against Proposition 8, and whether or not an author referred to a sacred text (see Appendix C for full list). If an article or letter to the editor mentioned religion, I further coded it for which religious group(s) it mentioned and, if it was a letter to the editor, the ways in which the author(s) used her or his or their conceptions of religion in the letter. Finally, if a letter was written by a religious leader, I coded it for the leader’s denomination, whether or not she or he used explicitly religious language, etc.

In-Depth Interviews

The second part of my research involved interviewing California religious leaders who support same-sex marriage. I conducted a total of eleven interviews. Four interviews were with ministers associated with the United Church of Christ, three interviews were with Reform rabbis, two were with Episcopal priests, one was with a Unitarian Universalist minister and, finally, one was with the minister of a nondenominational, evangelical, Pentecostal congregation (see Appendix D for more information regarding denominational beliefs regarding homosexuality and Appendix E for a chart with ministers' basic information). One of the interview participants, David⁶, who is currently an active member of the laity in the United Church of Christ, previously served the Metropolitan Community Church as clergy. Participants' ages ranged from 40 to 64, with the average age being 54. Though I contacted approximately the same number of women and men with interview requests, two of my interview participants were women and nine were men. I did not ask my interview participants about their sexual orientation, but five of them (Ana, David, Don, Ethan and Jack) came out to me as gay or lesbian and three (Kate, George and Tom) explicitly came out to me as straight. I conducted all interviews by phone or Skype; three people opted for Skype while eight opted for phone interviews. Interviews ranged from thirty-five minutes to an hour and forty-five minutes, with the average length being slightly less than an hour.

I recruited interview participants through a variety of approaches. First, I contacted two statewide liberal religious groups in California, one that is Christian affiliated and one that is Jewish affiliated. Both organizations gave me lists of their members who worked in the geographic areas in which I was interviewing. Second, I looked for churches and synagogues of

⁶ All interview participants are referred to with pseudonyms, as are their churches, synagogues, partners, spouses and congregants, if mentioned.

denominations that have historically been accepting of gays and lesbians, such as the United Church of Christ and the Reform Jewish movement. Third, I contacted faculty and student leaders affiliated with LGBTQ college groups in towns from which I hoped to interview. Finally, the religious leaders whom I interviewed were an invaluable resource and often suggested other religious leaders to me. Unfortunately, many of the people they suggested were outside of my geographic focus and, for purposes of clarity, I did not follow up on many of their suggestions. I contacted a total of thirty religious leaders and of those, I was able to interview eleven.

I tape-recorded all interviews and transcribed each in full. After transcribing the interviews, I read over all of the interview transcripts, noting common themes between the interviews. I then coded each interview for these themes that emerged. To do so, I read over each interview transcript at least two more times, writing down the themes that I had previously identified on relevant sections of the interview. I also used Microsoft Word to compile a list of quotations that I thought were particularly relevant to each theme, noting dissenting opinions as well. In addition, I went to each synagogue or church's website and recorded any mentions of LGBT issues, whether or not the synagogue or church has an online accessible newspaper, and whether or not text or audio of sermons was available online. Five of the religious leaders I interviewed sent unsolicited supplementary materials, such as sermons they had preached, letters to the editor they had published, and YouTube videos of them speaking at rallies. I went through each of these materials carefully, making note of common themes that existed within them.

To the best of my ability, I have attempted to preserve the confidentiality of my interview participants. As previously mentioned, all interview participants are referred to by pseudonyms throughout this paper. While I link each religious leader to her or his actual religious denomination, I do not give the actual names of their synagogues or churches or people within

their congregations. Some religious leaders requested that parts of our interview be off the record, and I have respected each of these requests. I also decided to discuss religious leaders in light of their more general geographic area, as opposed to the specific town in which they live. I did this both to further preserve the confidentiality of my interview participants and to acknowledge the reality that towns exist in relation to their surroundings. A liberal minister working in a small town, for example, may live in another nearby town, have congregants who travel from surrounding towns, and travel regularly to the areas around her or him. I defined “geographic area” as a radius of thirty miles and, as such, at the time of Proposition 8’s passage, all religious leaders worked in towns within a thirty mile radius of the towns in which the newspapers I analyzed were published.

As a cautionary note, like most qualitative research, this interview data cannot be viewed as representative or generalizable. In the words of Tom Rosenthal, a Reform rabbi in the Bay Area, “there are many voices in the temple.” There are many religious perspectives on same-sex marriage, and I am fortunate to have heard a small, yet diverse, sample of these perspectives in some depth. Despite their lack of representativeness, I think that these eleven interviews have much to suggest for our understandings of the relationships between religions, sexualities and politics.

Before beginning each interview, I asked all interview participants if they had questions they wanted to ask me about my research. Most (perhaps surprisingly) said no, but one participant was particularly apprehensive about why I was conducting this study. He seemed concerned that I had (seemingly anti-gay) ulterior motives and would portray his perspective unfairly. He was perceptibly reassured when I told him that I am personally active in both a religious community and LGBTQ activism. Indeed, I am someone who identifies as a lesbian,

was raised in a theologically and politically conservative Christian community, now attend a Unitarian Universalist Church, and have focused much of my college coursework in the Religious Studies department on the academic study of Judaism – in some way, then, every part of this research speaks to a part of my identity. I freely acknowledge that this may bias my analysis. Nonetheless, I believe that my background as a Sociology and Religious Studies double major, coupled with a sincere desire to understand diverse faith traditions, compel me to approach this research as rigorously and fairly as possible.

NEWSPAPER FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Descriptive Findings

Between the five newspapers I sampled--*Contra Costa Times*, *Inland Valley Daily*, *Oroville Mercury Register*, *San Bernardino Sun*, and *The San Francisco Chronicle*--I compiled 589 total articles and letters to the editor, published one month before the election to one month after the election (October 4, 2008 – December 4, 2008). 35.5% (N=209) were articles, while 64.5% (N=380) were letters to the editor or editorials. 51.3% (N=302) of total pieces were published after Election Day, 45.5% (N=268) were published before Election Day, and 3.2% (N=19) were published on Election Day. Of letters to the editor/editorials, 51.8% (N=189) were written by men, 45.2% were written by women (N=165) and 3% were written by multiple people (N=11, 7 of these were heterosexual couples and 1 was a gay couple). 64.2% (N=129) of letters to the editor were opposed to Proposition 8, while 39.2% (231) supported it.

Table 1 displays the percentage of letters to the editor in each paper that opposed or supported Proposition 8, as compared to the overall county vote on Proposition 8 of the county in which the newspaper was published.

Table 1: For/Against Proposition 8 in Election Results and Letters to the Editor

Newspaper/County	Views on Proposition 8	County Election Results	Newspaper Data
<i>Contra Costa Times/Contra Costa</i>	Support	45%	39%
	Oppose	55%	61%
	N	445,466	214
<i>Inland Valley Daily/San Bernardino</i>	Support	67%	62%
	Oppose	33%	39%
	N	605,992	26
<i>San Bernardino Sun/San Bernardino</i>	Support	67%	44%
	Oppose	33%	56%
	N	605,992	32
<i>San Francisco Chronicle/San Francisco</i>	Support	25%	18%
	Oppose	75%	82%
	N	373,027	88

As demonstrated by Table 1, every newspaper printed a greater percentage of letters in opposition to Proposition 8 than the percentage of county voters who voted “yes” on Election Day. Thus, we can hypothesize either that supporters of Proposition 8 were less likely to send in letters to the editor than opponents of Proposition 8 or that editors were less likely to publish letters written by supporters. There is no way to know which hypothesis is correct without

having access to all submitted letters to the editor. As such, it is important to keep in mind that while letters to the editor are important markers of the political climate of an area (Linneman 2003) they cannot be viewed as an unproblematic representation of public opinion. That withstanding, they show the conversations regarding Proposition 8 that many Californians read on a daily basis. As such, they have much to tell us about how Proposition 8 was conceptualized within California communities.

Coverage of Proposition 8 varied widely by newspaper. The *Contra Costa Times* and *San Francisco Chronicle*, for instance, published at least one letter to the editor or article per day regarding Proposition 8. On the other hand, the *Oroville Mercury Register* did not have any letters to the editor or editorials that are searchable using my specified search terms. Table 2 demonstrates the distribution of articles and letters to the editor/editorials by newspaper.

Table 2: Percentage of Articles and Letters to the Editor from each Newspaper

Newspaper	Article	Letter to the Editor	Total
<i>Contra Costa Times</i>	33%	57%	48%
<i>Inland Valley Daily</i>	10%	7%	8%
<i>Oroville Mercury Register</i>	2%	0%	1%
<i>San Bernardino Sun</i>	8%	9%	9%
<i>San Francisco Chronicle</i>	48%	26%	34%
N	209	380	589

As Table 2 demonstrates, of my entire sample, 57% of letters to the editor were published in the *Contra Costa Times* and 48% of articles were published in *The San Francisco Chronicle*. This limits conclusions that can be drawn about considerations of Proposition 8 in Butte County and the Inland Valley. Likewise, the overrepresentation of coverage from liberal areas--82% of total coverage was from the Bay Area--suggests that Proposition 8 factored more heavily into media coverage in the liberal areas that I studied than it did in conservative areas.

Many authors of letters to the editor and editorials talked about religion in relation to Proposition 8. I define “mention of religion” as any mention of a deity, world religion, denomination, or sacred text. 49% of total letters to the editor/editorials (N=186) mentioned religion, as opposed to 37% of articles (N=77). Table 3 breaks down these data by newspaper.

Table 3: Mentions of Religion by Newspaper

Newspaper

Type	Mentions Religion	<i>Inland Valley Daily</i>	<i>San Francisco Chronicle</i>	<i>San Bernardino Sun</i>	<i>Contra Costa Times</i>	<i>Oroville Mercury Register</i>	Total
Article	No	50%	63%	44%	71%	80%	63%
	Yes	50%	37%	56%	29%	20%	37%
	N	20	100	16	68	5	209
Letter to the Editor	No	46%	62%	40%	48%	n/a	51%
	Yes	54%	38%	60%	52%	n/a	49%
	N	28	100	35	217	0	380

As Table 3 shows, variety exists as to which newspapers published articles and letters to the editor regarding religion. With the exception of *The San Francisco Chronicle*, a majority of the letters to the editor in each newspaper mentioned religion. Furthermore, in every newspaper that published letters to the editor, a greater percentage of letters to the editor, as opposed to articles, mentioned religion. This becomes particularly striking in the case of the *Contra Costa Times*; 29% of articles mention religion, while 52% of letters to the editor mention religion. Clearly, then, religion emerged as important to conceptions of Proposition 8 by California voters, as many felt the need to discuss religion in their letters to the editor. This calls into question Renfro's (1979) article, which suggests that newspaper editors are unlikely to publish letters that refer to religion or the economy.

I further coded articles and letters to the editor for which religions they mentioned. Importantly, I did not double code; thus, if a piece mentioned both Mormonism and Catholicism I coded it as "Mormonism and Catholicism," and did not code it for the singular Mormon and Catholic categories. 37.7% (N=69) of letters to the editor/editorials mentioned Christianity; 21.3% (N=39) mentioned multiple religions, most often in a series, such as "Christians, Jews and Muslims are united by their rejection of homosexuality" or "Unitarian Universalists, liberal Christians and Jews have banded together in support of same-sex marriage"; 14.2% (26) mentioned Mormonism and Catholicism; 13.7% (N=25) mentioned Mormonism; 10.4% (N=19) mentioned Catholicism; 1.6% (N=3) mentioned Judaism; and 1.1% (N=2) mentioned Unitarian Universalism. As both Unitarian Universalism and Judaism tend to lean towards the liberal side of the spectrum in regard to support of gay rights, the relative lack of coverage of Jewish and Unitarian Universalist views on Proposition 8 emerges as particularly notable.

Finally, I considered who was engaging in conversations about Proposition 8. I wondered what percentage of pro- and anti- Proposition 8 letters mentioned religion. Table 4 shows letter to the editor data in terms of both the letters' positions on Proposition 8 and whether or not the authors mention religion in their letters. Again, a mention of religion can be as simple as saying "God" or mentioning one's religious affiliation; on the other hand, it could be as complex as devoting the entire letter to why Jesus' teachings should compel people not to discriminate and, thus, to vote against Proposition 8.

Table 4: Proposition 8 Position and Mentions of Religion

Proposition 8 Position			
Mentions Religion	For	Against	Total
No	58%	47%	51%
Yes	42%	53%	49%
N	129	231	360

Table 4 reveals that authors mention religion in 53% of letters to the editor against Proposition 8. On the other hand, only 42% of letters to the editor in support of Proposition 8 mention religion. A chi square test revealed that these differences are statistically significant at the .05 level ($\chi^2 = 4.294$, $df = 1$, $p = .038$). A majority of letters to the editor against Proposition 8 mention religion, while a majority of letters to the editor for Proposition 8 does not mention religion. I also coded for whether or not articles or letters to the editor mentioned religion as supporting Proposition 8 and/or as opposing Proposition 8. Only 29.3% of letters to the editor who both oppose Proposition 8 and mention religion refer to any religions' or religious groups' opposition to

Proposition 8. Thus, while a majority of letters to the editor that oppose Proposition 8 mention religion, they are unlikely to mention liberal religion or liberal religious leaders. In contrast, 70.7% of Proposition 8 supporters who mention religion discuss religions' or religious groups' support of Proposition 8.

Clearly, religion factors prominently in the democratic imaginations (Perrin 2006) of authors of anti-Proposition 8 letters to the editor. Just as clearly, however, many of these authors do not use liberal religion to justify their beliefs regarding Proposition 8. Rather, they offer responses to conservative religious groups that acted in support of Proposition 8. Indeed, while a majority of letter authors who opposed Proposition 8 mentioned religion, these authors were unlikely to themselves offer religious justification for their beliefs regarding same-sex marriage. On the other hand, pro-Proposition 8 letters that mentioned religion tended to make an explicitly religious argument (e.g., my religion compels me to vote in this way). Anti-Proposition 8 letters instead tended to adopt confused and angry tones regarding the political actions of conservative religious leaders and organizations to support Proposition 8.

Religious Arguments

Though the majority of pro-Proposition 8 letters did not mention religion, the prevalence of pro-Proposition 8 letters that made a religious argument in support of Proposition 8 still emerged as striking. All of these letters were from Christians. Only one pro-Proposition 8 author identified herself as a Mormon. She urged readers of the paper to stop blaming the Mormon church for its actions, as, in her view, they were only working in accordance with their correct and God-given beliefs. Other letter authors appealed to the Bible to legitimate their views regarding homosexuality, discussed their belief that God created men and women to be

complementary, and argued that people should support Proposition 8 because, otherwise, churches would be forced to perform same-sex marriages against their will.

Michelle Wolkomir (2006) details the power found in using religious texts to legitimate views regarding homosexuality. By doing so, people are able to claim a sense of ultimate, God-given truth. To other people who view these texts as authoritative, these arguments then carry deeper meaning and, perhaps, become relevant to their ultimate salvation. Many pro-Proposition 8 authors of letters to the editor talked about their religious beliefs as actively requiring them to vote in support of the measure:

I was very pleased to see Proposition 8 pass. God won or should I say that *people who believe in God and His laws won. In every world religion, there are strong prohibitions against same-sex marriage.* For gays to react so strongly against these prohibitions is to slap God in the face, if one could actually do that. Gays already have all of the civil rights that straight married couples have. And, except for a brief period when a California court ruled against God and the people of California, they do not have the right to "marry." Gays are on equal footing with straight couples, and have the right to marry should they opt to marry someone of the opposite sex.

November 10, 2008, *Contra Costa Times*, male author (emphasis added)

I believe in God and I believe in God's word, the Bible. God created man, the male species of humanity. God designed and formed the body. He then breathed life into that body. That God-created being was one complete entity. God then performed an operation by which he made two from that one. He put the man into a deep sleep and removed the female element, commonly called a rib, from that man and, from that, he made the woman.

God then performed the first marriage ceremony. He brought the woman to the man and the man accepted her as his wife.

The institution of marriage is stated in these words, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." In marriage, the two that were made from the original one are joined back together to be one again. This is the will of God. It is a very beautiful, meaningful uniting of two people of opposite sex into one unit. It is very wrong for any person to violently corrupt this God-given act.

I understand that the main desire is for those involved to have the same rights or privileges that the customary married man and woman have. Another way should have and could have been invented without corrupting the holy estate of matrimony.

October 23, 2008, *San Bernardino Sun*, male author (emphasis added)

In both of these letters to the editor, correct religious belief necessitates thinking that same-sex marriage is against God's plan for humanity. The first letter makes an interfaith claim against same-sex marriage: according to the author, all world religions condemn gay and lesbian marriage. While his argument could be challenged on factual and doctrinal grounds, it suggests the religious coalition-building seen in Catholic and Mormon support of Proposition 8; as people of faith, they recognize the commonality of belief regarding homosexuality that exists among many other theologically conservative people. The second letter uses the creation story of Adam and Eve found in the second chapter of Genesis to argue that God created men and women to be complementary. As such, same-sex marriage must be condemned for failing to live up to this divine ideal. Interestingly, for this author, it is acceptable for gays and lesbians to "have the same rights or privileges that the customary married man and woman have," so long as this does not "[corrupt] the holy estate of matrimony." Presumably, then, the author of this letter would view civil unions and domestic partnerships as acceptable, but rejects same-sex marriage because of marriage's unique ties to religion.

Other letters discussed the difference between the authors' religiously-based worldview and the views of the gay and lesbian rights movement. For these authors, the culture wars mentality espoused by Gallagher and Bull (2001) has credence: religious people and the gay and lesbian rights movement are fundamentally dissimilar and combating with one another. These authors further show how Fetner's (2001, 2008) theoretical works play out in real life, as they demonstrate the tension between conservative Christians and the gay and lesbian rights movement. One example of this logic is below:

I voted for Proposition 8, and encouraged any who spoke to me about it to vote for it also. I did not use fear, and I did not use deception, though opponents did so shamelessly and continuously, using an emotion-laden message that distorted the truth and was highly offensive.

I told people the truth: That it would be taught in school, that homosexuals are not born homosexual, that marriage is a sacred institution, and that marriage was worth defending. For some to say that their friends can't speak openly of the loves of their lives because of recrimination, I wonder where that actually is happening. This society is sexually permissive, and those who would argue contrary to that are the ones not telling the truth. The simple fact is, Californians do not believe that giving homosexuals the privilege of marriage is the right thing to do. Under California law, domestic partnerships have the same rights, protections, and benefits of married couples, so it isn't rights they want, it's legitimacy for a lifestyle that we simply do not recognize as morally right. It really is that simple.

As a pastor, I will continue teaching what God's word says on the subject of sin and salvation. God forgives all manner of sin, including homosexuality. If a homosexual desires to change, God's power is capable of bringing about such transformation.

The line is in the sand, and we will not yield on this point. Our children are at stake, and we will not deliver them up to the spirit of this age.

November 16, 2008, *Inland Valley Daily*, male author

For this pastor, same-sex marriage presents a threat to vulnerable children in the public school system, emerges as blasphemous since marriage is a sacred institution, and, above all, is unnecessary because gays and lesbians can change to be heterosexual with the help of God. For him, homosexuality represents a grievous sin against God. As such, his religious beliefs and homosexuality exist in fundamental and irreconcilable tension. Thus, same-sex marriage threatens both his religious identity and his view of a virtuous society, and he felt compelled to talk with those he knows about the looming threat of same-sex marriage. Political action emerged as necessary to expressing his faith fully.

Confused, Negative and Angry

On the other hand, the majority of anti-Proposition 8 letters that discussed religion talked about conservative religion in confused, negative, and angry tones. While some of these letters advanced religious arguments to legitimate opposition to Proposition 8, by far the most common theme of anti-Proposition 8 letters that mentioned religion was disapproval of the role that religion has played in shaping the movement against same-sex marriage. O'Brien (2004)

discusses her experiences at a Gay Pride march, when those in attendance began to boo the gay-affirming religious groups in the parade. To O'Brien, this suggested the deep distrust that gay and lesbian activists feel towards religion, even, for some, extending to religious groups that accept and affirm LGBT people. In the letters to the editor I studied, distrust and disapproval of religion and religious groups was clearly present. Most often, this distrust and disapproval was rooted in authors' reactions to the political actions of religious groups against gays and lesbians.

For many of these authors, the money donated to Proposition 8 by conservative religious groups became a point of contention. One female author wrote in anger about Mormons' contributions to the campaign:

How did this happen? Paid signature gatherers put Proposition 8 on the ballot and some estimates show more than 70 percent of yes on 8 funds came from the Mormon Church and its followers.

So what have we learned? With enough money, anyone can change the Constitution. This time, Mormons targeted the gay community and eliminated our fundamental right of marriage. But with California's current system that doesn't even require involvement of the Legislature, who's next?

November 13, 2008, *Contra Costa Times*, female author

For this woman, Proposition 8 represents a flaw of the legislative system in California: anyone can put a proposition on the ballot. She views the actions of Mormons to support Proposition 8 as particularly reprehensible. Echoing many other letters, she suggests that Mormons specifically "targeted" gays and lesbians and organized to remove a "fundamental right." Notice that she does not offer a doctrinal critique of Mormons' actions. Rather, she solely and explicitly criticizes their actions in the political sphere.

For others, the role of religion in campaigns to support Proposition 8 goes against their understandings of the constitutional guarantee of the separation of church and state. Letters such as this one were common:

The separation of church and state is meant to prevent the use of state power to enforce the religious views of any particular group on society as a whole. It is, in fact, the

proponents of Proposition 8 who are seeking to compel all of us to abide by their vision of right and wrong. They are the ones who want to abrogate the separation of church and state.

The law should not be about our prejudices, or our comfort zone or what we personally find disgusting; it is about the rights and duties of all citizens. Let's stand up for one of our foundational principles and vote "no" on Proposition 8.

October 25, 2008, *San Francisco Chronicle*, female author

For this author, and the many others who share her view, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution should protect against any religion's ability to force its views on the rest of society. To her, then, religious support of Proposition 8 not only compels anger, but emerges as antithetical to one of the "foundational principles" of the United States. Another woman simultaneously expresses her anger and the belief that Proposition 8 violates the separation of church and state:

This country has a long and august tradition of the separation of church and state. Since I so passionately believe in this tradition, and since it is currently threatened by the extreme agenda of the religious right, I have no choice but to propose a constitutional amendment denying fundamentalists the right to vote.

Please understand, I have nothing against these people personally. It is just that their votes will cheapen my own participation in our democracy and erode the values I hold dear.

San Francisco Chronicle, November 2, 2008, female author

Clearly satirical, this letter nonetheless demonstrates disapproval with the California initiative process, strong belief in the separation of church and state, and anger at the role of conservative religious groups to organize around their support of Proposition 8. For her, it appears, once again, disagreement with groups' political actions emerges as foundational to her anger and criticism of the Religious Right.

Viewed collectively, anti-Proposition 8 letters that discuss actions of conservative religious groups to support Proposition 8 are united by a common theme: anger. Though only briefly outlined here, authors express their anger towards conservative religious groups' political actions. Some of the authors came out as gay or lesbian, while others mentioned their activism

on LGBT issues. Many of these authors adopt the view of the woman who thought that religious groups had specifically targeted her – they express their belief that religious groups specifically pursued gays and lesbians in the political arena. While O’Brien (2004) witnessed distrust and disapproval of religion as a collective entity, the majority of this body of letters to the editor displays anger only at the *political actions* of these groups. Perhaps this difference can be attributed to the limited space authors have to express their views and/or the whims of newspaper editors, who serve a type of “gatekeeper” function (Renfro 1979). Regardless, this expressed level of anger has important social and political implications.

Content Analysis Summary

I conducted content analysis of all published newspaper articles and letters to the editor regarding Proposition 8 in the *Contra Costa Times*, *Inland Valley Daily*, *Oroville Mercury Register*, *San Bernardino Sun*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, from one month before the election to one month after. Variety existed among newspapers as to the breakdown of pro- and anti-Proposition 8 letters, how many total pieces were published, and what percentage of these letters mentioned religion. A key finding in this section is that anti-Proposition 8 letters actually mentioned religion more frequently than did pro-Proposition 8 letters. Yet, often these letters were characterized by a considerable degree of anger, as letter writers struggle to understand how and why religious groups mobilized to support Proposition 8. On the other hand, pro-Proposition 8 letters were more likely to make a religious argument to justify their views regarding Proposition 8. I turn now to analyzing in-depth interviews with California religious leaders. I consider how these religious leaders manage their own anger at conservative religious groups, similar to the anger expressed by authors of letters to the editor. I also detail the ways in which they construct arguments against Proposition 8 and how they and their congregations

choose whether or not to engage in political action against Proposition 8 in the public, political sphere.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Like many anti-Proposition 8 authors of letters to the editor, religious leaders whom I interviewed expressed high levels of anger regarding the political actions of conservative religious organizations in the movement to support Proposition 8, as well as the theologies that these organizations have developed. As people who personally experienced the effects of Proposition 8 and watched how it affected their congregations, all of these religious leaders felt compelled to act. Yet, as leaders in denominations and congregations that have largely distanced themselves from political organizing and action, these leaders were forced to work with their congregations to negotiate meanings of politics, justice and human rights. Among many of the religious leaders I interviewed, Proposition 8 forced reconsideration of their congregations' role in the political sphere. As such, several of the religious leaders described how Proposition 8 compelled action atypical to their congregations and belief structures. In this section, I question how and why religious leaders chose to act on their anger by becoming active in the movement against Proposition 8. I overview the anger felt by religious leaders, addressing institutionalized limits to acting on this anger. In the process, I consider how, why and to what extent religious leaders ultimately decided to get involved in political organizing.

Anger Regarding Political Actions of Conservative Religious Groups

Don Perry, a United Church of Christ minister working in Butte County, discusses the anger he felt towards the LDS church following Proposition 8's passage. Active in city and state government long before going into the ministry, Don recalls having to go into work in the

Colorado governor's office the day after Proposition 2 passed in 1992. Proposition 2, overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court Case *Romer v. Evans* (1996), prohibited "all legislative, executive, or judicial action at any level of state or local government designed to protect the status of persons based on their 'homosexual, lesbian or bisexual orientation, conduct, practices or relationships'" in the state of Colorado. As such, it prohibited the Colorado government from adopting employment nondiscrimination policies that included sexual orientation. Recalling this particularly difficult experience, Don claims that while he was initially upset over Proposition 8, he was not angry that it passed; he had previously experienced similar feelings with Proposition 2 and knew that he would eventually be okay. Regardless, he expressed anger at the involvement of religious groups in the organizing of the movement to support Proposition 8. He describes an experience he had at an interfaith meeting following the election:

We have an interfaith council that's truly interfaith, it's not just Christian churches, there are Muslims and Jews, Mormons, Baha'i, earth based faiths, all sorts of varieties of Christians who are all at the table together. And uh uh the meeting after the election which I guess would have been a week after the election was our first meeting...there was a genuine hostility in the room towards [the LDS representative] that day. You could feel it and sense it but you could not, no one acted on it. And I was very aware of it. I was aware of my own feelings that I wanted to stop her and say, "excuse me, I really like you but what you're doing, what your church just did disgusts me. And I'm not sure I can sit in the same room with you right now." That's how I felt. But I think, and I know there were others in the room who felt that way because they talked to me about it, but we all made a decision that that's not the way we were going to behave towards each other and we've lived out that decision. That was noticeable. That was the strongest feeling, emotional thing that I dealt with.

Thus, while Don was able to temper his anger regarding Proposition 8, he still felt a considerable level of anger towards the LDS church. He describes the visceral reaction he had to an LDS woman following Proposition 8's passage. Though he knew her and had previously worked with her, Proposition 8 generated a new feeling towards her – a feeling of "disgust," motivated by the

actions of her church. Moreover, Don suggests that other religious leaders in the room likely felt the same way.

Likewise, all religious leaders whom I interviewed discussed some degree of anger during our interview. Most often, this was in answer to the question: How did you react when you first found out that Proposition 8 passed? Two examples of answers to this question are below. The first is from Ethan James, an Episcopal priest in the Bay Area and the second is from Lucas Kaufmann, a UCC minister in the Bay Area:

I mean I was shocked at first but then I became really angry. To think that so called religious people pushed people for the passage of Prop. 8. Using lies and using church money in a way where we were pushing for something with honesty and then to bring up the “gay agenda was to educate gay marriage in schools” sort of that fear thing, sort of reminded me of the whole Bush years. Like code orange! The sirens are going off!
THE GAYS ARE COMING!
 Ethan James

I was really, I was really mad. And I know the Catholic Church and also Mormon churches were very involved here, and they raised a lot of money, and I felt they really should stay out of it. It was not, they are big churches, they have a lot of funds, they can really um they can really um they have a lot of influence and I really think it’s not their business to um to um decide what’s going on in California. And a lot of money came from other states and was pumped here into California.
 Lucas Kaufmann

Ethan refers to religious supporters of Proposition 8 as “so called religious people,” implicitly suggesting that he takes issue with their theologies and worldviews. In the next sentence, he compares the pro- and anti- Proposition 8 movements, stating that unlike religious groups that supported Proposition 8, people opposing Proposition 8 used “honesty.” Similarly, Lucas expresses his disapproval of Catholic and Mormon money being “pumped here into California” and how mad this made him. While I asked a question on conservative religious groups’ donations to Proposition 8 following this question⁷, it is important to note that religious leaders

⁷ This question reads: As I’m sure you know, the movement to pass Proposition 8 was supported by millions of dollars from religious organizations. As a person of faith, how did you respond when you heard this?

brought up conservative religious groups well before I asked this question. Indeed, religious support of Proposition 8, and the anger that it engendered, was such a common theme in the interviews that there was little left to say by the time we reached that question.

Ethan continued to express his anger at the Mormon church. In particular, he found himself angry at the political actions in which the church engaged:

And you know to have so much money coming from the Mormons in Utah and then them lying about it, it was just, none of it was truth, it was lies and using the fear of God. And for many people who know better, who know it's a political move for people to get money, we were upset. And for me, I got angry because I consider that to be evil.

Here, Ethan conceptualizes Mormons' political actions as "evil," resonating with Moon's (2004) discussion of "politics" as antithetical to the structure of the mainline churches she studied.

Moon claims "that one see as spiritual only those movements with which one identifies, and that one sees as political those movements from which one perceives an attack" (2004: 137). Ethan organized phonebanks of clergy against Proposition 8 and participated in a clergy blockade of an intersection following the California Supreme Court decision to uphold Proposition 8. Thus, while he certainly engaged in "political" actions against Proposition 8, congruent with Moon's argument, he conceptualized Mormons' actions as fundamentally dissimilar from his own religiously motivated action on the other side of the issue.

Likewise, Kate Beebe-Jones, a Unitarian Universalist minister in the Bay Area, described her congregation's extensive work in the movement against Proposition 8. While Kate's congregation took a unanimous vote to become active in the movement against Proposition 8, Kate describes a few people in her congregation as being initially hesitant to be involved. These congregants' uncertainty was rooted in the belief that people should not talk about politics in church or engage in political action as a religious community. Kate reports responding to these members by saying, "this isn't a political issue, it's a moral issue, it's a civil rights issue" and

claims that “usually they’re pretty satisfied with that answer.” By distancing her congregation from “political” actions, Kate is able to maintain that their actions are instead rooted in morals and civil rights. Like in Moon’s (2004) work, church members construct the abstract concept of politics as hostile to their community – the same actions are okay if described with another term. Similarly, Ethan calls the political actions of the Mormon Church “evil.” For Ethan, this evil is rooted in the use of “lies and the fear of God” by “so-called religious people,” suggesting both a doctrinal critique of Mormon theology and a more general critique of the political actions of religious bodies.

Anger Regarding Religious Beliefs of Conservative Religious Groups

Like Ethan, many religious leaders discussed their anger or frustration at conservative religious groups’ theologies, in addition to expressing anger at the political actions of these groups. Erzen (2006) and Wolkomir (2006) detail much of the opposition of conservative Christianity to homosexuality as being rooted in homosexuality’s inherent difference from the nuclear family ideal. Many conservative Christians view this ideal as having a biblical basis and see the Bible as containing injunctions against homosexuality (Wolkomir 2006). Yet, as people who have worked to negotiate gay-affirming religious identities, most religious leaders I interviewed expressed anger or frustration at what they see as the misuse and misinterpretation of religious texts.

Ana Rivera, a nondenominational, Pentecostal minister in the Bay Area, views discrimination against gays and lesbians as originating with human ideology, not with religious texts. She says, “If you want to be prejudiced, if you want to be ignorant, than just say this is me, this is not God! They think they have to peg God on it, that’s what awful, truly awful about it.” The actions of religious groups supporting Proposition 8 disturb her, as she believes these groups

are wrongly labeling their beliefs as coming from God. As a self-described lesbian, evangelical Christian, she finds the trend of gay and lesbian apostasy “just so sad,” and believes that many have “turned their backs on God because they were told that God turned His back on them.”

In a similar vein, Don Perry states that he “love[s] the Bible but [he] also know[s] what’s in it,” contrasting himself to the people “that love the Bible and don’t know what’s in it.” Don, an openly gay UCC minister raised in a Baptist household, and now living in Butte County, has spent considerable time developing gay-affirming interpretations of Scripture. For him, people who use the Christian Bible to preach against homosexuality do not have a fully developed sense of the contents and meanings of the biblical text. Instead, he believes that the Bible neither explicitly condemns nor affirms gays and lesbians. While he acknowledges that every apparent mention of homosexuality in the Bible is negative, he maintains that these references are culturally specific and believe that parts of the Bible can be read as implicitly celebrating affection between people of the same sex.

This anger and frustration directed at conservative churches’ theologies links to the effects of these theologies that these religious leaders have witnessed. Larry Katzman, a Reform rabbi in Inland Valley, hints at the totalizing effects of conservative religious theology within his community. Larry describes giving a sermon about Proposition 8:

I stressed um that there are more than the literal understandings of texts in Torah, texts in Leviticus arguing about the abomination of homosexuality. I wanted to stress that when people hear that there are religious messages regarding homosexuality that the one side doesn’t own the message. There’s more than one interpretation. To realize that Jewish texts are evolutionary and Jewish thinking is evolutionary, hence Reform Judaism. And that was somewhat empowering for people to realize that they don’t have to hear one message. I also wanted to stress and I did stress that the very idea of a family, family value, and protecting marriage and the idea of what is a family structure, also, is not owned by one voice but that the message of what is a family and what is a family unit within a synagogue is up to us to define.

Larry, living in the area with the most conservative vote on Proposition 8 of all the places I sampled, thinks that he must counter the conservative voice that dominates religious conversations regarding homosexuality. As part of Reform Judaism, a tradition that has historically been accepting of gays and lesbians, Larry still feels the need to tell his congregation that there are many sides to the religious debate over homosexuality, demonstrating the widespread influence of conservative religious views regarding homosexuality, marriage and family values. Ethan details the devastating effects that religion can have on gays and lesbians involved in religious communities that do not accept them:

I get angry when I know that people are using the word of God or lies to instill fear of something that should not be feared. And it just for me, [Mormons' and Catholics' donations to support Proposition 8] goes against the teachings of Christ, the true will set you free, and just thinking about people I know that have committed suicide because they're gay because of what their priest or their rabbi or their imam taught, you know, and this just like was like the nail in the coffin you know for that. I mean, here they go again. So, for me, as a Christian it calls me to do a lot more apologizing on behalf of the church, saying you know maybe we're talking about a different God than those who are funding something that's full of lies.

Ethan thinks that homosexuality should not be feared, and believes that it is wrong to use Scripture to condemn gays and lesbians. He brings up suicide as an extremely tragic result of conservative religious leaders' rhetoric surrounding homosexuality. As in previously quoted sections of our interview, he discusses the actions of pro-Proposition 8 churches as being rooted in fear and lies, while anti-Proposition 8 churches use an honest view of God and Jesus' teachings – indeed, Ethan claims that these two sides may be “talking about a different God.”

Clearly, then, the religious leaders whom I interviewed find many faults with the religious groups who actively supported Proposition 8. In addition to anger at these groups' actions in the public political sphere, many of the people I interviewed also provided doctrinal critiques of conservative religious groups' theologies. Several religious leaders link their doctrinal critiques to the everyday consequences of these theologies, such as propagating

discriminatory views regarding homosexuality, even to those in theologically liberal congregations, or making gays and lesbians question themselves to the devastating point of suicide. A couple of the people I interviewed drew a distinction between conservative religious groups' private religious beliefs and their actions. David, for instance, said, "I can respect and love what you do, but it's not for me, but when it comes to putting money into controlling someone else it's totally inappropriate... Don't you send money from Topeka, Kansas from your little Mormon ward to California," asserting that political action, not theological belief, is what is at fault. For most, however, both the content and application of religious beliefs compelled anger. As gays and lesbians, as activists, and as people living in relation to LGBT people in their congregations and communities, religious leaders were forced by Proposition 8 to confront their feelings about conservative religious opposition to same-sex marriage and make decisions about how they and their congregations should respond to the measure.

Political Activism and its (Changing) Limits

In line with Moon's (2004) work on the distancing of two United Methodist congregations from the abstract theme of "politics," all religious leaders I interviewed discussed some degree of distancing from political organizing within their congregations. David and George's congregation is simply, in their words, too old – the average age of congregants is 70 years old, so many within their congregation are unable to engage in large-scale political action. While both describe the congregational level of support of same-sex marriage as "very high," in David's words the congregation's work in terms of "rolling up their sleeves" was minimal. Kate details the distance from congregational political action that often occurs within her congregation. Though Unitarian Universalists have historically been committed to action on social justice issues, Kate says that most of this activism occurs in smaller committees of her church, instead

of an organized movement on behalf of the whole church. Yet, her congregation decided to vote on whether or not to be actively involved in the movement against Proposition 8. They unanimously voted yes and, as a result, Kate set up phonebanks in the church, passed out petitions around to those in her congregation, and organized participation at rallies. She describes the uniqueness of this widespread action:

And you know it was a big deal. UU's don't like to evangelize, it's not their thing, it doesn't matter what the cause is, it's like they'd rather not, they don't like people doing it to them, right? And it was kinda countercultural to get people organized and get them to be willing to do it, not because they weren't convinced of the issue, but just because that way of being is not the way of being that they're used to being.

Kate's congregants organized as a collective whole to engage in political action in opposition to Proposition 8. Kate views this action as "countercultural," as her congregation normally distances themselves from political organizing.

As people deeply affected by Proposition 8, religious leaders whom I interviewed knew that they had to act regarding Proposition 8. Like Kate, some saw new levels of political organizing within their congregations, while others' congregations largely did not get involved on the issue. As moral and spiritual authorities, every religious leader had to negotiate political identities congruent with their denominations' and congregations' expectations of them. Everyone I interviewed engaged in some sort of action against Proposition 8, from putting bumper stickers on their cars to organizing sustained phonebanking campaigns for clergy, laity and people within surrounding towns. Yet, most religious leaders also discussed potential limits to activism, such as an unwillingness of their congregations to donate money for political causes, belief systems that encouraged individualism as opposed to collective action, and strong belief in the separation of church and state. Many religious leaders thus found themselves between a proverbial rock and a hard place: how could they engage in the action they felt was necessary while staying true to the belief systems of the congregations that they lead? How could they

engage in political action without misusing “politics,” as they believed conservative religious groups had been doing? These questions repeatedly came up in interviews. In this section, I consider the actions of religious leaders to oppose Proposition 8 and how religious leaders worked to negotiate identities that were true to both their religious affiliations and their support of same-sex marriage.

All religious leaders discussed limits to political organizing rooted in their congregations’ culture and, specifically, many detailed differences they perceived between their congregations’ culture and that of more conservative religious groups that supported Proposition 8. For example, both Kate and Don detail difficulties with raising money for political issues within liberal congregations:

And, you know, it is that thing about, it’s where liberal people can really be at a disadvantage because conservative churches teach people to put their money where they believe. So it’s not against the culture of a conservative church for um leaders to say that you need to tithe so that we can raise the money to get the ads to keep this terrible thing from happening or whatever. And our folks see that as coercion, while “why are you asking us for money? And why can’t we just use volunteers?” And so we’re at a disadvantage in a system that’s increasingly more about money. Kate Beebe-Jones

And if I said to my congregation, you know, if you don’t donate to no on 8 you’re going to hell someone would raise their hand and say, “so does that mean we believe in hell now?” Um and then someone else would say, you don’t get to tell me what to do with my money. But I think most of them are going to, it sort of um highlighted the contrast between uh churches that value freedom and churches that put a lot of emphasis on hierarchy and obedience um and that you know it just highlights that. Don Perry

Both discuss the same key difference between their congregations’ organizing and the organizing of Mormons and Catholics: they know that members of their congregations would not be amenable to their religious leaders’ asking them to donate to Proposition 8. Don further ties this to his church’s lack of belief in hell – as a congregation that does not consider God as an entity capable of eternal damnation, his parishioners do not necessarily fear God’s wrath for questioning or defying the actions of their religious leaders. For Don, his inability to ask his

church to donate money to oppose Proposition 8 demonstrates another fundamental difference between his church and conservative churches: in his view, his church, and others like it, value “freedom,” while other churches, including the Mormon and Catholic Church, value “hierarchy and obedience.”

“Freedom,” as conceptualized by Don, seems to be defined as a willingness of churches to embrace religious individualism and to allow their members to be free to question and define their faith for themselves. Another key aspect of religious congregations’ culture is their understandings of the importance of religious individualism or, conversely, of shared theology and unified action. Sociologist Robert Bellah and colleagues (1985) detail the increasingly high levels of religious individualism in United States society. Bellah et al. document a trend of Americans crafting highly personalized ideas of religion to define their faith lives instead of uncritically accepting church doctrine. They argue that this is part of a larger shift in American society from focusing on community to a focus on the individual. In this vein, Jack Williams, an Episcopal priest in the Bay Area, notes that his congregation engaged in little collective political action against Proposition 8 (though he personally was highly involved in activism) because of their strong belief in religious individualism:

We have a tradition here of encouraging people to find the work that they’re passionate about doing and to take that out without having to be sort of guided or goaded by the whole church, so I think for a lot of folks here, they just found ways that they were willing to engage themselves and our work as the church was to prop them up, give them the strength, give them the courage, but not really anything else.

Thus, for Jack, while the church exists to support its members, it does not exist to “goad” them – it is there to help them achieve their goals, not to tell them what these goals should be. While Jack’s parishioners were highly active in the movement against Proposition 8, for the most part this action took place without the presence of the church.

Jack and Don were among two of the most personally politically involved people of those whom I interviewed. Even so, both distanced themselves from widespread congregational organizing on Proposition 8. Don, previously active in state and local government before joining the ministry, was active with the local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in their efforts against Proposition 8 and counseled church members devastated by Proposition 8's passage. Jack helped to organize a drive to give out fliers opposing Proposition 8 to people who came to his church's weekly food drive, passed out information about Proposition 8 to voters, and personally donated money to the campaign. Jack's husband works as a consultant on issues of "queer enfranchisement" and Jack reports becoming active in his work as well. The issue for Jack and Don, then, is certainly not about personal political involvement. Rather, as spiritual leaders, they have joined and helped to construct communities in which religious individualism emerges as the norm. For them, then, it would be inappropriate to organize their congregations to engage in collective action, as it would threaten the idea of individualism so prevalent within their churches. Thus, while both may support their congregants' efforts, such as counseling individual members or passing out fliers at a soup kitchen, both would stop far short of the level of organized political involvement seen in Catholic and Mormon action to support Proposition 8.

Another key factor determining congregational involvement in Proposition 8, among both authors of letters to the editor and religious leaders whom I interviewed, was strong belief in the separation of church and state. The 1st Amendment to the United States Constitution reads that, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." Colloquially, many refer to the injunction against establishing a religion as "the separation of church and state,"

as the Establishment Clause effectively draws a line between religious groups and the government. While a treatise on constitutional law lies far beyond the scope of this paper, numerous Supreme Court Cases have attempted to define these terms. Among many other laws drawn from the 1st Amendment's discussion of religion, religious congregations and leaders, while allowed to discuss politics and engage in political actions, are not allowed to endorse political candidates. Many of the religious leaders I interviewed were concerned about laws regarding the separation of church and state; some also further developed the concept to mean that their religious organizations should not engage in any political action, as they believe that religion should have little influence on the government.

Don and Leon both implicitly talk about the separation of church and state when discussing a perhaps unexpected topic: putting anti-Proposition 8 bumper stickers on their cars. Don, formerly involved with Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, decided, with some difficulty, to put an anti-Proposition 8 bumper sticker on his car. He certainly believed strongly enough in the issue to display a bumper sticker about it, but he considered what implications it might have for his role as a pastor: "I don't usually put political bumper stickers of any kind on my car because of my role as a pastor, a pastor is a kind of public role and um and I'm cautious about appearing that my church endorses a candidate." Though an anti-Proposition 8 bumper sticker on one's car is far different than endorsing a candidate, Don, as a religious leader particularly vested in the separation of church and state, still questioned whether or not it was an appropriate action. Similarly, while Leon did not discuss a similar period of consideration before putting an anti-Proposition 8 bumper sticker on his car, he did have members of the congregation ask him about the appropriateness of displaying such a sticker in relation to laws regarding the synagogue's tax-exempt status. Leon then explained to these

congregants that he is allowed to support positions, but not candidates. Even though Leon did not personally feel qualms about putting the bumper sticker on his car, members within his congregation quickly questioned his actions in terms of whether he, as a religious leader, had crossed too far into the political realm.

Like members within Leon's congregation, Ana reports that members of her church are very concerned with church/state issues and making sure that the distinction between the religious and governmental spheres is negotiated appropriately. Ana describes her congregation's beliefs on the separation of church and state:

We have a congregation, again, we're a little different... We didn't get all that... I shouldn't say all that... we don't get politically involved much at all, because we really believe in the separation of church and state kind of thing and to us, we don't want political issues in the church. We don't ask congressmen, we don't have the mayor come in, we don't do that.

Here we once again see a religious leader explicitly discussing intentional distancing from the political sphere. Ana justifies this distancing because of her congregation's belief that church and state should be separate. As such, Ana reports that her church does not take collective action or form stands on political issues and does not invite elected officials to talk with members of her congregation. Yet, the next part of our conversation reveals that Proposition 8 compelled change within her congregation. Ana states, "And one thing we did take a stand on and I said, 'we need to take a stand on this' so we signed the petitions, and we got our name out there saying that we of course advocate for gay marriage. *Um, so that's the only thing we've ever done like that*" (emphasis added). Ana describes being deeply personally affected by Proposition 8 and reports that her predominantly LGBT congregation was as well. As such, despite holding these beliefs, they chose to take exception for this issue and actively involve themselves in the movement against Proposition 8.

Leon holds seemingly contradictory views regarding the relationships between religion and the state. In response to my final question about the role that he saw religious leaders ultimately playing in the movement for same-sex marriage, he answered, in part, “In an ideal world-- we are blurring the lines between religion and state in general in America to the point that it’s dangerous. But I don’t think we live in an ideal world so we have to get dirty and play the game the way that they did.” “Dirtiness” was a common theme throughout our interview: religious groups who involve themselves in the political sphere are dirty because the state should be free from the influence of religious beliefs. Yet, Leon concludes that because we do not live in an ideal world, it is important for liberal religious leaders to involve themselves in the struggle for same-sex marriage. Despite holding strong conviction in the separate roles of religious groups and governmental actors, Leon sees their interaction as unfortunately inevitable and believes that, because of this, religious leaders who support same-sex marriage should “get dirty” and “play the game” alongside of other religious groups.

Like Leon, all religious leaders had to negotiate how best to respond to Proposition 8, acknowledging both their strong feelings regarding same-sex marriage and the institutionalized limits to responding in the political arena. O’Brien’s (2004) research participants identify a contradiction between being gay and being religious, saying that this contradiction is one that they must continually negotiate. Similarly, many of the religious leaders I interviewed discussed a sense of contradiction between being politically involved in LGBT activism as a congregation and being a liberal religious leader. Some religious leaders had encouraged religious individualism in their congregations to the point that collective action on issues was “countercultural”; others led congregations in which they felt particularly uncomfortable asking

members to donate money to oppose Proposition 8; and, finally, many had to negotiate their actions in light of strong congregational belief in the separation of church and state.

On a personal level, all religious leaders were involved in actions to oppose Proposition 8, though the nature of this involvement varied widely. Even the person who reported the lowest level of political activism, however, was present on the California Supreme Court steps when the court voted to uphold Proposition 8. At the higher ends of the activist spectrum, religious leaders blocked intersections, organized massive phonebanking campaigns, planned regional protests, covered their yards with signs, and, even, in one case, participated in a widely circulated documentary about religion and Proposition 8. While levels of activism did vary, religious leaders, as a whole, did not express religious-based hesitation⁸ to get involved in the movement against Proposition 8. Don emerges as one possible exception, as seen in his questioning of whether to put a bumper sticker on his car. Yet, for everyone else, and for Don in all other circumstances, their personal religious beliefs compelled action.

As people who have already negotiated gay-affirming religious beliefs well before talking with me, the religious leaders whom I interviewed viewed religion as a motivating force in the struggle for gay rights. Kate details how she believes it is impossible to be a Unitarian Universalist and not support gay rights. Ethan describes his involvement with liberation theology in Argentina and how that compels him to act against discrimination in its many forms. Leon compares gays and lesbians' struggles to the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt, stating that his understanding of Jewish history informs his support and belief in the necessity of action on gay and lesbian issues. Ana describes how being created by God to be a lesbian gives her strength and convinces her to act on issues of gay and lesbian rights. In short, religious leaders

⁸ Some religious leaders expressed hesitation for other reasons. Ana, for instance, thought that the movement was not organized and Jack reports being disillusioned by some of the strategies used by the No on 8 movement.

whom I interviewed are strongly invested in the struggle for LGBT rights and, by and large, view no contradictions between themselves as religious leaders and as actors within the movement for same-sex marriage.

The contradiction emerges, then, in how to share these identities with their congregations and how best to engage in congregational organizing on these issues, given aforementioned limits to organizing within their congregations. In some cases, such as in Tom's and Leon's congregations, a reported lack of interest on the part of the congregation translated into no action as a congregation on the issue. On the other hand, in the case of Kate's and Ana's church, an extremely high level of interest on the part of their congregation led to changes within congregational organizing. Kate led a vote on whether or not to be involved in the movement against Proposition 8. When the vote came back as a unanimous yes, Kate reports feeling "relieved" as she could now act in accordance with her conscience. Other religious leaders had more complex paths to navigate. Don, for instance, who believes strongly in the separation of church and state and details high levels of religious individualism within his congregation, felt as though it would be inappropriate to compel his congregation into action. So, while some members of his church actually organized a fundraising dinner to oppose Proposition 8 on church grounds, Don did not think it would be appropriate to engage in further action during the everyday work hours of the church. For others, such as Larry and Lucas, the congregation was fully aware of its leaders' activism, just as Larry and Lucas were aware of activism on the part of their congregations. Yet, the religious leaders' and congregations' activism, as discussed in our interviews, existed separate from one another. Unlike religious groups whose leaders organized collective congregational action on Proposition 8, activists appeared to exist harmoniously with little actual interaction.

As such, religious leaders whom I interviewed, themselves quite active in the movement against Proposition 8, detailed three different levels of activism among their congregations: no visible involvement, collective involvement organized by religious leaders and in conjunction with congregational desire for action, and, finally, activism by both the religious leader and his or her congregation. This last level of involvement was characterized by activism of members of the congregation occurring separately from the religious leaders and vice versa. Each level of activism existed in conjunction with institutionalized limits to activism detailed previously. Importantly, all collective activism that occurred within religious organizations began with congregants' approval and support. Instead of a top-down approach, in which religious leaders dictated the beliefs that their congregants' should have and the actions they should undertake, congregational based organizing was, in religious leaders' reports, fundamentally initiated by the congregations. Likewise, leaders of congregations with no visible political action reported that this lack of action was based in congregants' desires. Among the religious leaders I interviewed, then, the negotiation of identities as a liberal religious leader and leader of congregational political activism on LGBTQ issues, while seen as a type of contradiction, was ultimately understood in light of their congregations' desires.

A Tale of Three Geographic Areas

Regardless of the ultimate negotiation of these identities, the expression of activism was, of course, dependent on the geographic area in which religious leaders worked. Ana, in the Bay Area, expresses regret that she limited her activism to liberal areas, as she feels it would have been more effective to travel to conservative areas. She notes that in more conservative areas, it may be hard for people to be fully out to their communities and she felt that, as an out lesbian, she could talk more freely about her identity than many of the people who actually lived there.

Conversely, Larry, living in the Inland Valley area, discusses a very basic limit to activism: his location. Living in a conservative area far from highly populated, more liberal cities, Larry claims that his congregation is the only progressive religious voice in the area, making it hard to network with other liberal religious organizations. Even getting yard signs was difficult, as they had to be transported from Los Angeles.

As such, in addition to considering the beliefs of their congregations in terms of politics, collective organizing and the separation of church and state, religious leaders also had to deal with their geographical areas. The majority of my interviews took place with religious leaders living and working in the Bay Area, which had high levels of political activism surrounding Proposition 8. Ethan describes the overall climate of the Bay Area as one in which “a lot of work, writing letters and marching” took place in opposition to Proposition 8. Few, if any, limits to activism existed for religious bodies in the Bay Area. In contrast, as we have seen with the Inland Valley Area, locating other people who opposed Proposition 8 was difficult, let alone finding other religious people organizing against Proposition 8. So, while Larry says that a lot of people had “something on our cars, on our lawns, or such,” beyond that, widespread activism was highly limited by his geographic location. Finally, Butte County, composed of both small, conservative towns and more liberal small cities emerged as somewhat of a midpoint between the two extremes. David was able to access yard signs to cover his and his partners’ yard, Don was active in a chapter of the ACLU that existed in the area, and both Don and David participated in a protest following Proposition 8’s passage. Yet, all three religious leaders from Butte County discussed the at times overwhelming prevalence of conservative religious voices in the area and how difficult that could be to deal with.

As a result, religious leaders living in the Bay Area were logically able to engage in the largest and most public forms of activism. On the other hand, people in the Inland Valley had to travel to Los Angeles to experience similar levels of activism. And, finally, people in Butte County had several opportunities to engage in public activism, but these were perhaps less visible and certainly less populated than similar actions in the Bay Area. Consequently, the negotiation of congregational activism and adoption of political identities is limited by one's location within her or his community.

CONCLUSION

Summary

Like authors of letters to the editor, religious leaders whom I interviewed expressed high levels of anger regarding Mormons' and Catholics' monetary contributions to the campaign to support Proposition 8. Both religious leaders and letter authors were also troubled by perceived emergent threats to the 1st Amendment guarantee to the separation of church and state. Letter authors tended to view conservative religious groups' actions and Proposition 8 itself as violating the separation of church and state. On the other hand, religious leaders were concerned with defining appropriate political action, as many of their congregants believed strongly that religious beliefs should play a limited role in the political sphere. Religious leaders and their congregants worked to negotiate political identities congruent with their understandings of faith, politics, and justice for gays and lesbians.

Through analyzing 589 total articles and letters to the editor from five California newspapers, I was able to see how Proposition 8 was conceptualized in everyday discourse. Though these letters cannot be seen as an unproblematic representation of public opinion, they

are a strong option, as they show the discussions of Proposition 8 that many Californians read daily. Overall, 49% of letters to the editor mentioned religion. Anti-Proposition 8 letters were significantly ($p < .05$) more likely to mention religion than pro-Proposition 8 letters. Yet, pro-Proposition 8 authors were more likely to make a religious argument to justify their beliefs regarding Proposition 8. Instead, anti-Proposition 8 letters tended to discuss religion in confused, negative, and angry tones.

Likewise, religious leaders I interviewed expressed anger at both the political involvement and doctrinal basis of the Mormon and Catholic churches. They felt compelled to act in the movement against Proposition 8 because of this anger and their own personal investment in the gay rights movement. Each engaged in considerable personal action on Proposition 8, ranging from putting bumper stickers on their cars to organizing interfaith phonebanks, blocking intersections following the election, and planning protests after Proposition 8's passage. They all had to negotiate appropriate actions against Proposition 8 with their congregations. Religious leaders acknowledged the distancing from political organizing that occurred in their congregations, including reported unwillingness of congregants to donate money for political issues, a culture of religious individualism, and strong congregational belief in the separation of church and state. Geographic location also influenced political action, as religious leaders' and their congregations' ability to engage in collective political organizing could be supported or hindered by the town in which they lived. Leaders turned to members within their congregations to direct how their religious organizations should act, contrary to top-down organizing seen in Mormon and Catholic support of Proposition 8.

Looking Towards the Future

Though my interview data are not generalizable, considering the congregation-initiated activism surrounding Proposition 8 leads to important potential implications. All religious leaders, while personally invested in activism, were hesitant to *initiate* action within their own congregations. To some extent, this can be attributed to the high degree of religious individualism and emphasis on the separation of church and state found within these congregations. Yet, another key aspect to understanding religious leaders' hesitance is the distance that liberal religious leaders attempted to place between themselves and conservative religious leaders they saw organizing in support of Proposition 8 – they did not want the “dirtiness” of these leaders' tactics to pollute their own congregations.

As such, these religious leaders cannot be located as easily within the movement for gay rights as some of their Catholic, Mormon, and conservative Protestant colleagues can be located within the movement against gay rights. For this reason, the emphasis on conservative religious groups within social movements literature on religions and sexualities (Erzen 2006; Fetner 2001; Fetner 2008; Linneman 2003; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996) makes sense. Yet, though these activism emerge as different, they do not appear as less important or less capable of achieving social change.

Looking towards the future, every religious leader expressed the desire to see an increased prevalence of liberal religion in the movement for same-sex marriage and in the LGBT rights movement as a whole. Many raised liberal religious leaders' potential to counter the arguments of religious leaders who oppose gay rights. George stated that it “takes a pastor to challenge a pastor” and it is time we “do a little midrash and see where we get.” George's desire to do midrash, the tradition of rabbinical criticism and commentary, suggests a desire to converse

with other religious leaders about the meanings of same-sex marriage. As conservative religion has dominated news coverage of struggles for gay rights, religious leaders see a liberal religious answer to these challenges as necessary for social change. As their congregations are willing, these religious leaders are poised to guide them, support them, and help them determine how their voices can be most appropriately and effectively used.

Indeed, as Americans' beliefs regarding homosexuality continue to liberalize (Loftus 2001), it seems likely that religious congregations will play an increasingly important role in the movement for gay rights. Furthermore, the potential for ecumenical and interfaith coalitions to support gay rights emerges, as congregations ally with their leaders and both work within their communities for social change. My research is admittedly limited and small-scale, but my conclusions are supported by the recent formation of the Human Rights Campaign's (HRC)⁹ Religion and Faith program and the post-Proposition 8 creation of California Faith for Equality. Both groups are interfaith, para-religious organizations that mobilize religious leaders and congregations to support gay rights, the former on a national scale and the latter specifically focused on the state of California.

Directions for Further Research

While my research has worked to answer important questions, it also raises a host of other questions to be considered in future research: How do congregations across California and the United States compare to the few geographic areas I have sampled? Do congregants' experiences of activism match the reports of religious leaders? How do non-religious gays and lesbians respond to religious-based activism to support same-sex marriage? Following legalization of same-sex marriage, do religious leaders and congregations continue to engage in

⁹ The HRC purports to be the largest LGBT activist organization in the United States.

activism surrounding LGBT issues? Similarly, how do religious leaders and their congregations act on LGBT issues other than marriage?

Larger scale research is necessary to address these questions. Interviews with religious leaders, congregants, and gay and lesbian activists located outside of religious community are essential to developing a more thorough picture of conceptions of religious activism on LGBT issues. Further content analysis of media, including newspapers, television advertisements, widely circulated YouTube videos, and materials distributed by religious organizations also would be instructive. Likewise, survey research of religious congregations would shed light on the prevalence of the themes that I have identified through qualitative interviews.

Given the assumption of hostility between religion and the LGBT rights movement within sociological literature (Fetner 2008) and everyday discourse, it is necessary to consider how religion may compel social change on LGBT issues. I have shown the potential, and lack thereof, of liberal religious groups to organize in support of same-sex marriage. Through studying marriage, a uniquely-religiously charged institution, I have drawn from Moon's (2004) book to show how the abstract theoretical distancing from politics in the congregations she studied can be applied to concrete political organizing. I have demonstrated that religious congregations can and do engage in political discourse, even as this engagement is limited by religious individualism and strong congregational belief in the separation of church and state. Further research in this vein will shed considerable light on the complex relationships that exist among religions, sexualities, and politics. Developing a thorough understanding of these relationships, and, in particular, the relation of liberal religion to the larger LGBT rights movement, becomes essential to understanding, enacting, and sustaining social change on LGBT issues.

Appendix A: Table of California newspapers

California Newspapers

Newspaper	Town Population	County County Election Office	County Vote Yes/No	Town Vote Yes/No	Source
<i>Contra Costa Times</i>	64,296 (Walnut Creek)	Contra Costa http://results.enr.clarityelections.com/CA/Contra_Costa/9041/14139/en/summary.html	44.6/55.4	38/62	http://results.enr.clarityelections.com/CA/Contra_Costa/9041/14139/en/reports.html
<i>Enterprise Record, Chico</i>	59,954	Butte http://clerk-recorder.buttecounty.net/elections/electhome.html	56.1/43.0	42.35/57.65	http://clerk-recorder.buttecounty.net/elections/archives/Eln18/sov/state_props.pdf (city data on page 255)
<i>Eureka Times Standard</i>	26,097	Humboldt <i>co.humboldt.ca.us/election/</i>	39.9/60.1	44.0/56.0	http://co.humboldt.ca.us/election/results/2008/1104SecondAmendedOfficialCanvass.pdf
<i>Inland Valley Daily (Ontario)</i>	170,373	San Bernardino http://www.co.san-bernardino.ca.us/ROV/general_info/default.asp	66.8/33.2	66.1/33.9	http://www.co.san-bernardino.ca.us/ROV/past_elections/110408/sov/427CALIFORNIA.pdf
<i>Monterey County Herald</i>	30,641	Monterey http://montereycountyelections.us/	48.4/51.6	46.7/53.3	http://montereycountyelections.us/statements/20081104sov.pdf
<i>Oroville Mercury Register</i>	13,004	Butte http://clerk-recorder.buttecounty.net/	56.1/43.9	63.79/36.2	http://clerk-recorder.buttecounty.net/elections/archives/Eln18/sov/state_props.pdf

		elections/electhome.html			(city data on page 255)
<i>Pasadena Star News</i>	146,518	Los Angeles http://www.lavote.net/	50.1/49.9	42.2/57.8	http://projects.latimes.com/elections/la-county-prop-8-results-by-city/
<i>San Bernardino Sun</i>	205,010	San Bernardino http://www.co.san-bernardino.ca.us/ROV/general_info/default.asp	66.8/33.2	65.9/34.1	http://www.co.san-bernardino.ca.us/ROV/past_elections/110408/sov/427CALIFORNIA.pdf
<i>The San Francisco Chronicle</i>	808,976	San Francisco http://www.sfgov.org/site/elections_index.asp	24.8/75.2	24.8/75.2	http://www.sfgov.org/site/uploadedfiles/elections/ElectionsArchives/2008/november/SOV_081104.pdf
<i>San Gabriel Valley Tribune</i>	39,804	Los Angeles http://www.lavote.net/	50.1/49.9	56.6/43.4	http://projects.latimes.com/elections/la-county-prop-8-results-by-city/
<i>Vallejo Times Herald</i>	116,760	Solano http://www.co.solano.ca.us/depts/rov/default.asp	55.9/44.1	52/48	http://www.co.solano.ca.us/civica/filebank/blobload.asp?BlobID=4506
<i>Sacramento Bee</i>	502,743	Sacramento http://www.elections.sacounty.net/default.htm	53.9/46.1	~47/53	http://www.elections.sacounty.net/coswcms/groups/public/@wcm/@pub/@vre/documents/webcontent/sac_018058.pdf

Appendix B: Map of Selected California Towns and Cities



- A. San Bernardino
- B. Ontario
- C. San Francisco
- D. Walnut Creek
- E. Oroville

Appendix C: Codes for Newspaper Articles and Letters to the Editor

ALL NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

1	NWSPPR	Newspaper
		0 <i>Contra Costa Times</i>
		1 <i>Inland Valley Daily</i>
		2 <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i>
		3 <i>San Bernardino Sun</i>
		4 <i>Oroville Mercury Register</i>
2	TYPE	Article or Editorial/Letter to the Editor
		0 Article
		1 Editorial/Letter to the Editor
3	DATE	When Published
		0 After election day
		1 Election day
		2 Before election day
4	HOMOSEX	Refers to gays/lesbians as “homosexuals”
		0 No
		1 Yes
5	RELIG	Mentions Religion
		0 No
		1 Yes
If mention of Religion:		
6	RELMEN	Which religion mentioned
		0 Catholicism
		1 Christianity, other denomination
		2 Mormonism
		3 Unitarian Universalism
		4 Judaism
		5 Catholicism AND Mormonism
		6 Multiple (besides C and M)
		7 Other
		99 Doesn't mention religion
7	RSUPPORT	Mentions religious groups' support of Prop. 8

		0	No
		1	Yes
8	ROPPOSE		Mentions religious groups' opposition of Prop. 8
		0	No
		1	Yes

ONLY EDITORIALS/LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

9	GENDER		Gender (as assumed by name and/or content of letter)
		0	Male
		1	Female
		2	Other
		3	Multiple authors, mixed gender
		4	Multiple authors, all male
		5	Multiple authors, all female
		6	Can't tell
		98	Not a letter to the editor or editorial
10	COUPLE		Writing as a couple
		0	No
		1	Yes
		2	Can't tell
		98	Not a letter to the editor or editorial
11	PROP8OP		For/Against Prop 8
		0	For
		1	Against
		3	Other
		98	Not a letter to the editor or editorial
12	CIVUN		Civil Union/Domestic Partnerships ok, marriage not
		0	No
		1	Yes
		2	Not a letter to the editor or editorial

If Mention of Religion:

			For all:
		0	No
		1	Yes
		98	Not a letter to the editor or editorial

		99	Doesn't mention Religion
13	RELSUP		Religious justification for Proposition 8
14	RELOPP		Religious justification against Proposition 8
15	STLEG		Use of legitimation from sacred religious text (Bible, Hebrew Bible, Qur'an, etc.)
16	MWDEI		Men/Women created by deity to be complementary and/or procreative
17	CHSTATE		Prop 8 is a violation of separation of church and state
18	TAXCH		Tax exempt status of churches should be removed
19	STONE		Tone regarding religion
		0	Positive
		1	Negative
		2	Neutral
		98	Not a letter to the editor or editorial
		99	Doesn't mention religion

Author "comes out"

			For all:
		0	No
		1	Yes
		98	Not a letter to the editor or editorial
20	AUCATH		As Catholic
21	AUCHRIST		As (denomination unspecified/other denomination) Christian
22	AUMORM		As Mormon
23	AURL		Author is a religious leader
24	AULGB		As lgbt
25	AUPFLGB		As parent/family member of lgb person
26	AUGBF		As having "gay friends"

EDITORIALS/LETTERS TO THE EDITOR WRITTEN BY RELIGIOUS LEADERS

1	POSITION		Prop. 8 Position
		0	For
		1	Against
		2	Other
2	RELBACK		Religious Background

- 1 Catholicism
- 2 Christianity, Other Denomination
- 3 Atheist/Secular Humanist Group
- 4 Buddhism
- 5 Hinduism
- 6 Islam
- 7 Judaism
- 8 Mormonism
- 9 Paganism
- 10 Unitarian Universalism
- 11 Other

3 DENOM

Denomination, if applicable

- 1 African Methodist Episcopal
- 2 Baptist
- 3 Episcopalian
- 4 Disciples of Christ
- 5 Lutheran
- 6 Presbyterian
- 7 Quaker
- 8 United Methodist
- 9 United Church of Christ
- 10 Conservative Judaism
- 11 Orthodox Judaism
- 12 Reform Judaism
- 13 Nondenominational/unaffiliated
- 14 Other
- 15 Not listed
- 98 Not applicable

For All 0 – No; 1 – Yes

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------------|--|
| 4 | RELANG | Uses explicitly religious language |
| 5 | SECLANG | Uses secular language (e.g., human rights, civil rights, non-religious destruction of society) |
| 6 | CONGRGTE | Mention's congregation's efforts on Proposition 8 |
| 7 | DEITY | Appeal to deity for justification |
| 8 | RELTEXT | Appeal to sacred religious text for justification |
| 9 | SOCIETY | Decision necessary for good of society |
| 10 | CHILD | Decision necessary for good of children |

Appendix D: Denominational Stances on Homosexuality

After an opening series of questions regarding the religious leaders' background information and current congregations, all religious leaders were asked to define their denominations' stance on homosexuality. I asked Ana, the minister of a nondenominational church, if her church had an official stance on homosexuality or LGBT issues and, when she said yes, I asked her to describe that stance for me. I was able to verify all information given to me on the official denominational website – or, in Ana's case, on her own church's website. Here, I list a brief description of each denomination's or church's official position on homosexuality.

Ana's Church – Ana's church is a nondenominational, evangelical church located in the Bay Area. Ana describes her church as such:

I mean if we had to kind of align ourselves with any denomination I'd call us Baptacostal. And I know that sounds funny – we're Baptist in that you know we have a strong grounding in the word of God we very strongly believe in the word of God but we also believe in the gifts of spirit – I don't know if that's foreign to you. But you know there are gifts of the spirit, there's healing, prophecy, there's grace, there's different gifts – we believe in that, as well as, we have a more exuberant style praise and worship. So we clap and dance and sing and that kind of thing.

Because they are an evangelical congregation, Ana felt the need to distance the church from evangelical churches that condemn homosexuality. As such, her church's constitution explicitly states that the church will welcome LGBT people. The church also markets itself as an LGBT-affirming congregation.

Episcopal Church – In 1997, the Episcopal Church passed this resolution regarding homosexuality:

That this 72nd General Convention apologizes on behalf of the Episcopal Church to its members who are gay or lesbian and to lesbians and gay men outside the Church for years of rejection and maltreatment by the Church; . . . That this Church repents of its sins committed against lesbian and gay people—physical, psychological and spiritual—through covert and overt action and inaction. We seek amendment of our life together and we ask for God's help in sharing the Good News with all people (<http://www.integrityusa.org>).

That withstanding, the Episcopal Church is governed regionally, meaning that people may experience different theologies regarding homosexuality depending on the part of the country in which they live. In many dioceses, for instance, churches are prohibited from ordaining out gays and lesbians and performing same-sex weddings or commitment ceremonies. The two Episcopal priests I interviewed both work within the diocese of California (despite its name, this diocese only includes the Bay Area). Both Jack and Ethan report that their bishop is very accepting of LGBT people, even marching in pride parades. As such, Jack and Ethan, both openly gay men, are allowed to serve their congregations freely and may perform marriages and commitment ceremonies of same-sex couples.

Reform Judaism – The Union of Reform Judaism adopts resolutions to represent its stand on a variety of issues. In 1987, the Union adopted a resolution to welcome gays and lesbians into its synagogues. In 1997, the Union adopted a resolution to reaffirm its desire to welcome gays and lesbians into synagogues and to support civil marriage rights for gays and lesbians. In part, this resolution reads:

Therefore, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations resolves to:

1. Support secular efforts to promote legislation which would provide through civil marriage equal opportunity for gay men and lesbians;
2. Encourage its constituent congregations to honor monogamous domestic relationships formed by gay men or lesbians; and
3. Support the efforts of the CCAR in its ongoing work as it studies the appropriateness of religious ceremonies for use in a celebration of commitment recognizing a monogamous domestic relationship between two Jewish gay men or two Jewish lesbians.

(<http://urj.org>)

Unitarian Universalist – In 1970, the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly passed a resolution condemning discrimination against “homosexuals and bisexuals.” Since 1970, the UUA has passed resolutions supporting Employment Nondiscrimination Acts, condemning Don’t Ask Don’t Tell, and advocating for full equality of gays and lesbians under the law. In 2008, the UUA passed a resolution against Proposition 8 and a similar ballot initiative in Florida (<http://www.uua.org>).

Furthermore, the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry is a Sacramento based organization that advocates, among many other things, for the full equality of LGBTQ people (<http://www.uulmca.org>).

United Church of Christ – Finally, the United Church of Christ drafted its first resolution regarding homosexuality in 1969, entitled, “Resolution on Homosexuals and the Law.” In 1996, the UCC passed “Equal Marriage Rights for Same Gender Couples,” in 1999, “Affirming and Strengthening Marriage,” in 2004, “Call to Action and Invitation to Dialogue on Marriage,” and in 2005, “Equal Marriage Rights for All.” In part, this last resolution reads:

WHEREAS the Bible affirms and celebrates human expressions of love and partnership, calling us to live out fully that gift of God in responsible, faithful, committed relationships that recognize and respect the image of God in all people; and

WHEREAS the life and example of Jesus of Nazareth provides a model of radically inclusive love and abundant welcome for all; and

WHEREAS we proclaim ourselves to be listening to the voice of a Still Speaking God at that at all times in human history there is always yet more light and truth to break forth from God's holy word; and

WHEREAS many UCC pastors and congregations have held commitment services for gay and lesbian couples for some time, consistent with the call to loving, long-term committed relationships and to nurture family life; and

WHEREAS recognition of marriage carries with it significant access to institutional support, rights and benefits; and

WHEREAS children of families headed by same-gender couples should receive all legal rights and protections; and

WHEREAS legislation to ban recognition of same-gender marriages further undermine the civil liberties of gay and lesbian couples and contributes to a climate of misunderstanding and polarization, increasing hostility against gays and lesbians

...

LET IT BE FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Twenty-fifth General Synod urges the congregations and individuals of the United Church of Christ to prayerfully consider and support local, state and national legislation to grant equal marriage rights to couples regardless of gender, and to work against legislation, including constitutional amendments, which denies civil marriage rights to couples based on gender.

(<http://www.ucc.org>)

Appendix E: Religious Leaders' Basic Information

Name	Geographic Location	Religious Affiliation	Age
Ethan James	Bay Area	Episcopal	40
Jack Williams	Bay Area	Episcopal	49
Ana Rivera	Bay Area	Nondenominational Christian	62
Leon Hirsch	Bay Area	Reform Jew	63
Tom Rosenthal	Bay Area	Reform Jew	64
Kate Beebe-Jones	Bay Area	Unitarian Universalist	47
Lucas Kaufmann	Bay Area	United Church of Christ	54
Larry Katzman	Inland Valley	Reform Jew	51
David Ackerman	Butte County	Metropolitan Community Church/United Church of Christ	63
Don Perry	Butte County	United Church of Christ	52
George Davis	Butte County	United Church of Christ	51

Appendix F: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

General Background

Religious Affiliation:

Gender:

Educational/Work background:

Age:

Organization Questions

If you had to describe your congregation/organization for me, what would you say? (probe for size, political beliefs, potentially ethnic makeup)

Organizational/Personal Beliefs

Does your denomination/organization have an official position on homosexuality?

[If yes] How would you describe that position? Where is it written down?

[If no] Would you say that there is any informal position of your denomination/organization?

Would you say that your own opinions are similar to or different than your denomination/organization's official/unofficial position?

How about the people in your congregation? – How would you say your opinions on homosexuality relate to theirs?

(Christian, UU only) Have you ever preached a sermon on homosexuality? (**willing to share a copy?**)

[If yes] Tell me about it.

[If no] Why? Have you ever considered doing so?

Have you ever performed same-sex marriage or commitment ceremonies?

[If yes] How many have you performed?

Do you remember what year you performed the first ceremony in?

What made you decide to do so?

[If no] Would you ever perform a same-sex marriage or commitment ceremony?

What would you say regarding the statement, "People are born gay."?

Are there any books or websites that have been particularly helpful to you in defining your beliefs regarding religion and homosexuality? Any theological texts?

Proposition Eight

Could you describe your involvement in the movement against Proposition 8?

How about the involvement of your congregation or members within your congregation, on either side of the issue?

How aware is your congregation of your views on same-sex marriage?

How, if at all, do your religious beliefs influence your support of same-sex marriage?

Let's go back to the morning of November 5th, 2008. How did you react when you found out Proposition 8 had passed?

How did people within your congregation respond?

Did conversations about Prop 8 occur within your church, synagogue, etc.?

[If yes] Could you describe a specific conversation for me?

Did these conversations create any conflict within your congregation?

As I'm sure you know, the movement to pass Proposition 8 was supported by millions of dollars from religious organizations. As a person of faith, how did you respond when you heard this?

How would you respond to a person who makes a religious argument against gay marriage?

Do you think the media portray religious views on homosexuality accurately? Why/why not?

Given that it's over a year after Proposition 8 passed, what are your feelings on the measure now?

How about the people in your congregation?

How, if at all, would you say Proposition 8 changed your congregation's thinking on lgbt issues?

What role do you think religious leaders will ultimately play in the political movement for same-sex marriage?

Appendix G: Informed Consent Form

The College of William and Mary Department of Sociology
Consent Form

“All God’s Children: Liberal California Religious Leaders’ Responses to Proposition 8”

Investigator: Margaret A. Clendenen
Address: Dept. of Sociology, PO Box 8795, Williamsburg, VA 23187-8795
Phone: 410-251-3918
E-mail: maclen@wm.edu

Advisor: Thomas J. Linneman
Address: Dept. of Sociology, PO Box 8795, Williamsburg, VA 23187-8795
Office Phone: 757-221-1549
E-mail: tjlinn@wm.edu

Investigator’s Statement:

PURPOSES

This research is designed to investigate how liberal California religious leaders conceptualize Proposition 8 and how they talk about same-sex marriage within their congregations and communities.

PROCEDURES

For this project, you are the participant in an in-depth interview that will be tape recorded. You will be asked a number of open-ended questions. The interview is designed to last for approximately an hour.

RISKS, STRESS, AND DISCOMFORT

No significant risks are involved. Some questions may ask you to think about things that you may seldom consider, and this may cause some discomfort, but you are free to not answer any question.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

The project has the potential to offer insight regarding how liberal religious leaders conceptualize and talk about same-sex marriage. As conservative religion in relation to Proposition 8 continually made national news, this information may be potentially beneficial to those leaders whom I interview. Interview participants may also gain personal insight into these topics, and may find the subject matter thought-provoking.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Data will remain confidential. Your name will not be included either on the audio recording or the written transcript of the interview. Only the investigator will have access to identifiable data. The data will be kept under lock and key, and only the investigator will possess the key. Pseudonyms will be used during the interviews and only the investigator will have the code key connecting pseudonyms to true identities. The true identity will be used only should results of the project be of interest to the interview subject and only the subject’s own results will be made available to her or him. The data will be retained until the project is completed. I understand that I may terminate my participation in the study at any time without prejudice and that I may refuse to answer any question asked during the interview. I am aware that I may report any dissatisfaction with any aspect of this study to Michael R. Deschenes, Ph.D., Chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee at the College of William & Mary by telephone at 757-221-2778, or by e-mail at mrdesc@wm.edu. I ensure that I, the participant, am at least eighteen years of age.

Signature of Investigator Date

Subject’s Statement:

“The study described above has been explained to me. I voluntarily consent to participate in this activity. I have had an opportunity to ask questions. I understand the future questions I may have about the research or about my rights as a subject will be answered by the investigator listed above. My signature below indicates that I have received a copy of this consent form.”

Printed Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

Appendix H: George's Response

Good Morning, Margaret:

Excellent work! Thank you for giving this important question your thorough and insightful attention.

As I have been reading, it has been interesting to note how well your observations and conclusions fit my experience, and how experiences of the other religious leaders that you interviewed have been parallel with my own. **Within myself, I find no conflict between being a Pastor and speaking out for the legalization of same-sex marriage. If there is conflict, it is between my religiously grounded convictions and my equally valid commitment to be a Pastor to a diverse congregation. And yes, the question of individuality and the value of the freedom that allows for authenticity do play a part.**

Separation of church and state is an important part of the cultural context in which the conversation is conducted in the community, a set of rules which guide the participation by churches. **Within the church, I think another question is at work: Are our political positions based in our faith, or is our faith constructed to justify our political stances and socio-economic positions?** The normative answer might seem obvious, that, in the church, faith should guide politics. But I suspect that a theological case can also be made that faith is legitimately shaped by the needs of the day.

One item of data raises a question about a part of your methodology but in a way that is consistent with your conclusions. In Table 3, page 28, for the **Oroville Mercury Register**, your search method uncovered only five articles and no letters to the editor regarding Proposition 8. **I recall this issue was energetically debated in the letters, but it also rings true that the letters did not mention the proposition by name. This is consistent with your observation that the churches are more willing to address the question of same-sex marriage as a religious debate than as a political issue.** We do not expect or want people to vote contrary to their faith, so we try to influence the vote by shaping people's faith or by reframing the way people link their religious convictions with societal questions. The underlying attitudes are just as important as the outcome of a particular election. You might run a quick search with "marriage", "married", and "matrimony" to test the idea that people wrote letters because of Proposition 8 without ever mentioning it by name. Extensive coding of the new data may not be very helpful to your current project, however, because the results are likely to be very sensitive to the search terms selected.

I was intrigued by your perception that those who opposed Proposition 8 and who mentioned religion were "angry" and "confused". From a sociological perspective, is there a distinction between "anger" and "righteous indignation"? What is the relationship between the anger caused by hurt, and the anger that is strategically expressed? Were the opponents genuinely confused by religion, or was there an effort to ask questions to introduce some "confusion" or uncertainty into the "clear" and "certain" assumptions of those who might otherwise be swayed by the "religious" arguments of those who supported Proposition 8? Similarly, it might be interesting to ponder what the Judeo-Christian tradition implies by 'dirtiness', as opposed to what a sociological perspective might say about 'dirty fighting'; that is, methods of conflict that are outside the expressed norms of polite society but still integral to the way things really happen.

Your work uncovered several insights that may be worth a brief article in *Christian Century* or a similar publication: Some religious leaders publicly opposed Proposition 8, and did not seem to be inwardly conflicted. Some churches organized, some allowed or encouraged members to speak out, and others avoided involvement. Pastors looked to the consensus of the members to determine what kind of participation was appropriate. Liberal churches value individuality and the separation of church and state, yet also have a tradition of social involvement, and this creates a tension. Even with the small sample, your observations have raised hypotheses that are significant, and worth sharing.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in your study.

George Davis

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Human Rights Campaign (<http://www.hrc.org>)

Integrity USA (<http://www.integrityusa.org/>)

Union for Reform Judaism (<http://urj.org/>)

Unitarian Universalist Association (<http://www.uua.org>)

Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry California (<http://www.uulmca.org/>)

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