

## RE-EXAMINING LEFT-RIGHT DIFFERENCES IN ABORTION OPPOSITION: THE ROLES OF SEXISM AND SHARED REALITY

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There exists a strong left-right divide in abortion attitudes, with the political right being more anti-abortion. Popular rhetoric suggests that this divide is explained by the right's amplified concern about the humanness of the preborn, but recent research questions this position, instead positing greater sexism on the right as a mechanism. We re-examined this latter assumption in the United States ( $N = 296$ ) and consider an additional explanation: those on the right (vs. left) are especially likely to experience shared reality with key political figureheads, for instance, the then-nominated Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch, which further facilitates their antiabortion stance. We find support for the conservatism → sexism → antiabortion pattern, but shared reality as mediator overrides the effect of sexism. With no sex differences observed, antiabortion positions appear to be more about individual differences in ideology and epistemic motivations than group membership or sexism. Implications and future directions are discussed.

Key words: Abortion; Individual differences; Ideology; Sexism; Shared reality.

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Attitudes toward abortion have long been divisive in the United States. Prior to the 1970s, abortion was criminalized in many states, and only women with the financial means to travel and pay for abortions could access this service safely and legally (Garrow, 1998). Between 1955-1973, an estimate of up to 1,200,000 illegal abortions were performed annually in the United States, with unsafe and unsanitary methods contributing to abortion-related deaths (Tyrer, 1985). Critically, in *Roe v. Wade* (1973), the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that denying women access to abortions violated their constitutional rights to privacy and liberty guaranteed by the 14th amendment. Accordingly, state-specific antiabortion laws were repealed, and abortion was legalized uniformly across all states (although restricted in some states to varying degrees). Notably, access to legal abortion decreases the risk of abortion-related deaths (Tyrer, 1985) and provides women with control over their lives and bodies (see Finer, Frohworth, Dauphinee, Singh, & Moore, 2005; Sihvo, Bajos, Ducot, & Kaminski, 2003). Moreover, crime rates have fallen drastically since 1973, with legalized abortion thought to have at least in part contributed to a reduction in crime (see Donohue & Levitt, 2001). Clearly, legal abortion has benefits for women and society in general.

Despite the benefits of legalized abortion, strong pro-life movements that oppose abortion have flourished; since 1974, every year on the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* large crowds gather in Washington to protest legal abortion. Moreover, the Trump administration recently expressed interest in repealing *Roe v. Wade* (Gabbat, 2017), with Vice-President Mike Pence speaking at the *March for Life* rally in 2019 (Miller & Stanglin, 2019), and President Donald Trump successfully nominating conservatives Neil Gorsuch and

Brett Kavanaugh as Supreme Court Justices in large part due to their antiabortion stances (see Hill, 2018). With Justices as antiabortion as Gorsuch, the future of abortion rights is seriously in question (Hill, 2018), particularly given that these two new appointments have shifted the Supreme Court substantially to the right, especially regarding abortion opposition. Indeed, many Christians, especially evangelicals, appear determined to ignore many of Trump's sexual and personal indiscretions in order to populate the Supreme Court with judges strongly opposed to abortion (Gjelten, 2018). Regardless of one's political position on the legal status of abortion, however, it is important to recognize that women will seek abortions for a variety of reasons (personal, health, financial). It becomes critical, therefore, to better understand the factors that predict opposition to abortion, particularly given the tenuous status of *Roe v. Wade* and the implications for women's rights. Feminists have long argued that *sexism* underlies abortion opposition, but until recently this question has received scant empirical attention in the psychological literature. The present paper explores the extent to which individual differences in sexism, along with other factors, predict abortion opposition.

To understand opposition to abortion, it is important to consider individual differences. Research has reliably demonstrated that those endorsing higher levels of political conservatism (vs. liberalism) are more likely to oppose abortion (e.g., Hodson & MacInnis, 2017; MacInnis, MacLean, & Hodson, 2014; Poteat & Mereish, 2013; Prusaczyk & Hodson, 2018). Some on the political right (vs. left) have framed their abortion opposition in terms of humanness of the preborn (e.g., Bauman, 2011), that is, on the moral grounds that human characteristics grant the fetus the right to live. To investigate this possibility, MacInnis and colleagues (2014) collected data from both Canadian and U. S. samples, directly testing the degree to which humanness of the preborn can explain the effect of conservatism on abortion opposition. Contrary to popular pro-life rhetoric, however, the researchers found little-to-no support for conservatism predicting abortion opposition due to perceived humanness of the preborn. Moreover, the association between perceptions of preborn humanness and abortion opposition did not vary as a function of political ideology (that is, humanness of the fetus was not weighed more heavily in supporting or rejecting abortion among those on the political right than left). This finding begs the question: What does explain the left-right difference in abortion attitudes?

Feminists have long argued that antiabortion attitudes and policies disadvantage women (e.g., Markowitz, 1990; Sherwin, 1991). Accordingly, from a feminist perspective, might abortion opposition on the political right be (at least partly) due to greater endorsement of sexist beliefs among those on the right? In posing this question, it is important to keep in mind that most women obtain abortions because having a child interferes with their education and career development (Finer et al., 2005), factors that arguably better the position and status of women in society. Yet women who decide to obtain an abortion are met with moral outrage (Pacilli, Giovannelli, Spaccatini, Vaes, & Barbaranelli, 2018); importantly, antiabortion policy would effectively limit women's contributions outside of the home and hence maintain sexism. To directly address this potential, Hodson and MacInnis (2017) examined the role of sexism in explaining the left-right divide in abortion support. In New Zealand and U.S. samples, the researchers found that greater conservatism (vs. liberalism) predicted abortion opposition through the endorsement of greater sexism. Notably, in the New Zealand sample, 30% of the effect of conservatism on abortion opposition was explained by sexism, with this effect climbing to 75% in the U.S. sample. These findings are consistent with social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), whereby a right-leaning ideology such as conservatism predicts support for a hierarchy-enhancing policy (i.e., abortion opposition) through the legitimizing myth of sexism, which functions to justify abortion opposition. In other words, those on the right are more likely to consider women as inferior, with abortion opposition reflecting a disregard of the status of women's rights.

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With abortion such a “hot-button” topic in U.S. politics, it is important to better understand the potential for individual differences in sexism to explain the political divide on abortion, and its role in intergroup relations. Although the analysis by Hodson and MacInnis (2017) offered novel insights into the potential mediating role of sexism, the U.S. data were drawn from a convenience sample of approximately 500 people recruited from websites. To more definitively explore the mediating role of sexism, Prusaczyk and Hodson (2018) used the 2016 American National Election Studies pre-election dataset ( $N = 3,264$ ), in line with current Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) task force recommendations to replicate findings using large nationally representative samples (see Funder et al., 2014). Sex differences in the mediating role of sexism were also examined, with two alternative hypotheses tested. According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) people tend to favor their ingroups, and thus men would be expected to be especially reliant on sexism as a legitimizing myth facilitating the left-right divide in abortion opposition (which predominantly affects women). According to system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994), however, both higher and lower status group members endorse system justifying ideologies such as conservatism or sexism. From this perspective, ideology might be more relevant than group membership in predicting abortion opposition, minimizing the potential role for sex differences. In keeping with previous findings, but using nationally representative data, Prusaczyk and Hodson found a significant indirect effect of conservatism on abortion opposition via greater sexism. Notably, however, only 7.14% of the relation was explained by sexism (compared to 75% in Hodson & MacInnis, 2017), an estimate that is presumably closer to the true effect size in the United States. This study therefore qualified the potential role of sexism, suggesting that it is significant but much smaller than previously reported. More consistent with system justification theory than social identity theory, no sex differences in the pattern emerged, suggesting that individual differences in ideology are more important than group membership with respect to abortion opposition. Thus, sexism appears to partly explain abortion opposition on the political right, among both men and women, although to a lesser degree than originally observed.

#### PRESENT RESEARCH

The review of the literature thus far suggests that, contrary to popular rhetoric, perceived humanness of the preborn does not explain abortion opposition on the right (MacInnis et al., 2014), and instead sexism plays an explanatory role (Hodson & MacInnis, 2017), although the effect size is substantially smaller in larger, more nationally representative samples (Prusaczyk & Hodson, 2018). This pattern suggests that factors other than sexism might additionally explain the left-right divide in abortion attitudes. To explore this potential, we first considered relevant key differences of conservative versus liberal ideology. Relative to liberals, conservatives are more likely to prioritize conformity and tradition, perceive ingroup consensus on political issues, and share reality with like-minded others (Jost, van der Linden, Panagopoulos, & Hardin, 2018). These differences are thought to arise from epistemic and existential motivations, as those endorsing higher conservatism (vs. liberalism) are more intolerant of uncertainty, ambiguity, and threat (Jost, 2017; Jost, Ledgerwood, & Hardin, 2008). In the present context, we focus on shared reality and its role in relation to abortion opposition on the right.

Shared reality involves seeing the world in a similar way as like-minded others. For instance, people perceive how relevant others view a moral issue and come to hold it as a truth, that is, share a reality that is in common with others; in this way, the views and inner states of other people reveal how the world operates, helping one to satisfy their epistemic, relational, and existential motives (Echterhoff, Higgins, & Levine, 2009; see also Hardin & Higgins, 1996). Critically, for a shared reality to be established, a person

must perceive that a relevant other shares their inner state (Echterhoff et al., 2009). Although considered generally universal as a motive, conservatives are particularly motivated to maintain a shared reality with relevant others given that shared reality satisfies their increased need for affiliation and certainty (Barberá, Jost, Nagler, Tucker, & Bonneau, 2015), with the latter particularly relevant to conservatism (see Jost, 2017 for meta-analytic evidence). Research shows that the endorsement of conservatism (vs. liberalism) predicts stronger shared reality, which in turn predicts perceived ingroup consensus regarding political topics (Stern, West, Jost, & Rule, 2014). In other words, relative to liberals, conservatives have greater consensus on contentious topics in large part because they have a higher need for shared reality. Given that abortion is a highly political and polarizing topic, we propose that those higher in right- (vs. left) leaning ideology might oppose abortion given their underlying motivation to maintain a shared reality with like-minded others. That is, perceptions of a shared reality may ultimately guide how one leans toward abortion to be consistent with the ingroup. Given that a person must perceive a relevant other as sharing their inner state for shared reality to be established, we chose to highlight Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch as a relevant other for those on the political right, given his high-status position and antiabortion attitude at the time of data collection. As such, we expected that those higher (vs. lower) in conservatism would be more likely to oppose abortion because they perceive a shared reality with Neil Gorsuch, in addition to endorsing sexist beliefs.

The conceptual mediation model in Figure 1 was tested. We hypothesized that those more strongly endorsing conservative (vs. liberal) ideology would be less likely to support abortion (c-path). Conservatism was expected to predict both greater sexism and shared reality with Neil Gorsuch (a-paths). Sexism and shared reality were in turn expected to predict lower abortion support (b-paths). We then predicted indirect effects of conservatism on abortion opposition through sexism and shared reality. For comparison purposes, we also considered whether a general shared reality could serve as mediator. Consistent with how Prusaczyk and Hodson (2018) found no sex differences in the proposed mediation pattern, we also expected that sex would not moderate the relations between conservatism and greater sexism (a-path), conservatism and greater shared reality (a-path), and conservatism and lower abortion support (c'-path).

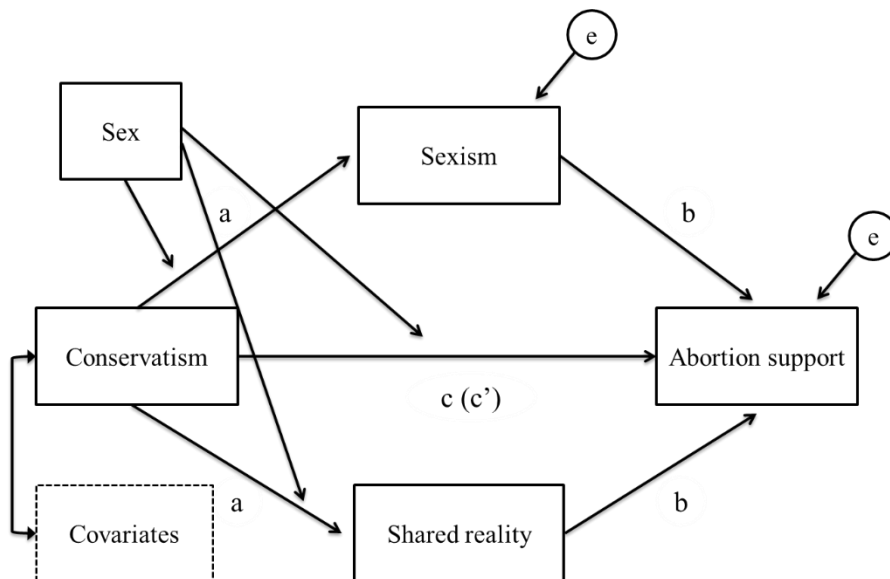


FIGURE 1

Conceptual model of conservatism predicting lower abortion support through sexism and shared reality with Neil Gorsuch. Sex is modelled as a moderator of paths a and c'. Models also tested with covariates (age, education, and religiosity) predicting sexism, shared reality, and abortion support.

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## METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

Ethics approval was granted from the authors' host institution. U.S. residents (18 years and older) were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk (see Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011) and paid \$0.75 US for their participation. Data were collected in March 2017, after President Donald Trump nominated Neil Gorsuch as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States but prior to his actual Senate confirmation. We therefore explored the role of sexism and shared reality at a cultural timepoint where abortion-relevant politics were very salient in the public sphere, as was the political divide. Participants ( $N = 296$ ) included men ( $n = 125$ ), women ( $n = 170$ ), and one unspecified, with a mean age of 37.14 years ( $SD = 12.10$ ). Approximately 79.0% of participants identified as White, 8.4% as Black, 6.8% as Asian, and 6.1% as Hispanic, approximating the general population. In terms of sexual orientation, 91.9% of participants identified as heterosexual, 3.0% as homosexual, 4.1% as bisexual, 0.7% as asexual, 0.3% as pansexual, and 0.7% did not know.<sup>1</sup>

Interested participants clicked on our survey link for a study called "15-minute Survey About Ending a Pregnancy," which was hosted on Qualtrics survey platform. After providing consent, participants read 10 abortion scenarios (in a randomized order) regarding a woman's decision to end a pregnancy; after each scenario, participants indicated their level of support for the woman's decision to abort the fetus. After, participants completed measures of conservatism, hostile sexism, perceptions of shared reality with Neil Gorsuch regarding abortion (i.e., SR-Gorsuch), and the importance of shared reality about abortion in general (i.e., SR-general), presented in a randomized order. Participants then provided demographic information (including sex, education, age, and religiosity) before reading the debriefing form. Upon completing the survey participants were compensated.

### Measures

*Political conservatism.* Participants indicated their level of political conservatism by placing themselves on a scale from 1 (*strongly liberal*) to 7 (*strongly conservative*).

*Sexism.* Glick and Fiske's (1996) 11-item hostile sexism subscale of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory was administered. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with items on a scale from 0 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). Two sample items include "Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for 'equality,'" and "Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash." Scores for sexism were created by averaging participants' responses to the items. After reverse coding, higher averaged scores indicated higher levels of sexism ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

*SR-Gorsuch.* Participants first read the following statement: "U.S. President Donald Trump recently nominated Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court. In general, Gorsuch does not support decisions to end pregnancies." Participants were then asked to rate the item "To what degree do you believe that Neil Gorsuch shares your opinion on abortion issues?" on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). Higher scores reflected higher SR-Gorsuch.

*SR-general.* To measure the importance of shared reality about abortion in general, participants were asked to rate "How important is it for you that others share your beliefs about abortion topics?" on a scale from 1 (*not at all important*) to 7 (*very important*). Higher scores reflected higher SR-general.

*Abortion support.* Participants read 10 abortion scenarios, rating their level of support after they read each scenario. They were told to consider the abortion decisions as occurring during the first trimester of pregnancy. Examples of abortion scenarios included: “A mother of three children becomes pregnant again. She considers that she already has too many children and decides to end the pregnancy,” “A woman’s birth control fails. She becomes pregnant and decides to end the pregnancy,” and “A woman does not know she is pregnant and drinks alcohol. To avoid any fetal abnormalities, she decides to end the pregnancy.” Following each abortion scenario, participants rated their level of disagreement or agreement with the item “I support the woman’s decision” on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Responses to the 10 abortion scenarios were aggregated to form a single abortion support variable, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of abortion support ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

*Sex.* Participant sex was coded as *female* (coded 1) or *male* (coded 2).

*Covariates.* Age, education, and religiosity were included as covariates. Participants indicated their education on a scale from 1 (*up to grade 8*) to 10 (*doctoral degree*), with higher scores denoting higher levels of educational attainment. To measure religiosity, participants rated the extent to which they considered themselves to be religious on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*), with higher scores reflecting higher levels of religiosity.

## RESULTS

Most variables contained virtually complete data: conservatism ( $N = 294$ ), sexism ( $N = 294$ ), SR-Gorsuch ( $N = 287$ ), SR-general ( $N = 290$ ), abortion support ( $N = 295$ ), sex ( $N = 295$ ), education ( $N = 293$ ), and religiosity ( $N = 295$ ). With less than 5% of data missing on each variable, corrective steps are typically not deemed necessary (Graham, 2009). Nonetheless, for continuous variables, we employed expectation maximization to deal with missing data.

### Preliminary Analyses

#### *Zero-Order Correlations Among Variables*

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations are shown in Table 1. As expected, higher conservatism was associated with higher sexism and SR-Gorsuch, and with lower abortion support. As predicted, higher sexism was associated with lower abortion support and with higher SR-Gorsuch. Also as expected, higher SR-Gorsuch was associated with lower abortion support. Moreover, higher religiosity was associated with higher conservatism, sexism, and SR-Gorsuch, and with lower abortion support. Unexpectedly, SR-general was unrelated to most variables, including conservatism and abortion support, and thus is de-emphasized in the analyses that follow. For magnitude of relations, and other patterns of associations, refer to Table 1.

### Primary Analyses

#### *Test of Models*

To test our hypotheses, mediation analyses were conducted using Model 4 in PROCESS software (Hayes, 2017). In all analyses, conservatism was entered as the predictor variable, sexism and/or SR-Gorsuch

TABLE 1  
 Correlations and descriptive statistics

	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Conservatism	3.44 (1.75)								
2. Sexism	1.63 (1.26)	.54**							
3. Abortion support	4.64 (2.11)	-.54**	-.38**						
4. SR-Gorsuch	3.00 (2.09)	.64**	.53**	-.68**					
5. SR-general	4.66 (1.77)	.00	-.03	.03	.10				
6. Sex (male)	42.23%	.05	.20**	.04	.03	-.11*			
7. Age	37.14 (12.10)	.05	-.15*	-.04	-.01	-.07	-.06		
8. Education	5.96 (1.53)	-.04	-.06	.11	-.05	.04	-.08	.08	
9. Religiosity	3.08 (2.17)	.45**	.32**	-.47**	.53**	.14*	-.14*	.08	.03

*Note.* *N* = 296. SR-Gorsuch = perceived shared reality with Neil Gorsuch regarding abortion; SR-general = importance of shared reality about abortion in general. Given that sex is a dichotomous variable, a percentage rather than mean value is provided. Conservatism, abortion support, SR-Gorsuch, SR-general, and religiosity were measured on scales from 1 to 7. Sexism was measured on a scale from 0 to 5, and education was measured on a scale from 1 to 10.  
 \**p* < .01. \*\**p* < .001.

were entered as mediator variables, and abortion support was entered as the criterion variable (we do not include results for SR-general given that it failed to correlate with most variables; see Table 1).<sup>2</sup> For subsequent models that included covariates, we entered age, education, and religiosity as predictors of mediators and the criterion. Prior to conducting the mediation analyses, variables were standardized, meaning that reported betas can be interpreted as standardized. Specifically, we tested: (1) the degree to which sexism mediates the effect of conservatism on lower abortion support (consistent with Hodson & MacInnis, 2017, and Prusaczyk & Hodson, 2018); (2) whether SR-Gorsuch mediated the effect of conservatism on lower abortion support (novel); and (3) the *simultaneous* mediating roles of sexism and SR-Gorsuch (also novel). To test sex as a moderator of the a- and c'-paths, we subsequently conducted additional moderated mediation analyses using Model 8 in PROCESS. Parameter estimates and significance tests were based on bias-corrected estimates generated from 1,000 bootstrap samples.

#### *Sexism as Mediator*

Our first goal was to replicate past research with sexism as mediator (Hodson & MacInnis, 2017; Prusaczyk & Hodson, 2018), to provide a point of comparison between samples, which is particularly important when later adding in an additional potential mediator. For parameter estimates and confidence intervals (CI), refer to Table 2. In a test of the basic model, the analyses revealed that conservatism significantly predicted greater sexism (a-path), and sexism significantly predicted lower abortion support (b-path); conservatism also significantly predicted lower abortion support (c-path). With sexism included as a predictor, there was a statistically significant yet reduced direct effect of conservatism on lower abortion support. Importantly, there was a significant indirect effect of conservatism on lower abortion support through sexism, consistent with past research (Hodson & MacInnis, 2017; Prusaczyk & Hodson, 2018). In the present case, sexism explained approximately 12% of the left-right divide in abortion, closer to the previous analyses using nationally representative data (Prusaczyk & Hodson, 2018) than those using nonrepresentative samples (e.g., Hodson & MacInnis, 2017). With covariates included in the analysis, results were similar except that sexism only marginally predicted lower abortion support, and the indirect effect of conservatism on lower abortion support through sexism was only marginally significant.

#### *SR-Gorsuch as Mediator*

For parameter estimates and confidence intervals, refer to Table 3. In tests of the basic model, and in tests that include covariates, conservatism significantly predicted greater SR-Gorsuch (a-path), and SR-Gorsuch significantly predicted lower abortion support (b-path). With SR-Gorsuch included as a predictor, there was a statistically significant yet sizably reduced direct effect of conservatism on lower abortion support. Importantly, as expected, there was a significant indirect effect of conservatism on lower abortion support through SR-Gorsuch, which explained more than half of the relation.

#### *Sexism and SR-Gorsuch as Simultaneous Mediators*

After establishing that both sexism and SR-Gorsuch can function as mediators of the left-right divide in abortion, we then sought to consider if both uniquely contribute meaningful variance. For parameter estimates and confidence intervals, refer to Table 4. For both the basic model, and with covariates included, conservatism significantly predicted greater sexism and SR-Gorsuch (a-paths), but only SR-Gorsuch



TABLE 2  
 Standardized effects decomposition of conservatism on abortion support through sexism

	a-path conservatism → sexism	b-path sexism → abortion	c'-path conservatism → abortion [sexism in model]	Conservatism effect on abortion support			
				Total	Direct	Indirect	% Indirect
Total <i>N</i> = 296							
Model without CVs	.54** [.45, .64]	-.12* [-.24, -.01]	-.47** [-.59, -.35]	-.54**	-.47**	-.07*	12.96%
Model with CVs	.48** [.37, .58]	-.11± [-.23, .01]	-.36** [-.49, -.22]	-.41**	-.36**	-.05±	12.19%

Note. CVs = covariates (education, age, religiosity). Bracketed values represent bootstrapped (*N* = 1,000) 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals.  
 ±*p* = .08. \**p* < .05. \*\* *p* < .001.

TABLE 3  
 Standardized effects decomposition of conservatism on abortion support through SR-Gorsuch

	a-path conservatism → SR-Gorsuch	b-path SR-Gorsuch → abortion	c'-path conservatism → abortion [SR-Gorsuch in model]	Conservatism effect on abortion support			
				Total	Direct	Indirect	% Indirect
Total <i>N</i> = 296							
Model without CVs	.64** [.56, .73]	-.56** [-.69, -.44]	-.18* [-.30, -.05]	-.54**	-.18*	-.36**	66.67%
Model with CVs	.50** [.39, .60]	-.51** [-.64, -.38]	-.15* [-.28, -.03]	-.41**	-.15*	-.25**	60.97%

Note. CVs = covariates (education, age, religiosity); SR-Gorsuch = perceived shared reality with Neil Gorsuch regarding abortion. Bracketed values represent bootstrapped (*N* = 1,000) 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals.  
 \**p* < .05. \*\* *p* < .001.

(and not sexism) significantly predicted lower abortion support (b-paths). With sexism and SR-Gorsuch included as predictors, there was a statistically significant yet sizably reduced direct effect of conservatism on lower abortion support. Further, there was a significant indirect effect of conservatism on lower abortion support only through SR-Gorsuch (but not sexism).

TABLE 4  
 Standardized effects decomposition of conservatism on abortion support  
 through sexism and SR- Gorsuch as simultaneous mediators

	Model without CVs	Model with CVs
a-path		
Conservatism → sexism	.54** [.45, .64]	.48** [.37, .58]
Conservatism → SR-Gorsuch	.64** [.56, .73]	.50** [.39, .60]
b-path		
Sexism → abortion	.02 [-.08, .13]	.01 [-.10, .12]
SR-Gorsuch → abortion	-.57** [-.70, -.44]	-.51** [-.65, -.37]
Total effect	-.54** [-.64, -.44]	-.41** [-.53, -.29]
Direct effect	-.19* [-.31, -.06]	-.15* [-.28, -.03]
Indirect effect		
Sexism	.01 [-.05, .07]	.00 [-.06, .05]
SR-Gorsuch	-.37** [-.46, -.28]	-.25** [-.35, -.18]
% Indirect effect		
Sexism	1.85%	0.00%
SR-Gorsuch	68.52%	60.97%

Note.  $N = 296$ . CVs = covariates (education, age, religiosity); SR-Gorsuch = perceived shared reality with Neil Gorsuch regarding abortion. Bracketed values represent bootstrapped ( $N = 1,000$ ) 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .

#### *Sex as a Potential Moderator*

Consistent with Prusaczyk and Hodson (2018) who found no conditional indirect effects, the interaction between conservatism and sex did not predict sexism — a-path;  $b = -.15$ , 95% CI [-.34, .04],  $p = .132$  — SR-Gorsuch — a-path;  $b = -.03$ , 95% CI [-.21, .13],  $p = .686$  — or abortion support — c'-path;  $b = -.14$ , 95% CI [-.33, .03],  $p = .096$  (results are similar without covariates included). Thus, the basic mediation pattern was equivalent for men and women alike.

#### DISCUSSION

With the current Trump administration and far right-leaning Supreme Court, the status of *Roe v Wade* is in question, meaning that women in the United States could lose their constitutionally protected right to abortion (Hill, 2018). With abortion such a controversial topic in U.S. politics, we investigated how individual differences in sexism and shared reality could explain the political divide on abortion attitudes.

As in past research (Hodson & MacInnis, 2017; Prusaczyk & Hodson, 2018), we found that those higher in conservatism (vs. liberalism) were more likely to endorse sexism and less likely to support abortion, particularly when not controlling for extraneous variables. Moreover, we observed a significant indirect effect of conservatism on lower abortion support through sexism which explained almost 13% of the relation, an effect that became nonsignificant once controlling for covariates. Thus, like Prusaczyk and Hodson (2018), we show that the role of sexism is smaller than previously observed (Hodson & MacInnis, 2017), and perhaps less relevant than formerly considered.

Novel to the existing literature, and consistent with expectations, we found that those more strongly endorsing conservative (vs. liberal) ideology were more likely to perceive a shared reality with Supreme Court Justice Gorsuch and were less likely to support abortion. Moreover, we observed a significant indirect effect of conservatism on lower abortion support through shared reality with Gorsuch, an effect that explained approximately 61% of the relation (controlling for possible confounds). Critically, with sexism included in the model as a simultaneous mediator, sexism no longer accounted for the relation, further demonstrating the relatively peripheral role of sexism and instead the relative importance of shared reality in abortion opposition. As past research demonstrates, those endorsing conservative (vs. liberal) ideology exhibit a stronger need to satisfy epistemic and existential motives, and thus are more likely to experience a shared reality, that is, perceive how others view complicated moral issues (for instance) and adopt those views as their own truths, sharing a reality in common with others (Echterhoff et al., 2009; Stern et al., 2014). Critically, for shared reality to be established, a person must perceive that a similar other shares their inner state or view about an issue (see Echterhoff et al., 2009). In the present context, we demonstrate that the perception of a shared reality with Gorsuch, a prominent conservative figurehead, was more relevant for predicting lower abortion support on the right than was the importance of a shared reality about abortion in general (which was unrelated to conservatism or abortion support). That is, a shared reality with an authority figure like Gorsuch who is strongly antiabortion might facilitate perceptions of ingroup consensus on the topic (see Stern et al., 2014), and ultimately guide or at least entrench abortion opposition on the political right. These findings are also in accordance with uncertainty-identity theory (Hogg, 2000), whereby a sense of uncertainty motivates thoughts and behaviors to remedy the aversive subjective experience, and identification with a group or prototypical leader serving to reduce the uncertainty. In the present context, abortion is a highly divisive and politicized topic in the United States, fraught with ambiguity and uncertainty, with public debates pitting the supposed interests of the fetus against those of women generally. Both positions are framed in terms of prosocial values, hence generating ambiguity and uncertainty. In such contexts, a sense of shared reality with a prominent group leader such as Gorsuch can meet epistemic needs and reduce subjective experiences of uncertainty.

In addition to examining factors that might explain the left-right divide in abortion attitudes, we also explored for potential sex differences. Replicating Prusaczyk and Hodson (2018), we found no sex differences in the sexism-as-mediator effect, and novel to the literature, no sex differences in the shared reality-as-mediator effect, findings which are more consistent with system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994) than social identity theory. That is, to the extent that both women and men endorsed a system justifying ideology such as conservatism, they opposed abortion in part through greater perceptions of shared reality with Gorsuch, even though opposing abortion disadvantages women and their ingroup. Also consistent with social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), perceiving a shared reality with a similar other can function as a legitimizing myth to justify and rationalize abortion opposition on the right. Sharing reality on the topic of abortion might reduce uncertainty in a way that trumps personal motivations or concerns with self-esteem, consistent with our finding that women were no less likely to engage in shared real-

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ity expressions. Troublingly, the justification of abortion opposition on the political right regresses women's rights in society and effectively maintains hierarchical relations between the sexes.

### Limitations and Future Directions

Rather than using an undergraduate student sample (for criticisms, see Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010), our participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk that roughly approximated the general U.S. population in terms of demographics, a benefit in terms of increased generalizability of findings (see Paolacci & Chandler, 2014 for a review). However, as with most research, the present findings should be considered with respect to some caveats. First, the cross-sectional correlational nature of the data warrants caution in interpreting the model causally. That is, although we show that conservatism is an important predictor of greater shared reality with Gorsuch and lower abortion support, the direction and causal nature of relations cannot be assumed due to the correlational design. The direction of relations is theoretically consistent with social dominance and system justification theories, as well as with research on shared reality (e.g., see Stern et al., 2014). In any case, future research could provide evidence of directionality and causality by experimentally priming conservative (vs. liberal) ideology (e.g., see Eidelman, Crandall, Goodman, & Blanchar, 2012) and longitudinally establishing its impact on shared reality with key political figureheads (e.g., Gorsuch or Kavanaugh), and in turn, the impact of shared reality on strengthening antiabortion attitudes.

Second, single-item measures of conservatism and shared reality were used in the present study. Although some caution against the use of single-item measures (e.g., Loo, 2002), multiple-item measures often yield similar results (Gardner, Cummings, Dunham, & Pierce, 1998). Moreover, single-item measures of conservatism and shared reality are routinely used in research. The single-item measure of political ideology, for instance, is used frequently and shows strong predictive validity (e.g., Jost, 2006), as do single-item measures of shared reality (e.g., Stern et al., 2014). Nonetheless, future research could compare results from single- and multiple-item measures of conservatism and shared reality.

Third, the present findings might not generalize outside of the United States. Perhaps in countries where there is lower gender equality (e.g., Iran), conservatism may not be a strong predictor of antiabortion attitudes given that attitudes toward abortion likely contain little variability (i.e., a ceiling effect may be observed). Moreover, in more progressive countries, those endorsing conservatism might struggle to find a shared reality and perhaps lean relatively less antiabortion. Accordingly, it would be fruitful for future research to cross-culturally explore the roles of sexism and shared reality in the left-right divide in abortion attitudes.

Given that shared reality explained approximately 61% of the relation between conservatism and lower abortion support, other mediators may still account for the remainder of the relation. As MacInnis and colleagues (2014) suggested, it is possible that positions on abortion may be partly rooted in political ideology rather than rationalized personally, and perhaps are based on visceral or emotional responses. Future research could explore this possibility. Another question, however, involves asking why liberals support abortion. That is, perhaps our failure to fully account for the left-right divide is the repeated focus on factors relevant to conservatism and opposition to abortion, not to liberalism and support for abortion. Future research could explore factors explaining abortion support (e.g., does the desire to uphold women's rights account for increased abortion support on the left?).

### Concluding Remarks

With the current U.S. Supreme Court now stacked in a conservative direction, the status of *Roe v. Wade* is in serious doubt. The Trump administration has already issued a rule to restrict federal funding for groups such as Planned Parenthood that provide women with abortion referrals (Fritze & O'Donnell, 2019). Yet access to safe, legal abortions is important for women's health (Tyrer, 1985) and society overall (see Donohue & Levitt, 2001). Surprisingly little research has explored left-right differences in abortion attitudes in the United States. Our review of the literature has suggested that perceived humanness of the preborn does not explain the left-right divide in abortion attitudes, with sexism instead accounting for part of the relation. In the present investigation we again find some support for the role of sexism in explaining antiabortion attitudes on the right, but when shared reality is included as a mediator, it overrides the effect of sexism. That is, perceiving a shared reality with a like-minded other, such as Supreme Court Justice Gorsuch, partly accounts for why conservatism predicts lower abortion support.

It is important to keep in mind that shared reality around political positions is fostered through the expressed priorities of governments and political groups. When people identify with a political group, political figureheads can then guide what attitudes people hold to make sense of the world (see Stern & Ondish, 2018), particularly on the right where epistemic and existential needs are greater (Jost et al., 2018). Importantly, people change their attitudes to be consistent with their party, even when it clashes with their personal values (Hawkins & Nosek, 2012). In this sense, attitudes toward controversial issues such as abortion may be more about "following the tribe" and looking to similar others to decide how to lean (see also MacInnis et al., 2014). Thus, to the extent that one's goal is to bolster rights for women (to control their own bodies and life trajectories), one method to shift attitudes toward abortion may be to alter perceptions of shared reality. For instance, conservative figureheads with relatively centrist leanings toward abortion could openly advocate their beliefs and soften the sharp political divide. Arguably, efforts to attenuate the left-right divide in countries as polarized as the United States will have positive spillover effects into other domains. Therefore, continuing to better understand the factors that facilitate the left-right divide in opposition to abortion (or climate change action, or gun control) is critical for deescalating intergroup tensions around political topics.

### NOTES

1. Participants were allowed to select more than one category, meaning that the totals could exceed 100%.
2. Although SR-general does not correlate with conservatism, SR-Gorsuch, or abortion support, we nonetheless entered it as a potential mediator in a separate analysis. As would be expected based on the zero-order correlations, we found no support for mediation.

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