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Kenyan Religious Leaders' Views on Same-Sex Sexuality and Gender Nonconformity: Religious Freedom versus Constitutional Rights

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Religion plays an important role in framing the public discourse on sexuality, especially in countries where religion fully permeates social life. We explored the perspectives of Kenyan religious leaders on sexual and gender diversity in their country's specific context. A total of 212 Catholic, Islamic, and Protestant leaders from urban centers and rural townships completed a self-administered questionnaire specifically developed for this study. The leaders' perspectives were predominantly negative. Limited acceptance was conditional on sexual minorities not engaging in same-sex practices or seeing such practices as sinful. A substantial minority (37%) endorsed the use of violence for maintaining social values, especially regarding homosexuality and gender nonconformity. The majority of religious leaders agreed on the difference between civil law and religious doctrine. Human rights principles enshrined in Kenya's Constitution were considered to be applicable to sexual and gender minorities. Decriminalization of same-sex sexuality was seen as against one's religion. Perspectives were less negative if leaders were familiar with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons. Interventions that promote intergroup contact could be effective in changing religious leaders' mind-sets and advancing human rights and health for sexual and gender minorities.

Religion as a social institution plays a critical role in framing the public discourse on sexuality in general and on same-sex sexuality in particular (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Jäckle & Wenzelburger, 2015). The way religious leaders portray persons who practice same-sex sexuality will affect how these persons are treated in society. Most religions have formal doctrines that reflect a negative perspective on same-sex sexuality. Yet religious leaders' views do not always coincide with the formal doctrines, and religious leaders can also be instrumental in promoting social acceptance of same-sex sexuality and gender nonconformity (Cadge & Wildeman, 2008). For this reason, it is critical to understand religious leaders' perspectives on sexual diversity and gender nonconformity.

The importance of religion in the societal discourse on sexuality varies by country and is especially strong in countries where religion fully permeates social life, as is the case in many African countries. Kenneth Kaunda, Zambia's founding president, said, "The Africanness which has its roots in the soil of our continent ... is basically a religious phenomenon; we are who we are because of our attitude to the mysterious depth of life, symbolized by birth and death, harvest and famine, ancestors and the unborn" (cited by Makumba, 2007, p. 166). Mbiti (2015), a leading African theologian, stated that Africans are notoriously religious and that in each African society religion is so pervasive in the way of life that it is actually embedded in the local language.

These opinions are supported by empirical evidence. While religious value systems have been shown to influence political choices (Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006), attitudes toward public policy (Baumgartner, Francia, &

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Morris, 2008), worldviews (Kelley & DeGraaf, 1997), and even cultural lifestyle choices such as how people dress (O'Neill, Gidengil, Cote, & Young, 2015) in various parts of the world, African countries stand out in terms of their endorsement of the importance of religion and attendance of religious services, as well as the number of religious organizations (Gilani, Shahid, & Zuetzel, 2012; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Kelley & DeGraaf, 1997).

Our study aimed to describe the perspectives on same-sex sexuality and gender nonconformity of religious leaders in Kenya. Some qualitative information suggests there is extreme prejudice against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people among religious leaders in Kenya (e.g., Finerty, 2012). There are, however, no quantitative data that substantiate this claim for Kenya, nor for any other African country. Our aim was to understand religious leaders' perspectives in their specific context of formal religious doctrines regarding same-sex sexuality and gender diversity, and in relation to the Kenyan penal code, its constitution, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Given the pervasiveness of religion in Kenya, it is unlikely that improving the lives of LGBT persons is possible without engaging religious leaders. For that reason, it is important to understand their perspectives.

Main Religions of Kenya

The main religions in Kenya are Christianity (Protestantism and Catholicism) and Islam. According to the latest census data available, about 48% of Kenyans have a Protestant affiliation, 24% report a Catholic affiliation, and about 11% report Muslim (Kenya OpenData, 2009). In addition to these religions, about 12% have a Christian affiliation other than Protestant or Catholic. Smaller groups are Hindu or Traditionalist; only 2% of the Kenyan population report having no religion (Kenya OpenData, 2009). While Christianity and Islam are the main religions, Kenya has more than 8,000 registered churches; a similar number are still waiting to be registered (Cole, 2007).

Formal Religious Doctrines

Although religions' formal positions on same-sex sexuality and gender nonconformity are not necessarily static and continue to be debated and discussed, they serve as critical anchor points for religious leaders. Officially, the Catholic Church is opposed to any sexual relationships outside the context of marriage, defined as between one woman and one man. Moreover, the Catholic Church is also opposed to any form of social acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex relationships (St Pauls, 1992, sec. 2357, 2358, 2359; Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1975). Although the Church teaches that persons with a homosexual orientation should be treated with respect, justice, and pastoral care (American Catholic, 2014), it also

advocates for chastity for same-sex-attracted people (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n.d.). The formal position of Islam on same-sex sexuality is more outspoken. The Hadiths (reports describing the words, actions, or habits of the Islamic prophet Muhammad) call for execution of persons who engage in same-sex sexuality by way of stoning (e.g., as Abu Dawud 38.4448, Al-Muwatta 41.41.111, and Tirmidhi 1.152), although some of the Hadiths seem to call for a lenient admonition on believers to "turn [such people] out of your houses" (e.g., Sahih Bukhari 7.72.774, 8.82.820). Although based on the Holy Bible as Catholicism is, Protestantism, with a more decentralized governance system, holds divergent views on same-sex sexuality. For some, the worldviews of Evangelical Christians and the gay and lesbian community are irreconcilable (e.g., Hodge, 2005), whereas some denominations, such as Episcopalians, hold that "gay and lesbian persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church" (The Archives of the Episcopal Church, 2007).

Whereas Catholicism and Protestantism do not have an official position on gender nonconformity, Islam seems to be relatively tolerant of transgender individuals. The Hadiths employ the term *mukhannathun* to describe gender-variant people, usually male-to-female transsexuals (Roscoe & Murray, 1997). Theologically, the acceptance of transgender persons must be understood on the basis that they are not explicitly condemned by the Qur'an (von Oldershausen, 2014). This tolerance is illustrated by a fatwa issued by Ayatollah Khomeini that made sex change in Iran permissible for "diagnosed transsexuals" (Hoder, 2008). Consequently, sex-change operations are supported by the government. It is not clear whether this fatwa specifically applies to persons who desire sex adjustment or whether surgery is also forced upon gender-nonconforming persons who do not experience gender dysphoria, consequently serving only to confirm and preserve the gender binary.

Formal Religious Positions in Kenya

The formal viewpoints of Kenyan religious leaders on sexuality and gender nonconformity vary. Yet, as several press sources indicate, these viewpoints are predominantly negative. Churches with historical or administrative links to churches in the Global North are more likely than indigenous ones to have thought through this topic.

Rev. David Gathanju, the presiding moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), has been reported saying, "We [PCEA] denounce all forms of sins which include, but not limited to homosexuality and lesbianism and devil worship" (East Africa Standard, 2014). With regard to Seventh Day Adventists, the executive director for the Coastal region, Zachariah Marwa, has been reported as saying that "gayism and lesbianism should not

be endorsed by anyone” (Lorna, 2013). The Anglican archbishop for Mombasa Diocese preaches that homosexual people are more dangerous than terrorists (Beja, 2012). When U.S. president Barack Obama, while visiting Senegal in June 2013, called for equal treatment before the law regardless of sexual orientation, Cardinal John Njue of the Nairobi Catholic Archdiocese responded, “Let him [Obama] forget, forget and forget. I don’t think God was making a mistake when he created Adam and Eve and told them what to do” (Mutambo, 2013).

The Kenyan Penal Code, The Constitution, and Human Rights

The unfavorable attitudes of churches toward same-sex sexuality are in line with the current Kenyan penal code. Sections 162, 163, and 165 in the penal code criminalize “carnal knowledge against the order of nature” with imprisonment of five to 21 years. The penal code conflates same-sex sexuality with pedophilia and bestiality. In practice, it is less frequently applied to consensual same-sex sexuality than to people who engage in sex with children and with animals (U.S. Department of State, 2013).

Even though same-sex sexuality is criminalized, the constitution of Kenya, which took effect August 27, 2010, offers broad protection of civil and human rights. Though LGBT persons are not explicitly mentioned, it has been argued that Kenya’s statutes discriminating against LGBT persons are unconstitutional (Finerty, 2012). Article 10, for instance, states, “The national values and principles of governance include ... human dignity, equity, social justice, inclusiveness, equality, human rights, non-discrimination and protection of the marginalized” (Constitution of Kenya, Ch. 2, L, art. 10, §2). Furthermore, article 19, paragraph 2, states that the purpose of recognizing and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms is to preserve the dignity of individuals and communities and to promote social justice and the realization of the potential of all human beings.

Gay and Lesbian Movement

Religions’ attitudes and the criminalization of same-sex sexuality reinforce pervasive stigma and discrimination of LGBT persons in Kenya, including violence, blackmail, and extortion (Human Rights Watch, 2015; Kenya Human Rights Commission, 2012; Thoreson & Cook, 2011). This negative climate has, however, not hindered LGBT groups from organizing. Although primarily in major urban areas, there are vibrant groups to be found in every part of the country, with the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK) being the main umbrella body that brings the groups together to form a national agenda. Community mobilization was accelerated in 2009 when the critical role

of male-to-male sexual transmission in Kenya’s human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) epidemic was first acknowledged by the government of Kenya in a Modes of Transmission study (Gelmon, 2009). This discovery influenced the HIV/AIDS response in the country and highlighted the importance for the government to work with civil society agencies. Even though homosexuality remains criminalized, the government and gay community groups have been working together to address the epidemic by providing HIV prevention and treatment services for men who have sex with men (National AIDS and STI Control Program, 2015; National AIDS Control Council, n.d.).

The Current Study

The current study sought to describe the perspectives of religious leaders in Kenya on same-sex sexuality and gender nonconformity in the context of their religion and their understanding of Kenya’s legal system. In trying to understand the leaders’ perspectives, we systematically explored whether there are differences among leaders from the three main denominations. Before discussing the attitudes and beliefs of religious leaders regarding same-sex sexuality and gender nonconformity, we described to what extent leaders were informed about the formal positions of their denomination. We explored whether religious leaders’ perspectives were associated with their understanding of the origin of homosexuality; studies have shown that persons who think of same-sex sexuality as something that people are born with have more favorable attitudes than persons who think that homosexuality is a result of upbringing or a personal choice (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008; Sakalli, 2002). From a societal perspective, we explored the religious leaders’ views on the role of violence in maintaining social values. In addition, we assessed the leaders’ ideas about same-sex sexuality and gender nonconformity from the perspectives of the law and human rights, as well as in the context of the protection of religious freedom offered by the Kenyan constitution. To deepen our understanding of religious leaders’ perspectives, we explored whether differences in opinions are related to age and sex; these factors have often been associated with perspectives on same-sex sexuality, with women and younger persons usually being more accepting of same-sex sexuality and gender nonconformity, compared to men and older persons (Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Guittar & Pals, 2014; Hicks & Lee, 2006; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Petersen & Hyde, 2011; West & Cowell, 2015). Finally, we explored whether there were differences between religious leaders perspectives based on their familiarity with same-sex sexuality and gender nonconformity. People who personally know gay and lesbian persons have generally been found to have less negative attitudes toward same-sex sexuality (e.g.,

Collier, Bos, & Sandfort, 2012; Graham, Frame, & Kenworthy, 2014; Patrick et al., 2013; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were religious leaders from registered churches and mosques in Kenya. In approaching potential participants, we aimed to have the broadest representation both geographically and by religious identity, reflecting the national structure of religious affiliations, as perceived from the 2009 census data. First, we selected major urban centers in Kenya (Nairobi, Kisumu, and Mombasa) and also rural townships (Naivasha, Nakuru, and Lodwar in the Rift Valley region). We then mapped the existing churches in these areas to help identify those facilities that had pastors/priests' offices and residences. We trained six research assistants to reach out to religious leaders in the church centers or facilities where they either resided or had an office. After self-identification, research assistants approached potential participants in person and invited them to participate in the study, either by completing a hard-copy questionnaire or online version of the same questionnaire on SurveyMonkey; the online tool specifically targeted those religious leaders with Internet access. Interested persons were told that participation in the study was completely confidential and that no one would know the identities of those who participated in the study or how they answered the questions.

We did not systematically collect nonresponse data and reasons for refusal to participate. We estimated, though, that about 25% of the leaders we approached were not willing to complete a hard-copy questionnaire. For the electronic version of the questionnaire, it cannot be determined how many potential participants were reached. Many religious leaders whom we approached declined to participate in a study on "homosexuality." For every Christian or Muslim leader who declined, others were willing to take part. This was not the case with Hindu religious leaders; we reached out to leaders at four Hindu temples in Nairobi, but all refused participation (in the Kenyan census of 2009, 0.14% reported to be Hindu; Kelley & DeGraaf, 1997). One religious leader in Nairobi, for instance, told a research assistant: "This subject is very sinful. I am sorry I cannot even touch your questionnaire. Please kneel down so that I can pray for you. You need to repent and be saved for engaging in this kind of research." In Nakuru, another research assistant was chased away from the church compound after explaining to the pastor the nature of the study: "This is not a gay church and we do not have gay people in our church. Never come back here unless you are willing to repent and change your ways from engaging in such a work. Which organization sent you here?" Implications of nonresponse are addressed in the Discussion section.

Procedure

The questionnaire was self-administered. Many religious leaders requested that research assistants drop off the questionnaires and pick them up at an agreed-upon later date; others asked for the research assistants to wait as they completed the questionnaires. Completed questionnaires in Nairobi were generally returned to the researchers daily; in other towns, research assistants collected them for the duration of data collection and later discreetly mailed them to the researcher in Nairobi through registered courier services. In addition, 7% of all questionnaires were completed online.

Study Sample

The sample consisted of 212 religious leaders (11.8% female; 5 participants [2.4%] did not report their gender), between 24 and 64 years of age (24 to 29: 14.8%; 30 to 39: 38.3%; 40 to 49: 34.9%; 50 to 64: 12.1%; 63 persons [29.7%] did not provide their age). Most religious leaders reported to be Protestant ($n = 125$; 59.0%), and sizable proportions were Muslim ($n = 47$; 22.2%) or Catholic ($n = 40$; 18.9%). Age and gender were not related to religious affiliation.

Among participants with a Catholic affiliation, most said they were a priest (62.5%) or bishop (10.0%). Most Muslim participants were either sheikh (72.3%) or imam (17.0%). Most participants with a Protestant affiliation reported to be pastors (77.6%). Religious affiliation was also associated with the size of the participants' congregations; sizes of congregations were small (up to 150 people; reported by 33.2% of the participants); medium (150 to 399; 31.6%); or large (400 to 10,000; 35.2%). Muslim participants were more likely to be part of a small congregation (66.7% compared to 30.4% and 2.8% of Protestant and Catholic participants, respectively), while Catholic participants were more likely to be part of a large congregation (63.9% compared to 33.9% and 14.3% of Protestant and Muslim participants, respectively; $\chi^2 = 40.90$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$).

Geographically, participants came from 11 of the 47 formal counties in Kenya. Most participants came from Mombasa (35.6%); others were established in Nairobi (13.2%), Kisumu (12.3%), Nakuru (11.3%), and Turkana (10.4%). The remaining participants came from other counties (17.2%). Reflecting the distribution of religious affiliations in Kenya, the affiliation of the participants was associated with the county of residence, for example, Muslim leaders were most likely to live in Mombasa (63.8% of all Muslim participants).

Measures

A questionnaire with closed-ended questions was specifically developed for this study and aimed to cover the range of topics discussed in the introductory section (see online supplement). Participants' knowledge of their religion's teachings on sexuality was assessed with seven knowledge

questions; participants had to indicate whether specific statements were correct or incorrect, or whether they did not know this (e.g., “According to my religion/church, only sex between a man and a woman who are married is allowed”). Religious leaders’ own attitudes and beliefs were assessed with six items. Three of these items were in Likert format (e.g., “Would you say your overall opinion of lesbian women is favorable or unfavorable?” 1 = *Very favorable*; 4 = *Very unfavorable*; 5 = *I do not know*). Some questions, for example, about the perceived origin of homosexuality, asked participants to select answers that according to them were most appropriate. We also asked whether participants personally knew anyone who was gay or lesbian. A parallel set of questions was used to assess the leaders’ attitudes and beliefs on gender nonconformity.

Subsequently, participants’ perspectives on violence and its use to protect cultural values was assessed with four statements. For each statement participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed (1 = *Strongly agree*; 4 = *Strongly disagree*; 5 = *I do not know*). These questions were included in response to the religiously related violence against men who have sex with men that took place in Mombasa in 2010 (Bocha, 2010). We specifically wanted to explore to what extent violence was condoned by the various religious groups.

The next sections of the questionnaire included 11 statements assessing the participants’ perspectives on Kenya’s penal code, constitution, and human rights. Various question formats and response scales were used (see online supplement); for instance, questions about the penal code assessed whether the leaders knew that practicing same-sex sexuality was illegal (e.g., “According to you, is the following statement correct or incorrect: ‘According to the Kenyan law, sex between two persons of the same sex is illegal’”; response options were *Correct*, *Incorrect*, and *I do not know*). Another question assessed whether it would be against their religion if the state decriminalized same-sex sexuality.

In a closing section, participants were asked about personal background information, including the kind of role they fulfilled in their religion, the size of their congregation (assessed with an open question), the county in which their ministry was located, and their gender and age.

Analysis

As indicated in the text, we combined certain answer categories to facilitate interpretation of the findings (e.g., all participants who strongly agreed or just agreed with a specific statement) in the description of basic frequency distributions. We used chi-square tests on the original scores to test differences in participants’ responses in relation to the following variables: religious denomination (Catholic, Muslim, and Protestant); age (24 to 29; 30 to 39; 40 to 49; and 50 to 64 years); and gender. Using chi-square tests, we also explored whether the attitudes of religious leaders were related to their perception of the origin of

homosexuality. We used chi-square tests because we did not want to exclude participants who answered *I don’t know* to some of the questions, especially because these proportions were rarely negligible. We had deliberately included the *I don’t know* category because we felt that it would not be justified to force people to select an answer if they did not have an opinion in answer to a particular question. The proportion of persons selecting a *Don’t know* response is in and of itself informative. To explore whether familiarity with same-sex sexuality or sexual diversity mattered, we used the same approach to test differences in participants’ responses in relation to (a) knowing a gay or lesbian person (*no/yes*) and (b) having heard about transgender persons (*no/yes*). Differences in variables with more than two categories were interpreted using standardized adjusted residuals, with values greater than |1.96|, indicating that a proportion deviated significantly ($p < .05$) from what would be expected based on the marginal totals. We systematically highlighted these proportions in describing our findings. All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Version 22.

Results

Institutional Perspectives

Religious leaders were asked about their religious institutions’ views on sexuality, and same-sex sexuality and gender nonconformity in particular. The majority of the participants said that their religion or church had official teaching on human sexuality (83.5%; 5.7% did not know) and that these teachings were described in holy scriptures (97.3%). Almost all participants (98.9%) agreed with the statement “According to my religion/church, only sex between a man and a woman who are married is allowed.” The same unanimity was found regarding statements about same-sex sexuality: 94.7% of the participants said that the statement “My religion/church considers sexuality between persons of the same sex a grave sin” was correct. The majority of the participants (93.6%) said that the statement “My religion/church allows sexuality between persons of the same sex” was incorrect, and 96.3% of all participants said that their religion/church did not allow persons of the same sex to get married.

Despite this unanimity, 15.5% of the participants said that the statement “According to my religion/church, persons who are sexually attracted to someone of the same sex are accepted, as long as they don’t engage in actual sex” was correct; compared to Muslim participants, Catholic participants were more likely to say that this statement was correct (26.5% versus 6.7%; $\chi^2 = 9.97$, $df = 4$, $p = .041$; 15.7% of the Protestant participants said this statement was incorrect). More participants (31.6%) said that the statement “My religion/church is open to every sinner, including persons who have sex with someone of the same sex” was correct. Again, Muslim participants were the least likely to say this was correct

(11.1% versus 40.7% of the Protestant participants; $\chi^2 = 19.10$, $df = 4$, $p = .001$; 29.4% of the Catholic participants said that this was correct).

Religious Leaders' Attitudes and Beliefs

Religious leaders' own attitudes and beliefs seemed somewhat less negative toward same-sex sexuality than the official doctrine (Table 1). In response to the question "Would you say your overall opinion of gay men is favorable or unfavorable?," 47.1% of the participants stated they felt very or mostly favorable. For lesbian women this percentage was 48.6%. The majority of the participants, however, agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "The only sex allowed is between a man and a woman who are married" (91.4%). Asked whether they felt that engaging in homosexual behavior was a sin or not, the majority (90.0%) stated that it was a sin (4.8% did not know).

The most common conception of same-sex sexuality among the participants was that it was a choice persons make: 43% of all participants chose the option "Being gay or lesbian is just the way that some people choose." A somewhat smaller group chose the option "Being gay or lesbian is a result of a person's upbringing." Fewer participants thought that people are born as gay or lesbian (11.4%). A few participants (6.2%) did not know how to conceive same-sex sexuality; five participants endorsed the "other" option: four participants called same-sex sexuality "demonic," "evil," or "a curse," while one participant saw same-sex sexuality as a consequence of Western influence.

The religious leaders' conceptions of same-sex sexuality were associated with their evaluations. Of the participants who thought that being gay or lesbian was a result of upbringing or that being gay was a choice, the majority agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the only sex allowed was between a man and a woman who were married (92.4% and 95.5%, respectively); among participants who conceived same-sex sexuality as something people are born with, 66.7% agreed with this statement ($\chi^2 = 49.71$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$). The majority of the participants who thought that same-sex sexuality resulted from upbringing or that it was a choice felt that engaging in homosexual behavior was a sin (94.9% and 96.6%, respectively); among participants who conceived same-sex sexuality as something that people are born with, only 43.5% thought that it was a sin ($\chi^2 = 82.52$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$).

Regarding gender nonconformity, a little over half of the participants (51.5%) stated that they had very or mostly favorable attitudes toward transgender persons. Asked whether it was morally wrong for a man to present himself in public as a woman and for a woman to present herself in public as a man, opinions were less favorable, though; 78.1% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that this behavior was morally wrong for men, while 77.1% of the participants thought that it was morally wrong for women. Compared to Catholic participants, more Muslim participants and less Protestant participants felt that it was

morally wrong for a man to present himself in public as a woman and for a woman to present herself in public as a man (see Table 1).

Social Values and Violence

Major differences based on religious affiliation were related to the role of violence in the preservation of social values. Overall, less than half of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that violence can be justified if it helps preserve social values (37.4%). Over half of all participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that violence against people is always wrong (58.6%). Muslim participants were more likely than Protestant and Catholic participants to agree with the first statement and to disagree with the second statement. Similar differences were evident in relation to violence in the context of homosexuality and gender nonconformity. Overall, less than one-third of the participants (31.7%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "In the case of homosexuality, violence helps to protect our cultural values." In the case of transgender persons, 27.4% agreed or strongly agreed that violence helps protect cultural values. Again, Muslim participants were substantially more likely to agree with both statements.

The Law, The Constitution, and Human Rights

Almost all participants (87.5%) were aware that sex between two persons of the same sex was criminal in Kenya (3.8% of the participants said that they did not know). To explore whether participants distinguished between the country's laws and their religious beliefs, they were asked whether according to their religious views sex between persons of the same sex should be illegal, or that what the law says was a completely separate issue. Almost one-third of the participants (31.3%) said that their religious views and the law were separate issues (4.3% said that they did not know). Nevertheless, the majority of the participants (87.0%) stated that it would be against their religion if the state decriminalized same-sex sexuality (4.8% said that they did not know).

To explore whether same-sex sexuality is a "sexual sin" like others, such as fornication and infidelity in marriage, that are, however, not criminalized, participants were asked to indicate whether homosexuality should be treated differently or in the same way as other sexual sins. While 4.9% of the participants said that they did not know, almost half of the participants (49.0%) said that homosexuality should be treated the same way; 46.1% said it should be treated differently. Muslim participants were more likely to say that homosexuality should be treated differently, while Protestant participants were most likely to say that homosexuality should be treated the same.

Almost all participants (97.6%) were aware that the constitution of Kenya supports freedom of religion and the majority (strongly) agreed that their religious beliefs are in

Table 1. Religious Leaders' Beliefs and Attitudes About Same-Sex Sexuality and Gender Nonconformity by Religion, Personally Knowing a Gay or Lesbian Person, and Ever Heard About Transgender Persons

	Religion				Knows Gay or Lesbian Person			Heard About Transgender Persons		
	Catholic (n = 40)	Muslim (n = 47)	Protestant (n = 125)	Chi ² b	No (n = 64)	Yes (n = 146)	Chi ² b	No (n = 71)	Yes (n = 139)	Chi ² b
<i>General beliefs and attitudes toward same-sex sexuality and gender nonconformity</i>										
Overall opinion of gay men (% very/mostly favorable)	57.5	63.8	37.4	n.s.	43.8	48.6	23.89***	59.2	41.0	n.s.
Overall opinion of lesbian women (% very/mostly favorable)	55.0	63.8	40.7	n.s.	39.1	52.7	20.20***	57.7	43.9	n.s.
The only sex allowed is between a man and a woman who are married (% strongly agree/agree)	92.5	91.5	91.1	n.s.	98.4	88.4	10.01*	93.0	90.6	n.s.
It is a sin to engage in homosexual behavior (% agree)	87.5	89.4	91.0	n.s.	98.4	86.2	7.35**	94.4	97.7	n.s.
Thinking about people who are gay or lesbian, which statement comes closer to your view? ^a				n.s.			9.83**			14.48***
People are born as gay or lesbian	21.6	8.9	10.9		1.8 ^c	17.0 ^c		0.0 ^c	19.0 ^c	
Being gay or lesbian is a result of upbringing	32.4	33.3	47.3		40.4	41.5		45.5	38.9	
Being gay is just the way some people choose	45.9	57.8	41.8		57.9 ^c	41.5 ^c		54.5	42.1	
It is morally wrong for a man to present himself in public as a woman (% strongly agree/agree)	77.5	87.2 ^c	74.8 ^c	18.47*	82.8	76.0	10.94*	87.3	73.4	14.64**
It is morally wrong for a woman to present herself in public as a man (% strongly agree/agree)	80.0	87.2 ^c	72.4 ^c	22.52**	81.3	75.3	9.78*	85.9	72.7	19.78***
Overall opinion of transgender persons (% very/mostly favorable)	55.0	61.7	46.3	n.s.	39.1	56.8	13.12*	62.0	46.0	n.s.
<i>Violence in the preservation of social values</i>										
Violence can be justified if it helps to preserve social values (% strongly agree/agree)	27.5	80.9 ^c	25.6 ^c	51.32***	43.8	36.1	n.s.	47.9	33.6	20.84***
Violence against people is always wrong (% strongly agree/agree)	70.0	42.6 ^c	61.2	24.66**	59.4	58.3	n.s.	38.0	69.3	35.25***
In the case of homosexuality violence helps to protect our cultural values (% strongly agree/agree)	27.5	74.5 ^c	16.5 ^c	60.41***	50.0	23.6	17.44**	49.3	22.6	20.29***
In the case of transgender persons' violence helps to protect our cultural values (% strongly agree/agree)	22.5	68.1 ^c	13.2 ^c	66.82***	35.9	23.6	12.24*	40.8	20.4	15.24**
<i>The law, religion, and rights</i>										
According to Kenyan law, sex between two persons of the same sex is illegal (% correct) ^a	91.9	93.5	89.7	n.s.	90.5	91.2	n.s.	94.2	89.3	n.s.
According to my religious views, ^a				7.11*			n.s.			n.s.
Sex between persons of the same sex should be illegal	65.8	52.2 ^c	73.9 ^c		62.3	69.6		59.4	71.5	
What the law says is a completely separate issue	34.2	47.8	26.1		37.7	30.4		40.6	28.5	
Decriminalization of same-sex sexuality would be against my religion (% agree) ^a	91.9	93.5	90.4	n.s.	91.9	91.1	n.s.	94.1	89.9	n.s.
Many things churches hold as sexual sins (e.g., fornication, infidelity in marriages) are not criminalized, yet homosexuality among consenting adults is				16.31***			9.35**			11.09***
Homosexuality should be treated ^a										
The same way as other sexual sins	55.3	25.0 ^c	60.5 ^c		35.5	59.0		34.8	60.0	
Differently	44.7	75.0	39.5		64.5	31.0		65.2	40.0	

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

	Religion				Knows Gay or Lesbian Person			Heard About Transgender Persons		
	Catholic (n = 40)	Muslim (n = 47)	Protestant (n = 125)	Chi ² b	No (n = 64)	Yes (n = 146)	Chi ² b	No (n = 71)	Yes (n = 139)	Chi ² b
The constitution of Kenya supports freedom of religion (% strongly agree/agree)	100.0	100.0	95.9	n.s.	98.4	97.2	n.s.	95.8	98.5	n.s.
My religious beliefs are in agreement with the constitution of Kenya on this issue (% strongly agree/agree)	80.0	80.9	76.0	n.s.	87.5	73.6	n.s.	85.9	73.7	23.50***
The constitution of Kenya applies to gay and lesbian persons (% strongly agree/agree)	45.0	55.3	56.2	n.s.	45.3	57.6	n.s.	66.2	47.4	13.34**
The constitution of Kenya applies to transgender persons (% strongly agree/agree)	45.0	42.6	52.9	n.s.	40.6	52.8	n.s.	59.2	43.8	12.54*
According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all people are equal in dignity and rights, and this is the basis for equality and nondiscrimination. ^a These values:				n.s.			n.s.			22.19***
Correspond with my religious beliefs (%)	60.0	34.8	49.6		41.0	51.4		25.0	60.0	
Contradict them (%)	40.0	65.2	50.4		59.0	48.6		75.0	40.0	
Values of equality and dignity, as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:										
Apply to lesbian and gay persons (% agree) ^a	73.5	34.1 ^c	67.6 ^c	16.57***	37.5	69.8	15.31***	59.6	61.7	n.s.
Apply to transgender persons (% agree) ^a	76.5	36.8	67.7 ^c	14.58***	39.1	71.4	14.75***	61.1	63.1	n.s.

^a Persons who answered *Don't know* were excluded; proportions of persons responding with *Don't know* ranged from 1.9% to 19.5%.

^b Calculated on the original frequencies.

^c Proportion that is significantly higher or lower than expected based on margin totals (in case variables are not dichotomous).

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

agreement with the constitution (77.9%). Surprisingly, 21.1% of the participants said that they (strongly) disagreed with the statement “My religious beliefs are in agreement with the constitution of Kenya on this issue [that the constitution supports freedom of religion]” (1.0% said that they did not know). About one-third of the participants believed the constitution of Kenya did not apply to gay and lesbian persons or transgender persons: 37.0% of the participants (strongly) disagreed with the statement “The constitution of Kenya applies to gay and lesbian persons” (9.1% said that they did not know); 35.5% (strongly) disagreed with the statement “The constitution of Kenya applies to transgender persons” (15.4% said that they did not know).

To explore participants' perceptions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, they were asked: “According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all people are equal in dignity and rights, and this is the basis for equality and nondiscrimination. Do these values correspond with your religious beliefs or do they contradict them?” Half of the participants (50.7%) said that these values contradicted their religious beliefs (1.9% said that they did not know). In addition, participants were asked whether they thought that the values of equality and dignity, as expressed in this Universal Declaration, applied to gay and lesbian persons, and to

transgender persons. Overall, 52.2% of the participants said that these values do apply to gay and lesbian persons (14.5% said that they did not know); 50.2% of the participants stated that these values also apply to transgender persons (19.5% said that they did not know).

Age and Gender

Surprisingly, and despite the variance in age among the participants, age was not related to any of the surveyed beliefs and attitudes. The only difference in terms of age was related to the statement “Violence against people is always wrong”: Participants in the age 50 to 64 category were relatively more likely than others to agree with this statement, while participants in the age 30 to 39 category were relatively more likely than others to disagree with the statement ($\chi^2 = 22.29$, $df = 12$, $p = .034$).

Similarly, there were very few gender differences. Surprisingly, men were more favorable toward transgender persons than women (55.5% of the men compared to 24.0% of the women were very or mostly favorable; $\chi^2 = 12.72$, $df = 4$, $p = .013$). Men were, however, more likely to agree with the statement that it is morally wrong for a woman to present herself in public as a man (60.4% of the men

strongly agreed with the statement compared to 36.0% of the women; $\chi^2 = 9.59$, $df = 4$, $p = .048$). Compared to men, more women agreed strongly with the statement that the constitution of Kenya applies to transgender persons (7.1% versus 24.0%; $\chi^2 = 10.70$, $df = 4$, $p = .030$). However, women were somewhat more likely than men to think that homosexuality should be treated like other “sexual sins” (70.8% versus 48.5%; $\chi^2 = 4.18$, $df = 1$, $p = .041$).

Familiarity With Same-Sex Sexuality and Gender Nonconformity

Table 1 shows that participants who said that they personally knew a gay or lesbian person or who had heard about transgender persons had somewhat more accepting beliefs and attitudes compared to participants who said that they did not know a gay or lesbian person or who had not heard about transgender persons. Of all participants, 68.9% said that they personally knew a gay or lesbian person and 65.6% had heard about transgender persons. These variables were associated: Of all participants who said that they knew a gay or lesbian person, 74.0% said that they had heard about transgender persons versus 48.4% of all participants who said that they did not know a gay or lesbian person ($\chi^2 = 12.96$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). Persons who said that they did know a gay or lesbian person or who had heard about transgender persons also reported being more knowledgeable about same-sex sexuality ($\chi^2 = 7.27$, $df = 2$, $p = .026$, and $\chi^2 = 10.15$, $df = 2$, $p = .006$, respectively).

Participants who said they personally knew a gay or lesbian person had somewhat less unfavorable attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women, as well as toward transgender persons (see Table 1). They were also somewhat less likely to think the only sex allowed was between a man and a woman who were married and that engaging in homosexual behavior was a sin. Participants who said that they personally knew a gay or lesbian person or who had heard about transgender persons were less likely to agree with the statement that it was morally wrong for a man to present himself in public as a woman or for a woman to present herself as a man. They were also less likely to say that being gay is just the way some people choose to live and more likely to say that people are born gay or lesbian.

Knowing a gay or lesbian person and having heard about transgender persons was also associated with participants' perspectives on violence and the preservation of social values (see Table 1). Participants who said that they personally knew a gay or lesbian person or who had heard about transgender persons were less likely to agree with the statement that in the case of homosexuality or transgender persons violence helps protect cultural values. Participants who had heard about transgender persons were less likely to agree with the statement that violence can be justified if it helps to preserve social values, and they were more likely to agree with the statement that violence against people is always wrong.

Participants who said they personally knew a gay or lesbian person or who had heard about transgender persons were more likely to feel that homosexuality among consenting adults should be treated like other “sexual sins” which are not criminalized by the government but which the churches hold as sexual sins (e.g., fornication, infidelity in marriages; see Table 1).

Participants who had heard about transgender persons were more likely to agree with the statement that their religious beliefs were in agreement with the constitution of Kenya, which supports the freedom of religion (see Table 1). Surprisingly, these participants were somewhat less likely to agree with the statements that the constitution of Kenya applies to gay and lesbian persons and transgender persons. However, participants who had heard about transgender persons were more likely to feel that their religious beliefs corresponded with the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which expresses that all people are equal in dignity and rights, and that this is the basis for equality and nondiscrimination. Participants who said they personally knew a gay or lesbian person were more likely to agree that these values of equality and dignity applied to lesbian and gay persons and to transgender persons.

Discussion

To the authors' knowledge, this is the first study that systematically described the perspectives of African religious leaders on same-sex sexuality and gender nonconformity. Religious leaders in Kenya seemed well aware of the negative perspectives on same-sex sexuality of the institutions they represent. In line with these formal doctrines, most of these leaders agreed that same-sex sexuality is sinful and that presenting oneself as a gender different from one's biological sex is morally wrong; as such, our findings confirm what has been suggested by qualitative information (e.g., Finerty, 2012). Although seemingly in contradiction, there was a little latitude in that a substantial minority of the religious leaders reported favorable attitudes toward LGBT persons. This acceptance seemed to be conditional and applied to the persons and not their behavior: For some, lesbian and gay persons were welcome if they did not engage in same-sex sexuality, or they were welcome as sinners, to whom the respective religions or churches claimed to be open. To the extent that any such flexibility exists, it seemed to be more present in Catholic and Protestant religious leaders than in Muslim religious leaders. The most striking finding was the endorsement by a substantial minority of religious leaders, predominantly Muslim religious leaders, of violence for the maintenance of social values, especially in the case of homosexuality and gender nonconformity.

Almost all religious leaders were aware that homosexuality is criminalized in Kenya and held the view that decriminalization would be against their religion. A substantial

minority, especially among Muslim religious leaders, agreed that what the law says about homosexuality is a completely separate issue from what their religion/church says. Still, the majority were of the opinion that decriminalizing same-sex sexuality would go against their religion.

Awareness of the relatively new constitution in Kenya seemed high among the religious leaders. Almost all leaders knew that the constitution protects freedom of religion; a minority (about one in five) did not feel their religious beliefs were in agreement with the constitution. Surprisingly, almost half of all religious leaders felt that Kenya's constitution applies to gay and lesbian persons and transgender persons. Compared to the constitution, endorsement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was more ambivalent.

The answer patterns showed some similarity with trends observed in other studies that assessed beliefs and attitudes toward same-sex sexuality. As in other studies (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008; Sakalli, 2002), we found that religious leaders who thought of same-sex sexuality as something that people are born with had more favorable attitudes than leaders who thought it was a result of upbringing or a personal choice. Other studies have demonstrated that women and younger generations had more positive attitudes toward same-sex sexuality compared to men and older generations, respectively (Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Guittar & Pals, 2014; Hicks & Lee, 2006; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Petersen & Hyde, 2011; West & Cowell, 2015); we did not find such differences. It could be that religion trumps the effects of age and gender; given the limited variance, it is also possible that our measures were not sensitive enough to capture differences related to age and gender. As in other studies (e.g., Collier et al., 2012; Graham et al., 2014; Patrick et al., 2013; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), we confirmed the importance of interpersonal contact: Religious leaders who personally knew gay and lesbian persons or who had heard about transgender persons generally had less negative attitudes.

It is not clear to what extent our findings generalize to other parts of Africa, although given the central role of religion it is likely that a similar pattern of responses would be found in other African countries. Compared to other African countries, the general acceptance of homosexuality is somewhat higher in Kenya, with the exception of South Africa (Kohut, 2013). A study conducted by the Pew Research Center showed that 8% of the Kenyans surveyed had the opinion that society should accept homosexuality, compared to 1% to 4% in Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and Uganda (in South Africa 32% felt that way; Kohut, 2013). The same study showed that across the world, there was a strong relationship between the level of religiosity in a country and acceptance of homosexuality. It is likely that in less accepting African countries, the views of religious leaders are even more negative than what we observed among religious leaders in Kenya.

The strengths of this study should be considered in the context of some limitations. A critical limitation was our sample. It was practically impossible to recruit a sample that was representative of all religious leaders in Kenya. Furthermore, although we did not systematically collect reasons for nonparticipation, nonresponse seemed to have been selective, with many religious leaders refusing to participate because of the study topic. The likely implication of this limitation is that our results present a more positive picture than we would have had with a more representative sample.

Other limitations are related to the content of the questionnaire. To strengthen response and prevent dropout, we decided to keep the questionnaire as short as possible. As a consequence, we assessed critical variables with single items. Using reliable and validated scales, consisting of multiple items, would have been a stronger approach. However, it would have prevented us from covering the diversity of topics that were relevant to understand religious leaders' opinions in the broader context. Furthermore, we focused on opinions and attitudes; it is not clear how these translate in actual behavior in relevant situations. Related to this, we did not assess religious fundamentalism, defined as there being only one interpretation of the Bible or the Qur'an that every Christian or Muslim, respectively, should endorse (see Koopmans, 2015). Understanding the extent of fundamentalism could indicate how deeply rooted or open to change these beliefs and attitudes are. It is important to note that religiosity as such is not necessarily associated with negative perspectives on same-sex sexuality and gender nonconformity, and that there is diversity among individuals within the same denomination. A final limitation is social desirability bias, which, as was the case in Kelly, Soler-Hampejsek, Mensch, and Hewett's (2013) study, might partly explain the discrepancy between the participants' descriptions of the religious teachings and their own, somewhat more favorable, personal beliefs about sexuality and gender.

Given how strongly religion permeates social life, it seems critical to work with religious leaders to improve the lives of sexual and gender minorities in Kenya and other African countries. Despite the overall denouncement of same-sex sexuality and gender nonconformity, the findings suggest some openings for such engagement. The religious leaders' opinions and beliefs were not unequivocally negative. There even seemed to be some internally contradictory perspectives that suggest opinions and beliefs were not completely developed and crystallized, leaving space for intervention. A major inconsistency in the leaders' perspectives had to do with the constitution. It is encouraging to see the religious leaders' awareness of the fact that the Kenyan constitution supports freedom of religion and also that the majority agreed that the constitution is in agreement with their religious beliefs. However, freedom of religion implies that the constitution also assures space for religions and churches that embrace LGBT persons or even those that would bring them together and unite them. Freedom of religion further implies that religious

prescriptions about how life should be lived cannot be imposed on persons who do not adhere to that specific religion. Scripture cannot be the rule of law in a society with a constitution that protects freedom of religion. These implications do not seem to be reflected in the religious leaders' beliefs. The clearest example of that is the endorsement of violence in preserving social values by a minority, but not an insignificant proportion, of religious leaders. Another example is that a substantial group of religious leaders did not think that the Kenyan constitution applied to LGBT persons. This indicates the need for education about the constitution, especially directed at people, such as religious leaders, who are influential in shaping the social climate in society. This seems to be a critical responsibility for the Kenyan government and civil society.

Another indication of the potential for change is that about half of the religious leaders seemed to perceive LGBT persons favorably and were of the opinion that the Kenyan constitution also applied to them. It is also encouraging that a majority of the religious leaders were of the opinion that values of equality and dignity, as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, also applied to LGBT persons.

There are several ways in which religious leaders in Kenya can be addressed. Findings from a meta-analytic study reviewing interventions to reduce sexual prejudice suggest the importance of education, contact with LGBT people, and affecting social norms as part of theoretically informed and evidence-based interventions (Bartoş, Berger, & Hegarty, 2014). As Bartoş et al. (2014) noted, it is not clear whether these interventions work with groups with higher levels of sexual prejudice than the populations that usually participate in this kind of research (i.e., U.S. students). However, our findings suggest the potential impact of interpersonal contact with LGBT individuals in promoting a more accepting climate. This strategy has lately been adopted by LGBT organizations in Kenya, such as PEMA (Persons Marginalized and Aggrieved) Kenya, while addressing knowledge gaps on same-sex sexuality with religious leaders (Kushner, 2015). A systematic evaluation of these interventions, which assesses the impact on attitudes and beliefs as well as behaviors vis-à-vis LGBT persons, would expand our understanding of how sexual prejudice can be diminished.

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