

Socioeconomic Status and Beliefs about God's Influence in Everyday Life*

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This study examines the differences in beliefs about God's influence in everyday life across levels of socioeconomic status (SES) and whether that association is contingent upon religious involvement (i.e., frequency of praying, attendance, reading religious texts, and subjective religiosity). I focus specifically on the beliefs in divine involvement and divine control. Using data from two national 2005 surveys of Americans, I observe the following: (1) overall, SES is associated negatively with beliefs in divine involvement and control; (2) with the exception of reading religious texts, each indicator of religious involvement is associated with higher levels of beliefs in divine involvement or divine control; (3) SES interacts with each dimension of religious involvement such that the negative association between SES and divine involvement or control is attenuated at higher levels of religious involvement. I discuss the contributions of this research for theoretical perspectives on the relationship between SES and beliefs about God's influence in everyday life, underscoring the need to assess religious involvement in these processes.

William James ([1902] 1999) defined religion as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (p. 36). For more than a century, critiques of religion have suggested that beliefs about God, including His engagement and involvement in everyday life, represent forms of delusional pathology (Ellis 1988; Freud 1976; Marx and Engels 1964;

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Watters 1992).¹ More recently, a fresh crop of writings from scholars across disciplines has sought to assess and challenge religion in contemporary society, especially in the United States (Dawkins 2006; Dennett 2006; Harris 2004; Hitchens 2007). Despite the increasing popularity of these recent polemics about religion, there is strong evidence that the vast majority of Americans maintain the belief in a personal God (Froese and Bader 2007), and these beliefs remain influential in many aspects of American social and political life (Wills 2007). Less is known, however, about the *content* of those beliefs. In this paper, therefore, I focus on the extent that individuals believe in a personal God who is involved and influential in people's lives—with a special emphasis on the distribution of these beliefs across SES.

Sociologists have long touted the social causes and consequences associated with beliefs about the divine (Marx and Engels [1878] 1964; Weber [1922] 1963). One area of interest has focused on the patterning of religious precepts and practices across social strata (Davidson 1977; Demerath 1965; Fukuyama 1961; Glock and Stark 1965; Stark 1972). Wilson (1982), for example, underscored “the differential appeal of religion according to the specifics of particular classes or social groups” (p. 23). Recent evidence confirms that stratification-based differences in religious affiliation persist (Pyle 2006; Smith and Faris 2005). In an effort to extend this tradition, I examine the association between SES and beliefs about God independently and in *conjunction* with other aspects of religious involvement, including the frequency of attending religious services, praying, reading religious texts, and subjective religious identification. Using data from two 2005 national surveys of American adults, I address three questions: (1) Is SES associated with beliefs about divine involvement and divine control? (2) How are different dimensions of religious involvement associated with those beliefs? (3) Does religious involvement modify the association between SES and beliefs about divine involvement and divine control? In supplemental analyses, I also assess whether or not the association between SES and the belief in divine involvement is contingent upon individuals' beliefs about the Bible as the literal word of God.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Beliefs about God's Influence in Everyday Life

It is well established that belief in God is pervasive and influential in contemporary American society—but *what* do people believe about the nature of

¹The “gender” of God is a key part of the collective mental representation of God. In the 2005 Baylor Religion Survey, 44 percent of Americans “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement that “God is a He.” Only 28 percent of those surveyed “disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that “God is a He.” Approximately 29 percent reported that they were “undecided” about God's gender. These findings are reported in the “American Piety in the 21st Century: New Insights to the Depth and Complexity of Religion in the United States” (<http://www.baylor.edu/isreligion/>).

God's presence in everyday life? Across historical times, societies, and cultures, individuals have maintained a heterogeneous assortment of mental representations of God, often assigning to Him human attributes that imply something about His involvement in human affairs (i.e., "master," "father," and "friend"; Armstrong 1993; Miles 1995; Sharot 2001; Stark 2001, 2007). Orthodox Christian theology socializes the belief that God desires to maintain a special connection with each individual and commonly intercedes in their lives (Ellison et al. 2001; Smith 2007; Watson et al. 1988). The concept of a *personal relationship* with God identifies the ways that many people maintain a bond with the divine that parallels social relations with other people (Glock and Stark 1965; Pollner 1989). These beliefs often include the conviction that God is a conscious, omnipotent being who has explicit expectations and desires for each human being (Black 1999; Stark and Finke 2000). Krause (2002) summarizes divine relations as a set of themes in which believers have "a sense of trust in God, believe that God is in control of their lives, believe that God knows what is best for them, and believe that God ultimately ensures they will get what they need most" (p. S335).

While some individuals believe that God is involved in the details of their lives, many people also profess a belief that God is a *causal* agent in everyday life (Welton et al. 1996). The sense of *divine control* involves the extent that one believes that God exercises a commanding authority over the course and direction of his or her own life (Schieman et al. 2005). This notion has deep theological roots. According to Stark and Glock (1968: 25), "the most universal and basic element in Christian theologies is an elaborate set of assertions about the nature and will of an all-powerful and sentient God." Similarly, Roberts and Davidson (1984) contend that the "theistic or traditional meaning system is the acceptance of God as the primary force governing and explaining life" (p. 340). In this respect, God is the "uncaused first cause" of the universe (Sagan 2006). Social scientists have sought to capture this belief conceptually with ideas like "God as a causal agent" (Ritzema and Young 1983), "religious coping" (Pargament 1997), and "God-mediated control" (Krause 2005, 2007).

Individuals who sustain a belief in divine control perceive that God has a determinative influence on the good and bad outcomes in their lives, that God has decided what their life shall be, and that their fate evolves according to God's will or plan for them (Schieman et al. 2005). Moreover, they tend to rely on God in their decision-making and more fervently seek His guidance for solutions to problems. My analyses focus on two potential influences that are central in sociological study of beliefs about God: SES and religious involvement. I propose that both independently shape beliefs in divine involvement and control and, more importantly, that the effects of one depend on levels of the other. Before describing the relevance of religious involvement, I outline different perspectives on the link between SES and beliefs about the divine.

SES and Beliefs about Divine Involvement and Control

The sociological tradition is rich with theory and evidence about the links between social inequality and religion (Stark 1972). For example, Weber ([1922] 1963) described social differentiation in theodicies—especially the ways the lower and higher classes invoke God as causally relevant for their personal socioeconomic positions. His thesis proposed that while the rich interpret signs of God's blessing in their success, the poor are more apt to adopt a *misfortune theodicy* that delineates the malevolence of wealth and the impending compensation for their suffering in the next life. Moreover, the social inequality-religion dynamic remains relevant in contemporary American society (Smith and Faris 2005), particularly in the recent rise of what is known as the “prosperity gospel” (Hunt 1998; Luo 2006). Despite the well-established prevalence and significance of beliefs about God, however, the patterning of these beliefs across social strata remains less clear.

I focus specifically on the relevance of SES—as indexed by education and income—for several reasons. First and foremost, these represent core dimensions of social stratification that have implications for an array of personal, social, and health advantages (Mirowsky and Ross 2003). Prior research has drawn attention to education's role in understanding variations in the nature and functions of religious precepts and practices. Pollner (1989), for example, hypothesized that education modifies the psychological effects of religiosity because of its association with cognitive abilities and an enhanced capacity to comprehend “complex symbolic codes.” Pollner's thesis implies that people with less education “may profit especially from the sense of order and meaning generated in and through divine interaction” (p. 94). Likewise, theoretical views about deprivation–compensation are potentially relevant (Wilson 1982). Individuals in disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions are purportedly more likely to construct a bond with the divine to compensate for their plight and acquire otherwise-unattainable rewards (Glock and Stark 1965; Stark 1972). This thesis posits that reliance upon an omnipotent deity who is perceived as satisfying desires may offset the deleterious psychological effects of immutable adversities in everyday life. Consistent with this view, substantial evidence confirms that low SES individuals are more likely to seek God's will through prayer (Albrecht and Heaton 1984), and tend to report higher levels of divine interaction (Pollner 1989), feeling connected with God (Krause 2002), religious meaning and coping (Krause 2003, 1995), God-mediated control (Krause 2005, 2007), and the sense of divine control (Schieman et al. 2006). Moreover, low SES groups tend to derive greater psychological benefits from religiosity (Ellison 1991; Krause 1995; Pollner 1989).

Another view predicts the *same* pattern as the deprivation–compensation hypothesis—but for *different* reasons; I label it the “demythologized beliefs” hypothesis. This view is based on the idea that SES-based secularization occurs such that higher SES attainments diminish the belief in the supernatural-mythological orthodoxy of religion. These ideas have their origins

in a sociological tradition that describes the secularization of beliefs, especially processes that involve the replacement of the “mystical and supernatural elements of traditional Christianity” with a “demythologized, ethical rather than theological religion” (Glock and Stark 1965: 116; also see Berger 1967; Herberg 1960). This view also shares conceptual terrain with Shiner’s (1967) notion of secularization which finds a transposition from sacred to secular explanations for events and outcomes in daily life. Thus, unlike the deprivation-compensation view, the demythologized beliefs hypothesis provides an explanation for why high SES groups would *not* profess the same (high) levels of belief in divine involvement and control as their low SES peers.

Collectively, these theoretical and empirical perspectives provide a basis for the hypothesis that SES is associated *negatively* with beliefs about divine involvement and control. That is, individuals with lower levels of SES should tend to report the highest levels of belief in divine involvement and control. However, it is also plausible that the hypothesized negative association between SES and these beliefs are *contingent upon religious involvement*. One possibility is that the negative association between SES and beliefs is attenuated by higher levels of religious involvement. An alternative view is that SES differences in beliefs remain irrespective of religious involvement. Next, I elaborate on these different ways that religious involvement may be relevant in the focal associations between SES and beliefs about God.

The Relevance of Religious Involvement

Individuals’ subjective identification as “religious” and the frequency that they engage in religious activities represent core elements of participation in, and commitment to, the religious role. Taken together, these are typically referred to as *religious involvement* (Froese and Bader 2007). In the present analyses, I identify two ways that religious involvement is potentially relevant. First, in the “exposure–reinforcement” hypothesis, I propose that individuals with higher levels of religious involvement are more likely to profess beliefs in divine involvement and control. The exposure–reinforcement view is based on the proposition that religion is a powerful source of socialization; the teachings, symbols, and rituals function to communicate and reinforce core beliefs (Sharot 2001; Stark and Finke 2000; Wilson 1982). More specifically, frequent engagement in religious activities offers individuals opportunities to discover, modify, and reaffirm the central tenets of their faith (Davidson and Knudsen 1977; Gaede 1976; Welch 1981), which likely includes the image of God as one who is personally involved in the lives of humans on a daily basis (Froese and Bader 2007; Krause 2002). Collectively, these ideas concur with Berger’s (1967) claim that “religious ideation is grounded in religious activity” (p. 40).

The second way that religious involvement is potentially relevant involves its role as an effect modifier. That is, the association between SES and the belief in divine involvement and control may be contingent upon religious involvement. As the exposure–reinforcement hypothesis predicts, high levels

of religious involvement may cultivate and sustain one's belief system, religious awareness and consciousness, and religious-based interpretations of the human experience. It is plausible that these processes occur irrespective of social standing, although the ways that they potentially differ in their influence on precepts and practices across social strata is unclear. One possibility is that more frequent participation in religious activities and strong religious identification *attenuate* the hypothesized negative association between SES and beliefs in divine involvement and control. In analytical terms, this hypothesis requires the test of SES-by-religious involvement interaction terms. Moreover, it predicts that SES-based differences in beliefs about divine involvement and control should be largest among those who participate less frequently and profess a weaker subjective religiosity. Thus, the exposure–reinforcement hypothesis predicts fewer SES-based differences in beliefs among individuals who exhibit more religious involvement.

For an alternative hypothesis, I draw upon the demythologized beliefs hypothesis to propose that the other elements of religious involvement are *irrelevant* for the negative association between SES and beliefs about divine involvement and control. This idea is rooted partly in the view that individuals with low SES tend to experience *different* outcomes associated with religious involvement compared with their higher status peers (Pollner 1989). Krause (1995), for example, suggests that individuals with fewer socioeconomic resources may place a “greater premium” on religiosity because of deficiencies in means or resources to “obtain self-validation elsewhere” (p. P244). Likewise, Van Roy et al. (1973) contend that “*regardless of religious affiliation*, the (stable) lower-status practitioner is expected to possess relatively more orthodox religious beliefs than his (stable) upper-status counterpart” (p. 428, italics added). I extend this idea to include religious involvement more generally. In analytic terms, these notions imply two general patterns: (1) individuals with high SES will be less likely to profess beliefs in divine involvement and control and (2) even when they share similar levels of religious involvement as low SES groups, those with high SES should exhibit overall lower levels of belief in divine involvement and control. That is, individuals with high SES should be less likely than low SES groups to endorse divine involvement and control beliefs *irrespective* of their participation in the religious role. The SES-based “secularization of belief” processes described above imply that SES reduces supernatural-mythological orthodoxy regardless of involvement. Put differently, religious involvement should not attenuate high SES individuals' diminished sense of divine involvement and control.

To sum, I have outlined reasons for variations in beliefs about God across social strata. While these arguments integrate deprivation–compensation ideas, they also seek to extend beyond that traditional view. I introduce the possibility that social strata differences depend on levels of religious involvement by either *attenuating* or *accentuating* SES differences in beliefs. Specifically, the exposure–reinforcement hypothesis predicts attenuation in the SES-beliefs association;

conversely, the demythologized beliefs hypothesis predicts an exacerbation of that association.

METHOD

Samples

Baylor Religion Survey The Baylor Religion Survey (BRS) is a nationally representative survey of 1,721 respondents. The survey was conducted by the Gallop Organization from October to December 2005. Procedures include a mixed-mode sampling design of telephone and self-administered mailed surveys. Participants were recruited through nationwide random digit dialing methods. Of the 3,702 potential respondents contacted, 1,721 returned completed surveys, for an overall participation rate of 46.5 percent. The overall response rate is roughly 24 percent; that is, 1,721 individuals of the total number that Gallop attempted to contact (7,041) participated. For the present analyses, I deleted cases with missing values on focal measures which yielded a sample of 1,558 cases. Using information from the most recent Bureau of the Census Current Population Survey, the data are weighted using information about gender, race, region, age, and education. See Bader et al. (2007) for a comprehensive overview of the survey content, data collection and sampling design, the weighting procedures, and its comparison to the 2004 General Social Survey.

Work, Stress, and Health Survey The Work, Stress, and Health Survey (WSH) derives data from telephone interviews with 1,800 adults in the 50 United States from February through August of 2005. Eligible participants are 18 years of age or older and participating in the paid labor force. Interviews were conducted in English, so participants had to be sufficiently fluent. Of the total number of individuals who were contacted and determined as eligible for the study (2,544), 71 percent agreed to participate and completed the full interview (1,800).² The age range is 18–94 with a mean of 44 years, 59

²To obtain the sample, a list-assisted random digit dialing (RDD) selection drawn proportionally from all 50 states from GENESYS Sampling Systems was used. The sampling approach employed the List +1 method, which tends to yield a higher proportion of productive numbers. List-assisted RDD is widely accepted now by most social survey research organizations as a cost-effective alternative to the pure RDD methods originally developed by Waksberg (1978). List-assisted RDD increases the probability of residential numbers while minimizing the biases often associated with non-traditional RDD techniques. The final sample was based on: (1) telephone numbers for residential households; (2) households agreeing to answer screening questions; (3) successfully screened households with one or more employed adults; and (4) eligible households with a sub-sampled adult who agreed to participate in the interview. Using the most conservative denominator, the overall screener response rate is 22 percent; that percentage increases to approximately 54 percent with a denominator that excludes likely ineligible cases (full details about the response rate and specific nonresponse outcomes are available upon request).

percent are women, and 72 percent are white. The sample demographic characteristics are similar to those in other datasets such as the 2005 American Community Survey (ACS). Using the ACS data, I weighted analyses to achieve conformance with the U.S. population in terms of sex, age, race, marital status, and occupation. For these analyses, I deleted cases with missing values on focal measures which yielded a sample of 1,709 individuals.

Focal Measures

Belief in divine involvement. Participants in the BRS were asked: “Even if you might not believe in God, based on your personal understanding, what do you think God is like?” Participants were then asked the extent that they agree or disagree with three statements: “God is removed from my personal affairs,” “God is concerned with my personal well-being” (reverse-coded), and “God is directly involved in my personal affairs” (reverse-coded). Response choices are: “strongly agree” (1), “agree” (2), “undecided” (3), “disagree” (4), and “strongly disagree” (5). Items load highly on one underlying factor (.84, .88, and .89, respectively) with an eigenvalue of 2.26. Items are averaged to create the belief in divine involvement index ($\alpha = .84$).

Belief in divine control Participants in the WSH survey were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following five statements: “You decide what to do without relying on God,” “When good or bad things happen, you see it is part of God’s plan for you” (reverse-coded), “God has decided what your life shall be” (reverse-coded), “You depend on God for help and guidance” (reverse-coded), and “There is no sense planning a lot—my fate is in God’s hands” (reverse-coded) (Schieman et al. 2005). Response choices are: “strongly agree” (1), “agree” (2), “disagree” (3), and “strongly disagree” (4). Factor analysis confirms that all of the items load highly ($>.68$) on a single underlying construct; one factor was retained with an eigenvalue of 2.96. I averaged the items to create the belief in divine control index ($\alpha = .83$).

Socioeconomic status To create the SES index, I standardized and averaged education and household income measures. In the BRS and WSH surveys, I coded education as “less than high school degree” (0), “high school graduate or GED” (1), some college but no degree earned (2), Associate’s Degree (2-year) (3), college graduate (BA or BS) (4), and post graduate—advanced degree (MA, Ph.D.) (5). The percentages in the BRS are as follows: 3 percent have less than a high school diploma, 14 percent are high school graduates, 24 percent have some college, 8 percent have trade/technical/vocational training, 26 percent are college graduates, and 25 percent have a graduate degree. In the WSH survey, 5 percent have less than high school, 28 percent have a high school graduate or GED, 18 percent have some college but no degree, 16 percent have specialized training or an associate’s degree, 21 percent are college graduates, and 13 percent have a graduate degree. These data indicate that the BRS is a somewhat better-educated sample than WSH.

In the BRS, household income is assessed with the question: "By your best estimate, what was your total household income last year, before taxes?" BRS income categories were coded (by the directors of the survey) as: (1) "\$10,000 or less," (2) "\$10,001–\$20,000," (3) "\$20,001–\$35,000," (4) "\$35,001–\$50,000," (5) "\$50,001–\$100,000," (6) "\$100,001–\$150,000," and (7) "\$150,001 or more."³ The median BRS income falls in the \$50,001–\$100,000 range. In the WSH survey, household income is assessed with the question: "For the complete year of 2004, what was your total household income, including income from all household sources, before taxes?" Income is coded as a continuous measure in the WSH survey; the median household income is \$50,000.⁴

Frequency of attendance at religious services. In the BRS, one item asks: "How often do you attend religious services?" Response choices are: "never" (1), "less than once a year" (2), "once or twice a year" (3), "several times a year" (4), "once a month" (5), "2–3 times a month" (6), "about weekly" (7), "weekly" (8), and "several times a week" (9). Likewise, the WSH survey asks: "In the past year, how often have you attended religious services?" Response choices are: "never" (1), "once or twice in the past year" (2), "once a month" (3), "2 to 3 times a month" (4), "once a week" (5), and "several times a week or more" (6).

Frequency of praying In the BRS, one item asks: "About how often do you pray or meditate outside of religious services?" Response choices are: "never" (1), "only on certain occasions" (2), "once a week or less" (3), "a few times a week" (4), "once a day" (5), and "several times a day" (6). Likewise, the WSH survey asks: "About how often do you pray or meditate privately in places other than a church or place of worship?" Response choices are: "never" (1), "less

³In the BRS data, I imputed income values for the 110 individuals (6.4 percent) with missing values on household income using the "impute" command in *Stata 10*. These imputed values are based on the following variables: sex, age, race, region, education, marital status, employment status, weekly work hours, and job sector. Collectively, these variables explain 40 percent of the total variation in household income, so they provide a substantially better estimate than simply substituting the mean income for missing. All BRS-based analyses adjust for a dummy-code of "missing income" (coded 1) versus not (coded 0). In the WSH survey, comprehensive techniques were employed in an effort to minimize "refusal" or "don't know" responses to the income questions; therefore, missing values were not problematic for the WSH income question.

⁴Some readers may wonder whether or not education and income have different effects. In separate analyses (not shown), I replaced the SES measure with education (or income) and tested all models. Results for education and income are generally similar, although when both are considered simultaneously in models their individual effects vanish. This is a classic symptom of collinearity—that is, in analyses of contingencies between education/income and religious involvement, the shared variance causes individual estimates to fluctuate and become non-significant. For this reason, I decided to report all analyses with the SES index. In addition, I recognize that it is possible to examine categorical contrasts. In separate analyses, I also tested these possibilities and discovered that levels of divine involvement and control exhibit an essentially negative and *linear* pattern.

than once a week" (2), "once a week" (3), "several times a week" (4), "once a day" (5), and "several times a day" (6).

Frequency of reading religious texts One item in the BRS asks: "Outside of attending religious services, about how often do you read the Bible, Koran, Torah, or other sacred book?" Response choices are: "never" (1), "less than once a year" (2), "once or twice a year" (3), "several times a year" (4), "once a month" (5), "2–3 times a month" (6), "about weekly" (7), "weekly" (8), and "several times a week" (9). No similar question was included in the WSH.

Subjective religiosity One item in the WSH survey asks: "Overall, would you describe yourself as 'not religious at all' (1), 'slightly religious' (2), 'moderately religious' (3), or 'very religious' (4)?" No similar question was included in the BRS.

Biblical literalism The BRS asks the following: "Which one statement comes closest to your personal beliefs about the Bible?" The response choices are: "The Bible means exactly what it says. It should be taken literally, word-for-word, on all subjects," "The Bible is perfectly true, but it should not be taken literally, word-for-word. We must interpret its meaning," "The Bible contains some human error," and "The Bible is an ancient book of history and legends." There is an additional category for individuals who report "don't know" responses.

Control Measures

To adjust for gender, I used dummy-codes for men (0) and women (1). Age is coded in years. I also used dummy-codes to contrast whites with African-Americans and "other race" groups in all regression analyses. Similarly, I used dummy-codes to contrast married with previously married and never married in regression analyses. In addition, one item is included that assesses the number of children under 18 residing in the household. In the BRS only, I dummy-coded the employed as 1, 0 otherwise. All individuals in the WSH survey are currently working for pay.

To assess religious denominational affiliation, the BRS asks: "With what religious family do you most closely identify?" Responses were collapsed into the following broad categories: "Evangelical Protestant," "Mainline Protestant," "Black Protestant," "Catholic," "Jewish," "other," and "none." Investigators involved in the BRS followed Steensland et al.'s (2000) RELTRAD schematic to classify religious tradition. In the WSH survey, one item asks: "What is your religious preference or affiliation?" Response categories are less detailed than the BRS: "Protestant," "Catholic," "Jewish," "other," or "no religious preference or affiliation." It should be noted that the WSH survey did not identify distinctions between mainline versus conservative Protestants.

Table 1 reports the summary statistics for the BRS (top panel) and WSH (bottom panel).

TABLE 1 Summary Statistics for all Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<i>2005 Baylor Religion Survey (n = 1,558)</i>				
Belief in divine involvement	3.731	1.157	1	5
SES	.041	.825	-2.123	1.504
Frequency of attendance	4.936	2.869	1	9
Frequency of praying	4.015	1.764	1	6
Frequency of reading religious texts	5.185	1.946	1	8
Women	.574	—	0	1
Age	52.629	15.145	18	93
White	.900	—	0	1
African-American	.034	—	0	1
Other race	.058	—	0	1
Married	.619	—	0	1
Previously married	.226	—	0	1
Never married	.117	—	0	1
Number of children at home	.527	.959	0	8
Employed	.637	—	0	1
Evangelical protestant	.298	—	0	1
Mainline protestant	.259	—	0	1
Catholic	.220	—	0	1
Black protestant	.019	—	0	1
Jewish	.028	—	0	1
Other religion	.048	—	0	1
No religion	.110	—	0	1
<i>2005 Work, Stress, and Health Survey (1,709)</i>				
Belief in divine control	2.744	.629	1	4
SES	-.003	.774	-1.114	14.645
Frequency of attendance	3.379	1.721	1	6
Frequency of praying	4.095	1.615	1	6
Subjective religiosity	2.775	.894	1	4
Women	.590	—	0	1
Age	43.305	13.167	18	94
White	.738	—	0	1
African-American	.156	—	0	1
Other race	.125	—	0	1
Married	.552	—	0	1
Previously married	.194	—	0	1
Never married	.255	—	0	1
Number of children at home	.812	1.032	0	3
Protestant	.533	—	0	1
Catholic	.237	—	0	1
Jewish	.023	—	0	1
Other religion	.090	—	0	1
No religion	.116	—	0	1

Analytic Plan

I present the results in three sections. The first section uses data from the BRS to examine belief in divine involvement as the focal-dependent variable. Following standard practice with these types of dependent variables (see Mirowsky 1999), all analyses use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression techniques. Model 1 of table 2 regresses divine involvement on SES and control measures. Model 2 adds the religious involvement measures in order to assess the net SES effects on belief in divine involvement. Subsequent models test interactions between SES and the frequency of attendance (model 3), praying (model 4), and reading religious texts (model 5). In table 3, I repeat these same models using data from the WSH survey with the belief in divine control as the dependent variable; I also substitute subjective religiosity for the frequency of reading religious texts in model 5. All variables in the interaction terms are centered, which reduces multicollinearity between the interaction coefficient and lower-order terms and increases the efficiency of the lower-order coefficient estimates (Mirowsky 1999). In table 4, I analyze the BRS data to assess these same models but replace Biblical literalism as the focal religion measure. I present these analyses separately from the models shown in table 2 because of conceptual distinctions between literalism and the other forms of religious involvement.

RESULTS

SES, Religious Involvement, and Belief in Divine Involvement

Model 1 of table 2 indicates that individuals with high SES report a significantly lower level of belief in divine involvement compared with their low SES peers. In model 2, the frequency of attendance and praying are associated positively and independently with divine involvement. Although the size of the SES coefficient diminishes slightly, the negative association between SES and belief in divine involvement remains significant net of religious involvement. More importantly, I observe that the association between SES and belief in divine involvement is contingent upon the frequency of attendance (model 3), praying (model 4), and reading religious texts (model 5). Taken together, these interaction effects indicate that SES is associated with lower levels of belief in divine involvement among individuals who less frequently engage in religious activities. In contrast, the negative SES–divine involvement association is attenuated among individuals who report more frequent attendance, praying, and reading religious texts. Figure 1 illustrates the association between SES and divine involvement across levels of attendance. When the same profile is plotted across levels of praying and reading texts, similar patterns are observed. It is useful to put these results in context. First, among those who never attend religious services, the predicted score on the divine involvement

TABLE 2 Regression of the Belief in Divine Involvement on SES, Religious Involvement, SES \times Religious

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
SES	-.161*** (.038)	-.131*** (.032)	-.130*** (.032)	-.134*** (.032)	-.135*** (.032)
<i>Religious involvement</i>					
Attendance	—	.078*** (.013)	.088*** (.013)	.077*** (.013)	.077*** (.013)
Praying	—	.235*** (.027)	.231*** (.022)	.241*** (.022)	.232*** (.022)
Reading texts	—	.018 (.014)	.017 (.014)	.019 (.014)	.026 (.014)
<i>Interactions</i>					
SES \times attendance	—	—	.035*** (.010)	—	—
SES \times praying	—	—	—	.050** (.016)	—
SES \times reading texts	—	—	—	—	.033** (.009)
<i>Control measures</i>					
Women	.345*** (.061)	.110* (.054)	.123* (.053)	.110* (.053)	.117* (.053)
Age	.004 (.003)	-.002 (.002)	-.001 (.002)	-.001 (.002)	-.001 (.002)
African-American ^a	.504* (.210)	.219 (.199)	.201 (.198)	.211 (.194)	.208 (.194)
Other race ^a	-.043 (.105)	-.017 (.083)	-.018 (.082)	-.013 (.084)	-.003 (.086)
Previously married ^b	-.189* (.075)	-.047 (.064)	-.052 (.064)	-.047 (.064)	-.043 (.064)
Never married ^b	-.025 (.105)	-.062 (.086)	-.062 (.085)	-.064 (.086)	-.049 (.087)
Children in household	.063 (.036)	.010 (.028)	.011 (.028)	.015 (.029)	.015 (.028)
Employed	.018 (.067)	.063 (.059)	.075 (.059)	.072 (.060)	.064 (.059)
Catholic ^c	-.461*** (.077)	-.224** (.072)	-.222** (.072)	-.229** (.072)	-.219** (.072)
Mainline Protestant ^c	-.477*** (.077)	-.199** (.069)	-.193** (.069)	-.200** (.068)	-.192** (.068)
Black Protestant ^d	-.513* (.242)	-.374 (.230)	-.356 (.228)	-.360 (.225)	-.348 (.226)
Jewish ^c	-1.205*** (.299)	-.631* (.249)	-.631* (.245)	-.600* (.251)	-.622* (.241)
Other religion ^c	-.605*** (.168)	-.482*** (.136)	-.461** (.132)	-.483*** (.135)	-.484*** (.136)
No religion ^c	-1.917*** (.114)	-.913*** (.130)	-.882*** (.131)	-.913*** (.129)	-.903*** (.128)
Constant	3.809	4.003	3.946	3.975	3.966
R ²	.334	.524	.529	.528	.529

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown with standard errors in parentheses. Involvement Interactions, and Control Measures (2005 Baylor Religion Survey; n = 1,558).

^aCompared with White.

^bCompared with Married.

^cCompared with Conservative Protestant.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 3 Regression of the Belief in Divine Control on SES, Religious Involvement, SES \times Religious

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
SES	-.148*** (.029)	-.134*** (.023)	-.139*** (.022)	-.131*** (.021)	-.136*** (.021)
<i>Religious involvement</i>					
Attendance	—	.034* (.015)	.037* (.015)	.033* (.015)	.033* (.014)
Praying	—	.117*** (.013)	.116*** (.013)	.118*** (.013)	.116*** (.013)
Subjective religiosity	—	.190*** (.027)	.187*** (.027)	.189*** (.027)	.191*** (.027)
<i>Interactions</i>					
SES \times attendance	—	—	.031** (.010)	—	—
SES \times praying	—	—	—	.035** (.013)	—
SES \times subjective religiosity	—	—	—	—	.062** (.024)
<i>Control measures</i>					
Women	.163*** (.036)	.084** (.032)	.087** (.031)	.091** (.032)	.090** (.031)
Age	.001 (.002)	-.003* (.001)	-.003* (.001)	-.003* (.001)	-.003* (.001)
African-American ^a	.380*** (.063)	.212*** (.056)	.213*** (.056)	.212*** (.056)	.215*** (.055)
Other race ^a	.091 (.067)	.057 (.062)	.057 (.062)	.061 (.062)	.056 (.061)
Previously married ^b	-.031 (.047)	.012 (.037)	.010 (.036)	.008 (.037)	.007 (.036)
Never married ^b	-.098 (.050)	-.045 (.042)	-.041 (.042)	-.044 (.042)	-.042 (.042)
Children in household	.046* (.019)	.022 (.017)	.021 (.017)	.023 (.017)	.022 (.017)
Catholic ^c	-.164*** (.039)	-.057 (.034)	-.053 (.034)	-.055 (.034)	-.054 (.034)
Jewish ^c	-.749*** (.092)	-.292*** (.082)	-.274*** (.083)	-.264*** (.086)	-.266*** (.084)
Other religion ^c	-.248** (.087)	-.141* (.071)	-.135 (.069)	-.134 (.069)	-.137* (.069)
No religion ^c	-.750*** (.067)	-.241*** (.061)	-.231*** (.061)	-.233*** (.061)	-.228*** (.061)
Constant	2.688	2.830	2.822	2.815	2.816
R ²	.273	.492	.496	.497	.497

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown with standard errors in parentheses. Involvement Interactions, and Control Measures (2005 Work, Stress, and Health Survey; $n = 1,709$)

^aCompared with White.

^bCompared with Married.

^cCompared with Protestant.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 4 Regression of the Belief in Divine Involvement on SES, Biblical Literalism, and SES \times literalism (2005 Baylor Religion Survey; $n = 1,558$)

	Model 1	Model 2
SES	-.087* (.031)	.075 (.056)
<i>Biblical literalism</i>		
“Bible is an ancient book of history and legends” ^a	-.824*** (.101)	-.892*** (.101)
“Bible contains some human error” ^a	-.315** (.098)	-.414*** (.091)
“Bible is perfectly true, but should not be taken literally” ^a	-.138* (.059)	-.221*** (.058)
“Don’t know” response to literalism question ^a	-.293* (.126)	-.315*** (.118)
<i>Interactions</i>		
SES \times “Bible is an ancient book of history and legends” ^a	—	-.280** (.086)
SES \times “Bible contains some human error” ^a	—	-.353*** (.095)
SES \times “Bible is perfectly true, but should not be taken literally” ^a	—	-.149* (.071)
SES \times “Don’t know” response to literalism question ^a	—	-.007 (.131)
Constant	4.175	4.249
R^2	.561	.569

Note: Models 1 and 2 adjust for sex, age, race, marital status, children at home, employed, religious denominational affiliation, and the frequency of attendance, praying, and reading religious texts. Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown with standard errors in parentheses.

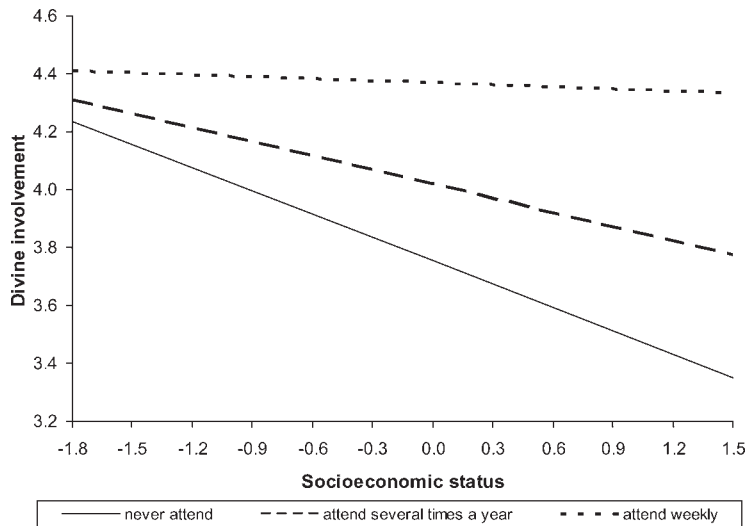
^aCompared with individuals who reported that the “Bible means exactly what it says. It should be taken literally, word-for-word, on all subjects.”

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

index is 4.15 for individuals with a high school degree and household income in the \$10,000–\$20,000 range; in contrast, the predicted divine involvement score is 3.44 for individuals with a graduate degree and income in the \$100,000–\$150,000 range. However, the SES-based gap diminishes as the level of religious participation increases. For example, among those who attend religious services weekly, the predicted level of divine involvement is 4.40 for the high school/\$10,000–\$20,000 income group compared with 4.34 for the graduate degree/\$100,000–\$150,000 income group. These examples demonstrate the ways that higher levels of religious participation attenuate the negative association between SES and the sense of divine involvement.

Although they are not central to the focal associations, several patterns among the control measures deserve brief mention. In model 1 of table 2, women, African-Americans, married individuals, and conservative Protestants report higher levels of belief in divine involvement compared with their

FIGURE 1. The Association between SES and Belief in Divine Involvement by Frequency of Attendance (2005 Baylor Survey)



Note: Predictions are based on the results presented in model 3 of Table 2. Among the controls, modal values are used for categorical variables; means are used for continuous variables. Using different values for these control variables will not influence the slopes but will slightly modify the y-intercepts.

respective counterparts. The inclusion of religious involvement in model 2, however, influences each of these patterns. Specifically, the size of the gender difference is reduced from .345 ($p < .001$) in model 1 to .110 ($p < .05$). Likewise, race and marital status differences are reduced to statistical insignificance. These patterns occur in these data because women, African-Americans, and married individuals tend to report higher levels of religious involvement compared with their respective peers—findings that others have documented elsewhere (e.g., Baker 2008; Krause 2002, 2003, 2005; Schieman and Bierman 2007). Although some differences between conservative Protestants and others are reduced, conservative Protestants maintain higher levels of divine involvement than Catholics, mainline Protestants, Jewish individuals, and those who report other religions or no religion—net of SES and religious involvement.

SES, Religious Involvement, and Belief in Divine Control

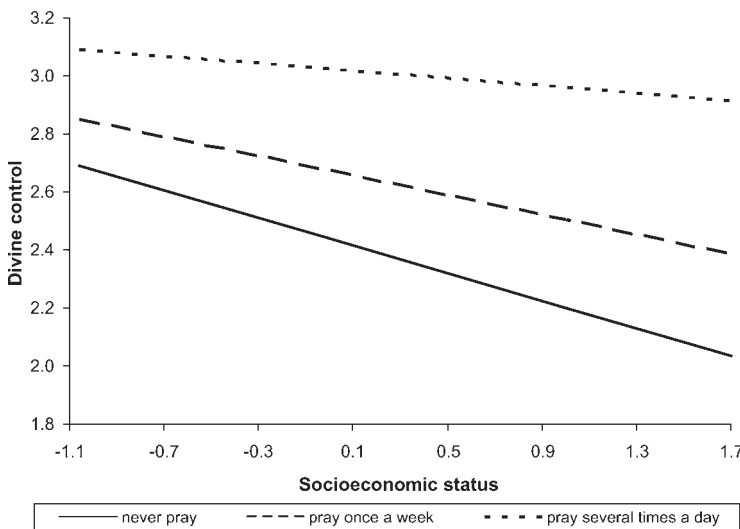
As shown in model 1 of table 3, individuals with high SES tend to report the lowest levels of belief in divine control. In model 2, the frequency of attendance, praying, and subjective religiosity are each associated positively and independently with belief in divine control. The negative association between SES and belief in divine control remains statistically significant net of religious involvement. Moreover, as observed with divine involvement, the relationship between SES and belief in divine control is contingent upon the frequency of attendance (model 3), praying (model 4), and subjective

religiosity (model 5). Collectively, these interaction effects indicate that SES is associated with lower levels of belief in divine control among individuals who report lower levels of attendance, praying, and subjective religiosity. In contrast, the negative SES–divine control association is attenuated among individuals who report higher levels of religious involvement. To illustrate a few of these patterns, I have plotted the SES–divine control association across different levels of praying (figure 2) and subjective religiosity (figure 3). A separate plot of the predicted values for attendance (model 3) yields patterns similar to those shown in figure 1.

Again, it is useful to put these patterns in real-world terms. First, among those who never pray, the predicted score on the divine control index is 2.61 for individuals with a high school degree and household income of \$20,000; in contrast, the predicted divine control score is 2.20 for individuals with a graduate degree and household income of \$120,000. However, the SES-based gap in divine control is reduced as frequency of praying increases. For example, among those who pray several times a day, the predicted sense of divine control score is 4.40 for the high school/\$20,000 income group compared with 4.36 for the graduate degree/\$120,000 income group. These contrasts between low and high SES categories demonstrate the ways that higher levels of religious participation attenuate the negative association between SES and divine control.

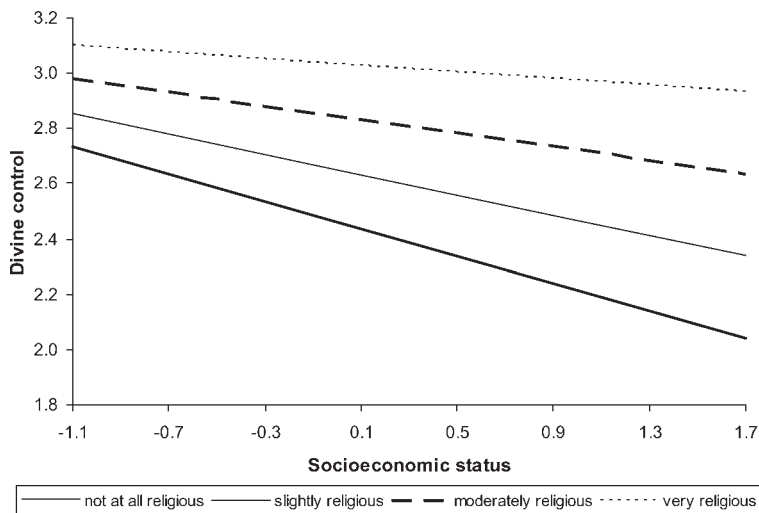
Several findings among the control measures are similar to those observed for divine involvement. As shown in model 1, women and African-Americans tend

FIGURE 2. The Association Between SES and Belief in Divine Control by Frequency of Praying (2005 WSH Survey)



Note: Predictions are based on the results presented in model 4 of Table 3. Among the controls, modal values are used for categorical variables; means are used for continuous variables. Using different values for these control variables will not influence the slopes but will slightly modify the y-intercepts.

FIGURE 3. The Association between SES and Belief in Divine Control by Subjective Religiosity (2005 WSH Survey)



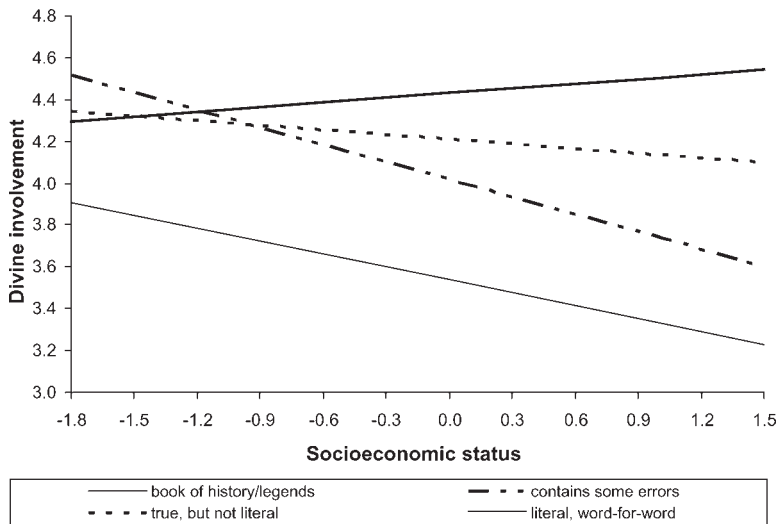
Note: Predictions are based on the results presented in model 5 of Table 3. Among the controls, modal values are used for categorical variables; means are used for continuous variables. Using different values for these control variables will not influence the slopes but will slightly modify the y-intercepts.

to report significantly higher levels of divine control compared with men and Whites. Statistical adjustments for religious involvement in model 2 reduce these gender and race differences in divine control, although each remains significant. That is, higher levels of religious involvement among women and African-Americans partly contribute to their higher levels of divine control. In model 1, Catholic, Jewish, “other religion” groups, and those with no religion report significantly lower levels of belief in divine control compared with Protestants. Adjustments for religious involvement reduce each of these contrasts; the Catholic–Protestant contrast, in particular, is no longer significant.

Supplemental Analyses: SES, Biblical Literalism, and the Belief in Divine Involvement

Although the central thrust of this paper focuses on the joint effects of SES and religious *involvement* on beliefs about God, I also consider another supplemental question: Is the SES association with the belief in divine involvement contingent upon individuals’ *beliefs about the Bible*? Model 1 of table 4 shows that individuals who interpret the Bible literally (the contrast category) profess the highest level of divine involvement compared with the other categories. These group comparisons form an essentially linear pattern in levels of divine involvement (note that the “don’t know” group falls between the “Bible is an ancient book of history and legends” and the “Bible contains some

FIGURE 4. The Association Between SES and the Belief in Divine Involvement across Categories of Biblical Literalism (2005 Baylor Religion Survey)



Note: Predictions are based on the results presented in model 2 of Table 4. Among the controls, modal values are used for categorical variables; means are used for continuous variables. Using different values for these control variables will not influence the slopes but will slightly modify the y-intercepts.

human error” groups). More importantly, in model 2, the association between SES and divine involvement is contingent upon Biblical literalism. The SES \times literalism coefficients indicate that low and high SES individuals share similar levels of divine involvement when they interpret the Bible literally (see figure 4)—net of religious denominational affiliation and involvement. Thus, as observed for each of the forms of religious involvement, the association between SES and belief in divine involvement is also contingent upon beliefs about the Bible.⁵

DISCUSSION

The belief in God is pervasive and influential in contemporary American society. Yet, surprisingly little is known about the content of those beliefs and

⁵Some readers may wonder about the numbers of cases in high versus low SES groups across Biblical literalism response categories. Defining low SES as values at or below the 25th percentile and high SES as values at or below the 75th percentile, we observe the following: 144 low SES and 41 high SES individuals reported that the Bible is “literal, word for word”; 196 low SES and 142 high SES individuals reported that the Bible is “true, but not literal”; 57 low SES and 68 high SES individuals reported that the Bible “contains some errors”; and 63 low SES and 139 high SES individuals reported that the Bible is “a book of history and legends.”

the ways those beliefs are differentially distributed across social strata. The present study takes steps toward addressing these gaps by using recent data from two national surveys of Americans. Focal associations are established: SES is associated negatively with beliefs about divine involvement and divine control. While these patterns initially appear to support the *demythologized beliefs* hypothesis, further analyses uncovered more support for the *exposure–reinforcement* hypothesis. Specifically, higher levels of religious involvement attenuate the negative associations between SES and beliefs about divine involvement and control. Taken together, these observations underscore the continued relevance of SES in the link between religious practices and beliefs. More importantly, they challenge the central contention of the demythologized beliefs view that high SES individuals *uniformly* profess lower levels of beliefs about God's involvement and causal relevance in everyday life.

Evidence in these surveys indicates that most Americans believe in an engaged and influential God. The majority of participants endorse statements that God is concerned with and directly involved in their personal affairs or well-being. Moreover, the belief in divine control is widely held—that is, most participants express the sense that God exerts a determinative force in events and outcomes. Given the significance of such beliefs for personal and social well-being and their widespread influence in contemporary American culture, it is important to concentrate a sociological lens on these patterns. For example, in speculating about the reasons for lower levels of belief in God's judgment and engagement among college educated and wealthier adults, Froese and Bader (2007) contend that “perhaps education leads one to dismiss the idea that God continually intervenes in the world or perhaps material riches lead one to dispel the idea that God's intervention is a necessary component to success” (p. 472). My observations refine those claims by contesting the view that SES is uniformly associated with lower levels of belief in divine involvement and control. The finding that high SES individuals tend to report similar levels of divine involvement and control as their low SES peers—*when they share high levels of religious involvement*—challenges the assertion that higher SES contributes to “demythologized beliefs” processes. In contrast, the results are more consistent with the view that exposure to messages and lessons in religious activities reinforces systems of “religious explanations”—especially doctrine about God's involvement and causal relevance in everyday life (Krause 2007; Stark and Finke 2000).

In some respects, my findings are inconsistent with central tenets of deprivation theory, which holds that the socioeconomically disadvantaged tend to use religion to cope with the adversities of their lives. There is little doubt that, *overall*, low SES individuals are more likely to belief in divine involvement and control. While this is consistent with deprivation theory, the observed contingencies that are linked to religious involvement challenge the uniformity of the deprivation idea. The alternative view of exposure–reinforcement garners more support: The negative association between SES and the belief in divine

involvement and control is null or weakly negative among highly participatory groups. In other words, when high SES individuals exhibit similar levels of religious involvement and Biblical literalism as their low SES peers, they also tend to share similar levels of belief in divine involvement and control. This concurs with Lefever's (1977) assertion that "the religious believer who is serious about his commitment puts all of his activities, sacred and secular, under the control of religiously prescribed norms" (p. 226). Moreover, the hypothesized role of exposure–reinforcement processes embedded in religious participation reflects the "power of religious ideation" notion. Collectively, these processes minimize or neutralize the overall socioeconomic differences in beliefs about divine involvement and control and likely offset the hypothesized "demythologized beliefs" outcomes that other scholars have described.

The ways that religious involvement might neutralize SES-linked demythologized belief processes deserves a bit more attention. According to Weber (1964), religiously involved individuals may be "driven not by material need but by an inner compulsion to understand the world as a meaningful cosmos and take up a position toward it" (pp. 116–117). As others have argued, the belief in God's engagement in and influence over events and outcomes is a central component of these processes (Froese and Bader 2007). Irrespective of social standing, religious activities help to develop, sustain, and reinforce religious-based explanations that *all* participants—well-educated or not, rich or poor—use to comprehend the world and their place in it. This is one feature of the "plausibility structure" that Berger (1967) delineates in the maintenance of religious worldviews. His contention about the link between religious activity and ideation is consistent with the observation that performative repetition yields similar levels of beliefs about the divine irrespective of SES.

Finally, although my observations generally call into question the core tenets of the deprivation–compensation view, one pattern is consistent with that theory: Compared with high SES groups, low SES individuals tend to profess higher levels of divine involvement and control even when both groups share similarly *low* levels of religious involvement. These patterns concur with the claim that low SES groups tend to hold more orthodox beliefs than high SES individuals—regardless of their actual participation in religious activities (Van Roy et al. 1973). That is, high SES individuals are said to "practice" their religion via engagement in religious activities, while low SES practitioners are more likely to "believe" in their religion (Demerath 1961; Fukuyama 1961, Gaede 1977; Stark 1972). These ideas imply that even when low SES individuals exhibit lower levels of religious involvement they will often retain a higher level of "cognitive religiosity." By extension, it is plausible that low SES individuals will maintain high levels of belief in divine control and involvement apart from other aspects of the religious role.

Some Limitations and Future Directions

One main limitation of the present study involves the inability to make definitive statements about causal ordering. An ongoing debate in this area of research centers on whether religious involvement causes beliefs or whether beliefs cause religious involvement. There is no consensus on this issue. On one side, some scholars contend that beliefs influence the frequency of participation in religious activities (Gaede 1977; Hoge and Carroll 1978; Stark and Glock 1968). In contrast, others argue that religious involvement is more likely to influence the nature and content of religious beliefs (Davidson and Knudsen 1977; Welch 1981). Recent research blends these distinctions by including beliefs and practices on both sides of the “causal equation” (Froese and Bader 2007) and by documenting that the frequency of attendance and Biblical literalism are associated positively with the frequency of praying (Baker 2008). Ultimately, it may be more accurate to view the dually constitutive relationship between beliefs and actions as “reflexive”; that is, they are self-reinforcing and, in the sense that Berger (1967) has described them, each contributes to the reproduction of the other.⁶

In my view, Krause’s (2007) summary of theoretical and empirical views about this issue is compelling: “Religious experiences, and the beliefs that are based upon them, are the product of a social process” (p. 523). Although I tend to agree with Welch’s (1981) assertion that the sociological perspective identifies beliefs as following behavior, the logic about the direction of causality is more convincing in some instances than others. For example, an individual who scores high on a measure of literalism believes that the Bible is the *literal word of God*. If the individual believes this, then he or she should also believe in God’s influence in everyday life—especially if the text conveys that message. Here, causal order is straightforward: Beliefs about God’s involvement and control flow from the socialization that occurs after one is exposed to the messages of the Bible. Repeated exposure through frequent reading of religious texts, attendance at services, and praying should reinforce the messages and lessons of the Bible. Nonetheless, more nuanced substantive and theoretical arguments and more sophisticated methodological procedures are needed in future research to more effectively disentangle the causal ordering among belief and behavior.

A familiar refrain about religion is that it provides the faithful with knowledge, meaning, control, and security. Common phrases such as “It is all part of God’s plan” and “It is God’s will” invoke God as a personally involved and causally relevant force in everyday life. An underlying feature of these views is that individuals maintain a relationship with God that often takes on interpersonal qualities. These mental representations of God connect to humans’ efforts to explain events and outcomes, especially

⁶I wish to acknowledge one of the reviewers for this insight.

those that seem incomprehensible (Lupfer et al. 1992; Spilka et al. 2003). However, future research should examine the ways that beliefs in a personal and causally relevant God reinforce and extend individuals' attribution processes. This leads to another limitation of the present research: The inability to determine the meaning of beliefs about God for the faithful. One criticism of the current data is that it is difficult to determine whether or not individuals profess a belief in divine involvement and control simply because of a generalized adherence to standard religious scripts and schemas. In other words, are they "true believers"? The current data provide no information about the extent that individuals' thoughts, identities, and actions are linked to these beliefs about God. Future research should seek to integrate and extend qualitative insights about the strength and salience of these beliefs.

More explicit measurement of deprivation–compensation processes is needed. Sociologists of religion have tended to describe the ways that social class influences the experiences and expression of religion, suggesting that the lower social classes believe more firmly in the doctrines of their faith and experience more intense religious experiences, while higher social classes are more likely to participate in more public forms of religiosity such as engaging in church organizations (Demerath 1965; Davidson 1977). Moreover, the nature of religiousness differs such that low SES groups may tend to profess those elements of faith that connect to the alleviation of suffering while the religiousness of higher SES groups may be more likely to legitimate their status position. Although education and income provide a strong foundation for understanding the potentially different meanings and consequences of belief across social strata, better indicators of actual or perceived *deprivation* are needed to more definitively assess the hypothesis. One fruitful direction involves analyses of changes in economic hardship over time and their link to changes in beliefs about God—especially within and across other dimensions of SES. Another theoretical position offered by Norris and Inglehard (2004) parallels the deprivation/demythologized beliefs view, suggesting "the absence of human security as critical for religiosity" (p. 14). This deserves more attention because it considers individual- and national-level experiences with social standing and their relevance to the nature and form of religiosity.

Finally, it should be underscored here that the WSH data are comprised of working adults. To the extent that employment status is associated with the focal measures of interest, this represents a potential weakness of the study. In addition, the distinctions among Protestants are not clear in the WSH data. While this may have implications for beliefs about divine control, it is unclear whether or not these distinctions influence the focal associations being investigated. There may be noteworthy distinctions between evangelical versus mainline or black Protestant traditions.

CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that belief in God is prevalent and relevant in contemporary American society. The question becomes: Which types of individuals profess particular beliefs about God's involvement and influence in everyday life? My observations show that beliefs about God are differentially distributed across SES—although those patterns are contingent upon religious involvement. The findings challenge the view that SES is uniformly associated with lower levels of beliefs about God's engagement and causal relevance. Instead, the results suggest more similarities between low and high SES individuals, but only when these groups share similarly high levels of religious involvement. Otherwise, SES differences in beliefs are most dramatic among the least religiously-involved. Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of other dimensions of the religious role in the relationship between SES and beliefs about God.

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