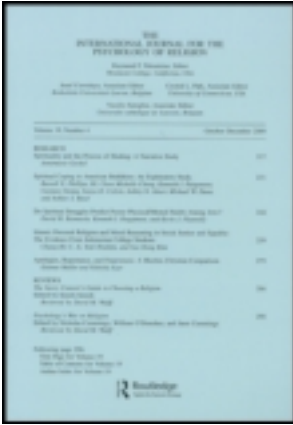


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Psychological Defensiveness as a Mechanism Explaining the Relationship Between Low Socioeconomic Status and Religiosity

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People who are low in socioeconomic status (SES) are more likely to be religious than their higher status counterparts; however, little research has tested the mechanisms for this relationship. Using data from 90 diverse societies and multilevel path analysis, we replicated findings that individuals low in SES are more religious and furthermore found that in wealthy countries this relationship was mediated by a measure of psychological defensiveness even while controlling for participants' sense of financial insecurities. These results suggest that religious belief may play a psychologically protective role for low SES individuals, independent of realistic economic concerns.

At this point it is clear that members of low-status social groups are more likely to be religious, a finding observed by sociologists, political scientists, and psychologists (e.g., Coreno, 2002; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Ruiter & van Tubergen, 2009; Smith & Faris, 2005; Taylor, Mattis, & Chatters, 1999). The current study builds on this research by examining one potential mechanism of this relationship—psychological defensiveness. Based on research and theory suggesting that members of low-status and stigmatized social groups face greater psychological threats because of their marginalized position in society, we propose that low-status individuals are more religious than their high-status counterparts in part because religious beliefs can serve a psychologically protective function.

LOW SOCIAL STATUS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFENSIVENESS

People with low socioeconomic status face a great deal of prejudice and rejection in society

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(Saegert et al., 2007) and may experience similar psychological reactions to prejudice as other members of stigmatized groups (e.g., some ethnic and religious minorities, women; cf. Johnson, Richeson, & Finkel, 2011). Victims of prejudice generally face long-term psychological threats to the self that can be especially pernicious (Crocker & Major, 1989; Goffman, 1963; Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002), leading members of groups that experience prejudice to be psychologically vigilant and defensive against these self-threats. For example, members of stigmatized ethnic groups may question whether they really belong (Walton & Cohen, 2007) and fit in (Lovelace & Rosen, 1996), perhaps leading them to expect rejection based on their identity (Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, & Pietrzak, 2002). Rather than let these psychological threats go unabated, stigmatized people seek to defend themselves through a variety of strategies. For example, authoritarianism, a construct that can provide psychological reassurance (Henry, 2011; Nagoshi, Terrell, & Nagoshi, 2007; Oesterreich, 2005; Sales, 1973), is found at higher levels among members of stigmatized ethnic groups compared to their nonstigmatized peers. More important, this trend disappears when stigmatized individuals are given the opportunity to affirm the self (Henry, 2011). Similarly, individuals with low socioeconomic status (as measured by income) are especially defensive of their sense of honor, reporting a greater likelihood to aggress in the face of insults compared to their high-status peers, an effect that disappears when participants are given the opportunity to affirm their social value (Henry, 2009). These examples illustrate some psychological defenses used by members of low-status and stigmatized groups.

One way these psychological threats can manifest is in terms of distrust in others, with trust defined as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon the positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998, p. 385). In general, people experience more overall trust when the circumstances are impartial and they have a sense of belongingness (DiTommaso, Brannen, & Best, 2004; Tyler, 2001). If people face chronic implicit and explicit derogation and discrimination based on their stigma or social status, they may be less willing to accept vulnerability, have less positive expectations of others, and have less a sense of belongingness, leading stigmatized and low-status individuals to express more distrust overall. Consistent with this idea, research has found that information about a business that threatens the social identity of African Americans leads African American professionals to distrust the business (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Dittmann, & Crosby, 2008). African Americans who have higher levels of race-related rejection sensitivity also experience more distrust (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002), and in nationally representative samples of the United States, people who were low status or stigmatized, as indicated by their family income, education, or race, were less trusting than people who were high status and nonstigmatized (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002; Henry, 2009). Overall, the sum of these studies suggests that low-status or stigmatized individuals may show characteristic psychological defensiveness, including its manifestation in measures of distrust, at a greater frequency and intensity compared to their higher status counterparts.

RELIGIOUS BELIEF AS PSYCHOLOGICAL PROTECTION

One way low-status individuals may protect against psychological threats is through religious beliefs. Religion and the associated belief in supernatural agents are cultural worldviews that

imbue life with meaning, value, and certainty (Brandt & Reyna, 2010; Silberman, 2005; Vail et al., 2010). As such, religious beliefs can provide psychological resources to meet a variety of more basic psychological needs. For example, religion appears to protect adherents from the anxiety of eventual death (Vail et al., 2010) and other forces that threaten one's sense of certainty, stability, and security (Hogg, Adelman, & Blagg, 2010; McCann, 1999; Sales, 1972). It can also help people live up to their standards and beliefs (Koole, McCullough, Kuhl, & Roelofsma, 2010) and provide people with a sense of identity (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010) and moral community (Graham & Haidt, 2010). Thus, although religion is a unique psychological process because of its connection with the sacred and perceptions of the divine (e.g., Pargament, Magyar-Russell, & Murray-Swank, 2005), it can also fulfill more basic psychological motivations.

One of those motivations is to protect and maintain people's social connectedness. Experimental manipulations of loneliness, such as receiving personality feedback predicting the participant will be alone later in life or watching a loneliness-inducing movie clip, result in greater belief in religious and supernatural agents (including ghosts, God, and the devil) compared to a variety of control conditions (Epley, Akalis, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2008). Other studies have found that manipulations of social exclusion foster greater religious belief in both Western and non-Western societies (Aydin, Fischer, & Frey, 2010). These results suggest that religious beliefs may help people shore up threats to their sense of social connectedness.

Consistent with the idea that religion may serve this psychologically buffering role for low-status individuals, Aydin et al. (2010, Study 1) found that Turkish immigrants in Germany reported more religiosity than a sample of Turks living in Turkey, with religiosity correlating with feelings of social exclusion among the Turkish immigrants. These findings are consistent with the idea that religiosity may help individuals manage their social marginalization, given that in Germany, Turkish immigrants are a low-status ethnic group that faces discrimination and social exclusion (Saucier, 2006 as cited in Aydin et al., 2010), whereas in Turkey the Turkish are the high-status ethnic group. These immigration findings represent further evidence that religiosity may help low-status individuals defend against psychological threats, including social exclusion.

SOCIETAL WEALTH AS A SOCIETY-LEVEL MODERATOR

The present article tests the hypothesis that psychological defensiveness, as manifest in generalized distrust, mediates the relationship between socioeconomic status and religious belief. One moderator of this model may be the wealth of the country a person resides in. Poor countries generally lack a variety of social and political structural characteristics, such as stable governments and effective law enforcement, that are conducive to generalized trust (Delhey & Newton, 2005), such that even wealthier individuals would have good reason to be distrusting in poorer countries. That is, distrust is less likely to be driven by psychological defenses in contexts where there are more realistic motives for distrust. Consistent with this idea, in an analysis of 36 countries, Hamamura (2012) found that in wealthy societies, low-income participants were less trusting than high-income participants, but in poor societies there was no difference between low- and high-income participants. Thus, we expected generalized distrust to most strongly mediate the relationship between socioeconomic status and religious belief in wealthy countries

compared to poorer countries. Insofar as religious beliefs serve a psychologically defensive function, the same reasoning can be applied to the relationship between socioeconomic status and religious belief, which should be stronger in wealthy countries compared to poor countries.

ECONOMIC INSECURITY OR PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFENSIVENESS?

It is important to distinguish between the concerns of low-status individuals over psychological threats and concerns over their realistic financial insecurities. Low status is often characterized by (e.g., the gender wage gap) and even defined by (e.g., the case of income) the lack of financial resources. Although stigmatized and low-status individuals can and do attempt to promote a more egalitarian society and gain resources for their groups (e.g., Bobo & Hutchings, 1996; Hornsey et al., 2006), the focus of this article is less on the material and more on the psychologically protective strategies at work.

An alternative perspective, however, holds that religiosity protects against the threats posed by the realistic difficulties of living in poverty (Norris & Inglehart, 2004; see also Ruiter & Van Tubergen, 2009). In both the psychological threat and the economic insecurity perspectives, religion is seen as a defense against some kind of threat. The perspectives differ in terms of the nature of the proposed threats. We suggest that low-status individuals are more psychologically defensive because of the psychological threats they receive because of their marginalization from society and that they use religion to defend against those threats. Economic insecurity suggests that low-status individuals, especially when status is defined by income, feel more economically insecure and are more religious in an attempt to assuage the insecurity caused by these economic concerns. Past research examining the link between status and religiosity has used status-related variables (e.g., income) to predict religiosity while controlling for other relevant alternative predictors (e.g., Ruiter & Van Tubergen, 2009), but this approach has not accounted for a psychological defensiveness perspective.

THE CURRENT STUDY

To test the hypothesis that low-status individuals will be more religious because they are more psychologically defensive, we analyzed data from the 90 societies surveyed as a part of the third, fourth, and fifth waves of the European and World Values Surveys. We predicted that the status-religiosity relationship would be at least partially mediated by psychological defensiveness, as represented by a general orientation to distrust. We also tested two contingencies of this basic model. First, we predicted that the mediation effect would be stronger in wealthy countries compared to less wealthy countries. Second, we predicted that the association between low social status and religious belief would be stronger in wealthy countries compared to less wealthy countries. To rule out the alternative explanation that the psychological defensiveness of low-status individuals is fueled by economic insecurity, we also controlled for participants' sense of economic security. Thus, in this study we are able to test societal-level moderators of our model and distinguish the psychological defensiveness perspective from economic security perspective across an extremely diverse and broadly international sample.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Participants were drawn from the third, fourth, and fifth waves of the European and World Values surveys (World Values Survey Association, 2008). Data from 216,249 participants (48.3% men, 51.6% women, 0.1% no reply; $M_{\text{age}} = 40.4$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 16.0$) were collected between 1995 and 2008. These data consist of representative samples from 90 countries and highly autonomous regions (e.g., Puerto Rico, Taiwan).¹ Countries and regions were not included in the analyses if they did not include one or more of the key measures during a particular wave of the survey. The European and World Values surveys are conducted across several regions every few years using face-to-face interviews and involve a representative sample of adults in those regions. Although sampling and survey procedures vary somewhat depending on the region, in general the survey provides the opportunity for cross-cultural analyses of a range of psychological and social variables.

Measures

Socioeconomic status was conceptualized and measured using two dimensions of status that occur cross-culturally: (a) participant self-reported income and (b) participant education. Participants' incomes were coded to represent their income's decile within their own region, so that the measure across participants ranged from 1 (lowest 10%) to 10 (highest 10%). Participants' education was represented on an 8-point scale ranging from 1 (*inadequately completed elementary education*) to 8 (*university with degree*). Both the income and education items were mean centered within context to ensure that their income and education were relative to others in their own society.

Psychological defensiveness is a broad construct that is manifest in many ways. In this study we measured psychological defensiveness with an item assessing the perception of

¹List of regions and sample sizes in alphabetical order: Albania ($n = 1,999$), Algeria ($n = 1,282$), Andorra ($n = 1,003$), Argentina ($n = 2,359$), Armenia ($n = 2,000$), Australia ($n = 3,469$), Azerbaijan ($n = 2,002$), Bangladesh ($n = 3,025$), Belarus ($n = 2,092$), Bosnia and Herzegovina ($n = 2,400$), Brazil ($n = 2,649$), Bulgaria ($n = 2,073$), Burkina Faso ($n = 1,534$), Canada ($n = 4,095$), Chile ($n = 3,200$), China ($n = 2,015$), Colombia ($n = 9,050$), Croatia ($n = 1,003$), Cyprus ($n = 1,050$), Czech Republic ($n = 1,147$), Dominican Republic ($n = 417$), Egypt ($n = 6,051$), El Salvador ($n = 1,254$), Estonia ($n = 1,021$), Ethiopia ($n = 1,500$), Finland ($n = 2,001$), France ($n = 1,001$), Georgia ($n = 3,508$), Germany ($n = 4,090$), Ghana ($n = 1,534$), Great Britain ($n = 1,041$), Guatemala ($n = 1,000$), Hong Kong ($n = 1,252$), Hungary ($n = 1,000$), Iceland ($n = 968$), India ($n = 6,043$), Indonesia ($n = 3,019$), Iran ($n = 5,199$), Iraq ($n = 5,026$), Ireland ($n = 1,012$), Israel ($n = 1,199$), Italy ($n = 1,012$), Japan ($n = 2,458$), Jordan ($n = 1,223$), Kyrgyzstan ($n = 1,043$), Latvia ($n = 1,200$), Lithuania ($n = 1,009$), Luxembourg ($n = 1,211$), Macedonia ($n = 2,050$), Malaysia ($n = 1,201$), Mali ($n = 1,534$), Mexico ($n = 5,459$), Moldova ($n = 3,038$), Morocco ($n = 3,464$), Netherlands ($n = 1,050$), New Zealand ($n = 2,155$), Nigeria ($n = 4,018$), Norway ($n = 2,152$), Pakistan ($n = 2,733$), Peru ($n = 4,212$), Philippines ($n = 1,200$), Poland ($n = 1,000$), Puerto Rico ($n = 1,884$), Romania ($n = 3,015$), Russian Federation ($n = 4,073$), Rwanda ($n = 1,507$), Saudi Arabia ($n = 1,502$), Serbia ($n = 1,220$), Serbia and Montenegro ($n = 3,780$), Singapore ($n = 1,512$), Slovakia ($n = 1,331$), Slovenia ($n = 1,037$), South Africa ($n = 8,923$), South Korea ($n = 2,400$), Spain ($n = 4,820$), Sweden ($n = 2,012$), Switzerland ($n = 2,453$), Taiwan ($n = 2,007$), Tanzania ($n = 1,171$), Thailand ($n = 1,534$), Trinidad and Tobago ($n = 1,002$), Turkey ($n = 7,860$), Uganda ($n = 1,002$), Ukraine ($n = 3,811$), United States ($n = 3,991$), Uruguay ($n = 2,000$), Venezuela ($n = 2,400$), Vietnam ($n = 2,495$), Zambia ($n = 1,500$), Zimbabwe ($n = 1,002$).

whether people could be trusted, based on past research that has identified distrust as a psychologically defensive response of low-status individuals (e.g., Henry, 2009). Moreover, low interpersonal trust (i.e., high psychological defensiveness) has been related to loneliness and social exclusion in both children and adults (DiTommaso et al., 2004; Rotenberg et al., 2010), which may reflect the social exclusion that characterizes low social status and stigmatization (Leary, 2010). Practically, in the European and World Values Surveys this item most clearly represents psychological defensiveness. The item read “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?” and people could choose 1 (*most people can be trusted*) or 2 (*need to be very careful*).

We measured participants’ private religious belief because this type of religious belief appears to be the most effective at assuaging psychological threats (Aydin et al., 2010; Epley et al., 2008). It was measured with an item that read, “How important is God in your life,” ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 10 (*very important*). Societal wealth was assessed with the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of each country included in the analyses (CIA, 2011).

Several control variables were included. Most important, economic security was measured with participants’ satisfaction with their income, with the assumption that economic dissatisfaction reflects economic insecurity. The item read, “How satisfied are you with the financial situation of your household?” and ranged from 1 (*completely dissatisfied*) to 10 (*completely satisfied*). Controlling for this item allowed us to show that the enhanced psychological defensiveness and religiousness of low-status individuals is likely *not* due to their economic insecurity. We also controlled for participants’ age and gender.

Missing data were estimated using 10 multiply imputed data sets. This technique provides more accurate and less biased results than listwise or pairwise deletion strategies (see, e.g., Peugh & Enders, 2004). Prior to the analyses, all variables were rescaled to range from 0 to 1 so that higher scores represented higher income, higher education, men, older age, higher trust, higher economic satisfaction, and stronger religious belief. This rescaling facilitates the interpretation of unstandardized regression coefficients used in multilevel modeling and provides a clearer sense of the magnitude of the effects. The coefficients can be interpreted as the percentage change in the outcome variable as the predictor variable goes from the lowest to the highest value. For example, a slope of .05 would indicate a 5% change in an outcome variable across the range of the predictor variable.

RESULTS

Analytic Strategy

Because the data are multilevel in nature (individuals nested within societies), we estimated a multilevel mediation path model with MPlus Version 6 (Muthen & Muthen, 2010; cf. Preacher, Zyphur, & Zhang, 2010) that represents the psychological defensiveness hypothesis.² Low

²The data can also be conceptualized as three levels, with participants on the first level, waves on the second level, and countries on the third level. Unfortunately, the sample size on the second level is too small to effectively estimate these values (second level *n* ranges 1–3). To address this problem we analyzed the data using country-wave combinations as the level-2 unit of analysis, and the results produced identical conclusions as those reported here.

social status, as represented by income and education, was used to predict trust, which in turn was used to predict the importance of God in the participants' life. We also allowed for direct paths between social status and the importance of God. The paths between social status and trust and between social status and the importance of God were specified as random slopes, and the intercepts of trust and the importance of God were specified as random intercepts. At the societal level of the model, these random slopes were predicted by the societies' GDP per capita (i.e., equivalent to an interaction between GDP and social status predicting trust and the importance of God). GDP per capita was centered around the sample mean. All of the individual-level predictor and mediator variables were centered within context because we are interested in the direction and significance of individual-level slopes (see Enders & Tofghi, 2007).

Figure 1 illustrates the final estimated model. The solid circles on the paths indicate that those slopes are random slopes predicted by GDP per capita at the country level of the model. The path between trust and the importance to God was not treated as a random slope because we did not predict variation in this slope across contexts and because preliminary analyses indicated that GDP per capita did not significantly predict this slope ($p = .41$). The solid circles at the end of the arrows predicting trust and the importance of God indicate that the intercepts of these two variables were allowed to vary.

Multilevel Path Model Results

We predicted that low socioeconomic status would be related to less trust and more importance of God in one's life. Consistent with this prediction, lower income and lower education were related to less trust and greater importance of God (see Figure 1). In turn, less trust predicted greater importance of God. Of importance, and consistent with our mediation hypothesis, the indirect effect of socioeconomic status on importance of God through trust was significant for both measures of status (indirect effect_{income} = $-.0003$, $SE < .001$, $p = .04$; indirect effect_{education} = $-.001$, $SE < .001$, $p = .05$), suggesting that trust was a significant partial mediator of the low socioeconomic status and religiosity relationship.

As predicted, a country's GDP per capita also played an important role by modifying the slopes between status and trust and between status and the importance of God (see Figure 1). To calculate the parameter estimates for wealthy and poor countries, the models were reanalyzed at 1 standard deviation above and below the GDP per capita mean (Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006). In wealthy countries lower income and lower education significantly predicted less trust ($b_{\text{income}} = .08$, $SE = .01$, $p < .001$; $b_{\text{education}} = .19$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$), whereas in poor countries these effects were nonsignificant ($b_{\text{income}} = -.003$, $SE = .01$, $p = .76$; $b_{\text{education}} = -.02$, $SE = .02$, $p = .17$). The differential effects of status on trust in wealthy versus poor countries resulted in significant mediation effects in wealthy countries (indirect effect_{income} = $-.001$, $SE < .001$, $p = .04$; indirect effect_{education} = $-.002$, $SE < .001$, $p = .05$) and nonsignificant mediation effects in poor countries (indirect effect_{income} = $.00002$, $SE < .001$, $p = .77$; indirect effect_{education} = $.0002$, $SE < .001$, $p = .21$). Similarly, the association between status and the importance of God was stronger in wealthy countries ($b_{\text{income}} = -.07$, $SE = .01$, $p < .001$; $b_{\text{education}} = -.07$, $SE = .01$, $p < .001$) compared to poor countries ($b_{\text{income}} = -.04$, $SE = .01$, $p < .001$; $b_{\text{education}} = -.02$, $SE = .01$, $p = .04$). This combination of results supports the psychological defensiveness predictions while acknowledging that this relationship does not function the same way across all cultural contexts.

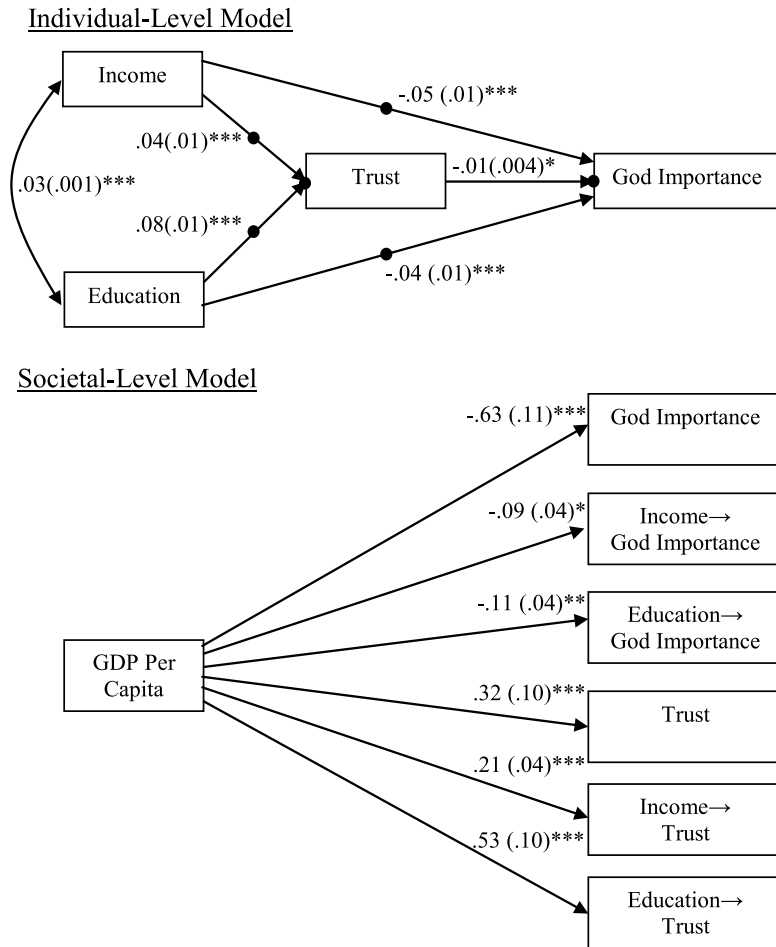


FIGURE 1 Trust partially mediates the relationship between socioeconomic status and the importance of God, especially in wealthy countries. Models include gender, age, and financial satisfaction as covariates, but are not presented in the figure to reduce complexity.

The control variables and GDP per capita also had effects on participants' sense of trust and the importance of God. Women ($b = .01, SE = .003, p = .03$), older individuals ($b = .06, SE = .01, p < .001$), people with less financial satisfaction ($b = .07, SE = .01, p < .001$), and people living in poorer countries ($b = .63, SE = .11, p < .001$) were all less trusting than their male, younger, more financially satisfied, and wealthier country counterparts. Similarly, women ($b = -.06, SE = .01, p < .001$), older individuals ($b = .12, SE = .02, p < .001$), and people living in poorer countries ($b = -.63, SE = .10, p < .001$), but also people with *more* financial satisfaction ($b = .05, SE = .01, p < .001$) reported God was more important compared to their male, younger, wealthier country resident and less financially satisfied counterparts. The results of the financial satisfaction variable are important to highlight because they are contrary

to the economic insecurity perspective, which would predict that the more economically secure an individual feels the *less* religious they will be.

DISCUSSION

Religion and status are robustly connected, yet the reasons for this relationship have faced little direct empirical attention. The current study tested and found support for a psychological defensiveness hypothesis, which suggests that people who have lower socioeconomic status are more psychologically defensive because they face chronic psychological threats from a society that marginalizes them. Consistent with this position, those with lower status, whether measured by income or education, were less trusting and, in turn, believed God was more important in their life than their higher status counterparts. These results held even when controlling for realistic financial insecurities (as measured by financial satisfaction). These results suggest that a psychological defensiveness hypothesis provides a viable explanation for the religiosity of low-status individuals and further confirms the role of religious belief as a palliative and psychologically protective belief system (Aydin et al., 2010; Epley et al., 2008; Inzlicht, McGregor, Hirsh, & Nash, 2009).

These main effects were moderated by the wealth of the country. Poor countries are associated with less economic and political stability compared to wealthy countries (Delhey & Newton, 2005), such that high-status individuals in poor countries also have good reason to be less trusting of others (cf. Hamamura, 2012). Consistent with this idea, and in part replicating Hamamura's findings with a broader sample and with a measure of education, the association between status and trust and between status and the importance of God was weaker in poor countries compared to wealthy countries. Additional analyses revealed that the wealth of a country did not moderate the path between trust and the importance of God, indicating that no matter the wealth of a country, distrust is associated with the perception of the importance of God. Thus, it appears that psychological defensiveness is consistently associated with the importance of God across contexts, but that in wealthy countries low-status individuals are more psychologically defensive, specifically more distrustful, than their higher status counterparts.

This study expands theory and research in at least three specific ways. Past research that has examined the status–religiosity relationship has primarily focused on establishing the robustness of the relationship by controlling for a host of relevant alternative predictors (Ruiter & Van Tubergen, 2009). The current study expands on this past research by identifying one important mechanism concerning the function of religiosity for low-status individuals—psychological defensiveness. Second, the current study further replicates and expands the relationship between low-status and psychological defensiveness. Past research has found that stigmatized ethnic groups and low-income individuals in the United States show more psychological defensiveness than their high-status counterparts (Henry, 2009; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Walton & Cohen, 2007). The current study found that this also holds for income and education dimensions of status across wealthy societies. Third, this study examined the role of a country's wealth in moderating the association between both status and trust and status and the importance of God, providing an understanding of important contextual variables for understanding the associations between status, religiosity, and psychological defensiveness.

Limitations and Future Directions

The theoretical perspective and mediation analysis make a specific causal argument that low status will lead to psychological defensiveness, which will lead to stronger religious beliefs. Although we cannot make definite causal claims with the current data, there are reasons to believe this causal arrangement. First, although it is impossible to ethically manipulate the long-term experience of low socioeconomic status, recent analysis of longitudinal data suggests that low status, as indicated by both income and education, leads to greater psychological defensiveness over time (Brandt & Henry, 2011). Second, experimental research suggests that manipulations of psychological threat increase religiosity (Aydin et al., 2010; Epley et al., 2008; Vail et al., 2010). Taken together, these studies provide some support for the causal arrangement proposed here. However, it is still possible that religious beliefs also influence perceptions of trust, providing cases of potential reciprocal relationships. The specificity of the causal argument made here, as compared to other viable arrangements, awaits further empirical scrutiny.

Although the results of our analysis are consistent with a psychological defensiveness mediation hypothesis, there are potential problems related to the measures that we used. First, some may not cover the full breadth of a construct of interest, given that several of the measures used single items. Specifically, the measures of generalized trust and the importance of God were both used to indicate the much broader constructs of psychological defensiveness and religiosity. In the European and World Values Surveys, trust was the only indicator of psychological defensiveness and the importance of God was the most widely available measure of religiosity. Thus, the complexity and breadth of these constructs was not fully represented in our study. Second, the meaning of the measures risks changing across cultures in a multicultural sample such as in the World Values Survey. For example, the measure of the importance of God may manifest differently depending on the cultural and religious context. Monotheistic religions may place a great emphasis on the importance of God, whereas other religions, such as Buddhism, do not focus on this aspect of belief. Future cross-cultural studies with additional items to validate measures cross-culturally and to measure the complexities of constructs like psychological defensiveness and religious belief will help to establish the consistency of the effect observed in this study.

The results for the economic insecurity control variable provide some preliminary insight into the economic insecurity hypothesis (Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Ruiters & Van Tubergen, 2009). Financial discomfort was associated with less trust and weaker religious belief. It is not clear why exactly this latter relationship exists, but one might speculate: For example, religions focus on the riches of an afterlife, and this may lead people to be more satisfied with their worldly economic situation; or perhaps people with better financial satisfaction may more strongly endorse a Calvinistic type of belief that their wealth is God's will and therefore legitimate. Regardless, at the very least these findings show that the economic insecurity hypothesis does not provide a complete explanation of the status-religiosity relationship.

Conclusion

Religiosity is globally ubiquitous. The current study examined one robust predictor of religiosity, replicating that low-status individuals are more likely to be religious than their high-status counterparts. However, this relationship appears to be driven in part by the psychological

defensiveness, as measured by the greater perceptions of distrust experienced by low-status individuals, and is most robust in wealthy countries. Religious beliefs may represent a strategic (though likely unconscious) effort by low-status individuals to defend against the psychological threats of a society that values them less.

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