**Examining the Moderating Role of Religiosity on the Inequality and Well-Being Relationship**

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**Abstract**

The impact of social inequality on individuals’ subjective well-being (SWB) is inconsistent, suggesting that a third variable might moderate this relationship. There is theoretical and empirical evidence that religion can reinforce non-egalitarian ideologies and encourage inequality. Importantly, even individuals who are not religious are influenced by culturally shared religious norms. Drawing from previous research on cultural fit (i.e., people behaving in accordance with social norms experience greater SWB), the current proposal consists of three studies that aim to elucidate the moderating effect of cultural religiosity on the relationship of gender and racial inequalities with SWB. In Study 1, data from two waves of the World Value Survey and other sources were analyzed in a multilevel model. The results indicated that under low religiosity, greater gender equality is associated with better SWB for both men and women but more so for women; under high religiosity, the corresponding relations were in the opposite direction but not significant. Study 2 aims to replicate the results of Study 1 with the addition of a third (and the most recent) wave of WVS data. Study 3 shifts focus from gender to racial inequality, testing the moderating effect of state-level religiosity on the relationship between state-level racial equality and individual SWB with data from two American samples of the PEW Religious Landscape Survey. Unlike the results obtained for gender inequality, it is predicted that under low religiosity, greater racial equality will be related to better SWB for Black but not for White people; as before, under high religiosity, the corresponding relationship should not be significant.

**Introduction**

The present work aims to examine the extent to which religious beliefs moderate the relation of gender and racial inequality with subjective well-being (SWB). In the introduction, I will first present evidence of religion’s relationship to non-egalitarian ideology, and then provide a more specific discussion of religion’s connection to global gender inequality and racial inequality in the U.S. In each case, I will address the magnitude of the inequality, the extent to which religion justifies the inequality, and whether the inequality is related to SWB. Finally, I argue that if religion supports inequality (or opposes equality), then the relation of greater equality with higher SWB will be stronger in less religious societies, This prediction will be tested in three studies.

**Religion and Inequality**

It is estimated that most of the world’s population is religiously affiliated. According to PEW data collected in 2010, it is projected that a substantial 5.8 billion people, about 84% of the global population, identify as religious. The same data also show that about a third of the world’s population is Christian, and estimate that as many people will be Muslim by 2030 (PEW, 2015). In the U.S., recent Gallup polling estimated that almost half of Americans (about 47%) describe themselves as religious (Gallup, 2024). With so many lives touched by religion, it is perhaps not surprising that the impact of religion on individuals’ and society’s well-being is a topic of theoretical considerations and empirical work.

Generally, religiosity is positively related to a variety of positive outcomes, such as happiness and life satisfaction (Aghababaei & Błachnio, 2014; Desmond et al., 2018; Marques et al., 2013; Yaden et al., 2022). Religion can provide individuals with meaning-making frameworks (Park, 2005), a sense of purpose (Francis et al., 2010; Galek et al., 2015), an increased sense of control (Kay et al., 2010), and belongingness (Saroglou et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2019). These functions of religion are particularly suited to fulfill the needs of social groups characterized by a lack of political power and lower social status. It is not surprising, therefore, that historically marginalized groups (e.g., low socioeconomic groups, African Americans, women) are more religious in comparison to their advantaged counterparts (Hoffman & Bartkowski, 2008; Norris & Inglehart, 2004).

However, early social theorists, including Marx (1970 [1843]), Weber (1994 [1895]), and Du Bois (1903), have recognized that the benefits bestowed by religion on those with marginalized identities can be a double-edged sword. The social and spiritual help provided by religion may distract people from their conditions, temper existing inequality, and suppress political resistance. Disempowered groups that find consolation in religion are theorized to be less likely to revolt against those in positions of authority. Marx (“[religion] is the opium of the people”) applied this analysis to the material deprivation of lower classes, but his analysis can and was extended to other forms of disenfranchisement. Du Bois (1903) used a similar argument in his discussion of the plight of African Americans, and current political activist and scientist, Angela Davis (1970), posited that Marx’s thesis is relevant to both race and gender. In summary, viewed through the prism of the “opium of the people,” religious benefits might indirectly preserve inequality.

Yet, the link between religion and inequality can also be direct. Core elements of religious faith and the institutions that act as messengers of religious doctrine suggest that religion might be inherently oriented toward hierarchical social structures. In most Western religions, God(s) is described as omnipotent and omniscient; this characterization implies that humans must submit to a higher power. Submission to God can then be generalized to submission to human authority. Historically, various cultures posited a direct transmission of authority from God to sociopolitical authority figures. For instance, in Europe during the medieval period through the mid-18th century, Christianity and the concept of monarchy were intertwined via the “divine right of kings”; this doctrine claimed that kings were granted their power and authority directly by God (Cawthon, 2002; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). To commit treason against the King was to commit an act of heresy. Going even further back, authoritarian rulers, from Egyptian pharaohs to Japanese emperors linked their authority to that of God(s).

Contemporary research has offered support for the association of God and human authority. Roberts et al. (2020) showed a two-way relationship between the power that God has over believers and the power that the ruling class has over a weaker population. In Western cultures, God is portrayed as an older, white man—features that are associated with social dominance. Roberts et al. (2020) also found that participants generalized beliefs about the characteristics of a hypothetical God on an imaginary planet to the characteristics of the ruling class, and vice versa.

Consistent with this line of thought, Schnabel’s (2021) recent work started with the well-known thesis that religion provides comfort to the disadvantaged and, as such, compensates them for their poor conditions and suppresses political resistance. As expected, Schnabel (2021) found that structurally disempowered groups (i.e., Black, Latinx, lower-income, and women) reported higher religious beliefs. The results also indicated that these groups scored higher on progressive views, and the effect became even stronger after adding religiosity to the regression equation. Indeed, because disempowered status was positively related to religious beliefs and religious beliefs were negatively related to progressive views, which is why the relationship between disempowered status and progressive views was amplified when controlling for religious beliefs. Schnabel (2021) thus argued that religious beliefs actively cultivate authoritarian, non-emancipatory schemas. Put differently, religion acts as a system-justification mechanism (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004).

Several studies have examined the direct relationship between religiosity and opposition to economic equality (e.g., Arikan & Bloom, 2019; Stegmueller et al., 2012; Van der Toom et al., 2017, Study 4). In general, they found positive but weak effects, possibly due to their use of only one- or two-item measures of either religiosity or equality. The most common measure of non-egalitarian ideology is the Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) scale (Pratto et al., 1994). Jost and Thomson (2000) performed a factor analysis and found that the scale can be divided into two components, opposition to equality (e.g., “Group equality is not a worthwhile ideal”) and group dominance (e.g., “Sometimes other groups must be kept in place”). However, a recent meta-analysis (Berry, 2023) challenged that distinction as the correlation between the two components (.83) was adequate for a reliability coefficient of a single scale, and the two subscales related similarly to a host of other relevant measures.

Several studies have examined the relationship between religiosity and the SDO scale; results have proven to be inconsistent. Dallago et al. (2008) and Van der Toom et al. (2017, Study 4b) reported no relation between a single-item religiosity measure and SDO (*r* = .02 and .07, respectively); although, it is important to note that the Van der Toom (2017) study only utilized the opposition to equality component of SDO. Altemeyer (1998), Duriez and Van Hiel (2002), and Harnish et al. (2018) all found small correlations between religious fundamentalism and SDO (.04 and .16, respectively; Harnish et al. used the two SDO subscales, *r* = .24 for both). Whitt and Gore (2019) examined the relationship between SDO and types of religiosity; across two studies, they found an inconsistent relationship between intrinsic religiosity and SDO (*r* = .06 and -.11) and a small positive relationship between extrinsic religiosity and SDO (*r* =.10 and .17; Whitt & Gore, 2019). Van Assche et. al., (2019) conducted cross-cultural studies on religiosity and ideological attitudes using data from three countries; the relationship between religiosity and SDO was positive in most of the samples (Belgian *r*s = .15 and .02, Turkish *r* = .15, and Dutch *r* = .23). It is possible that the use of one-item measures of religiosity is at least partially to blame for these rather weak results.

Perhaps the most comprehensive study on the relationship between religiosity and non-egalitarianism was performed by Jost et al. (2014). Using samples from over 200 countries, these investigators reported positive correlations between religious beliefs and several system-justifying beliefs, including belief in a just world, Protestant work ethic, fair market ideology, opposition to economic equality, right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), political conservatism, and general system justification beliefs (e.g., society is fair, as it should be). The results showed positive relationships between religiosity and all system justification measures. As the authors observed, however, religiosity and its correlates were assessed by single-item measures, resulting in small effect sizes. Excluding the RWA and political conservatism, the median of the correlations between religiosity and system-justifying beliefs was .11; for the RWA and political conservatism, the median correlations were higher (.24 and .33, respectively). The correlations were also higher for four general system-justifications scales that were administered in their entirety (median *r* =.22). Notably, SDO was not included in this study.

Recently, Burt, Snell, and Zuckerman (under review, 2024) conducted several studies to test the relationship between religiosity and non-egalitarian ideology and to examine some implications of this association. In two separate samples (*N*s = 256 and 289), they found strong relationships between religiosity and SDO (*r*s = .36, .50, respectively). In the second and larger sample, they also administered all of the system justification measures used in the Jost et al. (2014) study but aggregated the single items into scales. Religiosity was strongly related to all these measures (*r*s ranged from .44 to .66). They also found that two of the measures, RWA and conservatism, fully mediated the relation between religiosity and SDO. RWA emphasizes the need for a powerful leader, a feature common to both religion and non-egalitarianism. Conservatism implies reverence for tradition, which is consistent with adherence to ancient religious texts and rigid beliefs. In addition, conservatism is fundamentally opposed to change and, thus, resistant to addressing existing inequality (Jost et al., 2003). Although the mediation does not imply causality (the data were cross-sectional), it does suggest which elements of religiosity might account for its relation with non-egalitarian ideology.

In another study, Burt et al. used indirect measures to show that, although people in general are likely to associate social equality with well-being, religious people are less likely to do so. In their final study, Burt et al. showed that in more democratic (as opposed to more authoritarian) societies, the relationship between greater religiosity and higher SWB is weaker; and in less religious societies, the relationship between beliefs in democratic values and higher SWB is stronger. Considering the work of Jost et al. (2014) and Burt et al. (2024) together, there is strong evidence that religiosity is related to core elements of non-egalitarian ideology.

**Gender Inequality and Religion**

It is the case that non-egalitarian ideology can be expressed as individual behaviors and personality traits. Importantly, however, systemic non-egalitarianism can manifest as inequality between social groups. Gender inequality is one such manifestation as attested by its prevalence in the world today. The Global Gender Gap Report (Zahidi, 2023) calculates gender equality via a composite of ratio scores that divide relevant indices (e.g., earned income) of females by those of males. The resulting gap scores range from 0 to 100 with higher scores reflecting greater gender equality. Based on the gender gap scores for 146 countries, the most recent mean equality score indicated that the global gender gap was 68.4% (Zahidi, 2023). True equality between men and women is not yet present in any of the countries reported, although, Iceland came close with a gap score of 91.2%. The same report also suggests that full global gender equality will not be achieved for another 131 years (Zahidi, 2023). Similarly, the Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI; UNDP, 2023) reported that 9 out of 10 men and women in the world hold a negative bias against women. The GSNI represents about 85% of the world’s population, which suggests that non-egalitarian gender bias is bound to impede progress toward gender equality on a global scale (UNDP, 2023).

The aforementioned global gender gap index is a composite of several subindices that represent the gap between men and women’s health and survival, educational attainment, economic participation and opportunity, and political empowerment. These domains are similar to those present in other inequality indicators, like the Gender Inequality Index, which accounts for reproductive health, empowerment, and the labor market. These indices signify the substantial loss in potential human development due to gender inequalities.

A particularly striking finding of the 2023 Global Gender Gap Report revealed that, of the four subindices, the greatest disparity exists in the domain of political empowerment (22.1% closed; Zahidi, 2023). This finding was echoed by the GSNI report (UNDP, 2023), which states that across regions, income, culture, and level of development, about half of the world’s population believes that men make better political leaders than women. The second largest gap exists in the economic domain (mean gap score = 60.1%; World Economic Forum, 2023). This gap also exists in the US where, according to a Pew survey (Aragao, 2023), the difference in pay between working men and women has only closed by about 2% in the last couple of decades. As of 2022, women earned 82 cents for every dollar earned by men (Kochhar, 2023). The continued existence of such inequality may be due to a variety of factors, including gender roles, norms pertaining to industry and occupation, parenthood, and gender bias that affects hiring processes and promotion opportunities (Blau & Kahn, 2017). Thus, gender inequality impacts all spheres of life, but particularly those domains where people hold power and determine policies that affect the entire population.

Based on the evidence presented so far, one might suppose that gender inequality relates to lower SWB, particularly among women. The reason behind this expectation is twofold. First, those with fewer rights and resources struggle to adequately satisfy their needs (Tay & Diener, 2011). Second, lower status is frequently accompanied by discrimination, which increases the stress placed on the person’s regulatory system, leading to downstream negative consequences (Williams et al., 2019). Indeed, mental health problems of disadvantaged groups are often attributed to inequality. For example, discussions of women’s greater susceptibility to depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001) and lower self-esteem (Kling et al., 1999) have focused on women’s lower social and economic power. One would anticipate that the inequality leading to greater depression and lower self-esteem would also lead to lower SWB. Nonetheless, the extant research failed to support such a relationship. For example, Stevenson and Wolfers (2009) reported that since the 1970s, women’s lives in the US have improved while their happiness has decreased. Several cross-national comparisons, aiming to establish a relationship between gender inequality and women’s SWB, produced null or conflicting results (e.g., Graham & Chattopadhyay, 2013; Meisenberg & Woodley, 2015). A meta-analysis of 281 effect sizes (Batz-Barbarich et al., 2018) also showed that greater national gender inequality did not predict gender differences in SWB. Generally speaking, an expected relationship that does not materialize often implies the presence of a moderator. In other words, the relationship might exist under some conditions but other circumstances might weaken or even reverse its direction.

In the present case, the relationship between gender inequality and SWB might depend on the degree to which the cultural context is religious. Religious doctrine often presents conflicted messaging about equality, and some religious teachings encourage gender inequality. Most religious texts include statements that devalue women. “Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting by the Lord” (Colossians 3: 18-19). “Blessed are you, Lord, our God…who has not created me a woman” (Jewish morning prayer). “Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other…” (Sura, ayah 34). “The mind of woman brooks not discipline. Her intellect hath little weight” (Hindu Rig Veda, Book 8, Hymn 33). Most religions are rooted in patriarchal societies, which do not consider women as equal to men, and require wives to be submissive to their husbands. Leadership roles in many religions are restricted to males. Religion-based gender discrimination can occur in a number of fields, including basic health care (birth control, emergency contraception, and abortion), the right to property, family laws (marriage, divorce, custody of children), political participation (voting rights, power-sharing in government leadership roles and decision-making), and participation in the labor force. In all these cases, religion may offer an ideological framework that helps individuals justify gender non-egalitarianism. Furthermore, it is important to note that individuals tend to adopt the values and norms of the religious culture they live in, even if they do not consider themselves religious (Gebauer et al., 2012). If individuals adopt the religious view that inequality is acceptable, they are likely to treat gender inequality as normative or even appropriate.

**Racial Inequality and Religion**

Racial inequality is another manifestation of systemic non-egalitarianism in the world today and is particularly prevalent in the U.S. It has been 156 years since the Fourteenth Amendment granted African Americans the right to vote, 64 years since Ruby Bridges was the first African American child to integrate a formerly segregated whites-only school, 59 years since the Voting Rights Act was enacted to prevent states from blocking Black voters from participating in elections, and only 16 years since the US elected its first African American president. For all the crucial progress toward equality in the previous century, racial inequality persists across various domains. Several human rights activist groups and social justice movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter, National Black Justice Collective, Racial Equity Institute) have emphasized the need to close the racial disparities separating Black from White populations. As of 2023, the US Census Bureau estimates about 13.7% of the US population is Black or African American. In other words, Black people comprise a substantial portion of the American population, yet consistently fall behind Whites on various markers of development and empowerment. Curiously, race-based disparities and discrimination do not readily translate into parallel differences in SWB. As noted previously, the lack of a clear relation between manifestations of inequality and SWB prompts the search for a moderator.

Based on data collected by the Federal Reserve’s Survey of Consumer Finances, overall median wealth increased from 2019 to 2022 during COVID-19. However, the racial wealth gap also increased to a total of $240,120 (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve, 2023). Thus, in 2022, for every $100 held in White households, $15 was held in Black households (Perry et al., 2024). Relatedly, the US Census Bureau (2022) estimated that the poverty rate for the Black population stands at about 17.1%, a figure that might not look impressive until one considers other relevant statistics. Black individuals make up about 20.1% of those living in poverty, meaning that they are overrepresented in the impoverished population (a ratio of about 1.5 for poverty over that of the total population). White individuals, on the other hand, comprise about 44% of those in poverty yet make up about 58.5% of the total population (a ratio of .8). Thus, Black people are overrepresented in the poverty population while White people are underrepresented (Shrider, 2023). Underlying the differences in wealth and poverty is the fact that Black people are more likely to be unemployed, and even when employed, they are often underpaid (Gradín, 2014; Wilson & Rodgers, 2016).

Evaluations of inequality via educational outcomes follow a similar pattern. Based on 2022 educational attainment data, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 41.8% of White adults over age 25 have a bachelor’s degree or higher level of educational attainment compared to 27.6% among Black people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). It is no coincidence that disparities in education and economic outcomes coexist, as they can form a vicious cycle for individuals with historically marginalized identities. For instance, if individuals do not or are unable to pursue higher education due to a lack of resources, they are then also unable to attain greater economic opportunities due to their lower level of educational completion.

Health and life expectancy outcomes are likewise characterized by racial inequality in the U.S. In the recent pandemic, some estimates indicate that Black people died at 1.4 times the rate of White people (The COVID Racial Data Tracker, 2024). There is a corresponding difference in life expectancy; the average life expectancy is about 4 years lower for Black people than White people (75.3 to 78.9, respectively; GBD US Health Disparities Collaborators, 2022). Racial inequality also exists in the justice system. Not only is the US a world leader in incarceration rates, but Black Americans are disproportionately affected. As of 2021, Black adults are imprisoned at about five times the rate of White adults (Ghandnoosh et al., 2023). Compared to White communities, Communities of Color are over-policed; racial profiling likely plays a role in the bias present in drug arrests, pedestrian searches, and traffic stops (Birzer, 2012; Travis et al., 2014). Black Americans are also more likely to receive severe sentencing, such as longer or life sentences or the death penalty, compared to their White counterparts (Nellis, 2021). It is estimated that 55% of those currently serving life without parole are Black (Nellis, 2021); according to Muhammed et al. (2023), Black individuals comprised a third of the prisoners who were executed between 1976 and 2022. It is important to note that the racial disparities in arrests and convictions have downstream outcomes that intersect with other domains of life and empowerment (e.g., restriction of voting rights after a felony conviction; limited employment and economic opportunities; potential difficulties with housing; limited educational opportunities). Because all the aforementioned domains (e.g., political empowerment, health, economic, and education) are intertwined with each other, as cause and/or outcome, the presence of racial disparities in any domain can perpetuate the vicious cycle of inequality that negatively affects many Black Americans.

Surprisingly, despite the racial inequality seen in these objective outcomes, its relation to SWB is not as straightforward as might be anticipated. Nearly 40 years ago, Stock and colleagues (1985) found that whites report only slightly higher SWB (meta-analytic effect size of the difference: *r* = .09, CI = .03-.15). Almost 20 years later, another meta-analysis conducted by Twenge and Crocker (2002) showed that African Americans reported higher self-esteem compared to White individuals (d = .19, CI = .18-.19). Furthermore, in a study of longitudinal data spanning 1972-2008, Stevenson and Wolfers (2013) found an increase in SWB among Blacks. Specifically, the racial gap in SWB (Whites tended to report higher levels) declined from .45 to .27 *SD,* as the increase in SWB was seen both within Black participants across time and relative to that of Whites. Yet the gaps in income, employment, and education outcomes in those same years remained stable or increased, and controlling for these factors did not significantly change the SWB results. As with gender inequality, the lack of relation between inequality and SWB raises the possibility of a moderator effect. There is reason to anticipate that racial equality is related to greater SWB among Black individuals in contexts low in religiosity.

Religious doctrine is inconsistent on the topic of racial inequality and has been utilized to support arguments against abolition and civil rights movements. The Torah, the portion of the bible concerned with Hebrew rules and legislation, advocates a more humane treatment of slaves (e.g., manumission after six years) but does not call for abolishing slavery. Writers of the New Testament did not oppose slavery (e.g., Paul’s Epistle to Titus: “Tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect,” Titus, 2: 9-10). This led pro-slavery apologists in the 19th century to suggest that Jesus approved of slavery (Giles, 1994), or that God sanctioned it: “[Slavery] was established by decree of Almighty God…it is sanctioned in the Bible, in both testaments…” (Senator Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America, 1850; Bartlett, 2020). According to proslavery advocates, segregationists, and the white supremacists of today, their views are often based on religious convictions and protected by the principle of religious freedom.

Other religious texts present mixed messages about slavery. Mormon scripture appears to denounce both slavery and abolitionism. The Quran attempts to regulate slavery (e.g., it calls the manumission of slaves a meritorious act) and thereby implicitly accepts it (Lewis, 1992). In his “Knock at Midnight” speech, Martin Luther King, Jr. (1958) warned the church that it must be the conscience of the state instead of serving as its tool. Indeed, it seems he did not see the church as a consistent natural ally in his fight for social justice, but rather recognized that it could be weaponized by those in positions of power.

Empirical evidence provides some support for the connection between religion and racial inequality. For instance, Johnson et al. (2010) found that participants displayed more racial prejudice and general negative affect toward African Americans after being primed with Christian religious concepts, in comparison to those who saw neutral primes. Hall et al. (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of 55 independent studies to evaluate the link between religiosity and racism in America. They found that greater religious identification, extrinsic religiosity, and religious fundamentalism were positively related to racism. By comparing the zero-order correlation between fundamentalist religious motives and racial prejudice to their partial correlation after controlling for authoritarianism, the findings suggested that the connection between religious fundamentalism and prejudice can be explained by authoritarianism (Hall et al., 2010). Consistent with this line of thought, Johnson et al. (2011) showed that right-wing authoritarianism mediated the relationship between religiosity and racial prejudice conceptualized as subtle racism. Since religious practice and beliefs support some degree of racism, religiosity might moderate the relation between racial inequality and SWB.

**Religiosity as a Moderator**

Cultural religiosity is well-positioned to qualify the association between equality and SWB. Previously, it was shown that religiosity is related to general non-egalitarian ideology and, as such, promotes gender inequality and tolerates and perhaps even encourages racial inequality. It was also noted that people living in a religious society are influenced by religious values and norms even if they are not religious (Gebauer et al, 2012). Thus, the religious principles that are used to justify and encourage inequality become systemically ingrained in the ideological, legal, and financial structures of a society.

Cultural values and norms offer individuals a guiding template for the ‘dos’ and ‘do nots’ of how to live in a given society; they provide a socially acceptable way to exist in one’s community and maintain one’s social status. Research on cultural fit suggests that when people live in alignment with the cultural values of their society, they tend to experience greater SWB. On the other hand, when people strive toward goals that are dissonant with cultural messages, they may experience identity uncertainty (Feasel et al., 2024) and lower SWB (Fulmer et al., 2010; Stephens et al., 2012; Stephens & Townsend, 2015). Therefore, the consequences of misaligning with religious cultural values may prove detrimental to SWB. For example, if religion fosters a culture of inequality and perpetuates messages about traditional gender roles, then when women break through the proverbial glass ceiling, they may experience negative feelings of being counter-normative or tokenized, resulting in increased stress and lower SWB. Conversely, in contexts where such restrictive ideology does not exist or when traditional gender inequality runs counter social norms, breaking gender roles may be acceptable and might even garner social commendation and comparatively higher individual SWB.

A similar logic can be applied to racial inequality. Religion might foster acceptance or normalization of society in which Black people are marginalized and disempowered. Centuries of slavery and at least one century of explicit white supremacy coexisted with and perhaps even drew support from religious beliefs and norms. Applying the logic of cultural fit implies that in a highly religious context, Black individuals who break the glass ceiling might feel they are breaking social norms and deviating from learned social expectations. Conversely, in a less religious context, greater racial equality might be more in line with what cultural values prescribe. As such, whether people live in a religious vs non-religious society could moderate the relation between racial equality and SWB.

The current work applies the same model to both gender and racial inequality but the predictions for the two phenomena are markedly different. First, in the case of gender inequality, the literature cited above implies that the degree of inequality alone would not be related to SWB. In the case of racial inequality, the literature is mixed and, as such, it is difficult to make a prediction about the main effect of racial inequality on SWB. More importantly, in the case of gender inequality, a moderating effect of religiosity (i.e., Religiosity x Gender Equality interaction) is expected for both men and women, although it is anticipated to be stronger for women (i.e., Gender x Religiosity x Gender Equality). Most men are aware of gender inequality’s impact through their own experiences with women in the workplace and personal relationships. Their knowledge of gender inequality and whether it is normative is likely to affect their SWB although not to the same degree it should affect women’s SWB. However, in the case of racial inequality, although most White individuals are aware that racial gaps exist in the U.S., such knowledge may be relatively abstract, and (depending on the intergroup contact among individuals) awareness of inequality may not readily translate to personal experiences. The prejudice directed at African Americans can also functionally justify the many forms of racial inequality, distancing its impact on White individuals.

Finally, there is the question of how the moderator effect will be translated into simple effects. Given that a position of equality appears preferable to a position of disempowerment, it can be predicted that when it is endorsed by a low religiosity context, greater equality would be significantly associated with higher SWB. In contrast, since high religiosity can bolster non-egalitarianism, the benefits of greater equality might be outmatched by opposing religious norms, resulting in a negative but likely non-significant relation with SWB. In short, under low religiosity, the context and greater equality push in the same direction; hence the prediction of a significant relationship with SWB. Under high religiosity, the context and greater equality push in opposite directions, resulting in a non-significant relationship with SWB.

**Study 1**

The goal of Study 1 was to examine the moderating effects of country religiosity and gender on the relationship between gender equality and SWB. It was anticipated that greater equality would have a positive effect on individuals’ SWB in countries lower in religiosity and that this effect would be stronger for women than men.

**Method**

Data for religiosity, SWB, and individual demographic controls were obtained from the World Value Survey waves 5 (WVS5) and 6 (WVS6). WVS5 was conducted in 2005-2009 with data collected from 58 countries (Inglehart et al., 2014a). WVS6 was conducted in 2010-2014 with data collected from 60 countries (Inglehart et al., 2014b). Thirty-eight countries appeared in both waves. Survey data were primarily collected in face-to-face or postal interviews (Inglehart et al., 2014). The analyses utilized a three-level multilevel model with individuals (level 1) nested within the two waves of data collection (level 2), and waves nested within countries (level 3).

***Participants***

Data were available for 80,528 participants in WVS5 and 92,911 participants in WVS6. Across the two waves, mean age was 41.75 (*SD* = 16.51; 52.2% female). Of the two samples together, 19.8% identified as Roman Catholic, 19.5% identified as Muslim, and 19.5% reported none/ they did not belong to a denomination. Regarding education, 58.9% of participants indicated having completed secondary school or a higher level of education.

All individual data, both primary and control variables, were collected from the two WVS waves. Country-level data were collected from the WVS and external sources.

***Primary Individual Measures***

**Subjective Well-Being.** The SWB dependent variable was comprised of three items. The first item asked participants to rate their happiness (e.g., “Taking all things together, would you say you are…”) on a scale of 1 (Very happy) to 4 (Not at all happy). The second item asked participants to report their life satisfaction: “All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?” Participants responded on a scale of 1 (Completely dissatisfied) to 10 (Completely satisfied). The third item requested participants to report the state of their health on a scale of 1 (Very good) to 5 (Very poor). The items about happiness and health were reverse-scored, and the three items were standardized and averaged in their separate waves. After combining the two datasets, the SWB composite had a Cronbach’s alpha of .66.

**Individual Religiosity.** Individual religiosity was a composite of four items. One item asked participants to report how often they attend religious services (e.g., “Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services these days?”) on a scale of 1 (More than once a week) to 7 (Never, practically never). A second item requested participants to rate the importance of God in their life on a scale of 1 (Not at all important) to 10 (Very important). A third item asked the participants to rate the importance of religion in their life on a scale from 1 (Very important) to 4 (Not at all important). The fourth item, about prayer frequency, was worded slightly differently in the two waves. In WVS5, it was a binary response (1 = Yes and 2 = No) to the question, “Do you take some moments of prayer, meditation or contemplation or something like that?”. In WVS6, it was treated as a continuous scale; participants were asked, “Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you pray?” and rated their responses on a scale of 1 (Several times a day) to 8 (Never, practically never). After reverse-scoring the appropriate items, all four were standardized and averaged in their respective wave. After combining the waves into a single dataset, the individual religiosity composite (α = .83) was group-mean centered based on the country-level religiosity mean across the two waves.

**Gender.** An item representing participant sex was utilized as the proxy for gender. In both waves, participants were dummy coded as 0 (Male) or 1 (Female). The gender variable was grand mean centered.

***Primary Country Measures***

**Country Religiosity.** Religiosity at the country level was the average of the individual-level religiosity scores for each country. After combining WVS5 and WVS6 datasets, the country religiosity scores that were utilized as predictors at level 2 were group-mean centered based on each country mean across the two waves; as level-3 predictors, the country religiosity scores were averaged across waves and then grand mean centered.

**Gender-Equality Index.** An index of gender equality was computed for each wave of data collection utilizing country-level data from the Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR) across the years 2006-2009 for wave 5 (2006 was the earliest accessible year of the GGGR) and 2010-2014 for wave 6. The index is comprised of three equality indices for education, economy, and politics (health was not used because of a potential relation with SWB). In each domain, the index is based on a ratio of females’ achievement in the domain relative to that of males. Specifically, the education indicator was the average of four items (e.g., the ratio of female v. male literacy rate). The economy index was an average of five items (e.g., the ratio of females’ to males’ earned income). The political index was the average of three items (e.g., the ratio of years a female has been head of state to years a male has been head of state). Scores for these three indicators were obtained for the same years of each WVS data collection, and then standardized and averaged across items and years to form the three indices, which were then averaged to form one composite variable for each wave (WVS5 α = .91; WVS6 α = .94). The scores range from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating greater levels of gender equality. After combining WVS5 and WVS6 datasets, the gender-equality index scores as level 2 predictors were group-mean centered based on country means across the two waves; as level-3 predictors, the gender-equality index scores for each country were averaged across waves and then grand mean centered.

***Control Individual Measures***

A series of individual-level demographic variables were included as controls. These included relationship status (dummy coded as those married or living with a partner = 1), age, whether one has children (dummy coded as having children = 1), and employment status (dummy coded as employed = 1). A composite variable for socioeconomic status (SES) was computed by standardizing and averaging the following three items: education ( “What is the highest educational level that you have attained?”) rated on a scale from 1 (No formal education) to 9 (University-level education, with degree)), income, rated on a scale from 1, lowest, to 10, highest, and perceived SES (self-reported as belonging to one of five social classes coded from 1, upper class, to 5, lower class). The SES composite had a reliability score of α = .65. All individual control variables were grand mean centered.

***Control Country measures***

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita and income inequality (gini) served as country control measures. GDP data were collected from the CIA World Factbook (2024) for the years corresponding to WVS5 and WVS6 data collection (2005-2014). Income inequality was measured using the Gini index data from The World Bank (2024) for 2005-2014. Both indices’ data for 2005-2009 (corresponding to WVS5) and for 2010-2014 (corresponding to WVS6) were averaged across the appropriate years to form a GDP index and a Gini index for each WVS dataset. After averaging the scores for each WVS dataset, GDP data were log-transformed due to skewness. The Gini index values range between 0 and 1 with higher values indicating greater inequality. As level-2 predictors, scores for the GDP and Gini indices were centered based on country means across the two waves. As level-3 predictors, scores for the GDP and Gini indices were averaged across waves, and then grand mean centered.

***Wave Measures***

A dummy code representing wave of data collection was also included (WVS5 = 0, WVS6 = 1).

**Results**

All variables were standardized prior to conducting the analyses. As noted previously, the data were examined in a three-level multilevel model with individuals (level 1) nested within waves (level 2), and waves nested within countries (level 3). When the model was run without predictors, the results showed that 86% of the variance in SWB was at level 1 (individual), 3% of the variance was at level 2 (wave), and 11% was at level 3 (country).

The variables entered at level 1 included the group-mean-centered individual religiosity, the grand-mean-centered gender, and the individual demographic control variables (SES composite, relationship status, whether they have children, employment status, and age). All individual-level variables were estimated as random effects at the third level, allowing these variables to have their own effect in each country. At level 2, the group-mean-centered scores representing wave variations in country religiosity, gender equality, Gini, and GDP were entered as fixed effects, along with the dummy-coded wave. At level 3, grand-mean-centered country religiosity, gender equality index, gini, and GDP scores were estimated as fixed effects. These were followed by interactions relevant to the prediction, including the three-way interaction of Gender x Country Religiosity x Gender Equality and all the relevant two-way interactions (Country Religiosity x Gender, Country Religiosity x Gender Equality, and Gender x Gender Equality). Of the two-way interactions entered, the Country Religiosity x Gender Equality is of particular interest because it shows whether country religiosity moderates the effects of gender equality for both males and females.

Of the individual-level controls entered into the model, higher SES was associated with greater SWB (*b*  = .268, *95*% CI [.244, .293], *p* < .001); married individuals or those in a committed relationship reported greater SWB than those not in committed relationships (*b*  = .091, 95% CI [.080, .102], *p* < .001); those with children reported lower SWB than those without (*b*  = -.028, 95% CI [-.037, -.019], *p* < .001); employed individuals reported greater SWB than unemployed individuals (*b*  = .013, 95% CI [.003, .023], *p* = .011); age was negatively related to SWB (*b*  = -.159, 95% CI [-.182, -.135], *p* < .001); more religious individuals reported greater SWB than the less religious individuals (*b*  = .074, 95% CI [.058, .091], *p* < .001). None of the wave-level control variables yielded significant results (*p >* .179). Of the country-level controls entered at level 3, higher Gini scores (indicating higher inequality) were associated with greater SWB (*b*  = .092, 95% CI [.022, .162], *p* = .010). The relation of GDP with SWB was not significant, *p* = .081. Results regarding the variables of interest and their interactions are reported in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

*Effects of Country Religiosity, Gender Equality, Gender and the Interactions among These Variables on SWB*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *b* | *SE* | 95% CI | *p* |
| Intercept | -.011 | .043 | [-.097, .074] | .795 |
| Country Religiosity (CR) | .047 | .042 | [-.035, .129] | .258 |
| Gender Equality (GE) | .023 | .037 | [-.049, .095] | .525 |
| Gender | -.014 | .006 | [-.027, -.002] | .024 |
| Gender x GE | -.003 | .006 | [-.015, .008] | .588 |
| CR x GE | -.074 | .030 | [-.133, -.015] | .014 |
| Gender x CR | -.003 | .006 | [-.015, .010] | .683 |
| Gender x CR x GE | -.012 | .005 | [-.022, -.002] | .022 |
|  |  |  |  |  |

As anticipated, the gender equality-SWB was not significant, nor was the Gender x Gender Equality interaction. The implications are that gender equality in and of itself is not related to SWB for males or females. However, the relation of gender equality with SWB was significantly moderated by country religiosity (Country Religiosity x Gender Equality: *p* = .014), and this two-way interaction was further moderated by gender, Gender x Country Religiosity x Gender equality: *p* = .022. Simple effects analyses for the latter three-way interaction indicated that the Country Religiosity x Gender Equality interaction was significant for both men (*b* = -.113, *SE* = .040, 95% CI [-.192, -.035], *p* = .005) and women (*b* = -.137, *SE* = .041, 95% CI [-.218, -.056], *p* < .001), but the effect size was greater for women. As seen in Figures 1 and 2, for both men and women, greater gender equality seems associated with better SWB in less religious countries but not in more religious countries. However, for men, neither the positive relationship between gender equality and SWB in less religious countries (*b* = .089, *SE* = .054, *z* = 1.640, *p* = .101) nor the negative relationship between gender equality and SWB in more religious countries was significant, *b* = -0.035, *SE* = .042, *z* = -.840, *p* = .401.

**Figure 1**

*Country Religiosity x Gender Equality Interaction for Men*

For women in less religious countries, gender equality was significantly related to better SWB (*b* = .106, *SE* = .054, *z* = 1.964, *p* = .050); this relationship was reversed, but not significant in more religious countries, *b* = -.065, *SE* = .041, *z* = -1.573, *p* = .116.

**Figure 2**

*Country Religiosity x Gender Equality Interaction for Women*

Additional analyses were conducted to assess whether the wave of data collection moderated the two interactions of interest: (a) Country Religiosity x Gender Equality and (b) Gender x Country Religiosity x Gender Equality. The same variables and interaction terms were entered, as in the model reported above, as well as all the two-way interactions necessary to test the Wave x Country Religosity x Gender equality and all the three-way interactions required to test the Wave x Gender x Country Religiosity x Gender Equality. Neither the Wave x Country Religosity x Gender equality (*p* = .891)nor the relevant two-way interactions with wave (*p*s > .074 ) were significant. The Wave x Gender x Country Religiosity x Gender Equality was not significant (*p* = .125), nor was the Wave x Gender x Gender Equality interaction (*p* = .315). Wave x Gender x Country Religiosity was the only additional interaction term to have a significant effect on SWB (*p* = .030). However, given that it is not relevant to the theoretical model, this interaction will not be discussed further. As neither interaction of interest (Wave x Country Religosity x Gender Equality and Wave x Gender x Country Religiosity x Gender Equality) was significant, all the wave interactions were dropped from the model.

**Discussion**

To summarize, the results of Study 1 supported the primary hypotheses, namely that country gender equality had a positive effect on individuals’ SWB in less religious countries, and this effect was stronger for women than men. The findings also seemed to demonstrate a negative relation between gender equality and SWB in highly religious countries, but this relation was not significant for men or women.

When the analyses reported above were conducted separately for waves WVS5 and WVS6 , only one of the four effects of interest was significant. Specifically, the Country Religiosity x Gender Equality was not significant in either wave, *p*s > .36, and the Gender x Country Religiosity x Gender Equality was significant in WVS5, *p* = .019 but not in WVS6, *p* = .33. Although there was no interaction of wave with either of these effects, it is still important, to replicate these results with WVS7 added to waves 5 and 6. Furthermore, WVS5 and 6 data were collected from 2005 to 2014, making even the most recent data points a decade old. The inclusion of WVS7 provides recently updated data that may tap recent cultural changes in attitudes toward women (the #MeToo movement in particular; https://metoomvmt.org).

**Study 2**

Study 2 aims to replicate the moderating effects of country religiosity and gender on the relation between gender equality and SWB. As in Study 1, it is anticipated that greater equality will positively relate to individuals’ SWB in countries lower in religiosity and that this effect will be stronger for women.

**Method**

Data for religiosity, SWB, and individual demographic controls will be obtained from the World Value Survey waves 5, 6, and 7 (WVS7). WVS7 was conducted in 2017-2022 with data collected from 64 countries (Haerpfer et al., 2022). Twenty-eight countries were present in all three waves. Data for the country-level variables will be obtained from the three WVS waves and external sources. The analyses will consist of the same three-level model tested in Study 1.

Regarding the measures, all primary individual and country variables will be treated the same as in Study 1; the only difference will be that data from WVS5, 6, and 7 (or data from the corresponding years, such as for GDP) are to be used for creating the necessary composites. In the main analyses, three dummy codes representing the wave of data collection will also be included. In additional analyses, interactions of two orthogonal wave contrasts with the effects of interest (Country Religiosity x Gender Inequality, and Gender x Country Relgiosity x Gender inequality) will be tested, along with all the two-way and three-way interactions necessary in these analyses. One set of contrasts (WVS5 + -1, WVS6 = +1, WVS7 = 0) is a replication of the analyses in Study 1. A second set of contrasts (WVS5 = -1, WVS6 = - 1, WVS7 = +2) will examine if the effects of interest in WVS7 differ from the effects obtained in Study 1 (i.e., the significant Country Religiosity x Gender Inequality and Gender x Country Religiosity x Gender Inequality).

***Participants***

Data are available for 80,528 participants in WVS5, 92,911 participants in WVS6, and 94,278 participants in WVS7. It is expected that the sample demographics will be similar to those of Study 1, such that the sample will have a mean age of about 40 years old and be nearly evenly split with individuals identifying as men and women.

**Planned Analyses**

The data will be examined in a three-level multilevel model with individuals (level 1) nested within waves (level 2), and waves nested within countries (level 3). The variables entered at level 1 will be the group-mean-centered individual religiosity, the grand-mean-centered gender, and the individual demographic control variables. Again, all individual-level variables will be estimated as random effects at the third level. Then, at level 2, the group-mean-centered scores representing wave variations in country religiosity, gender equality, Gini, and GDP, and the variables representing the three waves will be entered as fixed effects. Finally, at level 3, the grand-mean-centered country religiosity, gender equality index, gini, and GDP scores will be estimated, followed by the two-way and three-way interactions. As in Study 1, the Country Religiosity x Gender Equality and the Gender x Country Religiosity x Gender Equality effects will be of the utmost interest among the terms entered. The interactions of the two wave contrasts with the aforementioned two-way and three-way interactions of interest along with all the necessary two-way and three-way interactions will also be tested.

**Study 3**

The goal of Study 3 will be to conceptually replicate the moderating effect of religiosity on the relationship between inequality and SWB. However, four major differences will set Study 3 apart from the previous two studies: first, Study 3 will evaluate the effect of racial equality rather than gender equality; second, Study 3 will utilize state-level data from the US rather than world country data. Third, it is anticipated that greater racial equality will positively relate to Black (but not to White) individuals’ SWB who live in less religious states. In other words, it is expected that the results will show a Race (Black/White) x State Religiosity x Racial Inequality interaction but not State Religioisisity x Racial inequality interaction. Fourth, an exploratory analysis will examine health problems, in addition to SWB, as a dependent variable.

The health disadvantages of African Americans are attributed to racial gaps in wealth, education, other disparities (e.g., inherited health risks, access to health care), and discrimination (see a review by Mays et al., 2007). The primary pathway from these factors to downstream health problems is the stress placed on the body’s regulatory systems. There is strong evidence that stress—specifically, anxiety associated with aversive events—is reduced when the events are predictable and/or justified (e.g., Grillon et al., 2004, 2009). Since inequality is more expected and therefore more normative in religious states, inequality might be less stressful and less strongly associated with stress compared to less religious states. As such, and similar to predictions made regarding SWB, it is predicted that state religiosity moderates the relation between racial inequality and health problems of Black people but not health problems of White people.

**Method**

Data for religiosity, SWB, race, and individual demographic controls will be obtained from the 2007 and 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Studies (PEW Research Center, 2008; PEW Research Center, 2015). For each of the Religious Landscape Studies, data were collected via telephone survey from more than 35,000 Americans across all 50 states and Washington, D.C. Data for state-level variables (racial equality index, GDP, and Gini) will be taken from other external sources (specified in the measures section below). The analyses of SWB will employ a three-level multilevel model with individuals (level 1) nested within the two surveys of data collection (level 2), and surveys nested within states (level 3). The analysis of health problems, which were available only at the state level, would employ a two-level multilevel model with surveys (level 1) nested within states (level 2).

***Participants***

Data are available for 35,957 participants from the 2007 survey and 35,071 from the 2014 survey (52.1% females for the two surveys combined). The mean age was about 50 (2007: *M* = 51.11, *SD* = 17.26; 2014: *M* = 6.94, *SD* = 3.65). Considering the two samples together, 75.4% identified as some form of Christian, 17.9% reported being unaffiliated with a religion, 2.2% identified as Jewish, and the remaining 3.9% of respondents selected some other religious affiliation. Regarding education, 89.1% of participants indicated having completed secondary school or a higher level of education. Finally, 78.8% of participants identified as White, 9.7% as Black, 2.7% as Asian, and 7.1% as mixed or another racial identity.

***Primary Individual Measures***

**Subjective Well-Being.** The SWB measure will be comprised of items about individuals’ perceptions of their general happiness and satisfaction with various aspects of their lives. However, there are some differences in the specific aspects that were addressed in the two surveys. In the 2007 survey, two categories of items assessed SWB. The first category consisted of the following questions: “All in all, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in your personal life?” (answered with 1 = Satisfied or 2 = Dissatisfied) and “Would you say that’s very (satisfied/dissatisfied) or just somewhat (satisfied/dissatisfied)?” answered with 1 = Very or 2 = Somewhat. These two questions will be combined into a single variable with a range of 1 (Very dissatisfied) to 4 (Very satisfied). The second category included four questions addressing satisfaction with one’s family life, standard of living, the country’s political system, and personal safety. Each question was answered on a scale of 1 (Very satisfied) to 4 (Very dissatisfied). The four answers will be averaged to form a single variable. The averaged scores derived from these two categories will be standardized and then averaged to form the SWB composite.

For the 2014 dataset, items about happiness, family life satisfaction, and satisfaction with their health will comprise the composite. Participants rated their general happiness on a scale from 1 (Very happy) to 3 (Not too happy) and their satisfaction with their family life and health on a scale from 1 (Very satisfied) to 4 (Very dissatisfied). The item about satisfaction with health will not be included because it is likely related to the dependent variable (SWB and, even more so, health problems). The remaining two items will be standardized and then averaged to form the SWB composite.

**Health Problems Index.** Three variables from the *outcomes* section of the State Health Database (SHADAC, 2024) will comprise the index representing health problems. First, prevalence of chronic disease (i.e., percent of the adult population who report having one or more of the following specific chronic disease types: diabetes, CVD, heart attack, stroke, and asthma). Second, incidences of cancer (i.e., rates of breast, cervical, lung, and colorectal cancer across all ages per 100,000 population). Third, incidences of premature deaths (i.e., average number of years of potential life lost before age 75 per 100,000 population). The third indicator is not unavailable for 2007, so the earliest available data (2009) will be used instead. For each state, the variables will be computed separately for Black participants (α = .59) and White participants (α = .80) and then standardized and averaged to form health problem indices for each racial group. In addition, ratio scores will be created for each of the health variables (e.g., the incidence of cancer among Black people divided by the incidence of cancer among White people), standardized, and averaged to form an index of racial inequality in health between Black and White people (higher scores indicate Black people experience more health problems than White people).

**Individual Religiosity.** In both PEW surveys, the religiosity composites will be created using items about the individual’s frequency of religious activities and service attendance, the importance of religion, and their certainty of specific religious beliefs. First, participants indicated the frequency of their religious service attendance, aside from weddings and funerals, on a scale of 1 (More than once a week) to 6 (Never). They next indicated the frequency with which they pray, participate in prayer or religious education groups, and read scripture outside of religious services. Participants then rated the importance of religion in their lives, on a scale of 1 (Very important) to 4 (Not at all important).

Several additional items assessed individuals’ certainty in specific beliefs. First, participants stated (yes/no) whether they believed in God or a universal spirit; this response will be combined with a second item that asked participants who indicated belief in God to rate the certainty of their belief (1 = Absolutely certain to 4 = Not at all certain). The composite of these two items will create a single belief in God item, rated on a scale from 1 (Yes, absolutely certain) to 5 (No, I don’t believe). Second, participants indicated whether they thought there was a heaven and/or a hell (Yes/No). Third, two items will be combined to reflect beliefs about whether their religious holy book(s) are truly the word of God (1 = is the word of God or 2 = is a book written by men and is not the word of God) and whether the writings are to be interpreted literally (1 = is to be taken literally, word for word or 2 = Not everything in [Holy Book] should be taken literally, word for word). The resulting eight items will be standardized and averaged in their respective wave of data collection to create the individual-level religiosity variable. Then, after combining the waves into a single dataset, the individual religiosity composite will be group-mean centered based on the state-level religiosity mean across the two waves.

**Race.** Individual race will be represented by a self-report dummy-coded variable, whereby Black participants will receive a code of 0 and White participants will receive a code of 1. The race variable will be grand mean centered.

***Primary State Measures***

**State Religiosity.** The average of the individual-level religiosity scores for each state will comprise the state-level religiosity measure. After combining the 2007 and 2014 datasets, the state religiosity scores will be utilized as predictors at level 2 (group-mean centered based on each state mean across the two waves) and at level 3 (state religiosity scores will be averaged across waves and grand mean centered).

**Racial-Equality Index.**  Since there is no index for racial equality in states in the US, one was created using the same method employed in creating the gender-equality index used in Studies 1 and 2 (provided in the Global Gender Gap Report). Specifically, the overall equality composite was based on ratio scores representing the difference in economics and education between Black/African American and White participants in each of the 50 states and Washington, D.C. The gap in economic outcomes was represented by unemployment rates (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007; 2014) and average household income in each state for Black and White people in 2007 and 2014 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). Two variables using data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2024) were utilized to compute educational attainment gaps in 2007 and 2014. One variable represented the percent of people in each racial group who received less than a high school diploma; these scores were calculated by summing the number of Black/African American (or White) participants who indicated receiving *No Schooling Completed* through grade school categories to *12th Grade NO DIPLOMA* and dividing by the total number of people who identified as Black/African American (or White). The other variable represented the percentage of people in each group who received a bachelor’s degree or higher. For each racial group, the number of people who indicated receiving a *Bachelor’s, Master’s, Professional, or Doctorate degree* was summed and then divided by the total who identified with the racial group.

Ratios for each of the four variables were created by taking the score for the Black/African American sample divided by the score for the White sample in each state. For example, regarding unemployment, the racial gap is the ratio of unemployment among Black people in each state divided by unemployment among White people. The ratio variables were standardized, and those representing inequality (e.g., unemployment of Black over that of White people) were reversed such that the resulting scores represent racial equality (the higher the score the higher the equality). Given the equal numbers of economic and education variables, the four scores were averaged, yielding a single racial equality score for each state and Washington, D.C. in 2007 (α = .84) and 2014 (α =. 84). After combining the 2007 and 2014 datasets, the racial-equality index scores will be group-mean centered based on state means across the two surveys and the resulting scores will be entered as a level 2 predictor; as level 3 predictor, the racial-equality index scores for each state will be averaged across waves and then grand mean centered.

***Control Individual Measures***

As in the previous studies, a series of individual-level demographic variables will be entered as controls. Several dummy-coded variables will be entered to control for various social attributes, including sex (dummy coded as 1 = female), race (Black = 1), religious affiliation (Christian = 1), political affiliation (Democrat = 1), individual citizenship status (non-U.S. citizens = 1), and marriage status (those married or living with a partner = 1). Continuous control variables will include age (“What is your age?”), education (“What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?”), income (“Last year, that is in 2006/2013, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes?”), and political ideology (“In general, would you describe your political views as... Very conservative (1) to Very liberal (5)”). All individual control variables will be grand mean-centered.

***Control Country measures***

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita and income inequality (Gini) will be included as state control variables. Inflation-corrected GDP for each state will be collected from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA; 2022) for the years 2007 and 2014. The Gini data will be attained via the U.S. Census Bureau (2022) for 2014. Since 2010 is the earliest year of Gini data available, this year state scores will be utilized for the 2007 dataset. To be included as level 2 predictors (in a three-level model), the scores for the GDP and Gini indices will be group mean centered based on state means across the two waves. To be included as level 3 predictors, scores for the GDP and Gini indices will be averaged across waves, and then grand mean centered. In a two-level model, the scores created above for levels 2 and 3 will be created for levels 1 and 2.

***Survey Measures***

A dummy code representing the survey of data collection will be included as well (PEW2007 = 0, PEW2014 = 1).

**Planned Analyses**

As noted earlier, two sets of analyses will be conducted, one for the SWB and another for the health problem index. The SWB data will be examined in a three-level multilevel model with individuals (level 1) nested within surveys (level 2), and surveys nested within states (level 3). The variables entered at level 1 will be the group-mean-centered individual religiosity, the grand-mean-centered race dummy code, and the individual demographic control variables. All individual-level variables will be estimated as random effects at the third level. The group-mean-centered scores representing survey variations in state religiosity, racial equality, Gini, and GDP, and the survey variable will be entered as fixed effects at level 2. At level 3, the grand-mean-centered state religiosity, racial equality index, Gini, and GDP scores will be estimated, followed by the two-way and three-way interactions. Similar to the previous two studies, we are primarily interested in the State Religiosity x Racial Equality and the Race x State Religiosity x Racial Equality effects. To repeat, we expect the former to be non-significant and the latter to be significant. The interactions of the survey variable with the aforementioned two-way and three-way interactions (and the required two-way and three-way interactions) will be tested as well.

The index of health problems will be examined in three separate multilevel models, one focused on the health problems of Black participants, another focused on the health problems of White participants, and a third focused on the ratio scores. In each model, surveys (level 1) will be nested within states (level 2); only the survey-level and state-level variables will be included: state religiosity, racial inequality, GDP, and Gini.

Given the exploratory nature of these analyses, the predictions are tentative. A significant State Religiosity x Racial Inequality is anticipated for the health problems index of Black people and for the ratio score but not for the health problems of White people. The interaction of survey with the State Religiosity x Racial Inequality will also be tested for all three models.

**Conclusion**

By examining the relationship between cultural religiosity, manifestations of systemic inequality, and SWB, the proposed work may offer a novel contribution to the cultural fit literature, as well as provide empirical evidence useful in guiding efforts to dismantle gender and racial inequality. To thoroughly address the impacts of inequality on SWB, it is crucial to first understand the nuances of how inequality manifests itself in different contexts. Religiosity is often considered an individual difference variable, a set of beliefs that guide personal choices; however, when shared widely as a cultural norm, those beliefs and behaviors can have unintended consequences for others. Thus, this work may prove particularly beneficial by informing legal policies and humanitarian efforts aimed at making the world a more equitable place.

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