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Gendering (Non)Religion: Politics, Education, and Gender Gaps in Secularity in the United States

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ABSTRACT

Gender gaps in religiosity among Western populations, such that women are more religious than men, are well documented. Previous explanations for these differences range from biological predispositions of risk aversion to patriarchal gender socialization, but all largely overlook the intersection of social statuses. Drawing on theories of intersectionality, we contribute to the cultural and empirical analysis of gender gaps in religiosity by documenting an interactive effect between gender, education, and political views for predicting religious nonaffiliation and infrequent attendance at religious services among Americans. For highly educated political liberals, gender gaps effectively disappear, such that men and women are almost equally likely to be secular (or religious). The results have implications for the long-standing disputes about the gendered "nature" of religiosity and highlight the importance of multiple intersecting statuses and modalities in shaping aggregate patterns of religiosity and secularity.

Keywords: religiosity; secularity; gender gap; politics; education; intersectionality

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between gender and religion is complex, to say the least. A topic concerning gender and religion that has generated an extensive body of empirical research is deciphering why, at population levels, men are consistently less religious than women on a host of religiosity measures. Personality differences (Francis 1997; Francis and Wilcox 1998; Freese and Montgomery 2007), gender orientation (Thompson 1991; Thompson and Remmes 2002), gender role socialization (Levitt 1995), power-control theory (Collett and Lizardo 2009), risk-aversion theory (Miller and Hoffmann 1995; Miller and Stark 2002; Stark 2002), and economic-structural location (Cornwall 1989b; de Vaus 1984; de Vaus and McAllister 1987) have all, to varying degrees, been suggested as explanations. At present, however, the debate continues due to standing critiques of the universality of gender differences in religiosity, as well as the incomplete explanatory power of proposed explanations (Cornwall 2009; Freese 2004; Hoffmann 2009; Roth and Kroll 2007; Sullins 2006).

Rather than attempting to validate any of these competing explanations, we pursue a related, but inverted, question compared to the general trend in previous literature on gender and religiosity. Where most extant work concentrates on how women are more religious than men, we focus on the degree to which men are more secular than women. Research on secularity mirrors the gender and religiosity literature, showing that men are more likely to be secular (Bainbridge 2005; Baker and Smith 2009a, 2015; Glenn 1987; Hayes 2000; Kosmin et al. 2009; Tamney, Powell, and Johnson 1989). While religiosity and secularity are two-sides of a continuum, they can present important differences in theoretical reasoning. In the case of the U.S., to explain the absence of religion we must theorize about an achieved status that challenges existing social conventions (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2007).[1] In short, we seek to explain

when and why women are secular at rates equal to men – a unique, and to date, ignored vantage point.[2] Recently, a rapidly expanding literature has begun examining secularity in American life. Multiple social statuses, including gender, are significantly related to individual levels of secularity. We connect this literature to the gender-religiosity question.

We emphasize the importance of intersecting social statuses – the notion that individual religiosity or secularity is shaped by numerous, overlapping social categories occupied – as key to understanding gender differences in religiosity. This perspective takes into account the fact that women are not more religious than men at all times, places, and contexts (see Miller 2000; Sullins 2006). By analyzing intersecting social categories, we can examine when and why there are (or are not) gender differences in religiosity and secularity. Intersectionality theory emphasizes the inherent complexity of social life (Davis 2008; Hancock 2007; McCall 2005; Prins 2006). Notably, prior research on gender differences in religiosity largely overlooks the intersection of social categories. We remedy this oversight, extending existing research by demonstrating that questions of gender and religiosity are necessarily political and related to levels of education. First, however, we review pervious literatures in multiple areas that converge to provide the foundation for our study.

GENDER AND RELIGIOSITY

The gendered patterning to religiosity, such that women express higher rates of supernatural belief (Sherkat 2008), religious practice (Baker 2008; Levin, Taylor, and Chatters 1994), and organizational affiliation (Hayes 2000) compared to men represents one of the most consistent, yet least understood findings in the empirical study of Western religion (Walter and Davie 1998). Empirical tests of gender differences in religiosity focusing on social factors such as the role of child rearing, attitudes toward work, and workforce participation produced mixed

and inconclusive results (*cf*. de Vaus 1984; de Vaus and McAllister 1987; Gee 1991; Steggarda 1993; Ulbrich and Wallace 1984).

The persistent empirical finding of gender differences in religiosity coupled with the absence of empirical support for proposed socialization explanations led some prominent sociologists to throw support behind physiological differences as accounting for the gaps (Miller and Hoffmann 1995; Miller and Stark 2002; Stark 2002). Not surprisingly, using the absence of an adequate empirical explanation as evidence in support of biological differences struck other researchers as ill-conceived, and several subsequent studies criticized the biological/risk-preference model both theoretically and empirically (Carroll 2004; Freese 2004; Freese and Montgomery 2007; Roth and Kroll 2007). Further, creative empirical studies show that religiosity is more connected to cultural and personal constructions of "femininity" than to biological sex characteristics (Thompson 1991; Thompson and Remmes 2002), and refinements in empirical tests indicate that the gender gap is larger for private forms of piety compared to participation in public rituals, and show that the gap is not universal, with notable exceptions in Jewish and Muslim populations (Sullins 2006), complicating the simplified view that women are "naturally" more religious. Many researchers have attempted to unpack these differences further by focusing on "personality differences" as the mechanism linking gender to religious expression (Francis 1997; Francis and Wilcox 1998; Freese and Montgomery 2007; Levitt 1995; Suziedelis and Potvin 1981).

To date, only one study has successfully framed gender gaps in religiosity in terms of social power coupled with a strong confirmatory empirical finding. Collett and Lizardo (2009) employed "power-control," a criminological theory, to help explain differences in religiosity between men and women. Using data from the General Social Surveys, they found that women

raised by mothers with higher levels of personal (rather than familial) socioeconomic status (SES) had lower levels of religiosity than women raised by mothers with lower SES. This points to the role of gender socialization and others' expectations as integral pieces of the puzzle concerning gender gaps in religiosity. Yet, not a single quantitative study that explicitly examines gender gaps in religiosity accounts for a factor that can help explain the differences in a more culturally meaningful way: political ideology. Even Collett and Lizardo failed to control for political identity. This is a glaring omission, as political traditionalism or progressivism may help account for the differences in religiosity.

POLITICS, EDUCATION, AND SECULARITY

In contrast to the literature on gender and religiosity, political identity has become a central focus of investigations of secularity. In general, secular individuals tend to be more politically progressive (Baker 2012; Hadaway and Roof 1979; Lim, MacGregor, and Putnam 2010; Roof and McKinney 1987; Vargas 2012; Williamson and Yancey 2013). More specifically, political position has played a critical role in the rapid increase in Americans claiming no religion beginning in the 1990s (Putnam and Campbell 2010). Hout and Fischer (2002, 2014) propose that the divisive use of religious identity by political parties led to a withdrawal from religion by many opposed to Right-wing political organizations. Missing from these analyses, however, is any discussion of possible differences by gender or the potential influence of education as it relates to gender or political differences.

Educational attainment plays a prominent role in Enlightenment-inspired theories of secularization, with the notion that there are irreconcilable differences between the content taught in colleges and universities and the beliefs of certain religions (Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977; Lehman 1972). More recent studies highlight how increases in education change

individuals' social networks, which can also lead to secularity (Baker and Smith 2009a; Maryl and Uecker 2011); however, recent empirical studies reveal an even more complex relationship between education and religiosity or secularity. In effect, higher levels of education simultaneously make individuals more likely to join groups, including religious congregations, but also more skeptical about supernaturalism and religious exclusivism (see Hill 2011).[3]

Still other studies highlight the possibility of an inverse causal relationship. Instead of higher education leading people to abdicate previous forms of religiosity, particular religions (or being non-religious) may influence education outcomes. For instance, conservative Protestants are much less likely to pursue advanced degrees (Darnell and Sherkat 1997; Massengill 2008), and this is especially true for conservative Protestant women (Sherkat and Darnell 1999; Wilson and Sherkat 1994). Overall, it has become clear that the relationship between religion and education is complex and highly contingent on a number of intersecting factors (see Mayrl and Oeur 2009; Mayrl and Uecker 2011; Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007). Political views are likely part of this contingency, especially because religion has become more politicized in domestic American politics over the past thirty-five years (see Domke and Coe 2010).

Further, the issues that have become prominent set pieces in the political "culture wars" centrally involve matters of gender and sexuality. For instance, opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment and the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade* served as catalysts for the mobilization of the Religious Right (Hunter 1991), and connections between religiosity and political conservatism have grown stronger in the past thirty years (Putnam and Campbell 2010). This process is partly responsible for the increasing number of Americans claiming no religion, but whether it affects how education relates to religiosity or secularity has yet to be explored. For example, while demonstrating the changing effect of education across cohorts and finding that

women are still *less likely* than men to report non-affiliation or no attendance at religious services even when controlling for the age, period, and cohort effects of increasing education, Schwadel (2014) also failed to account for political identity as a possible intervening factor in these processes. Moving beyond prior literature, we explore how education and politics interactively affect gender gaps in religiosity and secularity.

GENDER, POLITICS, EDUCATION, AND SECULARITY

As we have noted, prior empirical research on the gender gap in religiosity, and secularity by extension, largely ignores the intersection of social categories – in this case gender, education, and political identity – despite strong arguments for the importance of accounting for intersections among multiple social dimensions and modalities (Cornwall 2009, 252; Woodhead 2008). What is termed "intersectionality theory" encompasses a vast literature (see Davis 2008; Hancock 2007; McCall 2005; Prins 2006 for overviews). As originally posited, intersectionality refers to the interaction of multiple social statuses individuals occupy, particularly in relation to experiences of exclusion and subordination (Collins 2000). From this perspective, social reality exists as the *confluence* of multiple factors rather than there being simultaneous yet distinct social categories. Intersectionality emphasizes how categorical identities are experienced and lived out in relation to other social institutions (and therefore statuses) (Prins 2006), foregrounding "the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations as [its] central category of analysis" (McCall 2005, 1771). For example, social class is constantly lived within the modalities of ethnicity and gender, ethnicity is experienced within the modalities of gender and class, and, for the purposes of the present analysis, religion is always lived within the modalities of gender, education level, and political

alignments. Human experience cannot be reduced to single characteristics where social categories are considered at the exclusion of others.

Because intersectionality highlights the importance of power (and the effects of not having access to power), it sensitizes researchers to the variety of ways individuals may interact with and experience certain social institutions. Standpoint theory emphasizes that shared knowledge about the social world emerges from the intersection of various social modalities, and thus dominant ideologies tend to reproduce the views of the powerful, at the expense of the subjugated (Collins 2000; Hartsock 1983; Smith 2004).[4] The experiences of people from a particular standpoints may differ, even when interacting with the same social institutions. The norms of a particular institution may reflect one's privileged standpoint without notice, while interactions for those in other(ed) standpoints are much more problematic. For people who occupy social positions at intersections of status dimensions that do not "fit" well with the norms privileged by a social institution, different patterns and forms of interactions with the social institution—and ultimately also the outcomes related to such interactions—are likely.

When thinking about gender and religion in the context of politics and education, the potential for differential experiences becomes clear. Generally speaking, successful organized religious groups espouse versions of gender traditionalism (Edgell 2006). While some religious traditions may be "feminized," most are still "gendered" masculine because men continue to dominate access to resources and positions of power (Adams 2007; Cadge 2004; Whitehead 2013). As a result, highly educated, politically progressive women likely experience the institution of religion in vastly different ways than women with lower levels of education and/or who are politically conservative. The former may find a complete lack of "fit", while the latter is more likely to find that religion reflects their own standpoint. As Becker and Hofmeister (2001,

719) point out, women who are religiously uninvolved tend to perceive a mismatch between religion and their own lifestyles and worldviews. Applying an intersectionality perspective to the question of gender gaps in religion highlights how the cultural fit of religious institutions varies depending on factors of relative social location that shape women's (and men's) identities. Although intersectionality can be personalized in the sense that one's biographical history of experiences shapes narrativized status identity, we apply the idea at the level of status categories, as social statuses effectively shape population distributions of particular "standpoints" through relative social positioning. This in turn influences experiences individuals have interacting with social institutions. These experiences become part of biographical identity narratives that then influence if and how people interact with a given institution—religion, in the present case.

While a vast majority of the work in intersectionality deconstructs analytical categories with the intent of giving voice to subordinated and oppressed groups, another defining characteristic and strength of theories of intersectionality is that they are open-ended, allowing for flexibility in application (Davis 2008). Intersectionality is a general characteristic of the social world, meaning it holds applicability beyond particular or oppressed groups (Choo and Ferree 2010), and offers an approach to studying social phenomena that is combinatorial, not merely additive. Strictly additive approaches are limited because they only measure the collective influence of a host of social categories as a sum of their individual effects (Hankivsky 2012). Instead, modelling relationships between social statuses and examining how they interact allows for a more nuanced, and accurate view of social experiences, identities, and systems.

In particular, we are interested in how educational experiences and political identity intersect in relation to secularity, as well as how their intersection structures the relationship between gender and secularity. We draw on theories of intersectionality and test whether and

how each of the social factors under consideration—gender, education level, and political views—interactively produce differential probabilities of secularity.

DATA

To examine these relationships, we use the cumulative data file for the General Social Surveys (GSS). The GSS has been collected by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago since 1972. Initially administered annually, it has been collected biannually since 1994. We use pooled data across the 1972 to 2010 waves (see Smith, Marsden, and Hout 2015). The GSS is designed to be a nationally representative dataset for non-institutionalized, English-speaking adults in the United States.[5] The data collection is done through multi-stage probability sampling using geographic quotas for sex, age, and employment. The data for the surveys were collected in face-to-face interviews. All analyses were weighted by the variable WTSSALL.[6]

In the online appendix, we also show the results of parallel analyses using the Pew Religious Landscape Survey (2007) and cumulative National Election Surveys (after 1960) to test the proposed relationships between gender, political views, and education for predicting secularity. The analyses of multiple datasets provides for a more rigorous investigation of these relationships and ensures the patterns we outline are robust, a particularly important step amid concerns over the replicability of studies in the social sciences (see the Open Science Collaboration 2015). Each of these datasets provide enough cases to allow for testing the proposed interactions without the problem of too many sparse cells, which can produce unreliable results (Agresti 2002; Agresti and Yang 1987).[7] The appendix also presents analyses of GSS data examining whether there have been changes to the relationships between secularity

and gender, education, or political identity over time, with results indicating a shrinking gender gap and an increasing political gap in infrequent attendance at religious services.

MEASURES

Dependent Variables

To assess religious nonaffiliation, we used a variable that asked respondents, "What is your religious preference?" Those who reported their religion as "no religion" were coded as 1, while all religiously affiliated respondents were coded as 0. To assess infrequent religious practice, we used a question that asked, "How often do you attend religious services?" Those who responded "once or twice a year" or less were coded as 1, while all those who report attending more than once or twice a year were coded as 0.

Primary Independent Variables

Our primary independent variables of interest are gender, educational attainment, and political conservatism. Gender was coded so that women = 1. Education was measured in attainment categories ranging from less than a high school degree (0) to a graduate or professional degree (4). Political liberalism or conservatism was based on self-placement on the following scale: "extremely liberal" (1), "liberal (2), "slightly liberal" (3), "moderate, middle of the road" (4), "slightly conservative" (5), "conservative" (6), and "extremely conservative" (7).

We created four interaction terms: gender*degree attained; gender*political conservatism; degree attained*political conservatism; and gender*degree attained*political conservatism. To assess the proposed interaction between gender, education, and political conservatism, it is also necessary to account for the lower order effects of the interactions between gender and education, gender and political position, and education and political conservatism (e.g., Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008).

Control Variables

We also control for a number of variables known to be related to secularity. As secularity has become more common in the U.S. in the past twenty years, we controlled for the year the survey was administered. A control for age in years was also included. For race, we included two dummy variables for black and "other" races, with whites as the suppressed category. Marital status was divided into a series of dummy variables for never married, divorced, separated, and widowed, with currently married as the contrast category. Number of children was also used as a control. Region of the country was divided into South, Northeast, Midwest, and West based on designations from the Census Bureau. South was used as the suppressed category in multivariable models. We accounted for family income using a variable that measures income across the years of the GSS in constant dollars. To account for workforce participation, we used a variable for the number of hours worked in the last week. Those who were not employed at the time of the survey were coded as working zero hours the previous week. Finally, as a proxy for the SES of one's parents, we used measures for the highest degree earned by a respondent's mother and father.[8]

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

For both outcomes, we present five binary logistic regression models. The first includes the primary independent and control variables. The next three models add each of the lower order interactions, one at a time. A significant positive interaction between gender and education level signals that higher education has a stronger influence on secularity for women compared to men, while a significant negative interaction between gender and political position signals that political liberalism has a stronger influence on secularity for women compared to men. A significant negative interaction between political views and educational attainment indicates that

higher education has a stronger influence on moving political liberals away from religion compared to political conservatives. The fifth and final models test the "triple interaction," while accounting for all three of the lower order interactions and the control variables. We use the results from these models to determine and display graphically the predicted probabilities of secularity for respondents with varying characteristics of gender, educational attainment, and political views (see Long 1997). This allows us to examine gender gaps in secularity both statistically and substantively after accounting for the inter-relationships between gender, education, and political views.[9]

In tables we present unstandardized binary logistic regression coefficients, as these were the results used to graphically depict the relationships of interest; however, due to the large sample size, statistical significance differentiates little in terms of the relative impact exerted by the different independent variables in the baseline models. Therefore, we calculated fully standardized coefficients to determine which variables were the strongest predictors of secularity (see Menard 2011). We report these coefficients (β) in the main text. All variables were mean centered before entry into the models in order to make the constant a meaningful term in the baseline models (logged predicted probability at the mean of all variables), and also to facilitate the calculation of the predicted probabilities for the interaction models by placing all controls at their respective means.

FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the results of the models predicting religious nonaffiliation. In Model 1, the strongest predictors, in order of strength, were political conservatism (β = -.511), year of the survey (β = .407), living in the West as compared to the South (β = .357), gender (β = .-.312), and age (β = -.289). In Model 2, the interaction between gender and educational attainment is

not significant, indicating little difference between men and women concerning the effect of education on claiming no religion, at least absent being considered in conjunction with political position. In Model 3, the interaction between gender and political position is significant, such that increased liberalism has a significantly larger effect on increasing the probability of secularity among women compared to men.

In Model 4, the interaction between political position and education is strong and significant, such that higher levels of education have a stronger effect on claiming no religion for politically liberal Americans. The interaction effect is the strongest variable in the model (β = -.425), followed closely by the year of the survey (β = .418) and the lower order education variable (β = .401), which represents the effect of education on secularity for political liberals. This helps untangle some of the contingent effects of education on religiosity and secularity, as the political position of individuals strongly conditions the influence of educational attainment.

<Table 1 about here>

Model 5 adds the coefficient for the interaction between gender, education, and political views, which is negative and significant. The results from this model are graphed in Figure 1. Shown on the graph are the effects of educational attainment for “extremely liberal,” “moderate,” and “extremely conservative” men and women. By providing the predicted probabilities at the extremes and middle of political position, we show the basic parameters and mid-point of the relationship of interest. For those who are politically conservative, there is very little chance of claiming no religion, and the gap between men and women widens slightly as levels of education increase. The gender gap in nonaffiliation also increases as education rises for political moderates, with moderate men becoming more likely to claim no religion as education level increases, while moderate women become slightly less likely to be religious

nones as educational attainment rises. In sharp contrast, the gender gap closes with higher levels of education for those who are liberal. Among the "extremely liberal" with less than a high school degree, men (probability of .17) are more than twice as likely to claim no religion compared to women (probability of .08). For liberals at the highest levels of education, men have a probability of .31 for being a religious none; very similar to the .30 probability for women.[10]

<Figure 1 about here>

Table 2 presents the results of the regression models predicting infrequent attendance at religious services. The strongest predictors of non-attendance in Model 1 were, in order of strength: political conservatism (β = -.329), the difference between black and white respondents (β = -.293), the difference between living in the West and the South (β = .257), gender (β = -.246), and education (β = -.191). Notably, the influence of education is in the opposite direction for predicting service attendance compared to claiming no religion. Higher levels of education predict higher levels of service attendance, but lower levels of religious affiliation. These divergent effects represent two patterns. The tendency for higher levels of education to lead to lower levels of supernaturalism (Baker 2012; Sherkat 2008) *and* to higher levels of participation in voluntary associations (Helliwell and Putnam 2007).

In Model 2, the lower order interaction between gender and education level is non-significant, while the interactions between gender and political position in Model 3 and between education and political position in Model 4 are both significant.[11] In Model 4, the interaction between political conservatism and education is the strongest predictor in the model (β = -.299), followed by the difference between black and white respondents (β = -.290), living in the West (β = .256), and gender (β = -.249).

<Table 2 about here>

Model 5 adds the interaction term for gender, education, and political conservatism, which is significant and negative. The results from the model were again used to determine the predicted probabilities for respondents with different combinations of characteristics, as shown in Figure 2. Among both politically moderate and conservative respondents, higher levels of education lead to a lower probability of infrequent attendance at religious services, and the effects are roughly equivalent between men and women. Among political liberals, the story is quite different. Among liberal men, education has a negative effect on non-attendance, although the effect is not as strong as among political moderates or conservatives. Among politically liberal women, however, increased education *increases* the probability of not attending religious services. This is the only set of characteristics for gender, education, and political views for which higher education increases the probability of infrequent service attendance. There is a substantial gap between the probability of liberal men without a high school degree infrequently attending religious services compared to women with the same educational and political characteristics (.56 to .47), but *there is no gender gap* between highly educated political liberals (both .52). For both infrequently attending religious services and claiming no religion, men and women have an equal likelihood of being (non)religious when they have higher levels of educational attainment and maintain a politically progressive stance.

<Figure 2 about here>

DISCUSSION

Although we found no gender differences in the generalized effects of educational attainment on secularity, political position has a stronger effect on secularity for women compared to men. Meanwhile, the relationship between education level and secularity is highly

dependent upon political position. Finally, there are significant differential effects between men and women regarding the interactive influence of education level and political position on secularity. These empirical findings provide support for the notion that patterns of religiosity and secularity are shaped by numerous, overlapping social categories, highlighting the importance of accounting for intersecting social statuses in examining gender differences in religiosity or secularity.

These findings have three notable implications for ongoing discourse and research about the relationship between gender and religiosity (and secularity). First, politics and political positioning must necessarily be part of the discussion. Over the past thirty-five years, religion has become more politicized in domestic politics in the United States, often concerning matters of gender, sexuality, and the family. Religious leaders have exercised their moral authority on family and gender traditionalism in an attempt to gain political clout and achieve a particular vision of American society. While policy efforts in these areas have been mixed at best, and produced unintended consequences (such as driving large numbers of people away from organized religion), the Religious Right placed at center stage a "culture war" where the range of choices available to men and women in the realms of gender, sexuality, and the family were either supported or suppressed in gendered ways in the context of their interactions with social institutions – particularly religion and politics. Therefore, the role of political views in shaping religious identity, and vice versa, must be considered in work seeking to understand the gendered "nature" of religion. Beyond the case of the U.S., questions of both gender and religion are *necessarily political*, and should be considered as such. Further, debates about political traditionalism or progressivism typically involve matters of gender and sexual politics, with particular focus on issues involving women's bodies and social roles.

Second, the influence of education on religiosity and secularity must also be considered in concert with political views. As studies begin to unravel the contingent and complex relationship between education and religion, political views should be a focal point. An important part of this will be tracking the religious and political views of adolescents as they progress through various forms of education, documenting how and under what conditions education changes, or entrenches, pre-existing worldviews. Education is an inherently malleable institution. The meaning and influence of education is mediated by the educational environment, but also by students' developing understandings of politics, religion, and gender.

Third, the relatively consistent empirical gender gaps in Western religiosity should not be taken as evidence of innate biological differences or as due to single-factor social explanations. Instead, scholars should interrogate the social and cultural processes at play and the complex cultural cues men and women receive from their particular contexts (e.g., Sullins 2006). Our focus on the intersection of multiple status categories extends the literature on gendered patterns of religiosity, as well as on secularity in the United States. Prior research in both areas depends upon the use of binary, isolated depictions of women and men and therefore "fail[s] to consider the broader institutional arrangements in which people find themselves" (Hoffmann 2009, 238). Our work demonstrates, however, that it is the intersection of institutional arrangements that produces the distribution in social situations where perceptions of "fit" take place at the individual level. Religious and secular identities are situated and constructed in particular cultural locations made up of the intersection of various social statuses.

A puzzle that remains in this line of work is the persistent gap with regard to privatized aspects of religion such as belief in the supernatural and private prayer. We conducted parallel models to those presented on outcomes of dis- or non-belief in God (atheism and agnosticism)

and not praying privately. In those models, the differences between men and women were persistent, even after accounting for the intersection between gender, education, and political position (results available upon request). One possible explanation for this persistence could be that while highly educated, politically liberal women perceive a distinct lack of fit with *organized* religion – given the patriarchal "nature" of most religious institutions – private or individualized manifestations do not present the same obstacles. As Aune (2015) found in her study of the religio-spiritual lives of feminists in the UK, while individuals may be de-churched due to perceived lack of fit with religious organizations, many still emphasize spiritual practices and "lived religion." Notably then, perceived cultural fit with religion depends on whether it is publically or privately expressed. On this front, explanations for gender gaps remain more debatable, including claims that biological characteristics may be playing a role; however, the onus of proof must be on researchers to show how this is the case, rather than merely assumed when other explanations fail.

Our study is limited by its reliance on pooled time-series data, and therefore our inability to establish causal direction with regard to the relationship between education, political ideology, and secularity. While the relationships between these factors are likely reciprocal through time, it may also be true that the causal direction has shifted somewhat across the decades. As Hout and Fischer (2002, 2014) demonstrated, political ideology began to influence religious affiliation to a greater extent in the 1990s, which turned the commonly accepted causal direction of the time – religion influences political ideology – on its head. Accounting for education in this mix further complicates the story. Longitudinal qualitative research and panel data may be the only avenues through which the causal framework of these relationships can be carefully worked out for narrativizing identity and temporal sequence, respectively. Further, the data we analyzed do not

distinguish between type of education (e.g., public vs. private or secular vs. religious), so we are unable to determine whether and how type of schooling influences the patterns we have outlined. Further research with panel data and more granular measures of educational attainment would substantially improve upon the current findings. Our study is also limited by its monolithic measurement of secularity, which contains a number of varying expressions, such as atheism, agnosticism, and nonaffiliated theistic believers, who have distinct profiles with regard to certain aspects of political ideology and gender gaps (Baker and Smith 2009b, 2015, 141). Future studies could expand on the current findings by examining how gender, political views, and education patterns are similar or different across varying types of secularity.

Potential paths for further comparisons of the sociological and psychological factors for predicting religiosity and secularity between men and women are many. Other possibilities include examining how religion relates to individuals who strongly question or violate conventional gender norms, many of which are rooted in religious justifications. This can be done through qualitative (e.g., Moon 2004; Thumma and Gray 2004; Wilcox 2003, 2009), but also quantitative methods (e.g., Sherkat 2002). Future research can continue to draw on intersectionality theory to probe the relationships between various social statuses.

For example, how race and ethnicity intersect with gender, socio-economic status, and political views to influence levels and content of religious expression remains a relatively unexplored aspect of studies of religiosity and secularity. In supplemental models we examined whether the effects of gender, education, and political identity varied across racial groups for predicting claiming no religion and infrequently attending religious services. For white Americans, education increased the probability of claiming no religion for both liberal men and women. For African Americans and those of "other races," increased education had a negative

effect on claiming no religion for liberal men, such that liberal men with low levels of education have higher rates of secularity than well-educated men; however, education has a positive effect on claiming no religion for women who are African American or members of "other races." Meanwhile, concerning non-attendance, for whites and members of "other races," increased education makes liberal women less likely to attend religious services, but has little effect on liberal men. For African Americans, increased education makes both men and women less likely to attend religious services frequently. This makes the effects of increased education on nonaffiliation and attendance for African Americans (more affiliation, less attendance) the inverse of the relationship for whites (less affiliation, more attendance). Yet these findings are only preliminary, as even with pooled GSS data the number of African Americans and respondents of "other races" make it difficult to parse the complex relations between multiple social statuses. These relationships clearly warrant greater attention in future research.[12]

In undertaking further studies in this area, researchers should pay attention to both relevant qualitative research and critical theories of gender and sexuality. Theorists have highlighted how scholars of religion repeatedly fail to adequately conceptualize and incorporate gender into general theory—a critique that obviously applies to the "rational choice" argument that simultaneously reifies and mystifies gender disparity by invoking physiology, but also to theories of secularization (Woodhead 2008). Generally speaking, "dominant theoretical frameworks within the Sociology of Religion often remain gender-blind" (Woodhead 2007, 566; also see Becker 2000; Sointu and Woodhead 2008; Woodhead 2001, 2006). Correcting this oversight means paying greater attention to social power, which necessarily entails examining the political intersections of gender, sexuality, and religion.

Similarly, quantitative researchers should pay greater attention to and make more use of theories of intersectionality. While qualitative and theoretical methods have been the primary strategies for exploring intersectionality, quantitative work outlining the conditional and multiplicative effects of social statuses can further knowledge about larger scale patterns of intersectionality (e.g., Fording, Soss, and Schram 2011; Logan 2010; Schram at al. 2009). Doing so will also allow future analyses to account for the fact that not only are identities intersectional, but that combinatorial distributions of "standpoints" likely produce vastly different experiences (on the aggregate) when individuals from different positions interact with social institutions. The expansion of multiplicative and combinatorial analytical techniques provides ample opportunity in this regard. An extension of intersectionality research beyond the qualitative study of overlapping oppressions stands to both add to the breadth of the theory and provide insight into new areas of research. Such an approach comes closer to understanding the complexity of social reality in comparison to "additive" perspectives (Choo and Ferree 2010, 131; Martin 2004, 1258). To be clear, we are not suggesting a colonization of intersectionality by positivist approaches, but rather greater dialogue between qualitative and quantitative approaches accompanied by a broader recognition of the importance of intersectionality in all dimensions of social life.

In addition to implications for future research, our findings highlight interesting patterns in the process of secularization that has occurred in the U.S. over the past thirty years. While the role of politics has received attention, the potential for higher levels of educational attainment to lead to higher rates of apostasy from organized religion among liberal women has not been discussed. In particular, increasing levels of higher education and political liberalism about issues of gender and sexual politics help explain the substantial differences across generational

cohorts (see Hout and Fischer 2002, 2014; Schwadel 2014). Further, the closing gender gap in non-participation in religious services and the significant difference in the effects of political views for men and women indicate that by taking conservative stances on matters of sexual politics, religious leaders and advocates have ended up disproportionately driving American women out of organized religion. Higher levels of educational attainment among women and increasing political liberalism on matters of gender and sexuality among younger cohorts of Americans suggest this process of secularization is likely to continue in the near future, and also that gender gaps in religiosity and secularity will continue to shrink (Trzebiatowska and Bruce 2012).

CONCLUSION

Integrating previously separate strands of literature allowed us to extend these lines of inquiry, especially concerning aggregate differences in religiosity by gender, as well as the relationships between secularity, education, and political identity. By accounting for the complex relationships between religion, gender, education, and political identity, we proposed and tested a previously unexamined mechanism that helps explain the gender gaps in religiosity and secularity. Theoretically, we extended intersectionality theory to study a topic novel to this approach. The politicization of religion in the U.S., particularly regarding issues of gender and sexual politics, produces differential gender gaps in religiosity across varying levels of education and political identification. These findings illustrate some of the conditions under which gender differences in religiosity and secularity do and do not occur. For highly educated, political liberal Americans, gender differences in secularity effectively disappear. Further examinations of these

findings in additional contexts are necessary and warranted, as are further explorations of how gender intersects with other social institutions (and therefore statuses) in relation to religion.

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Table 1. Religious Nonaffiliation Regressed on Interactions of Gender, Education, and Political Position

Variables	*Model 1*	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	*Model 4*	*Model 5*
Women	-.627***	-.647***	-.408***	-.638***	-.888***
Degree	.074***	.069**	.073***	.352***	.248***
Political conservatism	-.376***	-.376***	-.351***	-.236***	-.265***
Year	.036***	.036***	.036***	.037***	.037***
Age	-.017***	-.017***	-.107***	-.018***	-.018***
Black[a]	-.594***	-.594***	-.592***	-.576***	-.574***
Other race[a]	-.278***	-.278***	-.275***	-.282***	-.280***
Divorced[b]	.450***	.450***	.448***	.440***	.439***
Separated[b]	.582***	.583***	.581***	.588***	.586***
Never married[b]	.191***	.191***	.190***	.185***	.181***
Widowed[b]	.012	.014	.014	.019	.019
Children	-.148***	-.148***	-.148***	-.146***	-.147***
Midwest[c]	.341***	.341***	.341***	.336***	.336***
Northeast[c]	.484***	.484***	.483***	.477***	.474***
West[c]	.906***	.906***	.904***	.904***	.902***
Family income	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Hours worked	-.001	-.001	-.001	-.001	-.001
Mother's degree	-.045	-.045	-.045	-.047	-.048
Father's degree	.053**	.053**	.053**	.054**	.054**
Interactions					
Gender X degree	---	.012	---	---	.267**
Gender X pol. conservatism	---	---	-.062*	---	.083
Degree X pol. conservatism	---	---	---	-.081***	-.049**
Gender X degree X pol. conservatism	---	---	---	---	-.087***
Model stats					
N	29703	29703	29703	29701	29703
Constant	-2.716	-2.716	-2.709	-2.690	-2.694
-2 log likelihood	16551.905	16551.783	16548.017	16509.613	16494.607
Nagelkerke R^2	.160	.160	.161	.163	.164

Data source: 1972-2010 General Social Surveys (unstandardized coefficients shown above, standardized coefficients reported in text)
*** P≤.001 ** P≤ .01 * P≤.05 (two-tailed tests)
a: Contrast category is white
b: Contrast category is currently married
c: Contrast category is South

Table 2. Infrequently Attending Religious Services Regressed on Interactions of Gender, Education, and Political Position

Variables	*Model 1*	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	*Model 4*	*Model 5*
Women	-.493***	-.495***	-.180*	-.501***	-.366**
Degree	-.168***	-.168***	-.169***	.055	.002
Political conservatism	-.242***	-.242***	-.205***	-.155***	-.140***
Year	.016***	.016***	.016***	.016***	.016***
Age	-.005***	-.005***	-.005***	-.005***	-.005***
Black[a]	-.862***	-.862***	-.862***	-.854***	-.853***
Other race[a]	-.472***	-.471***	-.467***	-.478***	-.474***
Divorced[b]	.518***	.518***	.517***	.512***	.512***
Separated[b]	.302***	.302***	.300***	.306***	.302***
Never married[b]	.139***	.139***	.140***	.135***	.134***
Widowed[b]	-.101	-.101	-.098	-.097	-.097
Children	-.100***	-.100***	-.100***	-.098***	-.099***
Midwest[c]	.147***	.147***	.147***	.143***	.143***
Northeast[c]	.350***	.350***	.348***	.344***	.342***
West[c]	.653***	.653***	.653***	.652***	.651***
Family income	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Hours worked	.001	.001	.001	.001	.001
Mother's degree	-.051**	-.052**	-.052**	-.053**	-.054***
Father's degree	.013	.013	.013	.013	.013
Interactions					
Gender X degree	---	.001	---	---	.128*
Gender X pol. conservatism	---	---	-.078***	---	-.024
Degree X pol. conservatism	---	---	---	-.057***	-.042***
Gender X degree X pol. conservatism	---	---	---	---	-.040*
Model stats					
N	29551	29551	29551	29551	29551
Constant	-.671	-.671	-.659	-.663	-.654
-2 log likelihood	36344.833	36344.831	36328.034	36291.401	36266.061
Nagelkerke R^2	.115	.115	.116	.117	.119

Data source: 1972-2010 General Social Surveys (unstandardized coefficients shown above, standardized coefficients reported in text)
*** P≤.001 ** P≤ .01 * P≤.05 (two-tailed tests)
a: Contrast category is white
b: Contrast category is currently married
c: Contrast category is South

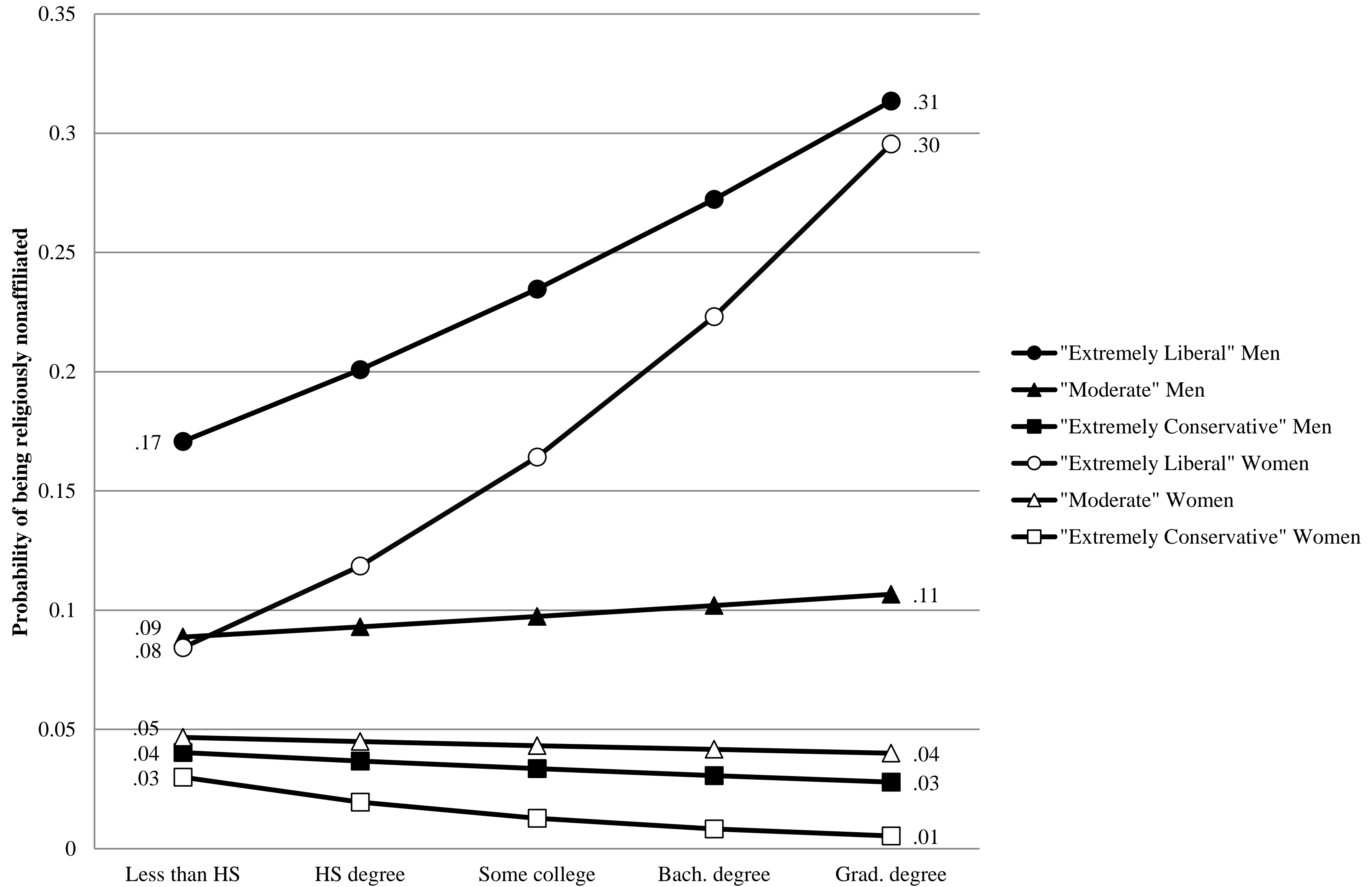
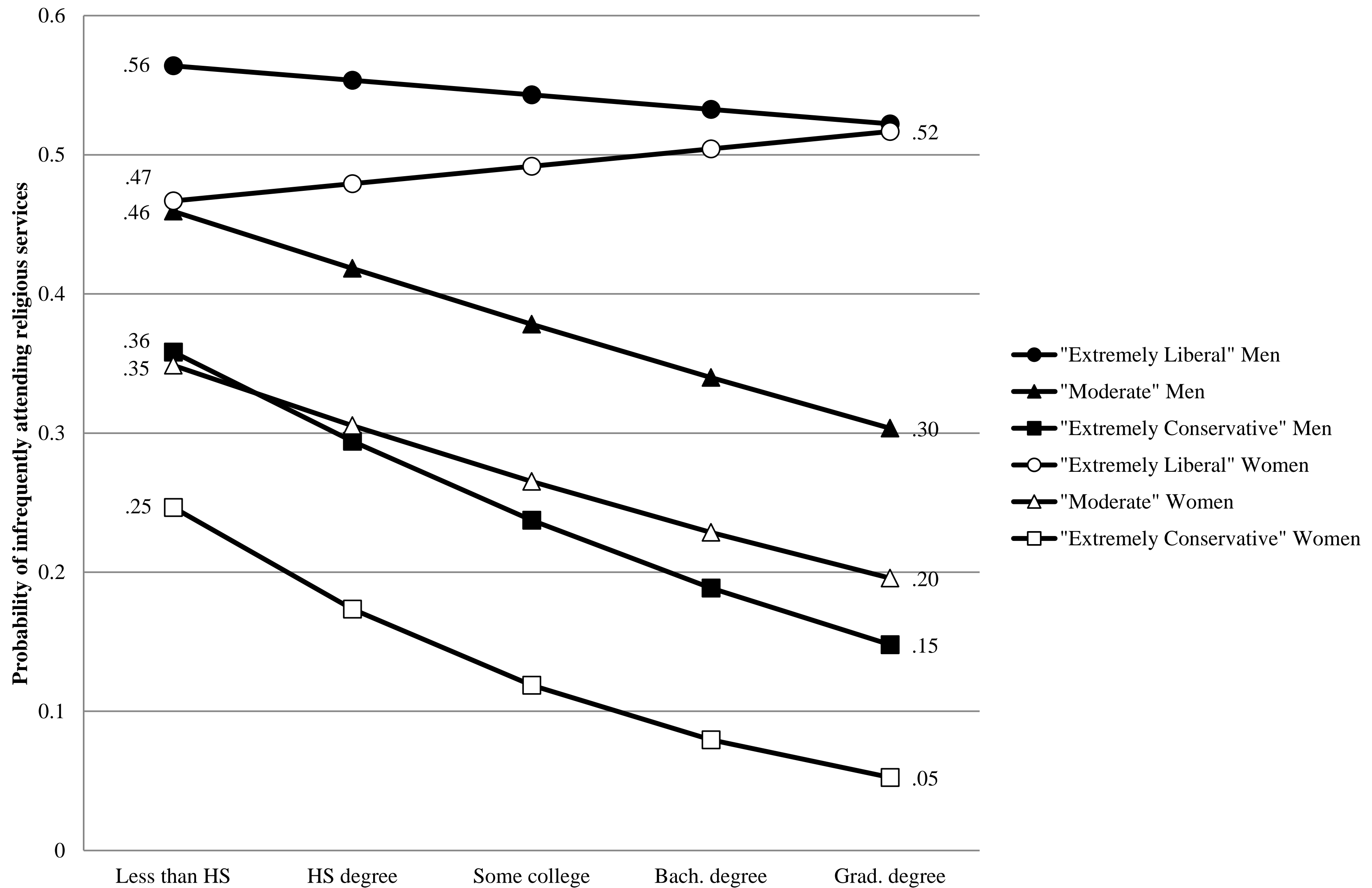


Figure 1. Probability of Religious Nonaffiliation by Gender, Education, and Political Position
Probability of being religiously nonaffiliated
0.35
0.3
0.25
0.2
0.15
0.1
0.05
0
.31
.30
.17
.11
.09
.08
.05
.04
.03
.04
.03
.01
Less than HS
HS degree
Some college
Bach. degree
Grad. degree
"Extremely Liberal" Men
"Moderate" Men
"Extremely Conservative" Men
"Extremely Liberal" Women
"Moderate" Women
"Extremely Conservative" Women

Figure 2. Probability of Infrequently Attending Religious Services by Gender, Education, and Political Position



NOTES

[1] In other cultural contexts secularity is relatively normative (for instance, see Zuckerman 2008), and in cases of politically enforced secularity, religion becomes deviant.

[2] Miller and Hoffmann (1995) and Miller and Stark (2002; Stark 2002) also claim this as their unique insight into the question. Notably, none of these studies actually investigates secularity.

[3] Recent work also suggests that the effect of education on non-affiliation is different across cohorts (Schwadel 2014). The strong, positive effect of education on reporting non-affiliation is weaker among more recent cohorts, and even negative in the youngest cohorts. The connection between education and nonaffiliation is largely driven by the relationship between non-theism (atheism or agnosticism) and education. "Nonaffiliated believers" have significantly lower levels of education compared to non-theists (Baker 2012), and constitute the largest proportion of the increase in nonaffiliation, hence the change in the effects sizes for education across cohorts. In essence, the change in the effects of education reflect the change in the composition of the religious nones category rather than a change in the links between education levels and non-theism.

[4] Empirical findings regarding standpoint theory are mixed, with some finding support (Martin, Reynolds, and Keith 2002) and others less so (Harnois 2010; Simien 2006).

[5] Since 2006, GSS samples have also included Spanish-speaking respondents.

[6] For details on the collection procedures and weights for the GSS, see the Appendix 1 to the codebook for the cumulative data file: http://publicdata.norc.org:41000/gss/documents//BOOK/GSS_Codebook_AppendixA.pdf.

[7] In the GSS 1972-2010 cumulative dataset, a contingency table between gender, education, and political views produces the sparsest cells for men who are junior college graduates and consider themselves "extremely conservative" (n = 11), followed by junior college graduates who consider themselves "extremely liberal" for both women (n = 13) and men (n = 14). Women with a graduate degree who consider themselves "very conservative" were also rare (n = 14).

[8] We use this measure rather than a more comprehensive measure of SES like Collett and Lizardo (2009) because it allows us to preserve more cases, as the parents' education questions have been asked across all waves of the GSS.

[9] While some intersectionality theorists shun the use of quantitative data because of the possibility of overlooking within-group diversity, we follow Hancock's (2007, 66) recommendation that researchers should not "eschew rich

datasets." It is also common for quantitative studies of intersectionality to use interaction effects to introduce more complexity in estimation procedures and interpretation (Hankivsky 2012, 1716; McCall 2005, 1788).

[10] We also assessed the triple interaction of interest with GSS data split by decade (1970s, 80s, 90s, and 2000s). Consistent with the effects shown here, highly educated liberal women were more likely to be secular than highly educated liberal men in seven of the eight models (one for each dependent variable across four decades); however, there were two noticeable breaks in the general patterns shown for the pooled dataset. First, for claiming no religion, in the 1980s and 90s increased education *decreased* the likelihood of claiming no religion for liberal men. Second, in three of the four models predicting infrequent attendance at religious services, liberal women were the only group for whom higher education increased the probability of infrequently attending; however, in the 1980s model, education also increased the probability of infrequent attendance for liberal men. Graphed results of these models are available upon request.

[11] We also used the GSS dataset split by decade to see if there were substantial changes in the interactive relationships between gender and political identity or politics and education. For the effects of political identity by gender, there was relative consistency in the effects across different decades of the GSS, with the exception that political identity became more strongly connected to claiming no religion for men over time. For infrequently attending religious services, the interactive effects of education and political identity have been relatively consistent across different decades of the GSS. In terms of politics and education in relation to claiming no religion, there has been a reduction in the positive effects of education on claiming no religion among political conservatives. As a result, the gap between the education effects for conservatives and liberals has widened. Graphed results of these analyses are available upon request. Due to changes in the relationship between education and secularity for political conservatives and the aforementioned (endnote 3) increase in the proportion of religious nones who are nonaffiliated believers, the overall effect of education on claiming no religion declined over time in our baseline models divided by decade (1970s, $b = .151$, $p = .006$; 1980s, $b = .157$, $p < .001$; 1990s, $b = .027$, $p = .486$; 2000s, $b = .017$, $p = .613$) (also see Schwadel 2014).

[12] Graphed results of these analyses are available upon request. On the relationship of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in relation to secularity in the United States, see Baker and Smith (2015, 115-123).