

## THE HIDDEN COST OF PRAYER: RELIGIOSITY AND THE GENDER WAGE GAP

TRACI SITZMANN  
University of Colorado Denver

ELIZABETH M. CAMPBELL  
University of Minnesota

**Religion is a preeminent social institution that meaningfully shapes cultures. Prevailing theory suggests that it is primarily a benevolent force in business, and differences across world religions preclude examining effects that thread across religions. We develop a theoretical account that fundamentally challenges these assumptions by explaining *how* and *why* religiosity—regardless of which religion is prominent—differentiates based on gender, widening the gender wage gap. Guided by an integrated review of the religion literature, we specify three dimensions of gender differentiation—social domains, sexuality, and agency—that explain why religiosity widens the gender wage gap. A series of studies tested our theoretical model. Two studies showcased the predictive power of religiosity on the gender wage gap across 140 countries worldwide and the 50 United States via gender-differentiated social domains, sexuality, and agency, explaining 37% of the variance in the wage gap. U.S. longitudinal data indicated that the gender wage gap is narrowing significantly faster in secular states. Moreover, experiments allowed for causal inference, revealing that gender-egalitarian interventions blocked the effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap. Finally, theoretical and empirical accounts converge to suggest that religiosity’s effect on the gender wage gap applies across the major world religions.**

Economic inequality is among the most pressing challenges in society, and organizations play a fundamental role in perpetuating inequality and propagating change because they are responsible for allocating the wages that determine most individuals’

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economic and social status (Amis, Mair, & Munir, 2020). Women earn 79% as much as men in the United States (Blau & Kahn, 2017), and 54% as much worldwide (Tyson & Parker, 2019). Research has made substantial strides in understanding the numerous barriers that hinder women’s access to lucrative jobs and the associated social status (Joshi, Son, & Roh, 2015b). However, research has rarely extended beyond the organizational level, necessitating a greater appreciation of how the broader social context affects how organizations allocate wages (Johns, 2006). Understanding the interplay between societal forces and organizations is crucial for addressing the social issues underlying inequality, as well as the challenges organizations may face as they strive for greater equality (Zhao & Wry, 2016).

One of the broadest social institutions that meaningfully shapes norms related to the social expectations and duties of men and women is religion (Du, 2016; Zhao & Wry, 2016). However, management outlets rarely discuss religion, which limits organizational insights and theoretical acumen (Tracey, 2012). It is puzzling that “management scholars have so studiously avoided one of the most pervasive influences in organizations” (Tracey, Phillips, &

Lounsbury, 2014: 4), potentially leading to “an incomplete organizational science” (Chan-Serafin, Brief, & George, 2013: 1596). The limited research has examined how religion shapes business ethics (for a review, see Rashid & Ibrahim, 2008) and predominantly highlighted its constructive implications, such as increased employee prosocial behavior and productivity (e.g., Senger, 1970; Weaver & Agle, 2002). Indeed, prevailing scholarship has described religion as a “benign and positive force” (Chan-Serafin et al., 2013: 1585). Notably absent from this conversation is explicit consideration of the implications of religion for gender attitudes. We develop theory that challenges the view that religiosity is predominantly a benevolent force in the workplace; rather, we theorize that religiosity advocates for gender-differentiated social expectations, which contributes to a larger gender wage gap in religious than in secular cultures.

We utilize a multimethod approach to first build and then test our theoretical model. Foremost, we engage in theory-building through a systematic, integrative review of the religion literature to specify *whether* and *how* religiosity advocates for gender differentiation and to conceptualize drivers that explain *why* religiosity contributes to the gender wage gap. Research on world religions has organically developed in a variety of domains and disciplines, resulting in evidence of sexism in an array of forms, but with little consensus or systematic review of religion’s cultural implications. We advance this literature by “inventing a way of understanding” (Locke, 2011: 631) via synthesizing beliefs and practices to generate a theoretical model of gender differentiation. As part of our theorizing, we document three forms of gender differentiation—social domains, sexuality, and agency—that are invariant across religions, and theorize why each of these forms of gender differentiation explains the effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap. We highlight that, regardless of which religion is predominant in a culture, the cultural importance of religion, or *religiosity*, affects wage equity in the workplace. Thus, we challenge the assumption that examining effects across religions is untenable because significant differences across religions preclude deciphering “the impact of religion *in general* [emphasis in original] on ethical behavior” (Weaver & Agle, 2002: 85).

Next, we test the explanatory power of our theory in a series of three studies. Study 1 showcases the predictive power of religiosity on the gender wage gap across 140 countries worldwide to explicate the external validity of religiosity’s effects. Study 2 replicates these findings across the 50 United States and examines the

extent to which the gender wage gap has narrowed over time in states as a function of their religiosity. Finally, Study 3 experimentally clarifies religiosity’s *causal* effect on the gender wage gap via the theorized explanatory mechanisms, and offers practical insight regarding organizational interventions that block religiosity’s effects, which is invaluable for generating policies that reduce gender-based wage inequality. Combining theory-building with empirical theory-testing ensures that the dimensions of gender differentiation included in the theoretical model are aligned with the religiosity literature, and that the “established theory holds up in the real world” (Edmonson & McManus, 2007: 1156). Convergent results from field and experimental studies build confidence in generalizability, offer constructive replication called for by scholars (e.g., Bergh, Sharp, Aguinis, & Li, 2017), and quantify the extent to which religiosity impacts the gender wage gap.

## CONCEPTUALIZING RELIGIOSITY

Religious culture, or religiosity, reflects the extent to which religion plays an important role in the lives of members of a specific culture or community (MacInnis & Hodson, 2015; Weaver & Agle, 2002). Central to this definition is that the religiosity of a culture is inherently collective and carries meaningful implications at the organizational, state, and country levels of analysis (see Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Religion is defined as an institutionalized, shared set of beliefs and practices that prescribe what is considered right and wrong based on faith in supernatural forces (Parboteeah, Hoegl, & Cullen, 2008). Scholarly analysis has typically focused on religions as types or categories, comparing and contrasting their tenets (e.g., Desai & Tamsah, 2014; Reitz, Phan, & Banerjee, 2015). Rather than contrasting religions, we examine whether there are commonalities across the major world religions that may affect gender attitudes, regardless of which religion is predominant in a culture.

Focusing on religion as a cultural value represents a meaningful contribution to the literature because context has typically been treated as a covariate rather than conceptually considered as a predictor of wage inequality (Johns, 2006; Joshi, et al., 2015a). A byproduct of our inattention to context is limited knowledge of how culture in general, and religiosity in particular, affect wage allocation (Chan-Serafin et al., 2013; Tracey, 2012). Focusing on the broader social context is imperative because organizations that strive for equality may be unsuccessful if the societies in which they operate are unsupportive (Zhao & Wry, 2016).

While it may be accurate to qualify cultures low in religiosity as secular and those high in religiosity as religious, religiosity is best understood on a continuum. Cultures vary from the vast majority of members being religious—such as Morocco, the Philippines, and Qatar—to the vast majority of members being non-religious—such as the Czech Republic, Japan, and Norway. At collective levels of analysis, religiosity reflects whether the preponderance of members agree that religion is important. When the preponderance of members are higher in religiosity, regulations signal social expectations that align with religious values, potentially influencing the behavior of all members of a culture (Adamczyk & Hayes, 2012; Fox, 2006).<sup>1</sup>

Next, we develop theory on *how* and *why* religiosity may affect the workplace in general and the gender wage gap in particular. The themes identified in the qualitative review and their applicability to each of the world religions are summarized in Table 1.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For clarity of exposition, throughout our manuscript we use the term “religious” to refer to cultures high in religiosity and “secular” to refer to cultures low in religiosity, while acknowledging the continuous nature of this construct.

<sup>2</sup> We systematically reviewed the literature on religion and gender, coding for policies, regulations, and expectations across religions while focusing on passages that mentioned gender. Specifically, we searched EBSCO Academic Search Premier and the JSTOR databases for the terms *religio\** and *sex* or *gender* along with the names of the world religions—Buddhism, Christianity, Folk, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism (Pew Research Center, 2014)—to ensure that the articles were representative across faiths. We focused on twenty-first century articles so that our review reflects practices in modern society. The first author initially reviewed articles and highlighted passages focusing on gender. The two authors worked iteratively to identify themes and created a coding scheme to classify passages. The first author then continued coding until concluding that the coding scheme encompassed the literature and attained theoretical saturation, such that the analysis of additional passages led to no new insights (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). We ensured that each theme emerged across religions to provide evidence that the themes are indicative of replicable dimensions of gender differentiation (see Rheinhardt, Kreiner, Gioia, & Corley, 2018). Importantly, every article discussed at least one form of gender differentiation. Throughout the qualitative analysis, the authors strove for reflexivity in interpretation (Charmaz, 2006). Many of the quotes presented in Table 1 and throughout the manuscript are provocative or emotionally charged. They are presented to illustrate the perspectives of the authors we are citing. A total of 133 articles and 1,041 passages were included in the review, representing at least 34 articles per world religion, with 44% of articles discussing multiple religions.

Aligned with the recommendation of Rheinhardt et al. (2018), we include extensive quotes both on Table 1 and throughout the Introduction to increase transparency and illustrate how the themes of gender differentiation manifest across religions.

## CONSEQUENCES OF RELIGIOSITY FOR THE WORKPLACE

### Religiosity, Gender Differentiation, and the Wage Gap

Although the specific beliefs and practices vary across religions, our review highlights a commonality threading through religious cultures: advocacy for differentiation based on gender. As religiosity increases, latitude regarding behavioral expectations narrows, and behavioral expectations differ based on gender. Behaving according to these expectations is important for remaining esteemed members of religious societies (Appleton, 2011; Csinos, 2010).

Gender-based social expectations require that women redefine the meaning of equality to align with religious customs and norms (McBaine, 2012); women should “advocate for a set of rights and provisions that take their particular needs and familial obligations into consideration,” rather than defining equality as similar to men’s positions in society (Gray, 2019: 74). The central premise is that religious societies are fair because men and women can emphasize their distinct strengths while the assets of both genders are valued (Munir, 2002; Tsomo, 2007).

Yet, history has shown that separate is not always equal (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954). In contrast to messages of equality, religious scholarship has also highlighted the “subordinated status of women” (Benjamin, 2019: 9), such that differentiation results in women occupying “marginalized positions within many religious traditions” (Bielefeldt, 2013: 38). Gender differentiation may also not be obvious to members of religious cultures because it is accompanied by benevolent sexism, which idealizes women who adhere to rules for appropriate behavior for members of their gender (Glick, Sakalli-Uğurlu, Akbaş, Orta, & Ceylan, 2016).

Religiosity may perpetuate patriarchal beliefs and practices (Gaunt, 2012; Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017). Historically, patriarchies were a classification of government systems in which men who were the head of their household formally ruled over societies (Weber, 1920/1947). Theoretical treatment of patriarchy has evolved to explain how gender stratification stems from socialization, rather than biology, casting patriarchies as culturally sanctioned systems that

**TABLE 1**  
**Religious Beliefs and Practices that Differentiate Based on Gender for Each of the Major World Religions**

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Differentiation Based on Gender</b>	<b>Social Domain Differentiation: Men's Role is the Public, Professional Domain; Women's Role is the Private, Domestic Domain</b>	<b>Sexuality Differentiation: Men are in Charge of Regulating their Own Sexuality; Women's Sexuality is Subject to External Regulation</b>	<b>Agency Differentiation: Pursuit of Power and Decision-Making Authority is Men's Purview; Women are Heedful of Men's Directive</b>
Buddhism	"The root cause of these practices is extreme misogyny and patriarchy combined with extreme disregard for the worth and well-being of women." (Gross, 2014: 73; former professor of religion, University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, United States)	"It is not just that the maternal experience is valorised by popular religiosity; more to the point, it is a role that is expected of and reached by the overwhelming majority of women." (Andaya, 2002: 7; professor of Asian studies, University of Hawaii, United States)	"The wise Bodhisattva advises the student that his expectations of fidelity are unreasonable and tells him that women are public property, like highways, rivers, and taverns: all who come to them are given hospitality. Wise men should realize this fact and not become angry when women succumb to their desires, because they are incapable of resisting temptation, particularly with regard to sex." (Powers, 2011: 435; professor of Asian studies and Buddhism, Australian National University in Canberra)	"Many lineages don't allow women to become fully ordained." (Chodron, 2009: 24; Buddhist monk, United States)
Christianity	"Christianity is irremediably sexist... it legitimizes male domination and violence toward women." (Noriko, 2003: 303; professor of religion at Nagoya Institute of Technology, Japan)	"Official church teaching materials [encourage] women to choose child rearing and homemaking over having a career." (Jeffries, 2010: 16; Master of American Religious History, and human resources professional for the state of Illinois, United States)	"While society expected females to be monogamous and not engage in sexual promiscuity, males are permitted to do otherwise. Additionally, females are expected to be subservient in sexual relationships and practices, and to 'satisfy' their male partners." (Anarfi & Owusu (2011: 14; Anarfi is a former associate professor of population studies, University of Ghana, Africa)	"The messages about gender conveyed in religious environments are uniquely politically demobilizing for women." (Cassese & Holman, 2016: 515; associate professor of political science, West Virginia University, United States)
Folk	"Sex selective abortions of female fetuses and the neglect of daughters (leading to higher mortality for	"In most religious houses, women's jobs are restricted to the hard labor of domestic work such as cleaning	"Gender discrimination in sexual socialization, expression of sexuality and enforcement of social sanctions	"Confucianism's negative influence on women's social status and gender equality has spread to Chinese

**TABLE 1**  
**(Continued)**

Religion	Differentiation Based on Gender	Social Domain Differentiation: Men's Role is the Public, Professional Domain; Women's Role is the Private, Domestic Domain	Sexuality Differentiation: Men are in Charge of Regulating their Own Sexuality; Women's Sexuality is Subject to External Regulation	Agency Differentiation: Pursuit of Power and Decision-Making Authority is Men's Purview; Women are Heedful of Men's Directive
	girls than boys) are important strategies that couples use to reach their desired sex composition of children while limiting family size." (Bélanger, 2002: 321; associate professor of geography, University of Western Ontario, Canada)	the animals, cooking, decorating, etc." (Marouan, 2018: 61; associate professor of women, gender, and sexuality studies, Pennsylvania State University, United States)	emerged glaringly, with females being at a disadvantaged position." (Anarfi & Owusu, 2011: 16; Anarfi is a former associate professor of population studies, University of Ghana, Africa)	enterprises and thus has led to fewer women directors in the boardroom." (Du, 2016: 403; professor of accounting, Xiamen University, China)
Hinduism	"Culturally, sons are preferred because of religious and social reasons. Sons are necessary for many Hindu rituals and particularly those that ensure the well-being of the soul after death (Kishor, 1995). Socially, sons are preferred because they continue the patriline." (Bose, 2012: 70; associate professor of sociology, State University of New York at New Paltz, United States)	"[There is a focus on] women's submission to male authority within the family and their adherence to forms of behavior that conform to expected female roles of wife and mother. Moreover, these biological roles are essentialized to make women unfit for other occupations." (Choudhury, 2015: 234; law professor, Florida International University, United States)	"This concern with protection of female purity and the control and management of female sexuality has led to several customs and social practices such as child marriage, sati, prohibition of widow remarriage, limitation on physical movement through <i>pardah</i> , i.e., seclusion and segregation, etc." (Chanana, 2001: 42; former professor of social sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India)	"Many Indian women, Hindu and Muslim alike, are illiterate. Learning how to read would go a long way toward lessening their dependence on men. Uneducated women are more likely than educated women to have to rely on men for all kinds of things, including determining whom to vote for." (Spinner-Halev, 2001: 110; professor of political ethics, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, United States)
Islam	"Men are women's protectors and providers ... women must remain subordinate to men and be brought back in line with (albeit mild) punishment when they exert their own will rather than obey men." (Glick et al., 2016: 546; professor of social sciences at Lawrence University, United States)	"Islam sees a woman as a mother, sister, wife, helper, and supporter." (Al-Mannai, 2010: 83; assistant professor of social work, Qatar University)	"The Hudood Ordinance ... extended the definition of zina, sexual intercourse with other than a legitimate partner, to include rape. Extending zina to include rape shifts the focus of all subsequent prosecution from the aggressor to the victim by putting the emphasis on proving or disproving consent instead of on forceful coercion or violation." (Ilkharacan, 2002: 767; psychotherapist,	"They view Muslim men as agents while Muslim women remain the passive objects of male action and power." (Choudhury, 2015: 245; law professor, Florida International University, United States)

**TABLE 1**  
**(Continued)**

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Judaism	"Other traditions and practices also point to the emergence of marriage as the only moment worth celebrating in the Jewish woman's life-span." (Leissner, 2001: 149; independent researcher of law and feminism, Israel)	"Women's honor is inward, taking care of the house, of the men, of the children; providing a safe haven for the men who go about doing their God-given tasks. Men recognize this and thus let them be in charge of household matters." (Cohen-Almagor, 2016: 297; politics professor, University of Hull, United Kingdom)	human rights activist and researcher, Turkey) "Female objects of sex and its discourses abound in the Mishnah and other rabbinic texts; female subjects of sex appear hardly at all." (Baker, 2005: 115; professor of religious studies, Bates College, United States)	"Patriarchy is reflected in Jewish law according to which women's issues are delineated in terms of their relationship to men. Their credibility as witnesses is severely limited, and they are powerless to effect changes in their own marital status." (Gaunt, 2012: 479; associate professor of psychology, University of Lincoln, United Kingdom)

promote power disparities, justifying men's economic and social privilege (Ritzer & Ryan, 2010; Wood & Eagly, 2002).

Our review of the literature revealed that predominant beliefs and practices across all six major world religions—Buddhism, Christianity, Folk, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism (Pew Research Center, 2014)—are used to justify and reinforce patriarchy, while no scholarly work examined in our review argued that religion is matriarchal. It is important to note that, while rare, gender-egalitarian interpretations of religion do exist and have been advanced by feminist religious scholars (e.g., Badran, 2013; Heschel, 2015; Seedat, 2013). While there has been some variability across scholars' views on the extent to which religiosity is patriarchal, the theme of patriarchy has appeared repeatedly to explain why "women have always been relegated to the margins of society" (Inyamah, 2008: 104). Establishing the pervasiveness of patriarchy across the major world religions represents an important contribution because the prevailing view is that patriarchy is uniquely pronounced in Catholicism and Islam (Zhao & Wry, 2016) and

differences in world religions preclude examining commonalities across religions (Weaver & Agle, 2002). It is important to acknowledge that patriarchy can also occur in the absence of religion (e.g., the military), and patriarchy and religiosity are likely mutually reinforcing. A key point of departure is that patriarchal contexts advocate for the dominance of men and the subjugation of women (Walby, 1990), whereas religiosity emphasizes that men and women are different and serve specialized roles. We are focusing on the effects of religiosity because it is an institutionalized, visible element of culture that has largely been overlooked by the management literature (Chan-Serafin et al., 2013; Tracey, 2012), whereas Zhao and Wry (2016) made substantial strides in understanding the intersection of gender and patriarchy.

Preferential treatment of men can devalue women, as illustrated in Table 1's column on *Differentiation Based on Gender* and the two quotes below. Themes include socializing women to believe they are inherently inferior to men, condoning violence against women, and treating women as men's property. While the justification

for women's inferior status varies across religions, the consequence is the same: Religiosity advances differentiated social expectations on the basis of gender that legitimize men's preeminence over women.

Patriarchy is reflected in Jewish law according to which women's issues are delineated in terms of their relationship to men. Their credibility as witnesses is severely limited, and they are powerless to effect changes in their own marital status (Adler 1999). Gender differentiation is similarly extensive. The Jewish tradition defines separate spheres for men and women, with men occupying the public sphere and women limited to the private sphere. Accordingly, women are exempted from many of the religious rituals that could undermine their devotion to domestic responsibilities. (Gaunt, 2012: 479; associate professor of psychology, University of Lincoln, United Kingdom)

Islamic discourses and practices such as Qur'anic scripture and the legal rules of shari'a are in particular perceived to entail inherently non-egalitarian gender relations. (Diehl, Koenig, & Ruckdeschel, 2009: 282; Diehl is a professor of sociology at the University of Konstanz, Germany)

Religiosity espouses that men and women differ in their innate social functions, as ordained by god himself (emphasizing that god is male in nearly all religions [Appleton, 2011; Miller, 2013]). Men endorse women's subordinate status to legitimize their privilege, fostering hostile sexist beliefs (Glick et al., 2016). Evoking supernatural forces to justify gender differentiation also stifles female advocacy because "humans cannot change the divinely mandated roles of men and women" (Choudhury, 2015: 236).

Collective beliefs and practices that differentiate between men and women underlie nonmeritocratic wage allocation (Amis et al., 2020; Follesdal, 2005). We propose that gender-differentiated social expectations that advantage men in religious cultures permeate into the workplace, affecting how men's and women's contributions are valued. Illustrating the effect of religiosity on business practices, banks in Islamic cultures must comply with prohibitions against interest and dealings with the pornography, pork, and alcoholic beverage industries (Chan-Serafin et al., 2013). We argue that religiosity also affects wage allocation, such that the beliefs and practices illustrated in Table 1 lead to men's workplace contributions being more highly valued than women's contributions, regardless of the quality of output. This premise is aligned with research indicating that the cultural environment in which a firm operates

can foster stereotypical expectations and status cues associated with gender, advantaging men over women in wage allocation (Joshi et al., 2015b). Religiosity advances the view that "there are biological imperatives at work that determine what women and men get in their pay packet" (Choudhury, 2015: 235). This gender bias may undermine meritocratic reward allocation, such that men's actions may be more highly valued, even when men and women have comparable performance, resulting in wage discrimination (Joshi et al., 2015b; Styhre, 2014).

*Hypothesis 1. Religiosity has a positive effect on the gender wage gap.*

Gender-based prescriptive and proscriptive roles can be intensified and relaxed based upon the nature of the stereotype (Prentice & Carranza, 2002), and differentiated gender roles are especially pronounced in religious cultures (Soucy, 2009; Yancey & Kim, 2008). Although the specific beliefs and practices vary across religions, we identify three dimensions of gender differentiation from our conceptual review: social domains, sexuality, and agency. Each dimension reflects the extent to which the culture levies stronger and gender-differentiated (versus weaker and undifferentiated) expectations on the basis of gender. Although these dimensions are interrelated, we contend that each specifies distinct ways in which expectations manifest for men and women across the spectrum of religious cultures. Below, we conceptualize the dimensions in turn, and explain how they operate as mechanisms through which religiosity affects wage inequality.

### **Explanatory Mechanism: Social Domain Differentiation**

Pope Francis appeared to bow to pressure from Catholic conservatives ... when he delivered a robust affirmation of the importance of the traditional family. (Squires, 2014: para. 1, regarding Christianity; journalist for *The Telegraph*, Rome, Italy)

There is a hierarchy of tasks wherein domestic chores occupy the lowest place. The hierarchy of male and female tasks within the domestic realm correspond with those associated with the pure/high castes and polluting/low castes. For instance, women perform the polluting/inferior tasks associated with the caste system and this sexual division of labour reaffirms their low valuation due to the impurity inherent in them during menstruation and childbirth. (Chanana, 2001: 53, regarding Hinduism; former professor, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India)

As illustrated by these quotes, our review revealed that each of the major world religions advocates for *gendered social domain differentiation*, defined as the extent to which the culture levies differentiated and tighter expectations regarding whether members should focus primarily on their career or familial responsibilities. Although most cultures differentiate between the genders to some degree, this is amplified in religious cultures. While secular cultures may presume that everyone can pursue career aspirations, contribute to domestic responsibilities, and have the discretion to define the balance that works for them, religious cultures advocate that men and women should emphasize different social domains: women's role is the private, domestic domain, while men's role is the public, professional domain (Table 1, column 3).

Religious societies tend to reinforce traditional values, such that women are expected to engage in socially facilitative behaviors on the home front, while men are expected to engage in task-oriented behaviors in the workforce (Judge & Livingston, 2008; Wood & Eagly, 2002). These differentiated roles are characterized as "innate," such that expectations for men and women "are natural to them" (Cohen-Almagor, 2016: 292). A clear division of labor is normalized, such that "from infancy girls are socialised to help, to be submissive and to learn the centrality of their domestic realm" (Chanana, 2001: 53). The importance of family is deeply ingrained in religious cultures, such that it is admirable for women to prioritize their families over economic pursuits (Follesdal, 2005; Gaunt, 2012). If women do enter the workforce, the expectation is that they will put their family first (Janer-Klausner, 2012).

Reproduction is essential to women's domestic realm, such that the "maternal experience is valorised by popular religiosity ... it is a role that is expected of and reached by the overwhelming majority of women" (Andaya, 2002: 7). Rather than acquiring value from the workforce, motherhood affirms women's value in the community (Braasch, 2010; Choudhury, 2015). In some cultures, men have the right to divorce wives who do not meet this core expectation of the domestic social domain; namely, if they are infertile (Anarfi & Owusu, 2011). In others, the public-private divide is so extreme that women do not enter the public sphere (Desai & Tamsah, 2014). This reproductive obligation is so fundamental that religious cultures withhold or make it challenging to attain access to birth control and abortion (Ariyabudhiphongs & Buaphoon, 2013). For example, U.S. organizations are permitted to refuse insurance coverage for contraception based on religious or moral

objection (*Little Sisters of the Poor Saints Peter and Paul Home v. Pennsylvania*, 2020).

We theorize that differentiated social domains may affect the gender wage gap via two pathways—discrimination and human capital—and these pathways are tightly entwined in religious cultures. Women—particularly those in religious cultures where expectations of reproduction and domestic duties are emphasized—must overcome social expectations that they are less committed to their careers compared to men (Amis et al., 2020; Rivera & Tilcsik, 2016). Wages are tied to job valuation, and organizations can perpetuate inequality as they match and route men and women to jobs (Baron & Pfeffer, 1994). Men are deemed a better fit for demanding jobs that require people to arrive on time, work long hours, and devote their total attention to work (Acker, 2006), particularly in religious cultures that prescribe the professional sphere as men's purview. Women are portrayed as less committed to the organization because of the competing obligation to care for their children, relegating them to less-demanding and -lucrative positions (Amis et al., 2020; Martin, 1990).

Religiosity's emphases on reproduction and caregiving are also likely to hamper the human capital of the female workforce. Human capital theory rests on the view that reward allocation is largely gender-blind and based on the accrual of value through experience and achievement; from this viewpoint, the gender wage gap is fair and reasonable, stemming from meaningful differences in human capital between men and women (Blau & Kahn, 2017; Weinberger & Kuhn, 2010). Evidence supporting this view has shown that women often make different choices than men; one prevailing factor is taking time off work for children and family (Blau & Kahn, 2000; Cohen & Huffman, 2003). When women take time off work to reproduce, recuperate, and care for their family, they accrue less experience throughout their career span (Blau & Kahn, 2000), and this may be more pervasive in religious cultures.

Although the human capital literature has made substantial strides in statistically differentiating the effects of discrimination and human capital in contributing to the gender wage gap (e.g., Blau & Kahn, 2000, 2017), these pathways are inextricably linked in religious cultures. Religion socializes members to increase their family size, placing an extreme burden on women because men are permitted or even expected to repudiate domestic tasks (Chanana, 2001; Gaunt, 2012). This decreases women's career commitment due to the infeasibility of both working full-time and shouldering the entire burden of the



domestic front, while simultaneously bolstering the stereotype that women are a misfit for demanding careers (contributing to discrimination against female employees). Addressing either aspect of this equation—including family size or support for domestic tasks—would improve stereotypes about women’s fit for demanding jobs, foster women’s workplace achievement, and enhance women’s human capital (Joshi, Neely, Emrich, Griffiths, & George, 2015a). Yet, valuing family and devaluing men’s domestic responsibilities are foundational elements of religiosity (Anarfi & Owusu, 2011; Cohen-Almagor, 2018).

*Hypothesis 2. Religiosity has a positive indirect effect on the gender wage gap through gender differentiation in social domains, prescribing that men should contribute publicly and professionally while women should contribute privately and domestically.*

### **Explanatory Mechanism: Sexuality Differentiation**

The sexual relations of Muslim men and women are conceived in terms of control and subordination. (Fernandez, 2009: 280; lecturer, School of Psychology, Politics, and Sociology at Canterbury Christ Church University, United Kingdom)

The prevailing constructs of sexuality involved a fundamental inequity and hierarchy between males and females. (Baker, 2005: 127, regarding Judaism; professor of religious studies, Bates College, United States)

The second theme that emerged from our review is that each of the major world religions promotes *gendered sexuality differentiation*, defined as the extent to which the culture levies differentiated and tighter expectations upon members’ sexuality on the basis of gender. Although nonreligious cultures may permit all adults to make decisions about their own sexuality, religiosity advocates that men are in charge of regulating their own sexuality while women’s sexuality is subject to external regulation (see Table 1, column 4).

Although the specific practices differ across the major world religions, themes of “control and management of female sexuality” (Chanana, 2001: 42) appear repeatedly across each of the world religions. Under the auspices of protecting women’s sexuality, religious cultures place greater restrictions on women’s ability to enter public spaces, interact unchaperoned with members of the opposite sex, and freely choose their apparel (Baker, 2005; Chanana, 2001). For example, in highly religious cultures, garments covering women’s hair, face, and body are seen as “a symbol of piety and humility,” while simultaneously indicating a woman’s sexual

availability (Braasch, 2010; Weiss, 2009: 89). Subjecting women’s sexuality to external regulation results in a host of injustices, such that “religion is unfortunately often misused as a powerful instrument of control with the goal of legitimizing violations of women’s human rights” (Glick et al., 2016; Ilkcaracan, 2002: 754; Raja, 2014).

Aligned with the sexual harassment literature, we argue that the sexual control prescribed by religiosity is driven by the motivation to influence others and maintain one’s social status, rather than being driven by sexual desire (Berdahl, 2007). Gender hierarchy in religious societies motivates individuals to defend their status by disparaging lower-status members (Berdahl, 2007; Kawahashi, 2003). Religiosity affords men greater status when they live up to masculine ideals of physicality, incentivizing men to prove their masculinity by demonstrating strength and sexual prowess (Niyitray, 2010; Powers, 2011).

Inequality in sexual rights fortifies both benevolent and hostile sexist attitudes, whereby women are deemed inferior to men, justifying their lesser roles in society and the workforce while simultaneously bolstering men’s status as protectors and regulators of women (Glick et al., 2016; Thomas, 1989). A keen focus on women’s sexuality draws attention away from their mental capabilities and competencies (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Gray, 2019). When women are sexualized, they are viewed as less competent, determined, and intelligent (Berdahl, 2007; Thomas, 1989), setting the stage for a larger gender wage gap in religious than secular cultures. The financial burden on women can be extreme because they are more likely to be harassed when they violate gender-based role differentiation by entering highly valued, male-dominated occupations (Braasch, 2010). Women often choose to leave these lucrative fields to get away from harassment, and these career interruptions contribute to direct earning losses and delayed promotions to higher-wage positions (McLaughlin, Uggen, & Blackstone, 2017).

Although sexualizing women can occur at the individual level of analysis, it can also result in cultural values that ascribe less value to women than to men (Berdahl, 2007). This isomorphic relationship results in collective acts of harassment that foster abusive work environments where women are sexually exploited and oppressed by men. We propose that the religiosity of the broader culture in which a firm operates can make sexual exploitation and devaluing female employees seem natural because these values are ingrained in the culture in which the firm operates.

In contrast, firms may deemphasize sexuality and differences between the sexes in secular cultures because the norm in these cultures is to treat people as individuals.

*Hypothesis 3: Religiosity has a positive indirect effect on the gender wage gap through differentiation in sovereignty over one's sexuality, prescribing that women's sexuality is subject to external regulation.*

### **Explanatory Mechanism: Agency Differentiation**

Women are still being denied leadership roles and the opportunity to serve as preachers, teachers, pastors, or even deacons in many, if not most, major denominations in the United States and the global community. This denial is based on the restrictions placed on women and their agency. (Inyamah, 2008: 88; library technician for the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission with a master's in divinity, Washington, DC, United States)

Women are subordinate to men in Buddhist institutions and disadvantaged in terms of opportunities for Buddhist education and ordination in many Buddhist societies. (Tsomo, 2007: 112; Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of San Diego, United States)

As illustrated in these quotes, the final theme that emerged from our review is that each of the major world religions advocates for *gendered agency differentiation*, defined as the extent to which the culture levies differentiated and tighter expectations upon members' agentic pursuit of power based on gender. While nonreligious cultures may advocate that anyone can pursue power, religiosity advocates that men should pursue power and decision-making authority, while women should heed power and defer to men's authority (Table 1; column 5).

Female agency directly contests religious norms because women are socialized to "remain the passive objects of male action and power" (Choudhury, 2015: 245). The root cause across religions is the belief that women "are expected to commit themselves to secondary, supporting, or behind-the-scenes roles of the kind considered proper to women" (Kawahashi, 2003: 293). This unequal power relationship results in women's underrepresentation in leadership positions, spanning from churches and temples to corporations and governments, such that women are underrepresented in supervisory roles, in elected positions, and on corporate boards in religious cultures (Armstrong, 2014; Du, 2016; Spinner-Halev, 2001; Summach, 2018). Indeed, Pope Francis indicated that "the door is closed" to women who wish to be ordained priests (Stewart, 2015: 24).

Women are also denied access to education and equal rights under the law, which are key factors limiting their agency. Women must be educated to attain power, but religiosity puts girls at an educational disadvantage relative to boys (Bose, 2012). Unequal education access ensures that women do not have the literacy and knowledge necessary to attain equality under the law, and religiosity evokes god to legitimize women's subservient status. "Reforming laws governing inheritance, polygamy, or women's right to divorce... is illegitimate because these rights and obligations have been set in stone by God" (Choudhury, 2015: 236).

Female agency is crucial for implementing gender equality initiatives and changing the cultural norms that justify devaluing women (Zhao & Wry, 2016). Pfeffer (1989: 389) argued that "wages are a resource and, like other resources, are allocated at least in part on the basis of the power of various interests." Ascension to leadership positions is often based on social beliefs and cultural practices, rather than merit (Rivera & Tilcsik, 2016). Individuals in positions of power tend to favor members of their own gender when setting policies; thus, when women have little power, they are unable to reverse gender-biased treatment (Hultin & Szulkin, 1999; Joshi et al., 2015b). Women in positions of power can elevate the status of members of their gender by providing mentorship and access to informal social networks (Stainback, Kleiner, & Skaggs, 2016). Ultimately, women's agency promotes more equitable treatment across genders, reduces gender discrimination, and improves financial outcomes for women (Joshi, Liao, & Jackson, 2006; Hultin & Szulkin, 1999; Post & Byron, 2015).

*Hypothesis 4. Religiosity has a positive indirect effect on the gender wage gap through gender differentiation in agency, prescribing that men should pursue power and decision-making authority while women should heed men's directive.*

## **OVERVIEW OF STUDIES**

We used a multimethod approach—including both experimental and field data—to test our theorized model. Foremost, we test how and why religiosity contributes to the gender wage gap across countries around the world (Study 1) and states in the United States (Study 2a), along with a time series analysis of changes in religiosity and the gender wage gap across 10 years in the United States (Study 2b). Finally, Study 3 consists of a series of experiments that test whether differentiated social domains, sexuality, and agency

mediate religiosity's effect on wage inequality. This is crucial for establishing that religiosity, rather than its correlates (e.g., conservatism), has a causal effect on the gender wage gap via the theorized mechanisms.

### STUDY 1—METHODS

Study 1 examined the effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap for countries around the world using publicly available data at the country level of analysis; details and sources for all data are provided in Table 2. We obtained data on both religiosity and the gender wage gap for 140 countries, which represents 72% of countries currently recognized as sovereign states by the United Nations (2018).<sup>3</sup>

#### Measures

**Gender wage gap.** Estimated earned income for men and women, regardless of the number of hours worked, was taken from the Human Development Report (2014). The global data did not enable accounting for variability in employment hours due to cross-country differences in standards for full-time employment. Aligned with Blau and Kahn (2000), we computed 1 minus women's income as a percentage of men's income for each country, so higher scores indicate a larger wage gap. Operationalizing the wage gap as a ratio enabled income comparability across countries, accounting for the wide variability in cost of living.

**Religiosity.** The extent to which individuals in a society are religious was used to represent the religiosity of each country. Gallup Incorporated (Crabtree & Pelham, 2009) called or conducted face-to-face interviews with approximately 1,000 adults per country in 143 countries, attaining a sampling error of  $\pm 4$  percentage points, between 2006 and 2008. Participants

were asked, "Is religion important in your daily life?" (0 = *no, religion is not important*; 1 = *yes, religion is important*). The percentage of respondents in each country that indicated religion was important reflected the country-level religiosity.

**Social domain differentiation.** A breadth of indicators was chosen to provide broad operationalizations of each explanatory mechanism. Four indicators were used as proxies for the preeminence of the domestic domain for women: reproduction, the gender gap in labor force participation, access to abortion, and family-friendly workplace policies (see Table 2). We operationalized *reproduction* as the average number of offspring per woman. We operationalized *gender gap in labor force participation* as 1 minus the labor force participation rate of women, relative to the labor force participation rate of men. *Abortion law* was operationalized as the number of reasons that abortion is permitted, including to save the mother's mental and physical health and life; for rape and incest, fetal impairment, or socioeconomic grounds; and available upon request.<sup>4</sup> *Family-friendly policies* was operationalized with two indicators: the mandatory length of paid maternity leave and whether the government mandates paternity leave.

**Sexuality differentiation.** We utilized two indicators of sexuality: rape and pornography consumption. Self-report and publicly available data may not provide an unbiased indicator of these constructs because of religiosity's influence. Religiosity affects peoples' willingness to report viewing pornography (MacInnis & Hodson, 2015). Religiosity also affects victims' reporting of unwanted sexual advances, peoples' willingness to aid women who are sexually victimized, and the likelihood of both arresting and prosecuting men for sexual violence because religion can make abuse seem legitimate for punishing women's misdeeds and protecting women's sexuality (Glick et al., 2016; Paris, 2010; Sarkaria, 2009). To avoid these constraints, we utilized Google Trends to capture the collective mentality toward sexuality.

Google Trends computes the number of searches for each term relative to the total number of Google searches conducted in a country or state, making it

<sup>3</sup> Every continent had missing data, with a fairly even representation of missing countries from Africa ( $n = 14$ ; e.g., Libya, Somalia), Asia ( $n = 10$ ; e.g., China, North Korea), Australia ( $n = 12$ ; e.g., Fiji, Samoa), Europe ( $n = 9$ ; e.g., Iceland, Malta), North America ( $n = 8$ ; e.g., Bahamas, Saint Lucia), and South America ( $n = 2$ ; i.e., Guyana, Suriname). Importantly, the countries included in the research did not significantly differ from those not included on GDP ( $t(177) = -.74, p = .46$ ), GDP per capita ( $t(177) = -1.16, p = .25$ ), the Gender Inequality Index ( $t(150) = .55, p = .58$ ), or the Human Development Index ( $t(185) = -.03, p = .98$ ) based on data provided in the Human Development Report (2014). The vast majority of the missing data were due to Gallup including 143 countries, rather than every country around the world, in its assessment of religiosity.

<sup>4</sup> Contraception is also relevant to women's control over their reproduction, but was not included in Studies 1 or 2 because: (a) The World Bank provided global data on contraception, but the data were missing for 81% of countries in our dataset; and (b) contraception data were not available in the United States since contraception coverage is provided by companies' insurance policies, which vary across companies operating in the same state.

possible to directly compare regions that differ in population and Internet usage via their respective Internet search volumes (MacInnis & Hodson, 2015). The scale ranges from 1 for the lowest search volume to 100 for the highest search volume. We ran Google Trends searches for both *porn* and *rape*, translated into the six languages of the United Nations (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish) and then averaged the searches. Thirty-seven percent of countries did not produce results for the main Google Trends search. To probe this further, we expanded Google Trends parameters to include low search volume regions, which indicated little to no search history on Google for these keywords, but every country had at least some search history for these keywords. Consequently, we assigned these countries a score of 1.0.

**Agency differentiation.** Four indicators were used to gauge whether women have agency: representation in politics, representation in organizations, educational attainment, and equality under the law. We operationalized *political representation* as the percentage of seats in national parliamentary bodies, or their country-specific analogs, held by women. *Representation in organizations* was operationalized as the female-to-male ratio of professional and technical workers, and *educational attainment* was operationalized as the female-to-male ratio of tertiary enrollment. Finally, we accounted for *equality under the law* with two indicators: Whether men and women are given equal capacity and equal inheritance rights.

**Control variables.** Median age was included as a covariate due to its correlation with reproduction and career stages. We also controlled for gross domestic product (GDP) per capita to account for economic productivity, relative to the country's population, due to evidence that per capita income affects income inequality (Kuznets, 1963). Data were translated to U.S. dollars using official exchange rates and divided by 1,000 to make the scale comparable to the religiosity and gender wage gap scales. We followed the convention of using the log of GDP per capita due to its skewed distribution (Linden & Ray, 2017).

### Analytical Approach

To facilitate inferences and minimize multicollinearity, we standardized indicators of the explanatory mechanisms, religiosity, and covariates (Aiken, West, & Reno, 1991). Next, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis using Mplus 8 with the indicators listed on Table 2 loading on the three gender differentiation domains (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Good model fit is indicative of a comparative fit index (CFI) of .90 or

greater, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR) of .08 or less based on the guidance of Hu and Bentler (1999) and Kline (2015). All indices indicated good model fit: CFI = .95, RMSEA = .08, and SRMR = .08. We estimated models using path analysis in Mplus 8.0 with full information maximum likelihood (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). For the path analysis, the standardized indicators were averaged to compute the explanatory processes.

## STUDY 1—RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3 summarizes descriptive statistics and correlations. The first path model examined the relationship between religiosity and the gender wage gap (Table 4, Model 1). Supporting Hypothesis 1, religiosity positively related to the gender wage gap ( $b = 8.47$ ,  $SE = 1.99$ ;  $p < .001$ ), explaining 10% of the variability in the gender wage gap over and above the covariates. In countries where 95% or more of the population reported that religion was an important part of their daily lives (e.g., Pakistan, Philippines, and Sri Lanka), women earned 46% as much as men. In countries where less than 20% of the population endorsed the importance of religion, women earned 75% of men's wages (i.e., Denmark, Estonia, and Sweden). Thus, the gender wage gap was 29 percentage points greater in the most (versus the least) religious countries.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that religiosity has a positive indirect effect on the gender wage gap through gender-differentiated social domains. Religiosity positively related to differentiated social domains ( $b = .18$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and differentiated social domains positively related to the gender wage gap ( $b = 18.78$ ,  $SE = 2.82$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Table 4, Model 2). The indirect effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap via differentiated social domains was positive (indirect effect = 3.37,  $p = .002$ ), supporting Hypothesis 2 (see Table 5).

Hypothesis 3 predicted that religiosity has a positive indirect effect on the gender wage gap through gender-differentiated sexuality. Religiosity positively related to sexualizing women ( $b = .32$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $p = .01$ ), and sexuality positively related to the gender wage gap ( $b = 3.74$ ,  $SE = 1.08$ ,  $p = .001$ ; Table 4, Model 2). The indirect effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap via sexuality was positive (indirect effect = 1.20,  $p = .04$ ; Table 5), supporting Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that religiosity has a positive indirect effect on the gender wage gap through gender-differentiated agency. Religiosity negatively related to female agency ( $b = -.39$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p < .001$ ); female agency negatively related to the gender

**TABLE 2**  
**Operationalizations of Differentiated Social Domains, Sexuality, and Agency (Studies 1 and 2a)**

Indicators	Global Operationalization	U.S. Operationalization
<i>Social Domains</i>		
Reproduction	Average birth rate per woman for each country (Human Development Report, 2014)	Average birth rate per woman for each state (National Vital Statistics Reports, 2013)
Gender gap in labor force participation	1 – (Labor force participation rate of women / Labor force participation rate of men) (World Bank, 2010b)	1 – (Labor force participation rate of women / Labor force participation rate of men) (Status of Women in the States, 2013)
Restrictiveness of abortion laws	Number of reasons that abortion is permitted (out of seven), including to save the mother's life, mental health, and physical health; for rape and incest, fetal impairment, or socioeconomic grounds; and available upon request. Reverse-scored so that higher scores indicate more restrictive abortion laws (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2013)	Percent of full-term pregnancy before abortion is banned; reverse-scored so that higher scores indicate more restrictive abortion laws (Abortion restrictions in states, 2013)
Family-friendly policies	1 <sup>st</sup> indicator—Mandatory minimum length of paid maternity leave in calendar days; reverse-scored so that higher scores indicate more restrictive maternity leave policies. 2 <sup>nd</sup> indicator—Does the government mandate paid or unpaid paternity leave? 1 = No, 0 = Yes (World Bank, 2010a)	1 <sup>st</sup> indicator—State laws scored from 0 to 140 indicating whether policies support parents, including wage replacement and job protection during parental leave and workplace accommodations during pregnancy (National Partnership for Women & Families, 2014); 2 <sup>nd</sup> indicator—Percentage of organizations on the Working Mother (2013) Best-of list that resided in a state. Both indicators were reverse-scored so that higher scores indicate that the culture is less family-friendly
<i>Sexuality</i>		
Rape and pornography	Google Trends for the words <i>rape</i> and <i>porn</i> translated across the six United Nations languages	Google Trends for the words <i>rape</i> and <i>porn</i>
<i>Female Agency</i>		
Representation in politics	Percent of seats in national parliamentary bodies or their country-specific analog held by women (World Bank, 2010b)	Percentage of state senators and representatives who are women (Status of Women in the States, 2013)
Representation in organizations	Female-to-male ratio of professional and technical workers (World Economic Forum, 2014)	1 <sup>st</sup> indicator—Percentage of all women employed in managerial or professional occupations (World Bank, 2010b); 2 <sup>nd</sup> indicator—Average across firms of the percentage of board seats on Russell 3000 companies filled by women (Women on Boards, 2020)
Tertiary enrollment and degrees	Female-to-male ratio of tertiary enrollment (Human Development Report, 2014)	Female-to-male ratio of four-year degrees awarded (Prosperity Now, 2020)
Equality under the law	1 <sup>st</sup> indicator—Do men and women have equal capacity under the law? 2 <sup>nd</sup> indicator—Do men and women have equal inheritance rights over movable and immovable property? 0 = No, 1 = Yes (World Bank, 2010a)	No comparable indicator in the United States

*Notes:* All indicators were standardized. Data were coded such that higher scores indicate a greater emphasis on domestic responsibilities, sexualizing women, and empowering women.

**TABLE 3**  
**Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (Studies 1 and 2a)**

	Global		United States		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>												
1. Gender wage gap	42.76	16.79	21.25	4.73	—	.42	.50	.42	-.51	-.06	-.12	.28				
2. Religiosity	.74	.25	2.06	.19	.25	—	.63	.52	-.55	-.41	-.30	.49				
3. Social domains	.02	.65	.00	.60	.40	.72	—	.33	-.49	-.28	-.40	.58				
4. Sexuality	.00	1.00	.00	.86	.30	-.05	-.13	—	-.36	-.34	.10	.29				
5. Female agency	-.08	.79	-.01	.57	-.39	-.57	-.59	.02	—	.27	.11	-.29				
6. GDP (log; in 1,000s USD)	9.08	1.29	10.80	.19	.15	-.59	-.55	.26	.31	—	.01	-.38				
7. Median age	29.37	9.11	37.02	2.23	-.04	-.77	-.78	.24	.48	.80	—	-.28				
<i>Supplementary Variables</i>																
8. Political regime	3.99	6.44	2.17	.19	-.24	-.33	-.41	.09	.37	.22	.39	—				
9. Power distance	.64	.20	—	—	.35	.57	.48	.26	-.46	-.31	-.43	-.43	—			
10. Uncertainty avoidance	.64	.20	—	—	.24	.01	-.12	.16	.08	.17	.21	.16	.17	—		
11. Individualism–collectivism	.38	.23	—	—	-.09	-.64	-.58	.03	.36	.58	.64	.32	-.60	-.09	—	
12. Masculinity–femininity	.51	.16	—	—	.18	.08	.00	.04	-.05	.03	.04	.04	.10	-.02	.18	—

*Notes:* The bottom half of the matrix includes the global correlations;  $n = 140$  countries for variables 1 through 7;  $n = 136$  countries for variable 8;  $n = 89$  countries for variables 9–12. Correlations of a magnitude .22 and above are significant at  $p < .05$  for the global correlations. The top half of the matrix includes the U.S. correlations;  $n = 50$  states for all variables. Correlations of a magnitude of .28 and above are significant at  $p < .05$ . GDP = gross domestic product.

wagegap ( $b = -4.09$ ,  $SE = 1.69$ ,  $p = .02$ ; Table 4, Model 2). The indirect effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap via agency was positive (indirect effect = 1.59,  $p = .03$ , see Table 5), supporting Hypothesis 4.

The total effect of religiosity and gender-differentiated social domains, sexuality, and agency explained 37% of the variability in the global gender wage gap after controlling for key covariates (total effect = 8.47; Table 5). It is noteworthy that the direct effect of religiosity was no longer significant after controlling for the explanatory mechanisms ( $b = 2.31$ ,  $SE = 1.77$ ,  $p = .19$ ; Table 4, Model 2), suggesting that the mechanisms meaningfully explain the effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap.

### Supplemental Analyses and Robustness Checks

We tested whether including political ideology as a covariate affected the results.<sup>5</sup> Political ideology was omitted from the primary analyses because the data were missing for four countries and we wanted to maximize the global representation in the primary analyses. For all three explanatory mechanisms, the results were the same as those reported in the manuscript.

We also tested whether the dimensions of culture described by Hofstede (1984) affected the global results.<sup>6</sup> These covariates were omitted from the

primary analyses because the data were only available for 89 countries. With these additional covariates in the model, religiosity retained a significant indirect effect on the gender wage gap via social domains (indirect effect = 2.22,  $SE = .99$ ,  $p = .03$ ) and agency (indirect effect = 2.73,  $SE = 1.09$ ;  $p = .01$ ), but the indirect effect via sexuality was no longer significant (indirect effect = .63,  $SE = .62$ ,  $p = .31$ ).

Finally, we examined the extent to which specific religions accounted for variance in the gender wage gap. Pew Research Center (2014) reported the percentage of each country's residents belonging to the six major religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Folk, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism, as well as the percentage of those who are unaffiliated. After controlling for covariates, religiosity, and the explanatory mechanisms, the percentage of the population affiliated with each religion did not significantly relate to the gender wage gap, and neither did religious affiliation moderate the effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap (Table 6).

<sup>6</sup> The four dimensions are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism–collectivism, and masculinity–femininity. Power distance refers to the less powerful members in a culture accepting that power should be distributed unevenly. Uncertainty avoidance represents a culture's tolerance for ambiguity. Individualism–collectivism refers to the extent to which people are integrated into groups, with individualistic cultures being loosely integrated and collectivistic cultures tightly integrated. Masculinity refers to a culture's preference for achievement, assertiveness, and material rewards for success, while femininity refers to a culture's preference for cooperation, modesty, and caring for the weak.

<sup>5</sup> The data were attained from the Oxford online publication Our World in Data (2018; Roser, 2016). Scores ranged from  $-1$  for a full autocracy (e.g., Saudi Arabia) to  $+1$  for a full democracy (e.g., Canada) on a 20-point scale.

**TABLE 4**  
Unstandardized Coefficients (Studies 1 and 2a)

	Model 1		Model 2							
	Gender Wage Gap		Social Domains		Sexuality		Female Agency		Gender Wage Gap	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
<i>Global Results, Study 1</i>										
Intercept	42.78**	1.27	.02	.03	.00	.08	-.07	.05	42.09**	1.02
<i>Control Variables</i>										
GDP (log; in 1,000s USD)	7.83**	2.14	.14*	.05	.17	.13	-.16	.09	4.00*	1.77
Median age	-.47	2.70	-.48**	.07	.35*	.17	.22	.11	8.17**	2.56
<i>Predictors</i>										
Religiosity	8.47**	1.99	.18**	.05	.32*	.13	-.39**	.08	2.31	1.77
Social domains									18.78**	2.82
Sexuality									3.74**	1.08
Female agency									-4.09*	1.69
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.20		.66		.11		.36		.46	
<i>F</i>	3.26**		14.31**		2.21*		5.56*		7.72**	
<i>U.S. Results, Study 2a</i>										
Intercept	21.26**	.60	.00	.06	.00	.10	-.01	.07	21.23**	.51
<i>Control Variables</i>										
GDP (log; in 1,000s USD)	.63	.67	-.03	.07	-.10	.11	.03	.08	.94	.57
Median age	.10	.64	-.14*	.07	.23*	.10	-.03	.07	.03	.60
<i>Predictors</i>										
Religiosity	2.28**	.70	.32**	.07	.47**	.11	-.31**	.08	-.03	.80
Social domains									2.51*	1.19
Sexuality									1.48*	.75
Female agency									-2.60*	1.10
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.19		.44		.35		.30		.38	
<i>F</i>	1.92†		4.22**		3.25**		2.79**		3.74**	

Notes: *n* = 140 countries or 50 states. Path analyses were estimated with full information maximum likelihood in Mplus. GDP = gross domestic product.

† *p* = .055

\* *p* < .05

\*\* *p* < .01

**TABLE 5**  
Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Religiosity on the Gender Wage Gap (Studies 1 and 2a)

Sample and Variables	Religiosity → Mechanism (a)	Mechanism → Gender Wage Gap (b)	Direct Effects (c')	Indirect Effects (a × b)		Total Effects (a) × (b) + (c')
				Estimate	90% CI	
<i>Global Data</i>						
Social domains	.18**	18.78**	2.31	3.37**	[1.61, 5.13]	8.47**
Sexuality	.32*	3.74**	2.31	1.20*	[.24, 2.15]	
Female agency	-.39**	-4.09*	2.31	1.59*	[.37, 2.81]	
<i>U.S. Data</i>						
Social domains	.32**	2.51*	-.03	.80†	[.11, 1.50]	2.28**
Sexuality	.47**	1.48*	-.03	.70†	[.06, 1.35]	
Female agency	-.31**	-2.60*	-.03	.81*	[.15, 1.46]	

Notes: *n* = 140 countries for the global data and 50 states for the U.S. data. Significance of the (a) and (b) paths is based upon path analysis estimates in Mplus.

† *p* < .08

\* *p* < .05

\*\* *p* < .01

**TABLE 6**  
**Unstandardized Coefficients Examining the Moderating Effect of Religious Affiliation, Global Data (Study 1)**

	Gender Wage Gap			
	Model 1		Model 2	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Intercept	42.26*	.82	41.07**	2.95
<i>Control Variables</i>				
GDP (log; in 1,000s USD)	3.09*	1.44	3.57*	1.41
Median age	9.49**	2.15	8.91**	2.23
<i>Predictors</i>				
Religiosity	4.36*	1.88	-.29	3.20
Social domains	15.39**	2.38	14.26**	2.48
Sexuality	2.94**	.96	3.09**	.95
Female agency	.31*	1.47	.03	1.46
<i>Type of Religion</i>				
Christian (%)	-74.62	73.56	11.66	81.50
Muslim (%)	-51.96	73.45	34.46	81.42
Hindu (%)	-72.93	75.58	51.39	88.77
Buddhist (%)	-85.90	74.40	16.18	86.16
Jewish (%)	-80.73	74.29	-307.22	280.88
Folk (%)	-85.81	75.48	-9.35	82.87
Unaffiliated (%)	-62.89	74.90	28.76	84.98
<i>Interactions</i>				
Religiosity × Christian			-162.71	104.76
Religiosity × Muslim			-162.93	104.41
Religiosity × Hindu			-235.10	108.28
Religiosity × Buddhist			-178.14	111.10
Religiosity × Jewish			-491.83	304.46
Religiosity × Folk			-180.48	104.38
Religiosity × Unaffiliated			-159.20	106.48
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.65		.68	
<i>F</i>	14.01**		15.53**	

Notes:  $n = 139$  countries. Path analyses were estimated with full information maximum likelihood in Mplus. GDP = gross domestic product.

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

These findings indicate that no single religion carried the effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap.

Overall, these results suggest that religiosity positively relates to the gender wage gap in countries around the world. The results also indicate that the relationship between religiosity and the gender wage gap can be explained by the three theorized dimensions of gender differentiation: social domains, sexuality, and agency.

## STUDY 2A—METHODS

Study 2 examined the effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap for states in the United States, focusing first on a comparison across states (Study 2a) followed by an examination of changes over time (Study 2b). In the United States, 78% of the population is Christian

(Liu, 2014), enabling a more robust examination of whether Study 1's results were driven by religious affiliation.

## Measures

**Gender wage gap.** Median annual earnings for men and women employed full-time, year-round were taken from the Status of Women in the States (2013) report and computed in the same manner as Study 1. We focused on full-time employment due to evidence that women tend to work fewer hours than men to reduce concerns that working part, rather than full, time is the prevailing contributor to the gender wage gap (Blau & Kahn, 2017).

**Religiosity.** Gallup assessed religiosity based on 348,306 interviews with adults in 2012, attaining a sampling error between 3 and 6 percentage points per state (Newport, 2013a). Participants were classified as nonreligious if they seldom or never attended religious services and indicated that religion is not important in their daily lives (coded 1), moderately religious if religion is important in their lives or they attend religious services regularly (coded 2), and highly religious if religion is important in their lives and they attend religious services every week or almost every week (coded 3). We used the average per state as a proxy for religiosity.

**Explanatory mechanisms.** Measures of the explanatory mechanisms were parallel between the United States and global data, with the few exceptions highlighted in Table 2.

## Analytical Approach

The analyses are parallel to those in Study 1. The confirmatory factor analysis of the indicators listed in Table 2 indicated good model fit—CFI = .97, RMSEA = .05, and SRMR = .08.

## STUDY 2A—RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Hypothesis Testing

Table 3 reports the descriptive statistics and correlations. Supporting Hypothesis 1, religiosity positively related to the gender wage gap ( $b = 2.28$ ,  $SE = .70$ ;  $p < .001$ ), explaining 17% of the variability in the gender wage gap after accounting for covariates (Table 4, Model 1). In the five most religious states (26% wage gap), the gender wage gap was 8 percentage points greater than the five least religious states (18% wage gap).



Hypothesis 2 predicted a positive indirect effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap through gender-differentiated social domains. Religiosity positively related to differentiated social domains ( $b = .32$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and differentiated social domains positively related to the gender wage gap ( $b = 2.51$ ,  $SE = 1.19$ ,  $p = .03$ ; Table 4, Model 2). Supporting Hypothesis 2, the indirect effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap via differentiated social domains was positive (indirect effect =  $.80$ ;  $p = .06^7$ ; see Table 5).

Hypothesis 3 predicted a positive indirect effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap through gender-differentiated sexuality. Religiosity positively related to sexuality differentiation ( $b = .47$ ,  $SE = .11$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and sexuality positively related to the gender wage gap ( $b = 1.48$ ,  $SE = .75$ ,  $p = .047$ ; Table 4, Model 2). The indirect effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap via sexuality was positive (indirect effect =  $.70$ ;  $p = .07$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3 (see Table 5).

Hypothesis 4 predicted a positive indirect effect for religiosity on the gender wage gap through gender-differentiated agency. Religiosity negatively related to female agency ( $b = -.31$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and female agency negatively related to the gender wage gap ( $b = -2.60$ ,  $SE = 1.10$ ,  $p = .02$ ; Table 4, Model 2). Supporting Hypothesis 4, the indirect effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap via female agency was positive (indirect effect =  $.81$ ;  $p = .04$ ; see Table 5).

The total effect of religiosity and gender-differentiated social domains, sexuality, and agency explained 37% of the variability in the gender wage gap after accounting for covariates (total effect = 2.28; Table 5). In addition, the direct effect of religiosity was no longer significant after controlling for the explanatory mechanisms ( $b = -.03$ ,  $SE = .80$ ,  $p = .97$ ; Table 4, Model 2), suggesting that the mechanisms meaningfully explain religiosity's effect on the gender wage gap.

### Supplemental Analysis and Robustness Check

First, we added political ideology as a covariate.<sup>8</sup> For all three explanatory mechanisms, the results

<sup>7</sup> A couple of effects in the U.S. data were significant at the .06 to .07 range (two-tailed), potentially due to the limited sample size of 50 states. We note the exact significance of these effects in the text of the manuscript and interpret the effects as meaningful because of the directional nature of our predictions, substantial effect sizes, and replication of the effects in the global data.

<sup>8</sup> Gallup polled a representative sample of adults in the United States to determine whether they are conservative, moderate, or liberal and aggregated the data to determine the conservativeness of the state (Newport, 2013b).

**TABLE 7**  
Unstandardized Coefficients Examining the Moderating Effect of Religious Affiliation, U.S. Data (Study 2a)

	Gender Wage Gap			
	Model 1		Model 2	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Intercept	21.30**	.43	57.57**	70.10
<i>Control Variables</i>				
GDP (log; in 1,000s USD)	1.94**	.56	1.58**	.59
Median age	1.58*	.69	1.82*	.71
<i>Predictors</i>				
Religiosity	1.54	1.06	-117.56	78.07
Social domains	-1.19	1.28	-1.25	1.43
Sexuality	2.15*	.73	1.88*	.75
Female agency	-1.12	1.02	-1.13	1.04
<i>Type of Religion</i>				
Christian (%)	-.53	.68	-.38	.72
Jewish (%)	-2.08	1.12	-2.12	1.13
Mormon (%)	-.25	.65	-.17	.74
Unaffiliated (%)	-.39	.84	-.22	.88
<i>Interactions</i>				
Religiosity × Christian			1.23	.81
Religiosity × Jewish			1.50	1.30
Religiosity × Mormon			1.28	.83
Religiosity × Unaffiliated			1.44	.91
$R^2$	.64		.66	
$F$	6.84**		7.01**	

Notes:  $n = 48$  states; data were missing for Hawaii and Alaska. Path analyses were estimated with full information maximum likelihood in Mplus. GDP = gross domestic product.

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

were the same as those reported in the manuscript with one exception: the significance of the indirect effect of agency on the gender wage gap increased from .04 to .05. We also examined the extent to which specific religions accounted for variance in the gender wage gap. Gallup Incorporated (Jones, 2004) reported the percentage of each state's residents that are Christian, Jewish, Mormon, and unaffiliated. The percentage of the population that was affiliated with each religion did not significantly relate to the gender wage gap, and religious affiliation did not significantly moderate the effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap (Table 7). Thus, no single religion carries the overall effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap.

### STUDY 2B—METHODS

We cannot rule out all potential factors that could influence the impact of religiosity on the gender wage gap. Therefore, we constructed a dataset with ratings of attendance at religious centers in the United

TABLE 8

## The Effect of Religiosity on the Gender Wage Gap, U.S. Time Series Data for Full-Time Workers, 2009–2018 (Study 2b)

	Gender Wage Gap					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
<i>Fixed Effects</i>						
Intercept	.254**	.005	.254**	.005	.253**	.005
Time	-.045**	.003	-.045**	.003	-.045**	.003
Religiosity			.023	.017	.017	.017
<i>Cross-Level Interaction</i>						
Religiosity × Time					.036**	.009
<i>Variance components</i>						
Time–Gender wage gap slope	.000**	.000	.000**	.000	.000**	.000
Level 1 residual variance	.000**	.000	.000**	.000	.000**	.000
Level 2 residual variance	.001**	.001	.001**	.000	.001**	.000

Notes:  $n = 500$  annual measurements of the gender wage gap over 10 years nested in 50 U.S. states. Religiosity was grand-mean centered.

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

States based on Gallup annual polls (2008–2016) and the gender wage gap (2009–2018) by state for each year. This dataset allowed us to examine the effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap overtime, partialing out stable state-level factors. Across years, state religiosity averaged 3.1 ( $SD = .31$ ), ranging from 2.2 to 3.8 between states. We computed each state's gender wage gap per year using the median annual income for men and women working full-time with data gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau (2018).<sup>9</sup> The gender wage gap averaged 22.4% ( $SD = 4.3\%$ ), ranging from 11.7 to 36.2% across states and time.

We estimated a cross-classified model for the gender wage gap, with time (level 1) and location (level 2) treated as independent forms of higher-level random variance (Cafri, Hedeker, & Aarons, 2015). This is analogous to time and location fixed-effects models. Significant variability in the gender wage gap from 2009–2018 can be attributed to both between-state differences ( $ICC(1) = .93$ ) and the within-state trajectory of the gender wage gap. There

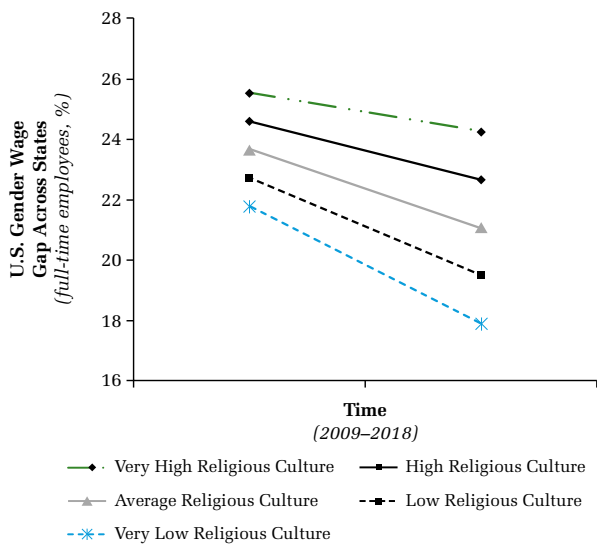
were significant between-state differences in religiosity ( $ICC(1) = .98$ ); however, religiosity did not significantly change within states over time. Thus, we examined the effect of religiosity at Time 0 (2008) on the gender wage gap over time (2009–2018) using multilevel modeling in Mplus 8.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017) with the gender wage gap per year nested within states.

### STUDY 2B—RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The average U.S. wage gap significantly narrowed between 2009–2018 ( $b = -.045$ ,  $SE = .003$ ;  $p < .001$ ; Table 8, Model 1). Religiosity in 2008 interacted with time, such that the narrowing trend in the gender wage gap significantly differed across more- and less-religious states ( $b = .036$ ,  $SE = .009$ ;  $p < .001$ ; Table 8, Model 3). States with less religiosity had significantly faster narrowing of the wage gap over these 10 years compared to those with greater religiosity. Specifically, the gender wage gap has narrowed over time at significantly different rates in states with very low ( $b = -.067$ ,  $SE = .006$ ;  $p < .001$ ), low ( $b = -.056$ ,  $SE = .003$ ;  $p < .001$ ), average ( $b = -.045$ ,  $SE = .000$ ;  $p < .001$ ), high ( $b = -.034$ ,  $SE = .003$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and very high ( $b = -.023$ ;  $SE = .006$ ;  $p < .001$ ; see Figure 1) religiosity. Thus, religiosity influences the rate at which states' wage gaps are narrowing, such that the gap is narrowing significantly faster in less religious states. Further, statewide religiosity did not vary significantly over time, assuaging concerns of reverse causality.

<sup>9</sup> Consideration of explanatory mechanisms over this timespan is unlikely to provide a fair test of effects. In particular, only 51% of U.S. residents had broadband Internet in 2008 and there were regional differences in access and adoption of the Internet between 2008 and 2018 (Pew Research Center, 2019). There is also an uneven turnover of political officials given that they are elected in even-numbered years, take or depart from office in odd-numbered years at two, four, or six-year intervals based upon role, and must comply with term limits that vary by state.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Religiosity on States' Gender Wage Gap over Time**  
**(Study 2b)**



Notes:  $n = 500$  annual measurements of the gender wage gap nested in 50 U.S. states. Lines represent states' degree of religiosity relative to the U.S. national average (very low =  $-2$  standard deviations ( $SD$ ), low =  $-1SD$ , high =  $+1SD$ , very high =  $+2SD$ ).

### STUDY 3—OVERVIEW

Study 3 experimentally clarifies religiosity's *causal* effect on the gender wage gap by utilizing a double randomization design (Pirlott & MacKinnon, 2016; e.g., Sherf, Tangirala, & Weber, 2017), also called an experimental-causal-chain design (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). First, Study 3a randomly assigned participants to conditions, manipulating religiosity (religious culture vs. control) while measuring the explanatory mechanisms and the gender wage gap. Second, Study 3b utilized a moderation-by-process design (Vancouver & Carlson, 2015), blocking the effects of religiosity via interventions targeting the three explanatory processes. Participants were exposed to religious values and randomly assigned to one of four conditions designed to vary organizational policies that permit (control condition) or systematically block (policies requiring equitable parental leave, prohibiting sexual harassment, and striving for inclusive leadership development) the influence of religiosity on gender-differentiated wage allocation. This two-part design enables causality to be inferred if: (a) religiosity is positively related to the gender wage gap when the explanatory mechanisms are allowed to vary randomly, and (b) religiosity does not increase the gender wage gap when the mechanisms responsible for this

relationship are systematically induced to block the effect of religiosity. To promote transparency and rigor, we preregistered the studies: <https://aspredicted.org/c6na5.pdf>

### STUDY 3A—METHODS

#### Sample and Procedure

Participants were fluent in English, employed full-time, had supervisory responsibilities at work, and were recruited through the online research platform Prolific Academic (Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, & Acquisti, 2017). One-hundred and two participants opted in, and 96 read the instructions and provided complete data. We removed five participants for failing attentional checks designed to flag careless responses (see Meade & Craig, 2012), which left a sample of 91. Over half (54%) were women; they averaged 36 years old ( $SD = 8.9$ ), 16 years of work experience ( $SD = 9.1$ ), five years in supervisory roles ( $SD = 1.9$ ), and eight direct reports ( $SD = 11.0$ ).

Guided by Castilla and Benard (2010), participants were invited to participate in a "Management Personnel Decision-Making Exercise" and asked to assume the role of a manager at "ServiceOne," a large private employer with a workforce of over 1,200 employees. We randomly assigned participants to read about ServiceOne's core values, which were either nonreligious or highly religious (between-person manipulation).

To examine the effect of religiosity on the three mechanisms, participants rated whether a series of organizational policies aligned with ServiceOne's cultural values. Next, participants viewed the performance appraisals for two internal consultants who both received a performance rating of 4 out of 5 and open-ended feedback from the same supervisor. We counterbalanced the order of the male and female consultants' appraisals and the open-ended supervisor comments (for details regarding validating the supervisor feedback to ensure equivalent merit across appraisals, see Castilla & Benard, 2010). Gender was introduced with the consultants' names: Patricia Anderson and Michael Taylor. Participants then allocated wages based on the organization's values and responded to manipulation check, attention check, and demographic questions.

#### Manipulation: Religiosity

Modeled after Castilla and Benard (2010), we varied the organizational culture through ServiceOne's "Core Company Values" by drawing from corporate mission

statements to ensure realism. In the religiosity condition, ServiceOne's values emphasized glorifying god and adherence to faith-based principles. In the nonreligious control condition, ServiceOne's values emphasized open communication and investing in the community (see the online supplement for manipulation details: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=3719543>). At the end of the study, participants rated the extent to which ServiceOne's core values "evoke God" on a 7-point Likert scale anchored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) as a manipulation check. To observe whether the religiosity manipulation increased the theorized gender differentiation dimensions, participants provided input for aligning three organizational policies with ServiceOne's cultural values.

### Measures

**Differentiated social domains.** Participants were told that ServiceOne is implementing a policy to help employees manage their *professional and domestic responsibilities*. Sample items included, "employees should be given flexibility to accommodate caring for their children" and "parental leave should be encouraged following the birth of a child." Participants rated whether the policy applies to male (but not female) employees (coded 1), equally to male and female employees (coded 4), or female (but not male) employees (coded 7) with seven items ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

**Differentiated sexuality.** Participants were told that ServiceOne is implementing a policy regarding *workplace sexual harassment*. Participants were asked how strict to make the policy by identifying the degree to which certain behaviors are (un)acceptable at ServiceOne, using a 7-point scale ranging from totally unacceptable (coded 1) to perfectly acceptable (coded 7) across five items. Sample items included "flirting with female employees" and "telling jokes about women's bodies" ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

**Differentiated agency.** Participants were told that ServiceOne is implementing a policy regarding employee *leadership development opportunities*. Participants rated six items examining the extent to which the details of the policy applied to male versus female employees using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (coded 1) to strongly agree (coded 7). Sample items included, "women should be in positions of power" (reverse-coded), and "men are more qualified than women to serve as leaders" ( $\alpha = .78$ ).

**Gender wage gap.** Participants allocated wages for the male and female employees using two indicators: annual salary (range: \$30,000 to \$120,000) and annual raise (range: \$0 to \$10,000). We computed the gender wage gap in the same manner as Studies 1 and 2, and averaged the two indicators.

### STUDY 3A—RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 9 summarizes means and standard errors across conditions. The manipulation achieved its intention to vary the religious values of the organization (religiosity:  $M = 6.44$ ,  $SE = .14$ ; control:  $M = 1.50$ ,  $SE = .14$ ;  $t_{89} = 25.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Religiosity also had significant effects on the gender wage gap and gender-differentiation in social domains, sexuality, and agency. Specifically, the male employee received 3% higher pay ( $SE = .03$ ) when the cultural values emphasized religion, whereas the female employee received 6% ( $SE = .04$ ) higher pay when the culture did not invoke religious values ( $t_{89} = 2.11$ ,  $p = .037$ ). Additionally, participants in the religiosity (vs. control) condition expressed that: (a) balancing professional and domestic responsibilities applied more to female than to male employees (religiosity:  $M = 4.56$ ,  $SE = .12$ ; control:  $M = 4.07$ ,  $SE = .03$ ;  $t_{89} = 3.97$ ,  $p < .001$ ), (b) sexualized behaviors toward female colleagues were more acceptable (religiosity:  $M = 2.04$ ,  $SE = .17$ ; control:  $M = 1.61$ ,  $SE = .11$ ;  $t_{89} = 2.10$ ,  $p = .039$ ), and (c) men were more suitable for power and leadership roles compared to women (religiosity:  $M = 3.58$ ,  $SE = .19$ ; control:  $M = 2.95$ ,  $SE = .14$ ;  $t_{89} = 2.66$ ,  $p = .009$ ).<sup>10</sup>

Study 3a offered initial evidence that religiosity has a positive, causal effect on the gender wage gap and gender differentiation in social domains, sexuality, and agency. Moreover, discrimination was responsible for the gender wage gap since the employees had equivalent performance. This represents an extension beyond Studies 1 and 2, which examined human capital and discriminatory factors in aggregate. Study 3b sought to block the effect of religiosity via the theorized explanatory

<sup>10</sup> Participants were randomly assigned to conditions and their own personal religiosity did not vary significantly across conditions, regardless of the items used to assess religiosity. We conducted a robustness check, controlling for participants' age, gender, self-reported importance of religion in their daily lives, frequency of religious service attendance, or a proxy combining these religiosity indicators. Inferences remained unchanged with and without these covariates.

**TABLE 9**  
Means and Standard Errors by Experimental Condition (Studies 3a and 3b)

	Gender Wage Gap		Differentiated Social Domains		Differentiated Sexuality		Differentiated Agency		Religious Values (Manipulation Check)	
	M	SE	M	SE	M	SE	M	SE	M	SE
<b>Study 3a, Experiment Observing Mechanisms</b>										
Control (non-religious) condition	-.06	.04	4.07	.03	1.61	.11	2.95	.14	1.50	.14
Religiosity condition	.03	.03	4.56	.12	2.04	.17	3.58	.19	6.44	.14
<b>Study 3b, Experiment Manipulating Mechanisms</b>										
Control condition (no blocking intervention)	.08	.03	4.25	.24	6.64	.12				
Equitable parental leave policy condition (blocking via undifferentiated social domains)	-.03	.02	6.30	.14	6.65	.10				
Prohibition of sexual harassment policy condition (blocking via proscribing women's sexualization)	-.04	.03	6.34	.18	6.62	.10				
Inclusive leadership development policy condition (blocking via proscribing equality in agency)	-.07	.04	6.00	.19	6.44	.14				

Notes: *n* = 91 for Study 3a, ranging from 45–46 across experimental conditions; *n* = 143 for Study 3b, ranging from 34–37 across experimental conditions.

mechanisms by promoting equitable treatment across genders.

### STUDY 3B—METHODS

#### Sample, Procedure, and Measures

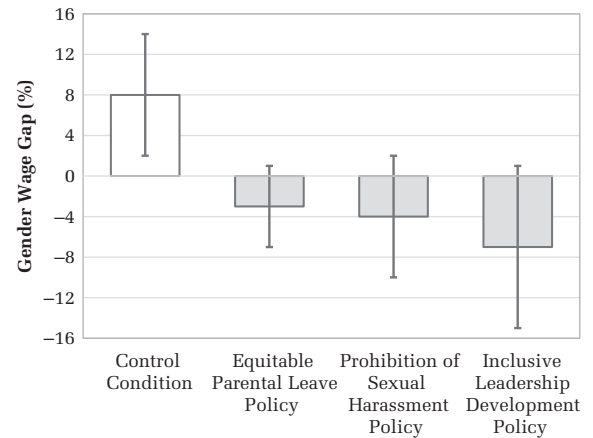
A total of 155 full-time employees with supervisory responsibilities volunteered, and 151 read the instructions and provided complete data. We omitted data from eight participants who failed attention checks (see Meade & Craig, 2012), which left a sample of 143. Of the respondents, 57% were female; they averaged 37 years old ( $SD = 9.6$ ), 17 years of work experience ( $SD = 9.6$ ), five years in supervisory roles ( $SD = 1.9$ ), and seven current direct reports ( $SD = 6.7$ ).

The procedure and wage allocation materials were identical to those in Study 3a with the exception that all participants were exposed to the religiosity condition and randomly assigned to one of four conditions designed to allow (control condition) or block, via organizational policies, the effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap. At the end of the study, participants completed the religious values manipulation check from Study 3a and three items assessing ServiceOne's values regarding gender equality (e.g., "ServiceOne strives for equality" and "Equality is a key value at ServiceOne"; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree;  $\alpha = .92$ ).

#### Manipulations: Organizational Policy Blocking Interventions

To block the effect of religiosity, we tested three interventions, with each intervention targeting one of our explanatory processes. For gender-differentiated social domains, ServiceOne implemented a policy that promoted an equitable division of domestic responsibilities, such that both male and female employees were encouraged to balance their personal and professional roles (see online supplement for the full language used in the experimental manipulations: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=3719543>). To block the effect via sexuality differentiation, ServiceOne implemented a policy that prohibited sexual harassment and reinforced cultural norms of professionalism. To block the effect via agency differentiation, ServiceOne implemented a policy that promoted inclusive leadership development and encouraged all members of its workforce to pursue leadership opportunities. The control condition was designed to observe the effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap, rather than blocking its effect, by emphasizing that employees have unique skillsets.

**FIGURE 2**  
Organizational Policy Interventions Blocking the Effects of Religiosity on the Gender Wage Gap (Study 3b)



### STUDY 3B—RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As summarized in Table 9, in the control condition the gender wage gap significantly differed from zero ( $M = .08$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $CI_{95\%} [.009, .141]$ ), which amounted to the male employee being recommended for 8% higher wages than the female employee. However, the gender wage gap did not significantly differ from zero when the firm implemented policies designed to block gender differentiation via parental leave ( $M = -.03$ ,  $SE = .02$ ;  $CI_{95\%} [-.080, .010]$ ), sexual harassment ( $M = -.04$ ,  $SE = .03$ ;  $CI_{95\%} [-.109, .025]$ ), or leadership development ( $M = -.07$ ,  $SE = .04$ ;  $CI_{95\%} [-.150, .0004]$ ) policies.<sup>11</sup> Figure 2 displays the results of these interventions.

These results demonstrate that interrupting gender differentiation via promoting equality can disrupt the effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap. Evoking religiosity as part of an organization's cultural values resulted in participants valuing employees' contributions differently as a function of gender, with the male employee paid significantly more for the same work. Yet, policies that emphasized the importance of balancing

<sup>11</sup> Similar to Study 3a, participants were randomly assigned to conditions and their own personal religiosity did not vary significantly across conditions. Moreover, controlling for participants' age, gender, self-reported importance of religion in their daily lives, frequency of religious service attendance, or a proxy combining these religiosity indicators did not affect the results.

professional and personal commitments for all employees, a workplace free of sexual harassment, and egalitarian leadership development opportunities blocked this effect. Studies 3a and 3b also help to assuage endogeneity concerns, such that the influence of religiosity cannot be attributed to correlated cultural values (e.g., political ideology).

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Despite religion's potential impact on workplace behavior, studies have rarely brought such insights into core management outlets, which has limited understanding of how religion affects organizations (Tracey, 2012). When religion's effect has been scientifically considered, the focus has primarily been on Western Christianity, rarely examining other faiths or Eastern cultures (Weaver & Agle, 2002). Outside management scholarship, the vast majority of religiosity research is descriptive of the norms, customs, and values of each of the world religions or trends across religions. This approach has been described as atheoretical, which has contributed to a scientific legitimacy problem (Chan-Serafin et al., 2013; Weaver & Agle, 2002).

Our integrated review facilitates theory-building by conceptualizing three commonalities across each of the major world religions—gender differentiation in social domains, sexuality, and agency—that explain the effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap. A series of studies supported these explanatory mechanisms and demonstrated that religiosity predicted both these mechanisms and the gender wage gap, explaining 10% (global data) and 17% (U.S. data) of the variability in the wage gap, after accounting for covariates. These effect sizes are uncommonly encountered in management and the social sciences (Bosco, Aguinis, Singh, Field, & Pierce, 2015; Ellis, 2010), and substantial in magnitude compared to key predictors emphasized in the gender wage gap literature (Blau & Kahn, 2017). The strength of effects underscores the value of understanding how religiosity operates; it is not just a statistically significant predictor but also has a noticeable practical impact in organizations (Combs, 2010).

These three forms of gender differentiation build off Zhao and Wry's (2016) conceptualization of patriarchy. We clarify the relationship between patriarchy and religiosity on three fronts. Foremost, we offer explanation for *why* these constructs are related. Patriarchy is an ideology that suggests socialization contributes to gender stratification (Parboteeah et al., 2008). Religious practices serve as organized

instruments of this socialization, advancing a shared belief in supernatural forces that justifies men's hierarchical superiority to women (Chanana, 2001; Csinos, 2010; Seedat, 2013). Thus, religiosity perpetuates patriarchy (Gaunt, 2012; Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017). Second, the prevailing view is that patriarchy is uniquely pronounced in certain religions, while other religions are less discriminatory (Braasch, 2010; Kawahashi, 2003; Zhao & Wry, 2016). Our review challenges this perspective and illustrates that all major world religions—through gender differentiation—facilitate patriarchy. In addition, the effect of religiosity does not significantly differ across religions; thus, a particular religion does not carry the effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap. Finally, our experimental results illustrate that directly espousing egalitarian values by prescribing overlapping social roles for men and women, proscribing sexual harassment, and prescribing equality in leadership development can buffer the effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap.

Human capital factors have been predominantly used to explain the gender wage gap, suggesting that the gap is largely due to women contributing less human capital to the workplace compared to men (e.g., Blau & Kahn, 2000, 2017). Evidence supporting this theory has found that women are more likely than men to take time off work for children and family (e.g., Blau & Kahn, 2000; Cohen & Huffman, 2003; Lips, 2013). Aligned with this literature, differentiated social domains were significantly related to the gender wage gap both globally and in the United States. Beyond human capital, the economics literature has tended to examine the effect of productivity on the gender wage gap, and the unexplained residual is attributed to discrimination (Weichselbaumer & Winter-Ebmer, 2005). For example, Blau and Kahn (2000) concluded that 38% of the gender wage gap is unexplained and is potentially due to discrimination. Evidence supporting this view includes a meta-analytic review of the gender wage gap, which revealed that, on average, women perform at the same level as men and performance differences do not contribute to the gender wage gap (Joshi et al., 2015b). We advance this literature by establishing that religiosity is an important cultural variable that exacerbates gender differentiation, and, thus, the gender wage gap.

Identifying commonalities across the world religions also advances social role theory by providing an explanation for cross-cultural differences in gender roles. We establish that it is not just personal ideologies but also shared, pervasive cultural values in

societies that affect inequality in the value ascribed to the workplace contributions of men and women. This supports biosocial theory's prediction that patriarchy emerges under predictable socioeconomic conditions, rather than being universally relevant across societies (Wood & Eagly, 2002).

In addition to experimentally manipulating religiosity and examining its relationships across two field samples, we examined the effect of religiosity on the gender wage gap over time across states in the United States. The advantage of examining the gender wage gap over time is that fixed-effects models account for between-state factors that may have compelling effects on the gender wage gap (e.g., industry and occupational differences across states). Hence, trends in the gender wage gap can be attributed to differences in states' religiosity, rather than other between-state differences. Lending credence to our prediction that religiosity positively influences the gender wage gap, the gender wage gap is narrowing significantly more slowly in religious than in secular states. At the current rate, the gender wage gap for full-time employees in the United States is forecasted to close in approximately 47 years (year 2067). However, the wage gap in secular states will take approximately 28 years to close (year 2048), while the gap in religious states will take approximately 109 years to close (year 2129).

These results also highlight that there was not significant variability in religiosity at the state level of analysis from 2008–2016. The U.S. Supreme Court recently issued a series of rulings that strengthen religious liberties (Hurley, 2020), and the United States is the only country that separates church from state (Fox, 2006). The strong interplay between government and religion may perpetuate laws and policies that ensure patriarchal values are unyielding over time, precluding equality across the genders (Adamczyk & Hayes, 2012; Fox, 2006). Research is needed to investigate the degree of separation between church and state across cultures, and whether separating these two entities reduces inequality.

### Practical Implications

In the United States, the Civil Rights Act protects employees from discrimination on the basis of religion. Some organizations explicitly demonstrate religious support by providing employees with a place to pray, opening meetings with prayer, and evoking god as an explanation for firm policies. Based on the existing literature (Chan-Serafin et al., 2013; Weaver & Agle, 2002), religious inclusion can benefit the workplace by encouraging prosocial or ethical behavior (e.g., McGhee

& Grant, 2017). However, religiosity may also have a significant and systematic effect on women's wages, suggesting that firms should toe a fine line between permitting religious freedom and ensuring that freedom does not infringe upon the rights of others.

The results also highlight the practical importance for managers, organizational leaders, and policy-makers to better understand how religiosity impacts men's and women's economic outcomes. After accounting for covariates, religiosity explained 17% of the variability in the gender wage gap across states, which represents a \$1,734 loss in annual wages for full-time female employees (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Constructive steps can be taken to buffer the effect of religiosity. Specifically, our experimental findings showcase that managers in religious cultures may counteract biased valuations of employees by emphasizing gender-egalitarian policies (i.e., support for both men and women to be actively involved in their children's lives, strict sexual harassment policies, and investment in female leaders' career development). Managers need to be aware of biases in wage allocation, increase transparency, and promote accountability to reduce that bias (Amis et al., 2020; Castilla & Benard, 2010). Managers operating in religious cultures, in particular, may need to proactively enact equitable workplace policies. A common notion is that the gender wage gap will resolve itself over time. While Study 2's time series analysis did reveal that the wage gap is slowly narrowing over time, this effect has been largely carried by secular states. Consequently, in religious cultures, managers likely need training to intervene when gender differentiation turns discriminatory.

Rather than waiting 47 years for wage parity, organizational leaders and policy-makers can assess whether employees are paid equitably based on the value of their work, regardless of gender. In Iceland, this is a requirement for organizations with 25 or more employees, which has helped the country maintain one of the the smallest gender wage gap for the past nine years (Akhtar, 2018). Employers must decide whether it is acceptable to let wage inequality slowly fade over time or follow in the lead of organizations—including Starbucks, Gap, Boston Scientific, Intel, and Adobe—that pay women and minorities on par with white men. Certifying employers that attain equity (similar to Iceland [Akhtar, 2018]) may hasten progress toward wage equality.

### Study Limitations and Directions for Future Research

On balance with these contributions, the nature of the global and U.S. samples posed several limitations,



which we hope will fuel future research. Foremost, while we tried to maximize the representation of countries in our global sample, we did not have complete data from every country. It is unlikely that the data were missing at random. Rather, missing data may be an indicator of a country's stage of development or more extreme externalities (e.g., countrywide censorship), and we cannot be certain whether including the remaining countries would change the results. To temper concerns that missing portions of the population may have skewed the results, we also tested our hypotheses experimentally and using data from all 50 states in the United States. Second, our theory development compared religious to secular cultures, but culture operates on a continuum. Indeed, our measures of religiosity in the global and U.S. data captured this continuum, ranging from the majority of the population being religious to the majority being nonreligious. Third, a couple of indicators of the mediating mechanisms were collected after the gender wage gap data (see Table 2), but each of these societal values and behaviors change slowly (Roe & Ester, 1999). Fourth, we focused on online searches for "rape" and "pornography." However, people may not turn to the Internet to understand sexual victimization experiences, pornography can be viewed in nondigital formats, and some countries censor Internet activity. Each of these factors would have attenuated relationships with sexuality. Despite these limitations, religiosity accounted for 11% and 8% of the variance in sexuality globally and in the United States, respectively, after accounting for covariates. Although there has been extensive research on the sexualization of women (see Berdahl, 2007; Braasch, 2010; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), additional research should examine how pornography consumption and rape affect the gender wage gap to build a comprehensive understanding of the factors underlying wage inequality.

Cultural tightness–looseness theory has illustrated that religious cultures tend to be tighter than secular cultures across countries around the world, and the loosening of societal values is correlated with a decline in religiosity in the United States over time (Gelfand et al., 2011; Jackson, Gelfand, De, & Fox, 2019). In tight cultures, norms are clearly defined and norm violations are sanctioned, whereas loose cultures permit greater behavioral variability. This work has advanced the view that cultures are similarly tight or loose across members within its boundaries. In contrast, extant research has suggested that gender serves as an important

moderator of the extent to which religious cultures are tight, such that societal constraints may be looser for men than for women. Research that integrates cultural tightness–looseness could expand upon our model by determining the extent to which religiosity has a uniform effect on behavioral expectations across all society members—or whether cultural tightness–looseness differs for men versus women.

## CONCLUSION

This research challenges the prevailing view of religiosity in the workplace by illustrating that religiosity is not uniformly a benevolent force, and that each of the major world religions differentiates based on gender. We hope that these theoretical advancements spark inquiry into the effects of religiosity on organizational phenomena beyond the gender wage gap and sensitize organizational leaders to societal forces that may require norm-shifting policies to disrupt inequality. In recent decades, societies, organizations, and individuals alike have progressed toward the view that men and women can contribute equally. Further progress may be made by understanding the implications of religiosity on discriminatory wage allocation. Ideally, these insights will sensitize organizational leaders to rectify cases where professional equals are compensated unequally based on gender.

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human trafficking. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 26: 79–99.



**Traci Sitzmann** (traci.sitzmann@ucdenver.edu) is a professor of management and One Year MBA Research Fellow at the University of Colorado Denver. Her research focuses on multilevel issues in strategic human resource management, including optimizing training effectiveness, employee motivation, and social issues related to equity and diversity.

**Elizabeth M. Campbell** (campbele@umn.edu) is a Lawrence Fellow and assistant professor of work and organizations at the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management. She received her PhD from the University of Maryland's Smith School of Business. Her research examines interpersonal interactions at work and how hidden consequences can emerge from seemingly positive organizational phenomena.

