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Poor Teenagers' Religion

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Abstract
Empirical research has ignored the effects of poverty on adolescent religion even though children are far more likely than adults to live in poverty in the United States. The current research demonstrates considerable differences in the religious activities and religious viewpoints of poor and non-poor American teenagers. Analysis of National Study of Youth and Religion survey data shows that while poor teenagers are especially likely to pray, read religious scriptures, and report high levels of personal faith, they are unlikely to regularly participate in organized religious activities. Other findings include poor teenagers' emphasis on role reversal in the afterlife, their apparently conventional levels of interaction with secular society, and their low likelihood of reporting the types of emotional religious experiences that are commonly associated with lower class religion. The findings highlight the important role poverty plays in shaping the religious outlooks and activities of adolescents, as well as the need for researchers to consider the role of social class when analyzing Americans' religious beliefs and activities.

Introduction

While questions about the relationship between social class and religion are as old as the field of sociology, sociologists have paid little attention to the effects of poverty on American religion in the last few decades. Influential European sociologists, such as Marx, Weber, and Troeltsch, analyzed the effects of social class on religion. Early American sociologists of religion, most notably Niebuhr, continued to focus on the different religious viewpoints of the various social classes. Research on American religion in the 1960s and 1970s empirically

examined the relationships between social class and religion hypothesized by Niebuhr, Marx, Weber, and Troeltsch (e.g. Davidson 1977; Demerath 1965; Estus and Overington 1970; Fukuyama 1961; Glock and Stark 1965; Goode 1966; Lenski 1963; Mueller and Johnson 1975; Stark 1972). Recently, however, empirical researchers have largely ignored the relationship between social class and American religion (see Smith and Faris 2005).

The dearth of research on social class and American religion is particularly detrimental to our understanding of adolescent religion since children are considerably more likely than adults to live in poverty in the United States. In 2005, 17.6 percent of Americans under 18 years old lived in homes with incomes below the poverty line, compared to only 11.1 percent of 18 to 64 year olds and 10.1 percent of those 65 years old and older (DeNavas-Walt, et al. 2006). A considerably larger proportion of American children live in homes that fell or will fall below the poverty line at some point during their childhoods (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan 1997). Despite the fairly common role of poverty in the lives of American teenagers, sociologists have failed to address how poverty affects American teenagers' religious activities and beliefs (see Ross 1950 for an exception).

Knowledge about poor adolescents' religion is further limited by the fact that teenagers' religious activities and beliefs do not always follow the same patterns as those of adults. There are sometimes even noteworthy differences between parents and their own children when it comes to religious beliefs, such as differences in their views of God, the Bible, and the importance of prayer (Hoge, et al. 1982; Keeley 1976). As discussed below, factors associated with being poor in the United States suggest that poor adolescents and their parents are particularly likely to differ in their religious outlooks and activities.

Variations between adult and child religiosity and the absence of recent research on poverty and American religion leave us knowing little about the religion of poor, American teenagers. Are poor teenagers active in religious organizations, one of the few contexts where lower class Americans have opportunities to learn and practice valuable civic skills (Verba, et al. 1995)? Do poor teenagers practice devotional activities and emphasize religious faith, which may curb some of the negative social and psychological consequences of adolescent poverty (Sherkat and Ellison 1999)? Addressing the lack of empirical research on social class and adolescent religion, this article examines the effects of poverty on adolescent religion through analysis of recent survey data of teenagers and their parents.

Religion and Social Class

Nineteenth and early twentieth century European sociologists wrote extensively on the topic of social class and religion. Karl Marx's views on the subject are probably the best known. Religion, according to Marx, is fre-

quently used to pacify the proletariat—religion is sometimes a tool used by the rich and powerful to control the poor (Marx [1844] 1978). In Marx's view, religion becomes destructive to the poor when it shifts their focus to otherworldly concerns, pacifying them against the inequities of this world (see Lefever 1977 for an alternative view). Max Weber's research on the worldviews of the different social classes also informs current views of poverty and religion. Weber ([1922] 1993) proposes a different theodicy of meaning, or religious explanation of chaotic circumstances, for the different social classes. The upper classes, according to Weber, have an immanent conception of the divine and often seek salvation through mystical channels (see Stark 2003 for an alternative viewpoint). Conversely, the poor and lower classes tend to stress a "theodicy of escape," seeking to master the conflicts inherent in this world by retreating into communities of like-minded believers with an otherworldly emphasis. Ernst Troeltsch ([1931] 1992) further describes the upper class tendency towards mysticism and the lower class emphasis on withdrawal from the secular environment. Weber ([1922] 1993) notes that factors associated with stratification other than income, such as status group affiliation, also affect religious worldviews. Speaking specifically of religion in the United States, he points out that that church affiliation is a financial hardship for poor Americans (Weber 1946).

Interest in the effects of social class on religion carried over to American sociologists. H. Richard Niebuhr (1929), influenced by Weber, Troeltsch, and Marx, describes the attributes of the religion of the poor, or what he calls the "churches of the disinherited." Churches of the disinherited promise poor people a reversal of fortunes in the afterlife. The religion of the poor, according to Niebuhr, is an otherworldly religion that emphasizes the next world over this world and places a great importance in personal religious experiences. Following Niebuhr's lead, empirical research on social class and religion in the United States suggests four general characteristics of lower class religion.

First, empirical research on social class and American religion points to the positive effects of income on participation in organized religious activities (Demerath 1965; Fukuyama 1961; Lenski 1963; Stark 1972; see Lipford and Tollison 2003 for an exception). It should be noted that the positive effects of income on religious service attendance are often not very large and may to some degree be a byproduct of the relationship between income and secular organizational activity (Goode 1966; Mueller and Johnson 1975; see Glock and Stark 1965 for an exception). While the effects of income on attending religious services may not be very large and may be partially due to other factors, income has a strong, positive effect on participating in religious activities other than service attendance (Schwadel 2002). Moreover, the lower classes are more likely than the middle and upper classes to not affiliate with organized religion. In other words, lower class Americans are particularly likely to claim no religious preference or to be religious "nones" (Demerath 1965).

The second attribute of lower class, American religion noted by sociologists is the emphasis on conservatism, otherworldly beliefs, emotional religious experiences, and the importance of religion in daily life. Though the strength of the relationship is in question, it is clear that lower class Protestants are more likely than middle and upper class Protestants to affiliate with conservative denominations (Roof and McKinney 1987; Smith and Faris 2005; Wuthnow 1988). Lower class Protestants also tend to hold conservative beliefs and emphasize the importance of religion. In what is probably the most extensive analysis of social class and American religion, N. J. Demerath III (1965) shows that lower class Americans stress doctrinal orthodoxy, religion having a large influence on everyday life, belief in the afterlife, holding fundamentalist beliefs, and rejecting religious relativism. Stark and Bainbridge (1985) discuss the otherworldly focus of the poor that makes up for poor people's lack of earthly rewards. Stark's (1972) analysis demonstrates that lower class church members are particularly likely to be orthodox, to find meaning and purpose in life in Christianity, and to report having personal religious experiences.

The importance of private devotional activities is the third well-established aspect of lower class, American religion. The lower classes are more likely than the middle and upper classes to pray (Baker 2008; Davidson 1977; Estus and Overington 1970; Fukuyama 1961; Stark 1972) and to read religious scriptures (Demerath 1965). Stark (1972:490) concludes, "Public, organized worship has more appeal for the upper classes, whereas private devotionalism is more predominant among the lower classes."

The fourth characteristic of lower class religion involves lower class Americans' tendency to withdraw from secular society. Poor Americans are considerably less likely than non-poor Americans to participate in secular voluntary organizations (Verba, et al. 1995). While the poor are underrepresented in secular activities, they tend to interact a great deal with people in their religious congregations or with people that hold similar religious beliefs. For instance, Demerath (1965) shows that the lower classes emphasize the communal features of religion, they are especially likely to interact with people in their congregations, and they disapprove of clergy participation in secular affairs. Similarly, Stark (1972) finds that the lower classes are more likely than the middle and upper classes to have three of their five closest friends in their congregations and to have the majority of their organizational memberships in religious organizations.

In general, empirical research on social class and American religion, though somewhat dated, suggests the following relationships between poverty and adult religion: (1) poor people are less active in organized religion than are non-poor people, (2) poor people are likely to emphasize the afterlife, meaningful religious experiences, and the importance of religion in daily life, (3) poor people are likely to perform personal devotional activities, and (4) poor people are

less likely than non-poor people to participate in secular voluntary organizations but they are more likely to interact with like-minded believers.

Poor Teenagers' Religion

Although empirical research, largely from the 1960s and 1970s, explores the effects of social class on the religious attitudes and activities of American adults, adolescents' religion can differ from the religion of adults. For instance, children are generally more likely than adults to attend religious services, particularly adults without school-aged children (Roof and McKinney 1987). Teenagers do not always resemble their own parents when it comes to religious beliefs and activities. Smith and colleagues (2003), for example, show that only two-thirds of teenagers have religious ideas that closely resemble their parents' religious ideas, and one-tenth have religious ideas that are very different from their parents' views. In an analysis of the transmission of religious values from parents to adolescent children, Hoge, et al. (1982:578) found "rather weak relationships." Plenty of other research focuses on the intergenerational transmission of religion in the U.S., and often the surprising lack thereof (Clark, et al. 1988; Dudley and Dudley 1986; Erickson 1992; Keeley 1976; Kieren and Munro 1987). Moreover, parents do not simply pass on their religious attitudes to their children. Children often shape religious discussions in the home, making parent-child religious socialization a reciprocal process (Boyatzis and Janicki 2003). As Regnerus and colleagues (2003:10) conclude in their review of the literature on adolescent religion, "Parent-child transmission of religiosity and religious identity is indeed quite powerful. But it's not inevitable."

Family and contextual factors that affect the intergenerational transmission of religion suggest that the religious outlooks and activities of poor, American teenagers are particularly likely to vary from their parents' religious viewpoints and activities. The quality of the parent-child relationship affects parent-child agreement on religious issues (Hoge, et al. 1982; Myers 1996; Okagaki and Bevis 1999), and poverty has a negative impact on parent-child relationships (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan 1997). The national context also affects intergenerational religious transmission. Parental religiosity has less of an effect on child religiosity in relatively religious nations, such as the United States (Kelley and De Graaf 1997; Nelsen and Rizvi 1984). Thus, it is possible that the religion of poor, American adolescents differs considerably from the religion of poor, American adults.

With notable differences in religious outlook between teenagers and adults and the lack of recent research on poverty and religion, the question remains how does poverty affect American teenagers' religious viewpoints and activities at the beginning of the twenty-first century?

Data and Methods

The effects of poverty on adolescent religion are examined with survey data from the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR). The NSYR is a nationally representative telephone survey of 3,290 U.S. teenagers, ages 13 to 17, and one of each of their parents. The English and Spanish language surveys were administered from July, 2002 to April, 2003 through random digit dialing and in-home randomization methods.[1] To be eligible for the survey, at least one teenager, ages 13 to 17, must live in the household for at least six months of the year. In the case of households identified as containing a teenager but refusing to participate, information about the survey was mailed to the household and then they were called back for possible participation. Diagnostic analyses show that NSYR teenagers are comparable to U.S. teenagers as a whole (see Smith and Denton 2003 for more information on NSYR sampling). A weight variable is applied in all analyses to adjust for the number of teenagers in the household, the number of telephone numbers in the house, and slight variations between NSYR respondents and the national population of adolescents in geographic location and household income distribution.

Primary Independent Variable

The central independent variable is a measure of poverty. The poverty measure follows the U.S. government's 2002 definition of poverty, taking into account the age of the head of the household, the number of children in the house, the number of household members, and the household income (U.S. Census Bureau 2003a). Because the NSYR measure of family income is a categorical variable, the poverty line for each household configuration falls within an income category. Given the low level of income needed to be considered poor, all borderline cases (i.e., those with family incomes in the same income category that the poverty line falls in) are coded as being poor. With this measure of poverty, 18.6 percent of NSYR teens and their parents are coded as being poor. In comparison, in 2002, 16.7 percent of Americans less than 18 years old lived in households with annual incomes below the poverty line and 22.3 percent lived in households that earned below 125 percent of the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau 2003b; U.S. Census Bureau 2003c).

Dependent Variables

The four sections of the analysis below test the extent to which previous findings on the religion of lower class adults apply to poor teenagers. Table 1 shows the original question wording and operationalization for all dependent variables, divided into the following analytical categories: (1) organized religious participation, (2) otherworldly beliefs, religious experiences, and the im-

1. About 3.7 percent of respondents completed the Spanish language version of the survey.

portance of religious faith, (3) private devotional activities, and (4) religiously similar friends and secular voluntary activity.[2] First, previous research suggests that poor adults are less likely than non-poor adults to participate in organized religious activities. If this pattern holds true for adolescents, poor teenagers should be less likely than non-poor teenagers to regularly attend religious services,[3] go to Sunday school, and participate in religious youth groups, and more likely to claim no religious preference. Second, if poor teenagers resemble lower class adults, they should be more likely than non-poor teenagers to believe in the afterlife and a judgment day, to report having moving religious experiences, and to say that religious faith is important in their daily lives. Third, the religion of lower class adults disproportionately focuses on private devotional activities, which means poor teenagers should be particularly likely to pray and read religious scriptures. Fourth, research suggests that lower class adults tend to associate primarily with people who have similar religious outlooks and they often shun participation in secular voluntary organizations. Assuming that poor teenagers are similar to poor adults in this respect, poor teenagers should be more likely than non-poor teenagers to report that at least three of their five closest friends hold religious beliefs that are similar to their religious beliefs, and less likely to participate in secular voluntary activities.

Analysis Technique and Control Variables

Binary logistic regression models examine the effects of poverty on teenagers' religious affiliations, practices, and beliefs. Binary logistic regression models compute the logged odds change in the dichotomous dependent variable for each one unit increase in the independent variables (Menard 1995). Teenagers' demographics, geographic location, and parental/family variables are added to the regression models of the effects of poverty on adolescent religion. Teenag-

2. Bivariate correlations between dependent variables range from near zero to .50. The following dependent variable combinations are correlated at the .40 level or higher (correlations in parentheses): regular service attendance and Sunday school participation (.49), regular service attendance and youth group participation (.42), youth group participation and Sunday school participation (.50), and importance of faith and prayer (.41).

3. Religious service attendance is dichotomized at two to three times a month or more versus less than two to three times a month, which is meant to tap regular religious participation. A more stringent measure of regular service attendance, such as weekly or more, might result in religiously active teenagers who have various other life commitments that compete with religious activity, such as sports, clubs, and other social events, being placed in the non-participating category (see Smith 2005 for a discussion of teenagers' various organizational and social commitments that compete with-religious activity). Nevertheless, alternative codings of the dichotomous religious participation variable do not seriously affect the results (see notes 5 and 6). Additionally, using the dichotomous measure of service participation rather than the original seven-category variable (never, few times a year, many times a year, once a month, two to three times a month, once a week, and more than once a week) also does not meaningfully change the results (see notes 5 and 6). The dichotomous measure of religious service attendance was chosen over the ordinal measure to keep the analysis consistent with the other binary logistic regression analyses.

Table 1. Question Wording and Operationalization of Dependent Variables

Organized Religious Participation

1. "Regardless of whether you now attend any religious services, do you ever think of yourself as part of a particular religion, denomination, or church?" (no = religious "none" [12%])
2. "About how often do you usually attend religious services …?"(two to three times a month or more = regular service attendance [53%])
3. "Are you currently involved in any religious youth group?" (yes = youth group activity [38%])
4. "In the last year, how often, if at all, have you attended a religious Sunday school?" (a few times a month or more = regular Sunday school participation [47%])

Otherworldly Beliefs, Religious Experiences, and Importance of Religious Faith

5. "Do you believe that there is life after death" (definitely believe = believe in afterlife [50%])
6. "Do you believe that there will come a judgment day when God will reward some and punish others, or not?" (yes = believe in a judgment day [73%])
7. "Have you ever had an experience of spiritual worship that was very moving and powerful?" (yes = had religious experience [52%])
8. "How important or unimportant is religious faith in shaping how you live your daily life?" (very or extremely important = faith important in daily life [51%])

Private Devotional Activities

9. "How often, if ever, do you pray by yourself alone?" (a few times a week or more = regular prayer [53%])
10. "How often, if ever, do you read from [appropriate scriptures] to yourself alone?" (once a week or more = regular scripture reading [26%])

Religiously Similar Friends and Secular Voluntary Activity

11. After naming their five closest friends, respondents were asked, "which, if any of these people, hold religious beliefs that are similar to yours" (three or more friends with similar religious beliefs = associating with people with similar religious outlooks [67%])
12. "In the last year, how much, if at all, have you done organized volunteer work or community service?" and "How much, if any, of this volunteer work or community service was organized by a religious organization or congregation?" (any volunteer work not done for a religious organization or congregation = secular voluntary activity [60%])

Percent of teenagers doing or saying concept in brackets. Data weighted to adjust for probability of selection into the sample and potential sampling bias.

ers' ages and a dummy variable for female teens control for age and gender effects, which are both relevant to religious participation and beliefs. Teen religious service attendance, a dummy variable for those who attend at least two to three times a month, is introduced as a control variable in all models following the analysis of the effects of poverty on teens' religious service attendance. Dummy variables for urban and rural teens (with suburban teens being the reference category) and a dummy variable for Southern residence control for geographic variations in religious practice and belief. A dummy variable for teens that live with married parents controls for variations in family stability. Parents' religious activity, which can have a large effect on their children's religiosity, is measured with a dummy variable for responding parents who attend religious services at least two to three times a month. Finally, but probably most importantly, the religious context of each teenager's home life is accounted for with dummy variables for the responding parent's religious tradition: evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, black Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, Jewish, other religions, and unaffiliated.[4] Not only are parents' religious traditions likely to affect their children's religious outlooks, but, as Figure 1 demonstrates, there are large differences in the proportion of families living near or below the poverty line among the different religious traditions. About one-third of teens whose parents are affiliated with black Protestant denominations are growing up in poverty, which is not surprising given the large racial differences in income in the United States. The religiously unaffiliated have the second largest proportion of poor families, with 23 percent poor, suggesting that many poor, American teenagers live in homes with little connection to organized religion. Supporting previous research on social class and American religion, evangelical Protestant families (16 percent) are more likely than mainline Protestant families (11 percent) to be poor.

Results

Participation in Organized Religion

As noted, poor teenagers may differ from their parents religiously more than non-poor teenagers differ from their parents. As a quick aside before presenting the logistic regression results, the NSYR data allow for a partial test of this hypothesis. Table 2 shows the correlations between teenagers and their responding parents having no religious preference and regularly attending religious services, for both the poor and the non-poor. The correlation between poor teenagers and their parents having no religious preference is somewhat lower than the correlation between non-poor teenagers and their parents hav-

4. Religious tradition is determined by the responding parent and the variable is constructed by the principle investigator of the NSYR to resemble, as closely as possible, the division of denominations devised by Steensland and colleagues (2000).

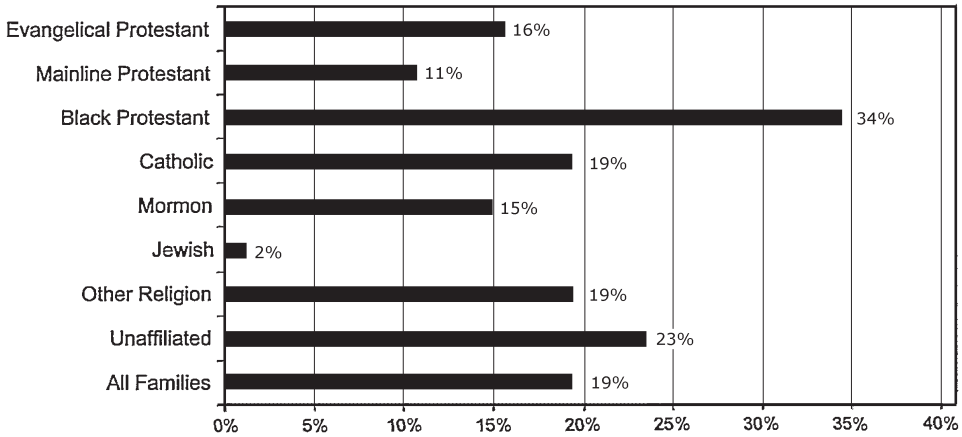

Figure 1. Percent of Families Near or Below the Poverty Line within Parents' Religious Tradition. (Data weighted to adjust for probability of selection into the sample and potential sampling bias. *Source:* National Study of Youth and Religion 2002-2003.)

ing no religious preference (.34 and .38, respectively). According to Fisher's *z* Transformation, which transforms the difference in correlations into a normally distributed *z*-score (Cohen, et al. 2003), this difference is not statistically significant. The difference in correlations is far greater when it comes to regular religious service attendance. The correlation between non-poor teens' and their parents' attendance (.50) is much larger than the correlation between poor teens' and their parents' attendance (.30); according to Fisher's *z* Transformation, this difference is highly significant. Alternative codings of religious service attendance result in even greater differences between poor teenagers and their parents compared to non-poor teenagers and their parents.[5] To put this difference in context, 76 percent of non-poor parents who regularly attend religious services have adolescent children who also regularly attend religious services while only 58 percent of poor parents who regularly attend religious services have adolescent children who also regularly attend religious services (not

5. When regular attendance is defined as weekly or more, the correlation between poor teens and their parents is .29 while the correlation between non-poor teens and their parents is .53 (both correlations significant at .001 level). Using the original seven-category measure of religious service attendance, the correlation between poor teens and their parents is .37 while the correlation between non-poor teens and their parents is .60 (both correlations significant at .001 level). According to Fisher's *z* Transformation, the difference in correlations between poor and non-poor teen/parent pairs is statistically significant at the .001 level with both alternate codings of religious service attendance.

Table 2. Correlations between Teenagers and Their Parents Having No Religious Preference and Regularly Attending Religious Services, Among the Poor and Non-Poor

	No religious preference	Attends religious services at least 2 to 3 times a month
Poor teen/parent correlation	.34***	.30***
	(575)	(574)
Non-poor teen/parent correlation	.38***	.50***
	(2,511)	(2,506)
Fisher's z [a]	0.82	3.91***

*N*s in parentheses. Data weighted to adjust for probability of selection into the sample and potential sampling bias. Source: National Study of Youth and Religion 2002-2003.

[a] Fisher's z transforms the difference between poor and non-poor correlations into a normally distributed z-score.

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed tests)

shown). In sum, non-poor teenagers and their parents are more religiously similar than are poor teenagers and their parents when it comes to regularly attending religious services, though the same cannot be said of having no religious preference.

Table 3 presents odds ratios from binary logistic regression analyses of teenagers' participation in organized religion. As the first column of Table 3 shows, in the bivariate regression of having no religious preference, poor teens' odds of claiming to be religious "nones" are 55 percent higher than the odds for non-poor teens (the odds ratio is 1.55). In the full model, poor teens' odds of having no religious preference are still 36 percent higher than the odds for non-poor teens, though the statistical significance of the poverty coefficient drops to the .1 level (column 2). The fact that many teens with no religious preference also have parents with no religious preference is evident from the very strong effect of having unaffiliated parents. Nonetheless, teens that live in poor or near poor households are more likely than other teens to be religious "nones," regardless of whether or not their parents are affiliated with a religious tradition.

Religious service attendance is the most common measure of religious participation. As the bivariate regression results in the third column of Table 3 show, poor teens' odds of attending religious services at least two to three times a month are 38 percent less than the odds for non-poor teens (1 – 0.62 = 0.38). The effect of poverty is smaller, but still meaningful, with control variables added to the model. In the full model, poor teens' odds of regular service attendance are 29 percent less than the odds for non-poor teens (column 4). While the statistical significance of the effect of poverty on teenagers' religious

service attendance declines from .001 to .01 when control variables are added to the model, poverty remains a strong and significant predictor of teenagers' religious service attendance. Alternative codings of religious service attendance result in even larger effects of poverty.[6]

The results in Table 3 also show that poor teens are less likely than non-poor teens to regularly participate in Sunday school and belong to religious youth groups. In the bivariate model, the odds of poor teens attending a religious Sunday school at least a few times a month are 30 percent less than the odds for non-poor teens (column 5). With control variables in the model, poor teens' odds of regular Sunday school participation are 21 percent less than the odds for non-poor teens (column 6). The statistical significance of the effect of poverty on teenagers' Sunday school participation declines when control variables are added to the model (from .001 to .1), but remains meaningful.

The difference between poor teens and non-poor teens is even greater when it comes to religious youth group activity. In the bivariate regression, poor teens' odds of religious youth group participation are 46 percent less than the odds for non-poor teens (column 7). In the full model, the odds of youth group participation for poor teens are 37 percent less than the odds for non-poor teens (column 8). In general, the results show that poor teens are less likely than non-poor teens to participate in organized religious activities ranging from simply affiliating with organized religion to religious service and Sunday school attendance to youth group participation.

Otherworldly Religious Beliefs, Religious Experiences, and Importance of Religious Faith

Table 4 presents odds ratios from logistic regression analyses of teenagers' otherworldly religious beliefs, their reporting of moving religious experiences, and the importance of religious faith in their lives. Contrary to the common portrayal of lower class religion, poor teenagers are less likely than non-poor teenagers to believe in the afterlife. The bivariate model shows that poor teens' odds of believing in the afterlife are 36 percent less than the odds for non-poor teens (column 1). In the full model, poor teens' odds of believing in life after death are 28 percent less than the odds for non-poor teens (column 2). While adding control variables to the model reduces the significance of the poverty coefficient from .001 to .01, poverty remains a strong predictor of belief in the afterlife.

6. When religious service attendance is dichotomized at weekly or more, the effect of poverty on service participation is stronger than the results presented in Table 3 (odds ratios of 0.57 in the bivariate regression and 0.68 in the full model, both effects significant at the .01 level or higher). Employing OLS regression with the original seven-category ordinal measure of religious service attendance also shows similar results (poverty coefficients of –.58 in the bivariate regression and –.32 in the full model, both effects significant at the .001 level).

Table 3. Odds Ratios from Binary Logistic Regression Models Predicting Participation in Organized Religion, Teenagers Ages 13-17

	No religious preference		Attends religious services at least 2 to 3 times a month		Attends a religious Sunday school a few times a month		Currently in a religious youth group	
Poverty	1.55 (.13)***	136 (.16)+	0.62 (.09)***	0.71 (.12)**	0.70 (.10)***	0.79 (.12)+	0.54 (.10)***	0.63 (.13)***
Teen Variables								
Age	–	1.07 (.05)	–	0.93 (.03) **	–	0.83 (.03)***	–	0.96 (.03)
Female	–	0.75 (.13)*	–	1.30 (.08)**	–	1.21 (.09)*	–	1.19 (.09)*
Service Attendance	–	–	–	–	–	6.66 (.10)***	–	.510 (.10)***
Location								
South	–	0.50 (.15)***	–	1.12 (.09)	–	1.22 (.09)*	–	1.42 (.09)***
Urban	–	1.26 (.15)	–	0.86 (.10)	–	0.86 (.11)	–	1.13 (.11)
Rural	–	1.31 (.17)	–	1.39 (.11)**	–	1.11 (.11)	–	1.29 (.11)*
(Suburban ref.)								
Parent Variables								
Service Attendance	–	0.15 (.17)***	–	6.48 (.09)***	–	1.97 (10)***	–	1.95 (.10)***
Married	–	0.92 (.14)	–	1.10 (.10)	–	0.95 (.11)	–	1.02 (.11)
Evangelical Protestant [a]	–	0.61 (.21)*	–	1.45 (.13)**	–	1.64 (.14)***	–	1.16 (.13)
Black Protestant	–	1.10 (.25)	–	0.84 (.16)	–	2.00 (.17)***	–	0.58 (.17)***
Catholic	–	0.68 (.20)+	–	0.86 (.13)	–	0.78 (.14)+	–	0.35 (.14)***
Mormon	–	0.50 (.55)	–	1.82 (.28)*	–	3.96 (.30)***	–	2.70 (.28)***
Jewish	–	0.65 (.48)	–	0.2 1 (.48)***	–	1.76 (.35)	–	1.07 (.37)
Other Religion	–	2.37 (.31)**	–	0.62 (.26)+	–	0.42 (.31)**	–	0.13 (.39)***
Unaffiliated	–	4.79 (.21)***	–	0.47 (.23)**	–	0.68 (.25)	–	0.41 (.27)***
Constant	–2.09	–2.20	0.19	0.03	–0.06	1.07	–0.40	–1.10
-2 Log Likelihood	2250.18	1732.24	4235.31	3438.64	4223.33	3182.92	4032.77	3153.12
N	3,085	3,085	3,085	3,085	3,073	3,073	3,076	3,076

Standard errors in parentheses. Full models include a dummy variable for parents whose religious affiliation was undeterminable. Data weighted to adjust for probability of selection into the sample and potential sampling bias. *Source:* National Study of Youth and Religion 2002-2003.

[a] Reference group for all religious affiliation variables is Mainline Protestant

+ $p \leq .10$; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed tests)

Table 4. Odds Ratios from Binary Logistic Regression Models Predicting Otherworldly Religious Beliefs, Religious Experiences, and the Importance of Religious Faith, Teenagers Ages 13-17

	Believe that there is life after death		Believe in a judgment day		Had moving and powerful experience of spiritual worship		Religious faith important in shaping daily life	
Poverty	0.64 (.10)***	0.72(.11)**	1.46 (.11)***	1.72 (.13)***	0.60 (.09)***	0.73 (.11)**	1.24 (.09)	9.48(.12)**'*
Teen Variables								
Age	–	1.05 (.03)+	–	1.01 (.03)	–	1.10 (.03)***	–	1.01 (.03)
Female	–	0.90 (.08)	–	1.35 (.09)***	–	1.07 (.08)	–	1.30 (.08)***
Service Attendance	–	2.00 (.09)***	–	2.17 (.11)***	–	3.15 (.09)***	–	3.47 (.09)***
Location								
South	–	1.24 (.08)***	–	1.50 (.10)***	–	1.52 (.09)***	–	1.71 (.09)***
Urban	–	1.07 (.09)	–	1.00 (.11)	–	0.98 (.10)	–	0.78 (.10)*
Rural	–	0.74 (.10)**	–	1.26 (.12)+	–	0.68 (.11)***	–	0.99 (.11)
(Suburban ref,)								
Parent Variables								
Service Attendance	–	1.56 (.09)***	–	2.10 (.11)***	–	1.70 (.09)***	–	1.97 (.09)***
Married	–	1.06 (.09)	–	1.25 (.11)*	–	1,09 (.10)	–	0.99 (.10)
Evangelical Protestant [a]	–	1.62 (.12)***	–	3.03 (.14)***	–	1.37 (.13)*	–	1.70 (.13)***
Black Protestant	–	1.14 (.15)	–	3.56 (.20)***	–	0.80 (.16)	–	2.53 (.17)***
Catholic	–	0.92 (.12)	–	1.17 (.13)	–	0.39 (.13)***	–	0.87 (.13)
Mormon	–	3.99 (.29)***	–	4.66 (.38)***	–	1.86 (.28)*	–	2.35 (.26)***
Jewish	–	0.64 (.35)	–	0.35 (.37)**	–	1.23 (.32)	–	0.42 (.45)+
Other Religion	–	0.66 (.25)+	–	0.86 (.27)	–	0.48 (.26)**	–	1.21 (.26)
Unaffiliated	–	1.19 (.19)	–	1.12 (.19)	–	0.47 (.21)***	–	0.78 (.22)
Constant	0.08	–1.50	0.95	–0.89	0.17	-2.15	–0.01	–1.77
–2 Log Likelihood	4173.74	3881.58	3430.29	2901.87	4181.66	3543.10	4256.63	3520.70
N	3,034	3,034	2,985	2,985	3,051	3,051	3,080	3,080

Standard errors in parentheses. Full models include a dummy variable for parents whose religious affiliation was undeterminable. Data weighted to adjust for probability of selection into the sample and potential sampling bias. *Source:* National Study of Youth and Religion 2002-2003.

[a] Reference group for all religious affiliation variables is Mainline Protestant

+ $p \leq .10$; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed tests)

In contrast to belief in the afterlife, poverty has a strong, positive effect on belief in a judgment day when God will reward some and punish others. In the bivariate regression, poor teenagers' odds of saying they believe in a judgment day are 46 percent higher than the odds for non-poor teenagers (column 3). With control variables in the model, the effect of poverty is even greater. In the full model, poor teens' odds of believing in a judgment day are 72 percent higher than the odds for non-poor teens (column 4). Teenagers' religious service attendance, which is strongly related to belief in a judgment day, appears to act as a suppressor variable (see Cohen, et al. 2003 for more on suppressor variables). Because religious service attendance and belief in a judgment day are strongly and positively related, the introduction of religious service attendance to the model of belief in a judgment day strengthens the effect of poverty by controlling for poor teens' low likelihood of regular service attendance. In other words, considering their low likelihood of regular religious service attendance, poor teenagers are especially likely to believe in a judgment day.

Contrary to research on adult religion that points to lower class adults' emphasis on emotional religious experiences, poor teenagers are not particularly likely to report having had a worship experience that was very moving and powerful. In the bivariate regression, poor teens' odds of reporting moving worship experiences are 40 percent less than the odds for non-poor teens (column 5). This difference is reduced, but still large, with control variables in the model. In the full model, poor teens' odds of reporting moving worship experiences are 27 percent less than the' odds for non-poor teens (column 6). The poverty coefficient declines in significance from the bivariate model to the full model (from .001 to .01), but remains highly significant. Even after controlling for the strong correlation between religious service attendance and moving worship experiences, poor teens are still less likely than non-poor teens to report worship experiences that are very moving and powerful.

As research on adult religion suggests, poor teens are considerably more likely than non-poor teens to say that religious faith is very or extremely important in shaping their daily lives. The bivariate regression results in the seventh column of Table 4 show that poor teens' odds of reporting that religious faith is very or extremely important in shaping their daily lives are 24 percent higher than the odds for non-poor teens. The effect of poverty is far greater with the addition of control variables to the model. In the full model, poor teens' odds of saying that religious faith is very or extremely important in shaping their daily lives are 48 percent higher than the odds for non-poor teens (column 8). As with belief in a judgment day, religious service attendance appears to act as a suppressor variable in the relationship between poverty and the importance of faith in daily life. Poor teenagers are highly likely to report that religious faith is important in their daily lives despite the fact that they are not likely to regularly attend religious services, and service attendance is strongly correlated with religious faith being important in daily life. The results in Table 4 demonstrate that

Table 5. Odds ratios from Binary Logistic Regressions of Private Devotional Activities, Teenagers Ages 13-17

	Pray alone a few times a week or more		Read from scriptures alone once a week or more	
Poverty	1.24 (.09)*	1.34 (.11)**	1.32 (.10)**	1.45 (.12)**
Teen Variables				
Age	--	1.05 (.03)	--	0.93 (.03)*
Female	--	1.80 (.08)***	--	1.26 (.09)**
Regular Service Attendance	--	3.07 (.09)***	--	2.99 (.11)***
Location				
South	--	1.40 (.09)***	--	1.16 (.09)
Urban	--	1.34 (.10)**	--	1.22 (.11)+
Rural	--	1.02 (.10)	--	1.08 (.11)
(Suburban ref.)				
Parent Variables				
Regular Service Attendance	--	1.60 (.09)***	--	1.46 (.11)***
Married	--	1.08 (.10)	--	0.92 (.11)
Evangelical Protestant [a]	--	1.62 (.13)***	--	1.98 (.14)***
Black Protestant	--	2.01 (.16)***	--	1.90 (.17)***
Catholic	--	1.03 (.13)	--	0.60 (.16)**
Mormon	--	1.95 (.26)**	--	3.68 (.25)***
Jewish	--	0.24 (.49)**	--	1.09 (.47)
Other Religion	--	0.90 (.25)	--	1.68 (.28)+
Unaffiliated	--	0.91 (.20)	--	1.13 (.26)
Constant	0.10	–2.23	–1.11	–1.41
–2 Log Likelihood	4240.16	3674.62	3505.04	3085.06
N	3,075	3,075	3,074	3,074

Standard errors in parentheses. Full models include a dummy variable for parents whose religious affiliation was undeterminable. Data weighted to adjust for probability of selection into the sample and potential sampling bias. *Source:* National Study of Youth and Religion 2002-2003.

[a] Reference group for all religious affiliation variables is Mainline Protestant

+ $p \leq .10$; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed tests)

poor teenagers' religion resembles the religion of lower class adults in certain respects, such as their emphasis on religious faith and belief in a judgment day. In other ways, however, the religion of poor adolescents differs from the common portrayal of lower class religion, exemplified by poor teenagers' low likelihood of reporting religious experiences and believing in the afterlife.

Private Devotional Activities

Table 5 presents odds ratios from logistic regression models of adolescents' private devotional activities. As the first bivariate regression shows, the odds of poor teens praying alone a few times a week or more are 24 percent higher than the odds for non-poor teens (column 1). With control variables added to the model, the odds of poor teens praying alone at least a few times a week increase to 34 percent higher than the odds for non-poor teens (column 2). Similarly, while the odds of poor teens reading religious scriptures alone at least once a week are 32 percent higher than the odds for non-poor teens in the bivariate regression (column 3), the odds for poor teens increase to 45 percent higher than the odds for non-poor teens when control variables are added to the model (column 4). Again, religious service attendance appears to act as a suppressor variable. Since devotional activities are positively correlated with service attendance, the positive effect of poverty on prayer and scripture reading is even greater when poor teens' low likelihood of regular service attendance is taken into account. Mirroring research on social class and adult religion, the results in Table 5 demonstrate that poor teenagers are particularly likely to perform private devotional activities.

Religiously Similar Friends and Secular Voluntary Activity

The regression results in the first two columns of Table 6 demonstrate that poor teens are relatively unlikely to perceive their friends as being religiously similar to them. In the bivariate regression, the odds of poor teens saying that at least three of their five closest friends have religious beliefs similar to their religious beliefs are 24 percent less than the odds for non-poor teens (column 1). With control variables in the model, the odds of poor teens saying three of their five closest friends have religious beliefs similar to theirs are 26 percent less than the odds for non-poor teens (column 2).

The results in Table 6 also show that poor teens are somewhat less likely than non-poor teens to participate in secular voluntary activities, but this relationship is not meaningful when control variables are included in the model. In the bivariate regression, the odds of poor teens participating in secular voluntary activities in the last year are 24 percent less than the odds for non-poor teens (column 3). With the addition of control variables, the odds of poor teens participating in secular voluntary activities are only 11 percent less than the odds for non-poor teens, and the effect of poverty is no longer statistically sig-

Table 6. Odds ratios from Binary Logistic Regressions of Having Religiously Similar Friends and Secular Voluntary Activity, Teenagers Ages 13-17

	At least 3 of 5 closest friends have similar religious beliefs		Done secular volunteer work in the last year	
Poverty	0.76 (0.13)*	0.74 (.14)*	0.76 (.09)**	0.89 (.10)
Teen Variables				
Age	--	0.96 (.03)	--	1.17 (.03)***
Female	--	1.06 (.09)	--	1.24 (.08)**
Regular Service Attendance	--	1.03 (.11)	--	1.35 (.09)***
Location				
South	--	1.34 (10)**	--	0.89 (.08)**
Urban	--	0.90 (.12)	--	1.01 (.09)
Rural	--	0.87 (.12)	--	0.83 (.10)*
(Suburban ref.)				
Parent Variables				
Regular Service Attendance	--	1.14 (.11)	--	1.10 (.09)
Married	--	1.03 (.12)	--	1.13 (.09)
Evangelical Protestant [a]	--	1.11 (.15)	--	0.69 (.12)**
Black Protestant	.-	1.30 (.19)	--	0.72 (.15)*
Catholic	--	1.05 (.15)	--	0.89 (.12)
Mormon	.-	0.92 (.27)	--	0.92 (.25)
Jewish	--	0.19 (.43)***	--	1.55 (.34)
Other Religion	--	0.41 (.33)**	--	0.76 (.24)
Unaffiliated	--	1.06 (.28)	--	1.18 (.18)
Constant	0.72	1.06	0.44	–2.08
–2 Log Likelihood	2685.06	2630.40	4133.86	4044.09
N	2,099	2,099	3,078	3,078

Standard errors in parentheses. Full models include a dummy variable for parents whose religious affiliation was undeterminable. Data weighted to adjust for probability of selection into the sample and potential sampling bias. *Source:* National Study of Youth and Religion 2002–2003.

[a] Reference group for all religious affiliation variables is Mainline Protestant

+ $p \leq .10$; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed tests)

nificant (column 4). In contrast to what research on lower class adults suggests, poor teenagers do not appear to be particularly withdrawn from secular society.

Discussion and Conclusions

With the lack of recent research on poverty and American religion, the most important conclusion from this analysis of the NSYR data is that social class does matter when examining American teenagers' religious participation and beliefs. Poor and non-poor teenagers differ considerably in their religious outlooks and religious activities. As predicted, poor teenagers are less active in organized religion than are non-poor teenagers. Compared to non-poor teenagers, poor teenagers are more likely to have no religious preference, and less likely to regularly attend religious services, participate in religious Sunday schools, and join religious youth groups. These findings support the notion that social class can impose constraints on religious participation (McCloud 2007; Weber 1946). Religious service, Sunday school, and religious youth group participation cost money, possibly excluding poor teens for monetary reasons (Hollingshead 1949). Poor teens (and their parents) might feel conspicuous because they cannot give to the collection plate or afford nice clothes; they might feel that other attendees will look down on them (Sakalas 1999). Poor teenagers may even have trouble getting to religious activities, as few Americans live within close walking distance of their religious congregations (Chaves 2004). In sum, poor teenagers may not choose to avoid religious activities. Instead, they may not be able to afford to participate.

Building on older deprivation theories of religious affiliation, sociologists recognize that social class can impose constraints on religious activity other than those that are strictly monetary, such as constraints on social networks (e.g. Stark and Bainbridge 1985). Most people interact primarily with those of a similar social class, meaning lower class people tend to interact with other lower class people (McPherson, et al. 2001). These class-influenced social networks are important predictors of the congregations and denominations that Americans affiliate with since people often find their religious institutions through their friends and neighbors (Hoge, et al. 1995; Stark and Bainbridge 1985). Not only are poor teenagers' social networks restricted by the social class homogeneity of most social networks, but, as the above findings show, poor teenagers are particularly likely to view their friends as having religious beliefs that are different from their religious beliefs. This suggests that poor teenagers are disadvantaged in their ability to connect to religious organizations that meet their tastes because they often perceive their friends as religiously dissimilar to them, which may help account for poor teenagers' low likelihood of regularly participating in religious organizations.

The analyses of participation in organized religious activities raise almost as many questions as they answer. Do poor teenagers lack the time and resources needed to regularly participate in organized religious activities? Have religious institutions been co-opted by the middle class and, therefore, no longer appeal to lower class adolescents (see Finke and Stark 1992)? Do poor teenagers have a hard time finding religious organizations and activities that appeal to them due to the social class constraints on their social networks? Perhaps religious institutions focus more on providing material resources to the poor than on supplying them with spiritual and religious resources (Sakalas 1999)? Are churches that operate charities for poor people less inviting to those same poor people when it comes time for Sunday services? These are questions that future research must address.

Poor teenagers are undoubtedly religious, but their religion tends to be private and personal, rather than institutionally-based. The regression models of prayer, scripture reading, belief in a judgment day, and the importance of faith in daily life all show suppressor effects of religious service attendance. Not only are poor teenagers especially likely to pray, read scriptures, believe in a judgment day, and say faith is important in their daily lives, but they are surprisingly likely to do/say these things given their low likelihood of regularly attending religious services.

While poor teenagers' stress the personal and private aspects of religion over the institutionally-based aspects of religion, their personal religious activities are far more conventional than the highly emotional religious experiences that are commonly associated with the lower classes. In contrast to research on adult religion, which suggests that the lower classes are particularly likely to have emotional religious experiences (Stark 1972), poor teenagers are less likely than non-poor teenagers to report meaningful experiences of spiritual worship, even after controlling for religious service attendance. Contrary to the common perception of lower class religion, it appears that poor teenagers' religion is not especially experience-based, but it does have a considerable influence on their lives through prayer, scripture reading, and an emphasis on faith in daily life.

Although it is generally believed that lower class religion focuses on the afterlife, analysis of the NSYR data reminds us that this is an oversimplification of theories of the relationship between social class and eschatology. While poor teenagers are somewhat less likely than non-poor teenagers to believe in life after death, poor teenagers are far more likely than non-poor teenagers to believe in a judgment day. At first this may seem contradictory and in contrast to the widespread view that poor people usually hold otherworldly beliefs. Nevertheless, poor teenagers' belief in "a judgment day when God will reward some and punish others" is consistent with the idea that lower class religion focuses not just on the afterlife but on the reversal of fortunes in the afterlife (Niebuhr 1929). When addressing the role of the afterlife in poor people's religion, we should not forget that Marx, Niebuhr, and others specified that poor people's religion emphasizes an afterlife

where the misfortunes of this world are corrected, not just a life after this one. More recently, theories of deprivation and religion point to the implicit exchange promised to poor people, with a deprived this-life being exchanged for of a joyful afterlife (Stark and Bainbridge 1996). The above findings support the view that for poor teenagers an afterlife without mention of divine judgment or the reversal of earthly roles does not have the same promise as a judgment day that will provide the poor with a prosperous eternal existence.

In contrast to poor adults (Demerath 1965; Stark 1972; Verba, et al. 1995), poor teenagers are less likely than non-poor teenagers to interact primarily with teens who have religious beliefs that are similar to their religious beliefs, and poor teens are not much less likely than other teens to participate in secular voluntary activities. In other words, today's poor teenagers do not appear to be particularly withdrawn from secular society. This could be something unique to teenagers since adolescents often lack control over their friendship networks and organizational commitments (Wilson 2000). On the other hand, poor teenagers may continue their relatively high levels of interaction with secular society as they grow older, eventually changing the perception of poor Americans as withdrawn from secular society. In the future, poor adults might be more participatory in secular society than they are now and have been in the past. Further research is needed to assess the long-term implications of poor teenagers' apparently conventional amount of interaction with secular society.

Although this article does not focus on the effects of parental religion on adolescent religion, two conclusions on the subject can be drawn from the above analysis. First, parental religion has a substantial impact on adolescent religion. In all regression models, other than the regressions of withdrawal from secular society (Table 6), both parents' service attendance and parents' religious tradition have strong effects on teenagers' religious outlooks and activities. Second, there appears to be a stronger relationship between parents' religious participation and their adolescent children's religious participation in non-poor families than in poor families-the correlation between parent and child regularly attending religious services is far larger for non-poor families than for poor families. No conclusions can be drawn about the effects of poverty on parent-child agreement on religious beliefs since the parents in the NSYR survey were not asked the same belief questions as the teenagers.

There are various possible reasons for the relatively large differences in regular religious service attendance between poor teenagers and their parents. As noted above, lower class families are disproportionately prone to family conflict (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan 1997). It is possible that the higher level of conflict between teens and parents in poor families is responsible for the large differences in regular religious service attendance between poor parents and their adolescent children. It is also possible that family structure plays a role in this relationship, with poor families being especially likely to be single-parent families (DeNavas-Walt, et al. 2006). Single parents have other commitments that

might conflict with religious service attendance. One parent means there is only one person to take the children where they need to go, to do errands that need to be done, to take care of the home, and to earn the family income. Single parents may simply have less time for religious services. Additionally, it is possible that teens from poor, single-parent households sometimes attend religious services with the nonresident parent, which could lead to large differences in service attendance between teens and their responding parents in these homes. Further research is needed to examine why poor teens and their parents differ in their religious service attendance more than non-poor teens and their parents.

Unfortunately, poverty is a fact of life for a considerable proportion of American children. The physical, social, and psychological consequences of living in poverty are substantial. Increased likelihood of alcohol and substance abuse, high levels of family conflict, early sexual activity, mental health and self-esteem problems, and poor physical health are only a few of the outcomes associated with adolescent poverty (Bianchi 1999). For teenagers, differences in religious outlook and religious activity are another aspect of living in poverty. It is possible that poor teenagers' emphasis on prayer, reading scriptures, and the importance of religious faith can help to mitigate some of the negative effects of living in poverty (Sherkat and Ellison 1999). On the other hand, poor teenagers' lack of regular religious participation is particularly troubling. With poor Americans being underrepresented in most social and political settings, religious organizations are seen as possibly the only context where the lower classes can participate on an equal footing with other Americans (Verba, et al. 1995). Poor teenagers, however, are unlikely to be very active in religious organizations. "While it is possible that this will change as these teens age, it is also possible that in the near future poor Americans will be seriously underrepresented in religious organizations, which will further limit the social, cultural, and political resources available to them.

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