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Gender, race, and the use of prayer to manage anger

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ABSTRACT

Women and blacks are more likely than men and whites to use prayer to manage negative emotions such as anger. However, the pathways explaining these associations are not fully understood. Using data from the 1996 General Social Survey's emotion module, we evaluate four potential mechanisms that might account for these associations: women's and blacks' relatively high levels of religious participation, relatively low socioeconomic status, extended duration of their negative emotional experiences, and relatively lower perceived control. Women's and blacks' higher likelihood of using prayer to manage anger is partially accounted for by their higher levels of religious participation, lower socioeconomic status, and duration of anger. Lower levels of perceived control contribute only to blacks' use of prayer to manage anger. Our findings highlight the importance of identifying pathways that explain why particular social groups use particular emotion management strategies.

Introduction

Social structural arrangements influence individuals' emotional experiences, including the emotions they experience, those they express, and how they express them (Gordon 1990; Hochschild 1983; Kemper 1978; Thoits 2004; see Sharp and Kidder [2013] for a review). In particular, social stratification by gender and race influences individuals' emotional experiences and expression (e.g., Brown 2003; Harlow 2003; Hochschild 1983; Lois 2001; Pierce 1995; Wingfield 2010). Because of long-standing social, economic, and political inequalities in the United States, women and blacks tend to have less social status and power than men and whites, respectively, and are more likely to be subject to both direct and subtle forms of institutional and interpersonal discrimination (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Ridgeway 2011). Given these persistent differences in both opportunity structures and exposure to "minority stress" (e.g., Brown 2003; Meyer, Schwartz, and Frost 2008), women and blacks may experience more frequent or intense negative emotions. Actual or anticipated negative reprisals for the expression of these negative emotions also may prevent them from publicly expressing these feelings, especially in the presence of persons who may be the source of these negative feelings.

To cope with the adverse experience of negative emotions, individuals often engage in emotion management, or the manipulation of "attitudes, thoughts, or behaviors in the service of changing one's own feelings" (Scheff 1979:9; see also Hochschild 1983:7). However, precisely how the use of particular emotion management strategies varies based on one's social position is not fully understood. Whereas some studies show that socially disadvantaged individuals are more likely to use particular emotion management strategies (e.g., Meyer et al. 2008; Simon and Nath 2004), the pathways that account for these relationships remain less understood.

Research consistently shows that women and blacks are more likely than men and whites to use prayer—or interactions with divine others (Sharp 2010)—as a means of managing negative emotions

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(e.g., Baker 2008; Chatters et al. 2008; Krause and Chatters 2005; Simon and Nath 2004). However, we know of no studies that have identified the pathways that might explain why women and blacks are more likely than men and whites, respectively, to use this strategy. To say that inequitable social arrangements account for these associations begs the question of *how* or *why* inequitable social arrangements account for these associations. Furthermore, although women and blacks are more likely than their counterparts to experience some types of social disadvantage, their high likelihood of using prayer to manage emotions may reflect advantages they possess, such as higher levels of social or religious integration. For example, blacks and women typically have greater levels of integration in their religious communities than do whites and men (e.g., Ellison and George 1994), thus providing a social context in which prayer is considered a desirable or useful strategy for managing negative emotions.

We seek to uncover the social factors that contribute to well-established gender and racial differences in the use of prayer to manage negative emotions. Drawing on previous theory and findings in the sociology of religion and the sociology of emotions, we hypothesize that these associations may reflect four factors: (1) women's and blacks' relatively high levels of religious participation, (2) women's and blacks' higher likelihood of inhabiting social positions that influence the emotion management resources in which they have access, (3) gender and racial differences in the duration of negative emotional experiences, and (4) gender and racial differences in levels of perceived control. Our analysis contributes to a sociological understanding of the associations among gender, race, and the use of prayer to manage emotions.

Background

Prayer is the most frequent religious practice performed in the United States. According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2014), 71% of Americans pray on at least a weekly basis, and 55% report praying daily. Personal motivations for prayer are diverse, and include asking for divine assistance, expressing praise or gratitude to a deity, saying grace before meals, and performing formal religious rituals (Cerulo and Barra 2008; Poloma and Gallup 1991; Stark and Finke 2000). Mounting literature indicates that another motivation for prayer is to manage negative emotions. For example, in a study of female victims of intimate partner violence, Sharp (2010) found that prayer provides distressed individuals with several types of emotion management resources, such as positive reflected appraisals—or a favorable perception of how others view one's self—and an always-available other to whom one can express private thoughts and emotions (see also Bade and Cook 2008; Krause and Chatters 2005; Simon and Nath 2004; Thoits 1990).

Studies consistently show that women and blacks are more likely than men and whites, respectively, to use prayer as a means to manage emotions (e.g., Baker 2008; Krause and Chatters 2005; Simon and Nath 2004; Thoits 1990). This may partly reflect women's and blacks' relatively high overall levels of participation in religious activities, including high frequency of prayer in general, religious attendance, and consumption of religious media. First, frequency of prayer *in general* (i.e., not solely for managing emotions) may make prayer a cognitively salient and readily accessible emotion management technique. Studies document that women and blacks pray more in general than men and whites. For example, Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2008) found that two thirds of women but just half of men report praying outside of religious services (also see Sullins 2006). Data from multiple waves of the General Social Survey (GSS) show that around 75% of blacks report praying on a daily basis, compared to 54% of whites (Smith et al. 2011; see also Baker 2008; Krause 2012).

Second, frequent religious attendance may make the use of prayer to manage emotions more salient to women and blacks than their counterparts. Prayer is a common activity in most religious services (Chaves 2004), and frequent attendees often listen to sermons praising the benefits of using prayer to cope with or to help understand life stressors and injustices (Lurhmann 2012). Because women and blacks attend religious services more frequently than men and whites (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008; Smith et al. 2011), the use of prayer to manage negative emotions may be more

cognitively accessible and thus more likely to be used by these groups. Persons with higher levels of participation in formal religious activities may adhere to a cognitive script in which prayer is a coping mechanism that one considers in the face of stress, whereas less religious people may possess a cognitive script that invokes another coping strategy, such as finding humor in the situation or going to a therapist (Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub 1989).

Third, consumption of religious media—in particular, watching or listening to religious programs on television or radio—also may encourage the use of prayer to manage negative emotions. Religious television and radio programming often contains messages about the importance of prayer to deal with problems. For example, a character in a television drama may turn to prayer when he or she faces life difficulties, and callers to a religious radio program may recount how their experience of prayer led to desirable outcomes. Although rigorous empirical evidence is sparse, some studies suggest that women and blacks consume more religious media than do men and whites, respectively (Park and Baker 2007; Taylor and Chatters 2011). This more frequent consumption of religious media may make using prayer to manage negative emotions a salient strategy sought out by women and blacks.

Inequitable social arrangements also may contribute to gender and racial differences in the use of prayer to manage emotions. Because of well-documented institutional and interpersonal discrimination on the basis of gender and race, women and blacks are more likely than men and whites to hold disadvantaged social positions, such as being unemployed or underemployed, having low levels of formal education, and/or having jobs with lower income and/or occupational prestige (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014). Consequently, women and blacks may have less access to emotion management techniques that require financial resources—such as going to a therapist, taking yoga courses, or using drugs or alcohol—than men and whites, respectively. For instances, whites are more likely than blacks to receive clinical therapy (Snowden and Yamada 2005), whereas men are more likely than women to cope by turning to substances (Nolen-Hoeksema and Hilt 2006.). However, prayer is a no-cost emotion management activity; individuals can pray anywhere, anytime, and they can do so undetected by others (because prayers in many religious traditions do not have to be spoken aloud). Thus, women and blacks may be more likely than their advantaged counterparts to use prayer to manage anger because it is an emotion management strategy to which they have access.

The social disadvantages experienced by women and blacks also may shape the nature of their negative emotional experiences, which in turn may account for their likelihood of using prayer to manage these negative emotions. According to Kemper (1978, 2007), emotions are the outcome of social interactions in which people may gain, lose, or maintain two things: power and status. Power involves the ability to impel or persuade others to perform certain actions, whereas status involves others voluntarily giving "appreciation, respect, approval, acceptance, or love" to an individual (Kemper 2007:93). When individuals feel that their power is limited or undermined, or that the status or respect they receive during a social interaction is insufficient, they may experience negative emotions such as fear, sadness, and anger.

Individuals who are subjected to social interactions that undermine their feeling of social standing have been found to experience negative emotions that are longer in duration than their more advantaged counterparts. For example, Collett and Lizardo (2010) found that those holding occupations marked by relatively low levels of prestige and status experience longer durations of anger than those at the middle of the occupational status and prestige distribution, a finding that they attribute to experiences of chronic stress associated with very low status positions (see also Doan 2012; Simon and Lively 2010). Women and blacks may experience longer durations of negative emotions because of experiencing status-deficient interactional outcomes due to cultural stereotypes that portray women and blacks as less competent and socially worthy (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Ridgeway 2011).

Because their experiences of negative emotions are relatively longer, women and blacks may perceive little other recourse for alleviating prolonged negative feelings than to turn to interactions with God through prayer. These interactions with God may bring women and blacks the status that they do not receive in interactions with others, which would then alleviate their anger. According to Kemper (2007:105), individuals often experience "divine love"—or a situation where two actors receive

"extreme amounts of status while one also has extreme power"—when they pray. Individuals often experience this divine love during interactions with God during prayer, as many individuals believe in a loving God that sees them as having great worth and because people view God as having extreme amount of power. For instance, Sharp (2010) has shown that individuals often report that they experience God's esteem, acceptance, and love of them during prayer (see also Luhrmann 2012). Thus, the duration of experienced anger may help explain why women and blacks are more likely than men and whites to use prayer to manage anger.

Differential access to particular coping resources—or social and personal characteristics that people draw upon to deal with stressful situations (Pearlin and Schooler 1978; Thoits 1995) may also contribute to blacks' and women's tendency to use prayer as an emotion management strategy. According to the stress process model, a particularly important and flexible coping resource is a sense of control over one's environment, or one's beliefs about how much mastery one has over both good and bad events (Pearlin and Schooler 1978; Ross and Mirowsky 2003). Those with high levels of perceived control may have the confidence, initiative, and feelings of efficacy that encourage the use of problem-focused coping strategies, which may involve confronting the source of the negative emotions directly. By contrast, those with low perceived control may lack the confidence, power, resources, or initiative necessary to enact such direct strategies and thus may instead use emotion-focused coping strategies. These indirect emotion management strategies do not target the source of negative emotions but rather focus on soothing one's emotions through strategies such as praying to God as a way to vent one's anger at another person (e.g., Sharp 2010).

Race and gender differences in perceived control are well documented. Women and blacks tend to exhibit lower levels of perceived control due to structural obstacles such as sexism, racism, and discriminatory practices that undermine their confidence in their ability to change the outcomes of events through their own actions (Ross and Mirowsky 2003; Shaw and Krause 2001; Thoits 1995). Furthermore, persons with low levels of perceived control may seek out divine intervention in part because they feel that they cannot personally perform actions that can bring about desired results (Schieman, Nguyen, and Elliot 2003). As such, women and blacks may perceive that they have little control over the persons and situations provoking their negative emotions, and may seek out divine assistance for help in managing these emotions.

In sum, we evaluate the extent to which well-documented race and gender differences in the use of prayer to manage negative emotions reflect four distinctive explanatory mechanisms: religious attendance, practices, and consumption; socioeconomic status (SES); duration of anger; and perceived control. All analyses are further adjusted for demographic factors that have been found elsewhere to be associated with both anger and one's overall use of prayer. Specifically, we control for age, parental status, and marital status, as each is associated with anger expression (e.g., Ross and Willigen 1996; Schieman 1999; Wood, Rhodes, and Whelan 1989) and with one's use of prayer in general (e.g., Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2014; Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy, and Waite 1995). Experiences of anger lessen with age due to declines in emotional reactivity (Schieman 1999), and members of older cohorts tend to be more religious and pray more frequently than members of younger birth cohorts (Chaves 2011). Parental status is associated with more frequent symptoms of anger (Ross and Willigen 1996) and with relatively high rates of religious participation (Stolzenberg et al. 1995). Married persons experience less anger than nonmarried persons (Wood et al. 1989), and they tend to be more religiously active than nonmarried individuals (Stolzenberg et al. 1995). We also control for religious affiliation, as evangelical Protestants are more likely to pray than individuals of other Christian denominations, other religions, and nonreligious persons (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2014).

We also evaluate whether the association between gender and the use of prayer to manage anger is moderated by race. Feminist theorists argue that status inequalities intersect with one another, which in turn lead to distinctive experiences based on the intersections of particular social statuses (Collins 1999). For instance, white women will tend to have different social experiences than black women, because the former tend to have more social advantage because of their race than the latter do. Given

prior theoretical work suggesting that the impacts of race and gender are multiplicative rather than additive (e.g., Collins 1999), we expect that black women will be the most likely to turn to prayer to manage anger, whereas white men will be the least likely.

Data and methods

Sample

We use data from the 1996 wave of the GSS, a random sample of 2,904 noninstitutionalized American adults 18 years of age and older. The response rate for this wave of the survey was 76%. The 1996 wave of the GSS included a topical module assessing respondents' emotional experiences in a variety of social contexts. This module was administered to a randomly selected 50% subsample ($n = 1,460$) to reduce the overall length of interview.

Our analysis focuses on the 77% of respondents ($n = 1,125$) who could recall and describe an event during the past month in which they felt "angry, irritated, or annoyed." Those who could recall and describe such an event were then asked several follow-up questions about this particular experience with anger, such as the source of the anger, how long they experienced the anger, and the strategies they used to manage the anger. We dropped the 11 cases who did not answer the question assessing whether respondents used prayer to manage the anger that they experienced, resulting in a final analytic sample of 1,114 persons. We used STATA's *ice* (imputation by chained equation) command to impute missing values for model variables.

Dependent variable

The study outcome is whether one used prayer to manage anger for the particular anger-inducing episode recalled by the participants. This variable is dichotomous, where $1 = $ yes. Twenty-eight percent of the sample reported using this strategy to help manage their anger.

Independent variables

Gender and race
Gender is a dichotomous variable, with $1 = $ female. *Race* is a three-category variable: white (reference category), black, and other.

Religious practice and affiliation
We consider three types of religious practice that may account for subgroup differences in the use of prayer to manage anger. *Frequency of prayer* refers to whether one prays "once a day or more" or "less than once a day" (reference category). Although the original response categories were "several times a day," "once a day," "several times a week," "once a week," "less than once a week," and "never," we use a dichotomous indicator because 43% of respondents reported praying once a day or more. Consistent with the notion that prayer is used for a range of purposes beyond emotion management, we found only a modest zero-order correlation between frequency of prayer and using prayer to manage anger ($r = .39$).[1]

Frequency of religious attendance refers to how often one attends religious services (e.g., church, temple). The categories include "never" (reference category), "several times a year or less," "once a month to nearly every week," and "every week or more than once a week."

Consumption of religious media is a dichotomous measure of whether the respondent watched or listened to a religiously themed television or radio program in the past week ($1 = $ yes).

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[1]To check for multicollinearity, we conducted analyses to calculate the tolerance of how much collinearity a model can tolerate and the variance inflation factor, an indicator of how much the standard errors are caused by collinearity. The tolerance levels for all the variables included in the analysis were well above 0.1, and the variance inflation factor for all variables was well below 10, indicating that multicollinearity is not a concern.

We also control for *religious affiliation*, because evangelical Protestants pray more than individuals in other Christian denominations and the nonreligious (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2014). Religious affiliation is a categorical variable that denotes whether a respondent is evangelical Protestant (e.g., Southern Baptist, Missouri Synod Lutheran), mainline Protestant (e.g., United Methodist, Episcopal), Catholic, a member of another religion (e.g., Judaism, Islam, Hinduism), or of no religious affiliation. We included Jews in the "other religion" category because there were only 26 Jews in the analytical sample.

Socioeconomic status variables
We include several measures of SES. *Education* is a continuous measure of the number of years of education the respondent had completed. *Income* is a categorical variable that measures respondents' yearly personal income. Categories include $0–$19,999 (reference category), $20,000–$39,999, $40,000–$74,999, and $75,000 or higher. *Employment status* is a categorical variable that measures if the respondent is not employed (reference category), works full-time, or works part-time. *Occupational prestige* is a continuous measure that gauges the prestige associated with respondents' occupation. This measure uses the two-digit Hodge, Siegel, and Rossi prestige score (Nakao, Hodge, and Treas 1990), with higher scores indicating higher occupational prestige.

Duration of anger
Concerning the anger-inducing episode recalled, the GSS asked respondents, "Emotions eventually fade away. How long did your anger or irritation last?" We coded *duration of anger* into three categories: (1) less than 1 hour (reference category), (2) from 1 to 24 hours, and (3) more than one day or felt continuously up until now.

Perceived control
Perceived control ($\alpha = .69$) is a four-item scale capturing one's level of agreement or disagreement with four statements: "There's no sense in planning a lot—if something good is going to happen, it will"; "Most of my problems are due to bad breaks"; "The really good things that happen to me are mostly luck"; and "I have little control over the bad things that happen to me." We averaged respondents' scores on these items; values ranged from one to five, with higher scores reflecting higher perceive control.

Control variables
We include *age* (in years), *parental status* (1 = parent), and *marital status* (married [reference category], widowed, divorced/separated, never married) as control variables in our analyses because these factors may confound the relationship between gender, race, and the use of prayer to manage emotions.[2]

Analytic strategy

We first present descriptive statistics and the results of bivariate analyses, contrasting those who pray to manage anger versus those who do not, with respect to all study variables. Second, we estimate multivariate logistic regression models to evaluate (1) the extent to which women and blacks use prayer to manage negative emotions and (2) factors that may account for this association. We also estimate Gender × Race interactions to evaluate whether the effect of gender is moderated by race. Third, we perform Sobel-Goodman mediation tests to estimate the total mediation effect of each relevant mediating variable considered in (2).

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[2]Zero-order correlations among all the model variables are available upon request.

Results

Bivariate analyses

Proportions or means (and standard deviations) for all study variables are presented in Table 1; asterisks denote statistically significant differences between persons who did versus did not use prayer

Table 1. Proportions or means (and standard deviations) for all independent variables by use of prayer to manage anger, general social survey (1996).

	Total sample	Used prayer to manage anger	Did not use prayer to manage anger
Total sample		.28	.72
Gender			
Male	.43	.29	.48***
Female	.57	.71	.52
Race			
White	.82	.72	.86***
Black	.13	.22	.09
Other	.05	.06	.05
Religious affiliation			
Evangelical Protestant	.29	.42	.24***
Mainline Protestant	.25	.25	.26
Catholic	.24	.19	.27
Other	.08	.09	.07
None	.13	.05	.16
Frequency of prayer			
Once a day or more	.45	.84	.43***
Less than once a day	.55	.16	.57
Religious attendance			
Never	.16	.07	.19***
Several times a year or less	.39	.24	.44
1–3 times a month	.22	.28	.20
Weekly or more	.23	.41	.16
Religious media consumption			
Yes	.24	.42	.17***
No	.76	.58	.83
Education (in years)	13.6 (2.9)	13.4 (2.8)	13.7 (2.9)
Income			
$0–$19.9 K	.47	.55	.44**
$20–$39.9 K	.33	.32	.33
$40–$74.9 K	.15	.10	.16
$75 K or more	.05	.03	.06
Occupational prestige (range = 17–86)	42.6 (14.7)	41.7 (14.4)	43.0 (14.8)
Employment status			
Full-time	.61	.54	.64**
Part-time	.11	.12	.10
Not employed	.29	.35	.26
Duration of anger			
Less than 1hour	.30	.21	.34***
One 24 hours	.39	.36	.40
More than one day	.31	.43	.26
Sense of Control (Range: 1–5)	3.5 (0.8)	3.4 (0.8)	3.6* (0.8)
Age (in years)	43.1 (15.7)	43.6 (15.4)	42.8 (15.8)
Parental Status			
Parent	.71	.76	.69**
Nonparent	.29	.24	.31
Marital Status			
Married	.47	.48	.47
Widowed	.08	.09	.08
Divorced/Separated	.21	.23	.20
Never married	.24	.20	.25
N	1114	310	804

Note. $N = 1,114$.
Significant differences (chi-square or *t*-test) between subgroups or means of independent variables on dependent variable noted as follows: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed).

to manage anger. As shown in previous studies, women are significantly more likely than men to use prayer to manage anger, and blacks are more likely than whites to do so.

Those who did versus did not use prayer to cope with anger also differ significantly with respect to all of the religiosity measures, including religious affiliation,[3] frequency of prayer, religious attendance, and consumption of religious media. We also detected significant differences in terms of employment status and personal income, but not for years of education or occupational prestige. Further, the two groups differ with respect to the duration of anger, with those who used prayer to manage anger significantly more likely to report a longer duration of anger. Those who used prayer to manage anger also report significantly lower levels of perceived control (3.4 vs. 3.6, $p < .05$). There were significant group differences by parental status, but there were no significant differences in terms of age or marital status.

Multivariate analyses

Table 2 presents the results of our multivariate logistic regression models; all odds ratios are presented with 95% confidence intervals. Model 1 includes the gender and race variables, along with controls (age, parental status, and marital status). Women are more than twice as likely as men, and blacks are almost three times as likely as whites, to use prayer to manage anger.

Model 2 adds measures of religiosity, including religious affiliation, frequency of prayer, frequency of religious attendance, and whether respondents reported consuming religious media in the past week. The effects of gender and race remain large although they decline considerably, which provides evidence that gender and race differences in the use of prayer to manage emotions are partly due to gender and race differences in overall religiosity.

Most of the religious measures also have direct effects on the use of prayer to manage anger, except for religious affiliation. Those who pray more than once a day are more than four times as likely as people who pray less often to use prayer to manage negative emotions. Those who attend church at least once a week are about three times as likely as nonattenders to use prayer to manage anger, and those who consumed religious media in the past week are almost twice as likely to use prayer to manage anger compared to those who did not consume religious media in the past week.

Model 3 further incorporates indicators of SES, including level of education, personal income, occupational prestige, and employment status; we conceptualize these measures as indicators of one's (dis)advantaged social position. None of these factors are statistically significant predictors of our outcome. Although the inclusion of these variables attenuates the effects of gender slightly (from odds ratio = 1.69 to 1.55), statistically significant gender and race effects remain.

Model 4 also adjusts for the duration of anger. With the inclusion of this measure, gender is no longer a statistically significant predictor of the use of prayer to manage anger. The effect of race attenuates slightly, yet remains statistically significant. The duration of anger also directly affects the use of prayer to manage anger. Respondents who reported that their anger lasted hours or all day were almost twice as likely to use prayer to manage anger as respondents who reported that their anger lasted a few seconds or minutes. Those who reported that their anger lasted several days or longer were roughly four times as likely to use prayer to manage anger as those whose anger only lasted seconds or minutes.

Finally, the full model (Model 5) incorporates perceived control. With the inclusion of this variable, the effect of race is no longer significant; thus, the black–white disparity in the use of prayer partly reflects blacks' relatively low levels of perceived control. Perceived control is significantly and inversely related to the use of prayer to manage anger, where each one-point increase in control is associated with a 7% decline in the odds of using prayer to manage anger.

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[3]Around 70% of evangelical Protestants report praying once a week or more, whereas around 53% of mainline Protestants and Catholics report praying once a week or more.

Table 2. Multivariate logistic regression models predicting the use of prayer to manage anger.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Sex (1 = female)	2.11*** (1.58–2.82)	1.69** (1.20–2.38)	1.55* (1.07–2.37)	1.44 (0.98–2.13)	1.46 (0.99–2.17)
Race[a]					
Black	2.92*** (1.84–4.63)	1.83* (1.04–3.19)	1.87* (1.08–3.23)	1.73* (1.00–2.99)	1.54 (0.86–2.75)
Other race	1.71 (0.87–3.41)	1.51 (0.67–3.39)	1.49 (0.66–3.36)	1.49 (0.65–3.39)	1.40 (0.60–3.26)
Religious affiliation[b]					
Mainline Protestant		0.88 (0.56–1.38)	0.90 (0.58–1.41)	0.88 (0.55–1.39)	0.88 (0.55–1.40)
Catholic		0.67 (0.42–1.08)	0.69 (0.43–1.12)	0.61* (0.38–1.00)	0.59* (0.36–0.96)
Other faith		1.18 (0.63–2.24)	1.23 (0.65–2.34)	1.06 (0.52–2.16)	1.10 (0.54–2.25)
None		0.78 (0.37–1.62)	0.78 (0.37–1.65)	0.74 (0.34–1.59)	0.78 (0.36–1.71)
Frequency of prayer (1 = once a day or more)		4.08*** (2.43–6.82)	4.01*** (2.36–6.80)	4.10*** (2.40–7.19)	4.24*** (2.47–7.28)
Religious attendance[c]					
Several times a year or less		1.16 (0.61–2.18)	1.13 (0.61–2.11)	1.13 (0.60–2.13)	1.18 (0.62–2.23)
1–3 times a month		1.84 (0.90–3.76)	1.90 (0.95–3.81)	2.11* (1.05–4.21)	2.25* (1.11–4.54)
Once a week or more		3.21** (1.68–6.13)	3.18** (1.71–5.92)	3.71*** (1.99–6.92)	4.14*** (2.19–7.82)
Religious media consumption (1 = yes)		1.97* (1.14–3.39)	1.97* (1.13–3.45)	2.21** (1.24–3.95)	2.20** (1.23–3.91)
Education (in years)			1.00 (0.94–1.07)	0.99 (0.93–1.06)	1.01 (0.95–1.09)
Income[d]					
$20–$39.9 K			1.09 (0.66–1.81)	1.25 (0.75–2.08)	1.29 (0.77–2.14)
$40–$47.9 K			0.65 (0.33–1.28)	0.61 (0.31–1.19)	0.62 (0.31–1.22)
$75 K or more			0.76 (0.22–2.64)	0.78 (0.23–2.67)	0.82 (0.24–2.86)
Occupational prestige			1.01 (0.99–1.02)	1.01 (0.99–1.02)	1.01 (0.99–1.02)
Employment status[e]					
Full-time			0.74 (0.48–1.14)	0.71 (0.45–1.12)	0.73 (0.46–1.15)
Part-time			0.87 (0..45–1.69)	0.91 (0.46–1.75)	0.92 (0.47–1.79)
Duration of anger[f]					
One 24 hours				1.84** (1.17–2.87)	1.84** (1.16–2.90)
More than one day				4.28*** (2.85–6.42)	4.14*** (2.74–6.24)
Sense of personal control					0.75* (0.60–0.95)
Age	1.00 (0.99–1.01)	0.99 (0.98–1.00)	0.99 (0.97–1.00)	0.99 (0.97–1.00)	0.99 (0.97–1.00)
Parent (1 = yes)	1.00 (0.68–1.48)	0.98 (0.63–1.53)	0.98 (0.63–1.51)	0.96 (0.61–1.52)	0.98 (0.61–1.56)
Marital status[g]					
Widowed	0.73 (0.44–1.21)	0.67 (0.38–1.18)	0.63 (0.35–1.15)	0.59 (0.32–1.09)	0.56 (0.30–1.05)
Divorced/Separated	0.91 (0.65–1.27)	1.16 (0.78–1.72)	1.19 (0.81–1.75)	1.15 (0.78–1.71)	1.14 (0.77–1.70)
Never married	0.63* (0.41–0.96)	0.79 (0.49–1.28)	0.77 (0.47–1.25)	0.74 (0.45–1.21)	0.73 (0.44–1.20)
χ^2; df	66.71; 8	261.86; 17	269.78; 24	320.24; 26	326.50; 27
Pseudo-R^2	0.05	0.20	0.21	0.24	0.25

Note. $N = 1,114$. Relative odds (exponentiated betas) are presented, with confidence intervals in parentheses. Omitted category of dependent variable is persons who did not use prayer to manage anger. All odds ratios are presented with a 95% confidence interval.
[a]Reference category is white.
[b]Reference category is evangelical Protestant.
[c]Reference category is never attends religious services.
[d]Reference category is $0–$19,999.
[e]Reference category is not employed.
[f]Reference category is less than one hour.
[g]Reference category is married.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed).

In supplementary analyses, we evaluated whether there were statistically significant gender and race interaction effects. We added a two-way interaction term (Gender × Race) to each of the models (analysis not shown). The interaction was not statistically significant in any of the models, which suggests that the effects of gender do not depend on a respondent's race, nor do the effects of race depend on a respondent's gender.

Table 3. Proportion of total effect of gender and race mediated by mediation variables (Sobel-Goodman mediation tests).

	Gender	Race
Gender	—	.05
Race	—	—
Religious affiliation	.10	.03
Frequency of prayer	.45	.23
Religious attendance	.19	.16
Consumption of religious media	—	.24
Education	—	—
Income	.16	.10
Occupational prestige	—	—
Employment status	—	—
Duration of anger	.10	.08
Sense of control	—	.08
Age	—	—
Parental status	—	.03
Marital status	—	—

Note. Values indicate that a variable meets all criteria for mediation (main independent variable significantly associated with dependent variable; mediator variable significantly associated with independent variable; mediator variable significantly associated with dependent variable while controlling for independent variable) (Baron and Kenny 1986).

Mediation analysis

Our results thus far suggest that race and gender differences in the use of prayer to manage anger are largely accounted for by the variables entered in Models 2 through 5. To pinpoint which factors account for these differences, we performed formal mediation analyses, which indicate the total mediation effect of each of the relevant factors. The three criteria for mediation effects are (1) the independent variable is a significant predictor of the dependent variable, (2) the independent variable is a significant predictor of the potential mediating variable, and 3) the mediator variable is a significant predictor of the dependent variable (Baron and Kenny 1986).

Regarding the first criterion, gender and race were significant predictors of using prayer to manage anger. For gender, we found that religious affiliation, frequency of prayer, frequency of religious attendance, income, and duration of anger fulfilled the second and third criteria. For race, we found that religious affiliation, frequency of prayer, frequency of religious attendance, consumption of religious media, income, duration of anger, sense of personal control, and parental status fulfilled the second and third criteria (see Table 3).

We also performed Sobel-Goodman mediation tests to estimate the proportion of the total effect of our main independent variables—gender and race—that was mediated by the potential explanatory mechanisms entered into Models 2 through 5, shown in Table 2. We present results of the formal mediation tests in Table 3.

Taken together, these results suggest that the well-documented gender and race differentials in use of prayer to manage anger reflect women's and blacks' more frequent use of prayer, greater odds of belonging to an evangelical Protestant denomination, high levels of religious attendance, lower incomes, and longer durations of anger, relative to men and whites. Each of these factors, in turn, is significantly associated with use of prayer to manage anger. The black–white gap is further accounted for by blacks' more frequent consumption of religious media, lower levels of perceived control, and higher rates parenthood relative to whites; each of these characteristics in turn increases the odds of using anger to manage prayer.

Discussion

Social scientists have examined how social stratification influences individuals' emotional experiences and expression. Our analysis shows that inequitable societal arrangements also influence the use of one particular emotion management strategy: the use of prayer to manage anger. Women and
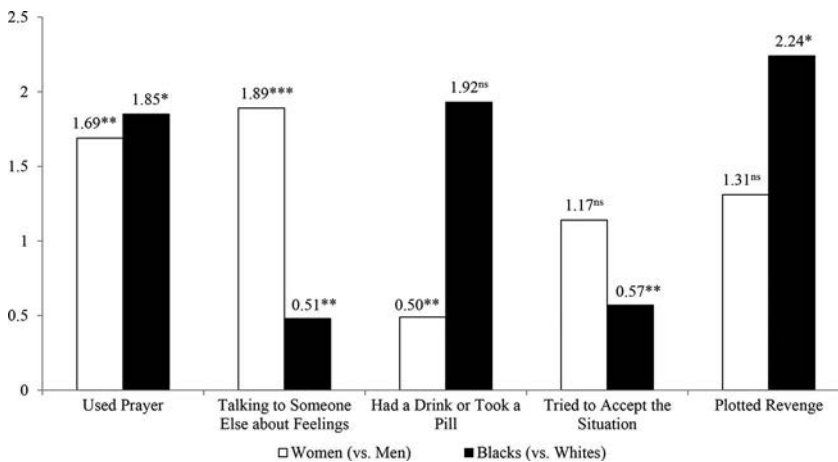
Figure 1. Relative odds of using emotion management techniques by gender and race. *Note.* Relative odds (exponentiated betas) are presented. Relative odds control for religious affiliation, frequency of religious attendance, frequency of prayer, consumption of religious media, age, marital status, and parental status. $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$ (two-tailed).

blacks—two groups that historically and currently have had relatively low power and status in U.S. society—are more likely than their advantaged counterparts to use prayer to manage negative emotions, and these associations are partly accounted for by specific factors related both to the social disadvantage and to potentially beneficial aspects of social integration.

We find that prayer is distinct among the many emotion management strategies assessed in the GSS because it is the only one of 16 that *both* women and blacks are more likely than men and whites to use, even after controlling for religious affiliation and religiosity (see Figure 1). In supplementary analyses (available from the authors), we reestimated Model 2 (in Table 2) to predict the use of other 15 emotion management strategies assessed by the GSS. We found only three coping strategies for which men and women differ significantly (women are more likely than men to use prayer or to talk to someone else about feelings; men are more likely than women to use alcohol or drugs) and only four in which there are significant differences between blacks and whites (blacks are more likely than whites to use prayer and plot revenge; whites are more likely than blacks to talk to someone else about feelings or to try to accept the situation). Of these, we found both significant gender and race differences for prayer and talking to someone else about feelings. However, prayer is the only technique that women *and* blacks are more likely to use, even after controlling for several measures of religiosity and religious affiliation. Thus, we believe that prayer provides a useful and informative case for exploring the social stratification of emotion management strategies in the face of anger.

Our analyses reveal somewhat different reasons for women's versus blacks' use of prayer to manage negative emotion. Both the gender and race gaps are partially accounted for by women's and blacks' relatively high levels of religious participation, low SES status, and prolonged duration of negative emotional experiences. Yet two additional factors emerged as contributors to the black–white gap: blacks' lower levels of perceived control, and their higher likelihood of being a parent.

We found strong evidence that the higher levels of religious participation and differences in religious affiliations contribute to gender and race differences in the use of prayer to manage emotions. Frequent participation in religious activities—such as prayer, religious attendance, and consuming religious television or radio programming—increases the likelihood of using prayer to manage emotions, as does belonging to an evangelical Protestant denomination. Although these findings are not surprising, it is still important to account for gender and racial differences in religious participation and affiliation to understand more fully the reasons behind gender and racial differences in the use of prayer and other religious practices to manage emotions. Our mediation analysis also reveals that the particular types of participation in religious activities that mediate the associations

between gender, race, and using prayer to manage emotions are heterogeneous. For instance, although consumption of religious media did not mediate the gender effect, this factor substantially mediated the race effect.

Thus, our analysis also suggests that it is important to consider several types of religious participation to understand how religious participation influences women's and blacks' use of religious-oriented emotion management strategies. These results also suggest ways that social scripts regarding emotion management are shaped by different forces for blacks and women, where religious media may play a more central role in forming the schemas blacks develop for appropriate and desirable ways to manage stress (Harris and Sanborn 2013). Although prior studies shows that media influences the social scripts that individuals hold regarding romantic relationships, health behaviors, and gender roles (e.g., Harris and Sanborn 2013), our work suggests that media, especially religious media, may contribute to individuals' cognitions regarding the management of negative emotions.

Although religious participation and affiliation largely account for the associations between gender, race, and the use of prayer as emotion management, these factors alone do not fully account for these differences. Rather, additional factors related to social disadvantage also contributed to these gender and racial differences. First, we found partial evidence that women's and blacks' low SES—at least in regards to income level—does influence the use of prayer to manage anger. However, we found no evidence that education, employment status, or occupational prestige explained these relationships. Given that prayer is a relatively cost-free way to manage emotions, we suspect that income partly explains the relationship between gender, race, and the use of prayer to manage anger, because women's and blacks' relatively low SES prevents them from using other, more costly emotion management strategies. We also found strong evidence that gender and racial differences in duration of negative emotional experiences account for observed differences in the use of prayer to manage emotions. We propose that women and blacks experience prolonged emotional consequences, perhaps due to systems of gender and racial stratification—such as overt and subtle forms of discrimination—that may cause them to experience or perceive one's social interactions as stressful, demeaning, or unjust. Because of this, women and blacks may feel that they have no other recourse for finally alleviating their negative emotions than to turn to interactions with God to receive compensatory status. Unfortunately, the GSS data do not allow us to evaluate if respondents turned to other emotion management strategies before they turned to prayer, as they do not collect information on the temporal order of the strategies adopted.

Our analysis also shows that perceived control is significantly and inversely associated with using prayer to manage negative emotions. Although this factor did not account for the gender effect, it did partly account for the race effect. We found that blacks have lower levels of perceived control than whites; the average perceived control score for whites was 3.6, whereas the average perceived control score for blacks was 3.1. This factor partially accounted for blacks' higher likelihood of using prayer to manage emotions. We propose that perceived control is inversely associated with using prayer to manage emotions because prayer represents an "emotion-focused" rather than a "problem-focused" coping strategy (Brown and Niacasso 1987; Carver et al. 1989). Those with lower senses of control tend to use emotion-focused coping strategies—such as engaging in wishful thinking—rather than problem-focused coping strategies—such as trying to change the situation by engaging in proactive problem solving—because these individuals believe that they cannot adequately perform problem-focused coping strategies (Ross and Mirowsky 2003). Turning to prayer may be an example of an emotion-focused coping strategy, because individuals who use prayer might believe that God will solve their problems and thus take no problem-focused strategies on their own. To further evaluate this idea, we performed supplemental analyses assessing whether other coping strategies were significantly and negatively associated with perceived control (analysis not shown). We found this to be the case for only 3 of the 16: having a drink or taking a pill, fantasizing about a magical solution to the problem, and thinking about how to get revenge. All three are examples of emotion-focused coping, further supporting our assertion that perceived control is negatively associated with emotion-focused coping.

An unexpected finding is that parental status partially mediated the association between race and the use of prayer to manage emotions. This may be due to the combination of (1) individuals who are parents—at least in some contexts and situations—being more prone to experiencing interactions in which others do not afford them the status they feel they deserve (Benard and Correll 2010) and (2) blacks being more likely than whites both to have any children and to have a greater number of children (Pew Research Center 2015).

Our study is among the first we know of to explore why women and blacks are particularly likely to turn to prayer as a strategy for managing anger. However, our study has three limitations. First, the GSS obtained measures of the use of prayer to manage the emotion of anger specifically, and thus we could not consider other negative emotions such as sadness or fear. Anger is a distinctive emotion in that it tends to arise in the face of unjust circumstances (Frijda 1988). However, individuals also use prayer to manage other such negative emotions (Sharp 2010). Future work should explore gender and race differences in using prayer to manage other negative emotions besides anger. We find frustration to be a particularly fruitful topic of future inquiry, as this emotion typically arises when one faces actual or perceived obstacles to one's goals (e.g., Berkowitz 1989); as such, it may be a particularly salient emotion for those belonging to historical disadvantaged groups. Second, because of the composition of the GSS sample, we could not explore race differences beyond black and white, nor could we investigate ethnicity effects. Exploring more nuanced racial and ethnic differences in the use of prayer to manage emotions is a task we hope scholars investigate in the future. Third, because our data are cross-sectional, we cannot make strong causal claims about the associations between our purported pathway and outcome variables; for example, those who use prayer to manage their anger may be more likely to see out religious media as a source of solace. Finally, our fully adjusted model only accounted for 25% of the variance in the use of prayer to manage emotions. Future work should further investigate the psychosocial and emotional experience factors that predict the use of prayer to manage emotions.

Despite these limitations, our analysis has two major implications. First, we show how inequitable social arrangements can influence the use of particular emotion management strategies. We have shown that prayer is an emotion management strategy that is powerfully shaped by race and gender, and we hope that our work further stimulates explorations of how social disadvantage influences the use of other emotion management techniques. Second, our work highlights the importance of investigating the factors that mediate the relationship between particular social statuses and the use of one particular emotion management strategy. We found that distinctive pathways explain why women and blacks are more likely than their counterparts to use prayer to manage emotions. Thus, it is important that scholars investigate *why* particular social statuses lead to the use of particular emotion management strategies, because the reasons one social group might be more likely to use an emotion management strategy might be quite distinct from the reasons another social group does so.

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