EXAMINING RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL PREDICTORS OF POVERTY
ATTRIBUTIONS

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

      In this study, we investigated how religion and spirituality were associated with internal or external attributions for the causes of poverty. Such attributions are important as they may shape the types of policies and interventions that individuals support to alleviate poverty. Across two studies with samples of Christian students from a Catholic university in the Midwest (Study 1: $n = 245$) and a large Midwestern university (Study 2: $n = 791$), multiple regression analyses revealed that religious variables including religious attendance, religious conservatism, and literal interpretation of sacred text predicted internal poverty attributions whereas a spirituality variable, universality, predicted external poverty attributions. These findings were present while controlling for demographic variables, political conservatism, and the Protestant work ethic and were consistent across Study 1 and Study 2. Overall, this shows the unique ability of religious and spiritual variables to predict these different types of poverty attributions. Limitations and directions for future research and working with religious and spiritual communities are discussed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dedication

Para mi Papa, Jesus Morris, tus sacrificios crearon mis oportunidades.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the U.S. Census reported more than 43.1 million (13.5%) people in the United States live below the federal poverty line. This startling number shows the need for social policies and interventions to reduce this high rate of poverty. Psychologists have long been interested in antecedents and consequences of poverty, with the goal of designing social interventions to reduce poverty (e.g., Bullock, 2017; Evans, Rosen, Kesten, & Moore, 2014; Shinn & McCormack, 2017; Speer, Peterson, Armstead, & Allen, 2013). However, central to the design and implementation of change efforts are the beliefs people hold about issues, like poverty, because these beliefs may shape support for specific types of policies and intervention (Beck, 2014; Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003; Caplan & Nelson, 1973; Furnham, 1982). A large body of research shows that factors such as education, income, and political conservatism predict attitudes toward the cause of poverty (e.g., Bullock, et al., 2003; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Godfrey & Wolf, 2016). Yet there is very little research on how individual's religious beliefs and spirituality inform the attributions they make for why people are poor. This gap is unfortunate, specifically because 77% of people in the United States identify as religious and 37% of people that do not identify as religious identify as spiritual (Religious Landscape Study, 2016). Therefore, in this study we examine religious and spiritual predictors of why individuals believe people are poor (i.e., poverty attributions). Such an examination holds promise to promote greater understanding of how religious and spiritual factors may contribute to attitudes conducive (or not) to support of interventions and policies to reduce poverty.

Internal and External Poverty Attributions

Poverty attributions have been defined as "specific beliefs about the factors that cause (or do not cause) some people to become wealthy and others poor" (Smith & Stone, 1989). Previous research has identified internal and external as two types of poverty attributions (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001), which are similar to constructs of individualistic and structural attributions respectively (Furnham, 1982). Internal poverty attributions are beliefs that others are poor due a lack of effort or skills (e.g., being lazy) whereas external poverty attributions are beliefs that others are poor due to environmental or systemic factors that are beyond one's control (e.g., not enough jobs are available). Such attributions are important to understand as they are associated with relevant attitudes and behaviors. For example, internal poverty attributions are associated with support of restrictive welfare policies, a belief in meritocracy, and individualism (Bullock et al., 2003; Godfrey & Wolf, 2016). Moreover, scholars argue that internal poverty attributions may be part of the framework held by social and political conservatives that individualize social and economic problems which can lead to victim blaming of those who are in poverty (Feagin, 1972; Furnham, 1982). On the other hand, external poverty attributions are associated with support for anti-poverty programs and a rejection of the idea of the "deserving" poor (Bullock, et al., 2003; Robinson, 2009). Clearly, poverty attributions are a key ingredient of attitudes about poverty and thus, what should be done to reduce poverty.

Beyond what poverty attributions predict, attributions themselves are predicted by key demographic and attitudinal variables. For example, people from marginalized groups tend to have lower internal and greater external poverty attributions (Hunt, 2007; Kraus, Piff, Keltner, 2009; Shek, 2004). When education is taken into account, the results are mixed; while Hunt (2007) found that individuals with more education are more likely to endorse external poverty attributions and those with less education are more likely to endorse internal poverty attributions,

Reutter et al. (2006) found no significant effects for education in predicting poverty attributions. In addition to demographic factors, specific attitudes predict poverty attributions. For example, the Protestant work ethic (i.e., the belief that success is achieved through hard work) is positively associated with internal poverty attributions (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001). This may be due to the Protestant work ethic's dependence on individualism and the idea that success is based upon individual effort. Smith (1989) offered further support to this claim by noting that individuals that are more individualistic tend to cite a lack of drive and motivation as attributions for poverty, showing another link between individualism and internal poverty attributions. Lastly, on a broader scale, countries that are more individualistic report greater internal poverty attributions (Feagin, 1972; Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Evidently, a reliance on individualism is intimately linked with internal explanations for the causes of poverty.

Interestingly, research shows that poverty attributions are amenable to change. Life experience, multicultural training, and work experience have all been shown to impact the types of poverty attributions individuals hold (Godfrey & Wolf, 2016; Toporek & Pope-Davis, 2005). For instance, Godfrey and Wolf's (2016) sample of low-income racial and ethnic minority immigrant women were more likely to endorse internal attribute poverty attributions. Godfrey and Wolf (2016) hypothesize that this is due to their lack of consciousness about structural explanations for poverty given their experiences of marginalization. In contrast, Toporek and Pope-Davis (2005) found that multicultural training helped increase trainees' understanding of structural poverty attributions and decreased internal poverty attributions. Thus, trainings have been an effective way to increase awareness for similar individuals to encourage support for transformative types of policies and interventions. Furthermore, because beliefs about poverty influence the types of policies that are supported to decrease poverty, individual's beliefs may be

3

important targets for interventions. Specifically, decreasing internal and increasing external attributions may help to garner support for systemic policy change.

Religion, Spirituality, and Poverty Attributions

There is little research examining the relationship between religious and spiritual factors and poverty attributions. This gap in the literature is unfortunate given the continued prevalence of religious belief and attendance in the United States, the potential to use religious settings as spaces to promote social justice (e.g., Houston & Todd, 2013; Todd, 2017; Todd & Rufa, 2013), as well as the potential for spirituality to transcend beyond traditional organized religion (Pargament, 2008). The literature to date on this topic has focused on links between religious conservatism and poverty attributions; however, the literature is mixed. For example, Davidson (2009) found that religious conservatism and biblical literalism were positively associated whereas frequency of prayer was negatively associated with endorsing internal poverty attributions. In contrast, Pyle (1993) found no association between religious and economic conservatism, after controlling for socioeconomic status, race, and political party. More broadly, Hunt (2002) examined religious tradition and found that members of minority religious traditions in the United States, such as Judaism, were more likely to hold external attributions whereas members of dominant religious traditions, such as Catholics and Protestants, were more likely to hold internal attributions. Hunt (2002) credits these differences to shared experience between marginalized religious groups and people living in poverty as a form of marginalization.

To make sense of these equivocal findings, scholars have posited a theoretical link between certain forms of religion and religious belief and attitudes toward social problems such as poverty (Pargament & Maton, 2000). For example, Emerson and Smith (2000) propose that more conservative White Christianity promotes a hyper-individualism due to the emphasis on

4

people pursing a personal relationship with God and an emphasis on personal piety through one's choices. In line with this thinking, Emerson and Smith (2000) as well as Tranby and Hartman (2008) provide empirical evidence that White conservative Christians hold a greater reliance on individualism in relation to explaining racial inequality than other Whites and other White liberal Christians. Thus, it is possible that more conservative religious beliefs may promote individualism that further contributes to an internal attribution for why people are poor. Based on this literature, we hypothesize that religious conservatism will be positively associated with internal poverty attributions.

Relatedly, the relationship between spirituality and poverty attributions is rarely studied. Spirituality has been defined in many ways with multiple components (e.g., Kapuscinski & Masters, 2010). For example, Hirsh, Walberg, and Peterson (2013) used a very general definition of spirituality and found it predicted more liberal political attitudes (which may also predict greater external poverty attributions). To aid in conceptual clarity, for this study, we focused on a specific component of spirituality, universality, which is defined as "a belief in the unitive nature of life" (Piedmont, 1999). Universality is associated with a greater sense of interconnectedness with others and the world, with more prosocial behaviors, greater perceived social support, and less vulnerability to stress (Piedmont, 1999). We believe the relational quality of universality makes it an interesting dimension of spirituality to study in relation to beliefs about others experiencing poverty. For example, research studying group identification found that people who felt more unified with people experiencing poverty were more likely to support external poverty attributions, whereas those who felt less unified with people experiencing poverty had more internal poverty attributions (Landmane & Renge, 2010). Thus, the spiritual dimension of feeling connected to others may predict external poverty attributions in

5

a similar way such that individuals with greater levels of universality may be more likely to feel that others are a part of their in-group. Moreover, if an individual believes that someone else is part of their in-group they may "correct" initial internal poverty attributions with more external poverty attributions (Skitka, et al., 2002). Based on this literature, we tentatively expect that universality will be positively associated with more external poverty attributions.

Present Investigation

Thus far, little research has been conducted to understand the relationship between religion and spirituality and attitudes towards poverty. Examining these relationships may enable a better understanding of additional factors that contribute to internal and external poverty attributions. Therefore, in the current study, we were interested in testing the associations between religious beliefs and spirituality and poverty attributions. We hypothesized that greater religious conservatism (as defined by self-identification or more literal interpretation of sacred text) will predict internal poverty attributions. Conversely, we hypothesized that greater endorsement of universality will predict external poverty attributions. We also explore how religious conservatism may predict external attributions, and how universality may predict internal attributions. We examine these hypotheses across two studies. In Study 1, we use a sample of 245 Christian students at a private Catholic university in the Midwest. We then attempted to replicate findings in Study 2, using a sample of 791 Christian students at a public university in the Midwest. We received appropriate ethics approval for all studies.

CHAPTER 2: Study 1

Poverty Attributions in a Christian Student Sample at a Private University

Purpose

In Study 1, we test if conservative religious beliefs and spirituality (i.e., universality) predict internal and external poverty attributions using a Christian sample at a private Catholic university in the Midwest. We hypothesize that conservative religious beliefs and universality will predict internal and external poverty attributions, respectively. We also explore how conservative religious beliefs and universality predict external and internal poverty attributions, respectively. All analyses control for demographic variables and the Protestant work ethic.

Method

Participants and procedures. Participants were 245 students attending a four-year Catholic university in the Midwest who were recruited through the psychology participant pool. The majority of students (77%) were women, 22.5% identified as men, and a few identified as other (<1%). The majority of students (50.4%) identified as White, 9% African American/Black, 5.3%, Asian/Pacific Islander, 28.7% Hispanic/Latino/a, 0.4% Native American, 5.3% as biracial or multiracial, and 0.8% did not report. The mean age was 20 years old (*SD* = 4.22, *Range* 18-54). Politically, 24% of students identified as Republican, 56% Democrats, less than 1% as Independents, and 20% identified other parties or did not report. In response to questions asking for religious identification, 67.8% identified as Catholic, 18.8% identified as Protestant, and 5.3% did not specify a denomination but identified as "Christian."

The online study was only made visible to students who identified as Protestant or Catholic in a pre-screening survey given to the entire participant pool. Students received course

7

credit for completing the study. Students were first presented with an informed consent where continuing indicated consent. They then completed surveys described subsequently and other questions about religious beliefs and social attitudes as part of a larger study. Upon completion participants were thanked.

Measures.

Poverty attributions. We used the Poverty Attributions Scale (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001) to assess internal and external poverty attributions. Participants used a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*extremely important*) to rate "how important are the following to the causes of poverty." We used the six-item Internal Poverty Attributions Subscale, which consisted of items such as, "A lack of motivation caused by being on welfare" and the seven-item External Attributions Subscale, which consisted of items such as, "Prejudice and discrimination in promotion and wages." We averaged responses for each subscale with higher scores indicating a greater endorsement of internal or external poverty attributions. In support of construct validity, Cozzarelli et al. (2001) found that internal poverty attributions were positively correlated with the Protestant work ethic. In previous studies, the internal consistency for internal poverty attributions was $\alpha = .75$ and external poverty attributions was $\alpha = .79$ (Cozzarelli et al., 2001). In the current study, internal consistency for internal and external poverty attributions were $\alpha = .83$ and $\alpha = .80$, respectively.

Political conservatism. We used three items to assess political conservatism (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Participants reported their political views for three separate categories, which included foreign policy, economic issues, and social policy issues. For each category, participants rated their views on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*very liberal*) to 7 (*very conservative*). We averaged responses; thus, higher scores indicated greater

8

political conservatism. In previous studies, internal consistency was α = .83 and as expected political conservatism was positively associated with social dominance orientation (Pratto et al., 1994). In the current study, α = .81.

Protestant work ethic. We used the 19-item Protestant Worth Ethic Scale to assess participant's support for the Protestant work ethic (McHoskey, 1994; Mirels & Garrett, 1971). Participants used a Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) to rate items such as "Most people who don't succeed in life are just plain lazy." Higher scores indicate greater endorsement of the Protestant work ethic. Beit-Hallahmi (1979) demonstrated an association between the Protestant work ethic and religious conventionality, specifically with a belief in God and church attendance. Previous internal consistency of the scale was .79 (Mirels & Garrett, 1971). In the current study, α = .72.

Religious variables. We assessed three religious variables of religious attendance, religious conservatism, and biblical literalism. We assessed *religious attendance* using a one-item self-report. We asked participants, "How often do you attend religious worship services at a church or congregation?" Participants responded using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*several times a week*) to 9 (*never*). We reverse coded responses so that higher scores indicted more frequent religious attendance. We used two approaches to assess aspects of religious conservatism as scholars indicate there are multiple ways to assess this construct (Woodberry & Smith, 1998) and using a multi-item scale overcomes limitations of a single self-report item (Kellstedt & Smidt, 1993). First, we assessed *religious conservatism* using one self-report item similar to Wuthnow (1996) and Tarakeshwar, Swank, Pargament, and Mahoney (2001) that asked participants, "In general, how would you describe your theological views?" Participants then used a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*very liberal*) to 7 (*very conservative*). Responses

9

with higher scores indicated greater religious conservatism. Scholars also indicate biblical literalism is a key indicator of religious conservatism (Kellstedt & Smidt, 1993); thus, we used four items to assess biblical literalism. Participants used a Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) to respond to each of the following items: "The Bible is literally true in all its parts," "The Bible does not contain all the important truths about life," "The Bible is the inspired word of God," and "All the miracles in the Bible are probably not true (reverse coded)." We averaged responses with higher scores indicating more literal attitudes toward biblical interpretation. An exploratory factor analysis indicated all four items loaded on one factor (loadings ranged from .74 to .85, available upon request). In the current study, $\alpha = .80$. Other research using similar items for religious conservatism and biblical literalism report associations in the expected direction when looking at racial attitudes (Author Citation, 2014).

Spirituality: Universality. To assess universality as a component of spirituality, we used the nine-item Universality subscale from the Spiritual Transcendence Scale (Piedmont, 1999). Piedmont defines universality as "a belief in the unitive nature of life" and we conceptualize this scale to capture a sense of shared connection and interdependence with the world and other people. Participants used a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) with items such as "All life is interconnected." Responses were averaged with higher scores indicating greater universality. In prior studies, $\alpha = .85$ (Piedmont, 1999). In the current study, $\alpha = .84$. Piedmont (1999) provided validity evidence as universality was positively associated with religious and spiritual items such as prayer, attending religious services, and union with God. Moreover, Piedmont (1999) demonstrated cross-observer validity such that self-report scores were correlated with observer ratings.

Demographics. We included demographic questions about age, gender, and race. We dummy coded gender such that men were the reference group. Because we did not have a large enough sample of students from distinct racial and ethnic minority groups, we combined minority students into one group and created a dummy coded variable for race where students of color served as the reference group.

Analytic strategy. We used ordinary least squares regression to test study hypotheses with internal and external poverty attributions as separate dependent variables. We followed Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003) and mean-centered all continuous predictor variables to aid in interpretation. To test how religious and spiritual variables predicted internal and external poverty attributions, we used the same predictors in each model. In Model 1, we tested whether demographic variables, political conservatism, and Protestant work ethic predicted internal and external poverty attributions. In Model 2, we tested whether a set of religious variables (i.e., religious attendance, religious conservatism, and biblical literalism) predicted internal and external poverty attributions while controlling for Model 1 variables. In Model 3, we tested whether universality predicted internal and external poverty attributions while controlling for all other study variables. We conducted analyses using PROC REG in SAS Version 9.4.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 1. Table 2 shows the results from the three models predicting internal and external poverty attributions. For internal poverty attributions, Model 1 showed political conservatism and Protestant work ethic were positively associated with internal poverty attributions such that students reporting greater political conservatism and Protestant work ethic reported more internal poverty attributions. In Model 1, the variables explained 27% of the unexplained variance. In Model 2, religious attendance,

11

religious conservatism, and biblical literalism were all significant positive predictors of internal poverty attributions. Specifically, students with more frequent attendance, greater religious conservatism, and greater biblical literalism reported greater internal poverty attributions. In Model 2, the variables explained 32% of the unexplained variance. In Model 3, universality was not significantly associated with internal poverty attributions, after controlling for all other study variables. The collection of variables in Model 3 explained 32% of the unexplained variance. Overall, gender and race were not significant predictors in any of the three models.

For external poverty attributions, in Model 1, the demographic variables of gender, race, and political conservatism were associated with external poverty attributions. Specifically, women had higher mean levels of external poverty attributions than men, White students reported lower mean levels of external poverty attributions than students of color, and students that were more conservative had less external poverty attributions. The model explained 10% of the unexplained variance. Model 2 added religious attendance, religious conservatism, and biblical literalism while controlling for gender, race, political conservatism, and Protestant work ethic. None of the variables were significantly associated with external poverty attributions. This collection of variables explained 12% of the unexplained variance. Model 3 added the universality dimension of spirituality while controlling for the predictors in the previous models. Universality was associated with external poverty attributions such that those that endorsed greater universality had greater external poverty attributions. The model explained 23% of the unexplained variance.

Discussion

As expected, religious attendance and two indicators of religious conservatism predicted more support for internal poverty attributions; yet the same religious predictors did not predict

external poverty attributions. Also as expected, universality predicted external but not internal poverty attributions. Together, these results show that religious and spiritual variables differentially predicted internal and external poverty attributions, even after controlling for political conservatism, Protestant work ethic, and other demographic variables. However, Study 1 was limited to a student sample at a private Catholic university and the measure for biblical literalism was not validated. Study 2 begins to address these limitations.

CHAPTER 3: STUDY 2

Poverty Attributions in a Christian Student Sample at a Public University

Purpose

Given Study 1 limitations, we conducted Study 2 with students from a public university to replicate findings from Study 1, and to strengthen measurement of biblical literalism. Thus, we conducted the same set of analyses with the same variables, except now we used a validated measure of literal interpretation of sacred text. We continue to propose the same hypotheses, that religious and spiritual variable will predict internal and external poverty attributions, respectively. Also, based on findings from Study 1, we expect that religious and spiritual variables will not predict external and internal poverty attributions, respectively. We conduct all study analyses while controlling for demographic variables and the Protestant work ethic.

Method

Participants and procedures. Participants were 791 undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory psychology course during fall 2016 at a large Midwestern university. Students received course credit for participating. The study was only visible to students who indicated in a pre-survey they were 18 years or older and U.S. born. The study was completed online where surveys and items within surveys were presented in a random order. Student mean age was 19.30 ($SD = 1.38$), 69.9% were women, 30.0% men, and <1% reported a different gender. Students identified as White (61.5%), Black or African American (10.3%), Asian American (8.8%), Native American (<1%), Pacific Islander or Hawaiian (<1%), Prefer not to answer (<1%), and Other (<1%). Also, 15.9% of the sample identified as Hispanic or Latino. Politically, 22% identified as Republican, 50% identified as Democrats, 10% as Independents, and 18% identified

14

other parties or did not report. In response to a question asking for religious identification, 53.5% identified as Catholic, 19.4% identified as Protestant, and 27.2% did not specify a denomination but identified as "Christian."

Measures.

Same measures as Study 1. We used the same measures as Study 1 for poverty attributions, political conservatism, Protestant work ethic, religious attendance, religious conservatism, and universality. Estimates of internal consistency are presented in Table 1.

Literal interpretation of sacred text. In order to use a validated scale to assess literal interpretation of sacred text, we used the Intratextual Fundamentalism scale (Williamson, Hood, Ahmad, Sadiq, & Hill, 2010). Participants used a Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) to respond to items like: "Everything in the Sacred Writing is absolutely true without question" and "The Sacred Writing is the only one that is true above all Holy Books or sacred texts of other religions." We averaged responses with higher scores indicating more literal attitudes toward interpretation of sacred text. Williamson and colleagues (2010) provided validity evidence as intratextual fundamentalism was positively associated with religious fundamentalism and right-wing authoritarianism. In prior studies, $\alpha = .94$ (Williamson et al., 2010). In the current study, $\alpha = .87$.

Demographics. We included demographic questions about age, gender, and race. We formed dummy coded variables for gender with men serving as the reference group. In order to conduct similar analyses to Study 1, we also dummy coded race such that students of color continued to serve as the reference group.

Analytic strategy. We used the same ordinary least squares regression approach as Study 1 to test study hypotheses.

15

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 1. Table 3 shows the results from the three models predicting internal and external poverty attributions. For internal poverty attributions, Model 1 showed political conservatism and Protestant work ethic were positively associated with internal poverty attributions; this set of variables explained 16% of the unexplained variance. In Model 2, religious attendance and religious conservatism were significant positive predictors of internal poverty attributions. Specifically, students with more frequent religious attendance, and greater religious conservatism reported greater internal poverty attributions. Intratextuality was not a significant predictor. In Model 2, the variables explained 18% of the unexplained variance. In Model 3, universality was significantly associated with internal poverty attributions, after controlling for all study variables. This was surprising given that the zero-order correlation between universality and internal attributions was not significant. The collection of variables in Model 3 explained 18% of the unexplained variance. Overall, gender was not a significant predictor in any of the three models. Race was significantly associated with internal poverty attributions such that White students reported lower mean levels of internal poverty attributions than students of color.

For external poverty attributions, in Model 1, political conservatism and protestant work ethic were negatively associated with external poverty attributions; this set of variables explained 32% of the unexplained variance. In Model 2, religious attendance, religious conservatism, and intratextuality were not significantly associated with external poverty attributions. This collection of variables explained 33% of the unexplained variance. Model 3 added the universality while controlling for the predictors in the previous models. Universality was positively associated with external poverty attributions such that those that endorsed greater

universality had greater external poverty attributions. The model explained 35% of the unexplained variance. Overall, gender was significantly associated with external poverty attributions such that women had higher mean levels of external poverty attributions compared to men. Additionally, race was significantly associated with poverty attributions such that White students had lower mean levels of external poverty attributions compared to students of color.

Discussion

We used a large sample from a public university to replicate findings from Study 1. Overall, Study 2 demonstrated similar results to Study 1 in the following ways. First, religious variables of attendance and religious conservatism predicted internal but not external poverty attributions. However, the measure of literal interpretation of scared text, intratextuality, did not predict internal poverty attributions as it had in Study 1. Second, universality continued to predict external poverty attributions. However, diverging from Study 1 findings of a non-significant association, universality demonstrated a weak but significant association with internal poverty attributions. Also, the association between universality and external poverty attributions appeared weaker in Study 2 ($b = 0.18$, $SE = .04$) compared to Study 1 ($b = 0.49$, $SE = .09$). Third, political conservatism functioned in similar ways across samples (positively and negatively predicting internal and external poverty attributions, respectively). However, findings across studies diverged for Protestant work ethic. In both studies, Protestant work ethic was positively associated with internal poverty attributions. Yet, in Study 1, Protestant work ethic was not associated with external poverty attributions, whereas in Study 2 there was a negative association between these two variables. Despite these differences, Study 2 provides evidence that in general, religious variables were predictors of internal poverty attributions whereas universality predicted external poverty attributions.

CHAPTER 4: INTEGRATIVE DISCUSSION

Across two studies, we consistently found the religious variables of religious attendance and religious conservatism predicted internal poverty attributions whereas a spirituality variable, universality, predicted external poverty attributions. Also, religious variables did not predict external poverty attributions, and universality, at least in Study 1, did not predict internal poverty attributions. These results were present while controlling for gender, race, political conservatism, and the Protestant work ethic; thus, our findings show the unique ability of religious and spiritual variables to predict these beliefs about the causes of poverty. We now situate these results in the literature and discuss future implications for research and intervention.

Internal Poverty Attributions and Religious Attendance and Conservatism

We found that religious variables, which included religious attendance, self-reported religious conservatism, and biblical literalism (in Study 1), each predicted endorsement of internal poverty attributions over-and-above political conservatism and the Protestant work ethic. At the same time, universality was not a consistent predictor of internal poverty attributions. These findings are in-line with research that suggests more conservative religious beliefs are predictive of more conservative social welfare policy (Belcher, Fandetti, & Cole, 2004). Also, as noted by Pargament and Maton (2000) and Tranby and Hartman (2008), more conservative religious frameworks may promote a strong sense of individualism and of personal responsibility. Indeed, central to internal poverty attributions is a sense of personal responsibility in explaining economic inequality. Interestingly, we found that religious conservatism continued to predict internal poverty attributions even after controlling for the Protestant work ethic and political conservatism. This finding shows that there is a unique

element to religious conservatism, beyond the Protestant work ethic and political conservatism, that is linked to internal poverty attributions. Future research is needed to better understand what other variables may help to explain the association between religious conservatism and internal poverty attributions, and the role of individualism more generally as an explanatory factor.

External Poverty Attributions and Universality

Conversely, none of the religious variables predicted external poverty attributions. Instead, universality (i.e., a sense of shared connection and interdependence with the world and other people), emerged as a predictor of external poverty attributions. In general, this affirms general calls in the literature to carefully conceptualize and differentiate between measures of religion (religious attendance, religious conservatism) and measures of spirituality (universality) as we found distinct and different effects for these two types of variables (e.g., Piedmont, 1999). To our knowledge, this is one of the first studies to demonstrate the link between universality and external poverty attributions. However, it is possible that the observed association is related to universality's reliance on a connection with others. Previous research shows a sense of unity with people experiencing poverty (Landmane & Renge, 2010) or a sense that someone else is part of their in-group (Skitka, et al., 2002) may predict more external poverty attributions. Thus, the degree that universality taps into a sense of unity with people experiencing poverty, or the belief that people experiencing poverty are a part of one's in-group, may help to explain this finding. This interpretation needs to be examined in future research to better understand the mechanisms of why universality is linked to external poverty attributions.

However, there were disparate findings across the two studies regarding the association between universalities and internal poverty attributions. Universality did not predict internal poverty attributions in Study 1, and the weak association that emerged in Study 2 may have been

19

a function of suppression. Indeed, in both Studies the zero-order correlation between universality and internal poverty attributions was effectively zero and non-significant. Also, in Study 1, though not significant, the association between universality and internal poverty attributions was negative whereas in Study 2 the association was positive. This is further indication of a possible suppression effect, or that the effect may not be stable across samples. Future research is needed to explore this inconsistency.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although our findings contribute a new understanding of the associations between religious and spiritual variables with poverty attributions, they are not without limitations. First, findings are based on a student sample. Generalization beyond this specific population should be made with caution, showing the need for research across different religious traditions outside of Christianity with more diverse samples. Second, a few measures were limited in scope. For example, universality is just one aspect of spirituality and future research should examine other aspects of spirituality. Also, we only used one item for religious conservatism; and findings for biblical literalism (Study 1) did not replicate when we used a different validated measure of literal interpretation of sacred text (Study 2). Future studies would be strengthened by more holistic and comprehensive measurement of both religious and spiritual practices and belief. Third, because this study focused on poverty attributions rather than specific policies, we are not able to draw a link between religion and spirituality and support for policies that may impact people experiencing poverty. Future studies would benefit from examining support for specific policies as the dependent variable to explore the role of spirituality and religious beliefs in promoting specific poverty policies.

Future research also would benefit from examining how religious settings, like congregations, socialize members about internal and external poverty attributions. Specifically, research may examine congregational programming and activities to determine if certain types of approaches to poverty alleviation promote more internal or external poverty attributions. For example, programs focused only on meeting short-term direct needs may lack exposure to more systemic reasons for poverty, whereas congregational activities focused on political advocacy for policy change may encourage more systemic understandings of the reasons for poverty (e.g., Chaves & Tsitsos, 2001; Pargament & Maton, 2000; Todd & Houston, 2013). Finally, future research should examine links between internal and external poverty attributions with specific poverty policies. It is likely that many policies may be driven by both internal and external poverty attributions and research should examine these attributions in combination. For instance, a policy could target systemic understandings for poverty like housing or employment, while also making access to these resources conditional upon abstinence from substance use. By doing so, the policy might be a product of both internal and external poverty attributions. Thus, a more nuanced understanding is necessary to examine how internal and external attributions work in concert to shape attitudes and behaviors related to particular types of poverty policies.

Implications for Psychological Practice with Religious Communities

Psychologists have recognized the potential for religious and spiritual communities (e.g., congregations, mosques, synagogues, interfaith groups) to be agents of change in decreasing poverty while also working against othering and victim blaming (Maton, Domingo, & Westin, 2013; Pargament & Maton, 2000). However, our current study shows that more conservative types of religious beliefs were associated with more internal poverty attributions, thus presenting a potential challenge for religious communities with certain types of beliefs. Although a

potential challenge, we believe there are opportunities to work within multiple types of religious communities to confront internal attributions, and to promote more external attributions for poverty. For example, perhaps working with cultural insiders, such as religious leaders within more conservative traditions, may help to design or translate interventions that can work to decrease internal poverty attributions within a conservative framework. For instance, Sider (2005) has advocated within conservative Christian communities for antipoverty work that is holistic and more structural. Similarly, Catholic Social Teaching promotes putting "the needs of the poor and vulnerable first" given the theme of the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable (Shank, 2007, p. 12). Also, our findings show that religious liberalism was associated with lower internal poverty attributions, thus there may be many religious communities already working from this perspective. Thus, identifying and working with religious leaders that are actively pursuing ways to embrace less internal and more external explanations for poverty may be a fruitful area of collaboration.

More concretely, there are many opportunities for psychologist to partner with religious and spiritual groups. For instance, psychologists could work with groups to help them elucidate the reasons for *why* they work to decrease poverty or to meet the need of people experiencing poverty. Articulating these reasons may help groups see how their work is based on more internal or external attributions for poverty, and how such reasons align with their larger mission and group-based beliefs. Also, psychologists bring a wealth of experience in helping groups to build or strengthen pre-existing congregational programs designed to alleviate poverty (Pargament & Maton, 2000; Shinn & McCormack, 2017). Psychologists also might engage in curriculum development for training religious and spiritual leaders to provide more systemic

explanations and understandings of poverty. Overall, we believe there is rich potential for

joining with religious and spiritual communities in the shared goal of working to reduce poverty.

Table 1

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	*Mean*	*SD*	α
1. Internal Poverty Attribution	—	-.00	.26*	.49*	.13	.26*	.18*	-.03	3.51	0.85	.83
2. External Poverty Attribution	.02	—	-.24*	-.01	-.08	-.05	.12	.42*	3.29	0.74	.80
3. Political Conservatism	.30*	-.45*	—	.14*	-.09	.38*	.17*	-.09	3.55	1.27	.81
4. Protestant Work Ethic	.36*	-.45*	.44*	—	-.01	.15*	.12	.22*	4.66	0.58	.72
5. Religious Attendance	-.01	.01	-.15*	-.03	___	-.08	-.40*	-.22*	4.87	2.14	___
6. Religious Conservatism	.30*	-.27*	.64*	.29*	-.27*	___	.23*	.06	4.42	2.17	___
7. Biblical Literalism[a]/Intratextuality[b]	.20*	-.13*	.30*	.21*	-.43*	.44*	___	.25*	3.85	1.18	.80
8. Universality	.03	.21*	-.10*	-.12*	-.12*	.04	.18*	___	3.90	0.57	.84
Mean	3.07	3.08	0.32	0.10	-0.27	0.50	0.15	0.23			
SD	0.89	0.81	1.38	0.89	1.20	1.37	1.28	0.71			
α	.83	.82	.83	.69	___	___	.87	.90			

Note. Intercorrelations for Study 1 (n = 234-245) are presented above the diagonal, and intercorrelations for Study 2 (n = 764-789) are presented below the diagonal. Means, standard deviations, and reliability estimates for Study 1 are presented in the vertical columns whereas the same information for Study 2 is presented in the horizontal rows.
[a] Biblical literalism was assessed in Study 1.
[b] Intratextuality was assessed in Study 2.
* $p < .05$.

Table 2

Study 1: Regression Analysis Predicting Internal and External Poverty Attributions

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	b (SE) [95% CI]	b (SE) [95% CI]	b (SE) [95% CI]
Internal Poverty Attributions			
Intercept	3.60* (0.11) [3.37, 3.82]	3.59* (0.12) [3.36, 3.81]	3.57* (0.11) [3.34, 3.79]
Woman[a]	-0.01 (0.11) [-0.24, 0.21]	0.00 (0.11) [-0.22, 0.23]	0.03 (0.11) [-0.19, 0.26]
White[a]	-0.15 (0.10) [-0.34, 0.04]	-0.14 (0.10) [-0.34, 0.05]	-0.15 (0.10) [-0.34, 0.04]
Political Conservatism	0.13* (0.04) [0.06, 0.21]	0.09* (0.04) [0.02, 0.17]	0.08* (0.04) [0.00, 0.16]
Protestant Work Ethic	0.71* (0.09) [0.52, 0.88]	0.60* (0.09) [0.43, 0.78]	0.64* (0.09) [0.46, 0.82]
Religious Attendance	___	0.09 * (0.02) [0.04, 0.13]	0.08* (0.02) [0.03, 0.12]
Religious Conservatism	___	0.06* (0.02) [0.02, 0.11]	0.06* (0.02) [0.02, 0.11]
Biblical Literalism	___	0.12* (0.05) [0.03, 0.21]	0.13* (0.05) [0.04, 0.22]
Universality	___	___	-0.18 (0.09) [-0.36, 0.00]
R^2	.27	.32	.32
External Poverty Attributions			
Intercept	3.25* (0.11) [3.03, 3.47]	3.25* (0.11) [3.03, 3.48]	3.31 (0.11) [3.09, 3.52]
Woman[a]	0.22* (0.11) [0.01, 0.44]	0.22 (0.11) [-0.01, 0.44]	0.14 (0.11) [-0.07, 0.34]
White[a]	-0.28* (0.09) [-0.46, -0.09]	-0.27* (0.10) [-0.46, -0.08]	-0.25* (0.09) [-0.43, -0.07]
Political Conservatism	-0.13* (0.04) [-0.20, -0.05]	-0.14* (0.04) [-0.22, -0.06]	-0.11* (0.04) [-0.18, -0.03]
Protestant Work Ethic	0.03 (0.08) [-0.14, 0.19]	0.02 (0.09) [-0.15, 0.19]	-0.10 (0.08) [-0.26, 0.07]
Religious Attendance	___	-0.02 (0.02) [-0.07, 0.03]	-0.01 (0.02) [-0.05, 0.04]
Religious Conservatism	___	0.01 (0.02) [-0.04, 0.05]	0.00 (0.02) [-0.04, 0.05]
Biblical Literalism	___	0.06 (0.05) [-0.03, 0.15]	0.03 (0.04) [-0.05, 0.11]
Universality	___	___	0.49* (0.09) [0.32, 0.66]
R^2	.10	.12	.23

Note. [a]Men and students of color served as the reference group.

* $p < .05$.

Table 3

Study 2: Regression Analysis Predicting Internal and External Poverty Attributions

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	b (SE) [95% CI]	b (SE) [95% CI]	b (SE) [95% CI]
Internal Poverty Attributions			
Intercept	3.03* (0.07) [2.90, 3.17]	3.01* (0.07) [2.87, 3.14]	2.99* (0.07) [2.86, 3.13]
Woman[a]	0.09 (0.07) [-0.05, 0.22]	0.08 (0.07) [-0.05, 0.22]	0.09 (0.07) [-0.05, 0.22]
White[a]	-0.16* (0.07) [-0.28, -0.03]	-0.14* (0.07) [-0.27, -0.01]	-0.15* (0.07) [-0.29, -0.02]
Political Conservatism	0.13* (0.02) [0.08, 0.18]	0.06 (0.03) [-0.00, 0.12]	0.06* (0.03) [0.00, 0.12]
Protestant Work Ethic	0.29* (0.04) [0.22, 0.36]	0.27* (0.04) [0.20, 0.35]	0.28* (0.04) [0.21, 0.36]
Religious Attendance	___	0.07* (0.03) [0.02, 0.13]	0.08* (0.03) [0.02, 0.13]
Religious Conservatism	___	0.11* (0.03) [0.05, 0.16]	0.10* (0.03) [0.05, 0.16]
Intratextuality	___	0.05 (0.03) [-0.01, 0.10]	0.04 (0.03) [-0.02, 0.10]
Universality	___	___	0.09* (0.04) [0.01, 0.17]
R^2	.16	.18	.18
External Poverty Attributions			
Intercept	3.25* (0.06) [3.14, 3.36]	3.24* (0.06) [3.13, 3.56]	3.21* (0.06) [3.09, 3.32]
Woman[a]	0.16* (0.06) [0.05, 0.26]	0.16* (0.06) [0.05, 0.27]	0.17* (0.06) [0.06, 0.28]
White[a]	-0.30* (0.05) [-0.41, -0.20]	-0.30* (0.06) [-0.41, -0.19]	-0.31* (0.03) [-0.42, -0.20]
Political Conservatism	-0.15* (0.02) [-0.19, -0.11]	-0.16* (0.03) [-0.21, -0.11]	-0.15* (0.03) [-0.20, -0.10]
Protestant Work Ethic	-0.27* (0.03) [-0.33, -0.21]	-0.26* (0.03) [-0.32, -0.20]	-0.25* (0.03) [-0.31, -0.19]
Religious Attendance	___	-0.02 (0.02) [-0.06, 0.03]	-0.01 (0.02) [-0.06, 0.03]
Religious Conservatism	___	0.00 (0.02) [-0.05, 0.05]	-0.00 (0.02) [-0.05, 0.05]
Intratextuality	___	0.01 (0.02) [-0.06, 0.04]	-0.03 (0.02) [-0.07, 0.02]
Universality	___	___	0.18* (0.04) [0.11, 0.25]
R^2	.32	.33	.35

Note. [a]Men and students of color served as the reference group.

* $p < .05$.

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