From Existential to Social Understandings of Risk: Examining Gender Differences in Non-religion

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October 29, 2016

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Western societies, women are generally found to be more religious than men; explanations for this pattern include gender differences in socialization, social roles and expectations, and biology. One of the most influential explanations, risk preference theory, argues that women are more likely to avoid the existential risk of rejecting belief in a god who may turn out to be real (e.g. Miller and Hoffman 1995). As we describe below, risk preference theory has generated an extensive body of scholarship, much of which modifies or extends the original formulation by Miller and Hoffman (1995), and some of which contests the underlying assumption that women are, in general, more risk-averse than men.

We argue that the concept of risk is useful in explaining women's generally greater religiosity, but that the risk is social, not existential. Building on recent research on how social location influences religious and non-religious choices (Baker and Smith 2015; Schnabel 2016; Sherkat and Ellison 1995) and how women are differentially sanctioned for non-religious identification (Baker and Smith 2015; Schutz and Roth 2015), we argue that women are more likely than men to incur social costs for embracing non-religious beliefs, identities, and practices, and that this influences not only the choice to be non-religious, but also which non-religious identities and practices women adopt. Rather than being more risk averse, women face greater risk than do men for similarly socially stigmatized choices, and we develop the concept of *social risk* to account for this.

We draw on recent, nationally representative survey data to analyze how gender influences the propensity to be non-religious, using measures of non-religion that include non-involvement in religious institutions, non-belief, and a variety of non-religious identifications. We analyze how gender shapes which form of non-religious identification individuals embrace, comparing those who identify as atheist with those who claim less overtly religion-rejecting identities (e.g. "nothing in particular" and "spiritual, but not

religious"). This allows us to explore how gender shapes the particular way in which non-religion is practiced and expressed, with a focus on comparing more and less socially risky choices. Our research contributes to the critique and reformulation of understandings of gender, risk, and religiosity by reconceptualizing the nature of the risks involved in eschewing religious involvement (Avishai, Jafar, and Rinaldo 2015; Baker and Smith 2015; Cornwall 2009).

We also answer recent calls for research that goes beyond a belief-centered approach to religiosity. Both the risk-preference explanation and many of its critics rely on the same asocial and belief-centered understanding of the risk of being non-religious as existential; unbelief is understood to trigger the same impersonal cognitive mechanism across contexts, influencing religiosity. But we agree with those who argue that both religion and non-religion are best understood as a set of practices that are contextually embedded in institutions and relations of power, intersecting with other aspects of identity in contingent ways that shape the relevance and impact of religious beliefs for individuals (Baker and Smith 2015; Chaves 2010; Edgell 2012; Edgell and Tranby 2007; Frost and Edgell 2016). Likewise, when gender is conceptualized as a contextually embedded set of practices, a more complex understanding of what gender means and how it intersects with religiosity becomes possible (Cornwall 2009; Neitz 2014; Sullins 2006).

We approach religiosity and gender as contextually embedded practices and argue that, in the contemporary United States, being non-religious is a more socially risky practice for women, who are more likely to be actively sanctioned for rejecting religion. While social risk and stigma have been taken into account in research on the religiosity of other marginalized populations (e.g. Sherkat and Ellison 1995), they have been largely absent in the literature on women's religiosity. We argue that the concept of social risk enables a practice-oriented approach to non-religious choices by highlighting non-religious identification as a process of claiming a social identity and creating symbolic boundaries around that identity (e.g. Lamont 1992), allowing us to examine how power and privilege shape religious and non-religious identification.

NON-RELIGION AS EXISTENTIALLY RISKY: DIFFERENTIAL RISK PREFERENCE AND THE GENDER GAP IN RELIGIOSITY

Gender differences in religiosity are pervasive across Western societies in the modern era (Carroll 2004; Voas, McAndrew, and Storm 2013) and numerous explanations for this gap have been offered, including women's roles in Western societies as caretakers and homemakers (Becker and Hofmeister 2001; Hastings and Lindsay 2013), the socialization of women into being emotional, caring, and thus religious (Collett and Lizardo 2009; Devine 2013), differences in sex-type personalities (Sherkat 2002; Thompson 1991), and biological innateness (Bradshaw and Ellison 2009; Stark 2002). One of the most prominent explanations for the gender gap in religiosity is the argument for differential risk preferences (Miller and Hoffmann 1995; Miller 2000; Miller and Stark 2002). Building on Pascal's Wager, Miller and Hoffmann (1995) argue that being non-religious is an existentially risky choice; if one denies belief in a god that does in fact exist, one risks eternal damnation. They find that women are more averse to risk taking, adventure seeking, and danger, and they conclude that women's propensity to be risk-averse is the main explanatory factor for their higher religiosity. Miller (2000) subsequently argues that the risk of non-religion varies across cultures, arguing that women in less religious cultures see less of a risk to non-religion. Finally, Miller and Stark (2002) attempt to explain *why* women are more risk-averse than men. Drawing on Stark's (2002) work, Miller and Stark (2002) argue that risk-aversion is a biologically "feminine" trait and, since non-religion is existentially risky, the source of women's greater religiosity is biological.

EXTENSIONS AND CRITIQUES OF THE RISK PREFERENCE EXPLANATION

Important extensions and critiques of the differential risk preference explanation have called into question the validity and universality of its claims (Carroll 2004; Collett and Lizardo 2009; Cornwall 2009; Hoffmann 2009; Roth and Kroll 2007; Sherkat 2002, 2014; Schnabel 2015; Schutz and Roth 2015; Sullins 2006). For example, Collett and Lizardo (2009) draw on power-control theory, finding that women raised in

traditional, patriarchal households are more risk averse than women raised in egalitarian households; they argue that socialization, not biology, is the root of gender-differential risk preferences. Roth and Kroll (2007) argue that many non-religious individuals do not believe in eternal damnation and thus perceive no risk to rejecting religious beliefs. Their analysis reveals that a belief in life after death affects men's religiosity more so than it does women's and that women who do not believe in heaven or hell participate in religious institutions more than men who *do* believe. Further, in a replication of the original study conducted by Miller and Hoffman (1995), Freese (2004) finds no support for the claim that risk preferences drive gender differences in religion (see also Freese and Montgomery 2007).

Critiques have also focused on refuting assumptions of the universality of gender differences in religiosity. Sherkat (2002) finds that gay men are more religious than lesbian women, arguing that it is individuals with "feminine" personality traits that are more risk averse and more religious. Carroll (2004) details an historical account of the "feminization of religion" in the 19th century, explaining that, before the 19th century, Protestantism and Catholicism in the U.S. were practiced more by men than by women. Similarly, Sullins (2006) finds that among Jews and Muslims, men are in fact *more* religious than are women. Baker and Smith (2015) find that the gender gap disappears under certain conditions of political ideology and educational attainment such that highly educated, liberal women match educated liberal men in their propensity to be non-religious.

However, the majority of extensions and critiques of risk preference theory retain the core idea of non-religion as potentially risky for existential reasons. That is, they focus on religious belief as the essential, defining element of religiosity and they set out to explain gender differences in theism. This belief-centered understanding of religiosity assumes that religious beliefs are the main driver of religiosity and that they have a uniform effect on social action (Chaves 2010). In this way, risk preference explanations elide the intersectionality of religiosity with other aspects of social identity and the ways in which religiosity is constructed through practice (McGuire 2008; Riesebrodt 2009), contextually embedded in institutions

(Edgell 2012), and influenced by structural location (Edgell and Tranby 2007; Frost and Edgell 2016). A practice-oriented approach takes into account social embeddedness and understands both gender and religion as things individuals "do," not things that individuals "are" (Cornwall 2009; Neitz 2014; Sullins 2006). As Cornwall (2009) explains, religion and risk preference are gendered constructs and research should focus on "gendering processes" that account for differences in both risk preference and religiosity.

NON-RELIGIOUS OPTIONS AND CHOICES

In the contemporary United States, the increase in non-religious persons (Hout and Fischer 2014) has led to a variety of groups, movements, and modes of identification among the non-religious (Baker and Smith 2015; Beaman and Tomlins 2015; Cimino and Smith 2014). Individuals may practice non-religion in a variety of ways, or even mix elements of religious and non-religious practice (e.g. Keysar 2014). And these non-religious choices often fall along gendered lines (Sherkat 2014). Thus, the category of "non-religion" is increasingly understood as an indicator of highly heterogeneous beliefs, identifications, and behaviors (Lee 2014; Cotter 2015). Atheists have been found to be the most vocal and active in regards to criticizing religion in the public sphere and promoting non-religious identity politics (Altermeyer 2009; Baker and Smith 2009); they are more often male, white, highly educated, and politically liberal (LeDrew 2015; Sherkat 2008). Agnostics are a less-studied group; some use the agnostic label to indicate an openness to phenomenon other than what they can see or detect, while others use the label to indicate a certain apathy toward both religion and non-religion (Cotter 2015).

Another prominent sub-group within the non-religious are the "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR). Those who take on this label often maintain religious beliefs and behaviors, including attending church and belief in the supernatural; the choice to distinguish their identity from religion is typically a moral and political distancing from organized religion (Ammerman 2013). SBNRs are more often women, older, and non-white (Aune 2015; Brown, Taylor and Chatters 2015; Wilcox 2009). While at first categorizing SBNR's as

"non-religious" seems counterintuitive, and in fact many surveys categorize SBNRs as an "other" religious group, it is an intentional distancing from organized religion and should be categorized as a non-religious choice.

Perhaps the most understudied sub-group among the non-religious is the "nothing in particulars." This group eschews both religious *and* non-religious identities, but their rejection of religion means they are rightfully grouped with the non-religious. Lee (2014) argues that individuals might choose this label because they are indifferent to religion and non-religion, or they may want to signal their disaffiliation from *any* engagement and "locate themselves outside of religious culture in general" (Lee 2014: 474).

RETHINKING RISK: NON-RELIGION AS SOCIALLY RISKY

In the United States, religiosity is intertwined with both national identity and civic virtue; religious belonging and practices such as prayer and church attendance enable religious individuals to define themselves as moral people, good neighbors, and good citizens (see Edgell, Hartmann, Stewart, and Gerteis 2016). The fact that religion is voluntary and chosen makes it particularly useful for boundary maintenance and it is often understood as an indicator of moral worth and the acceptance of culturally valued practices; rejection of such practices makes one a "cultural outsider" (Kalkan et al. 2009), and cultural outsider status may persist despite increasing visibility of or contact with the outsider group. As a result, atheists in America are disliked and distrusted (Cook, Cohen, and Solomon 2015; Gervais, Shariff, and Norenzayan 2011), seen as immoral and/or elitist (Edgell et al. 2016; Wright and Nichols 2014), and are discriminated against in the workplace, the military, and even by their friends and family (Cragun et al. 2012; Hammer, Cragun, and Hwang 2013; Hammer et al. 2012; Wright et al. 2013; Wallace, Wright, and Hyde 2014). In short, non-religion is stigmatized in American society, especially atheism, and in this sense, rejecting belief in a god in America is not simply existentially risky, it also entails strong *social* risks.

The Causes and Consequences of Stigma

Stigmatization is the process whereby an attribute or trait is believed to discredit or taint an individual or group, resulting in the devaluing of their status in the eyes of others (Goffman 1963; Major and O'Brien 2005). Stigma is the co-occurrence of "labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination" in which a trait or characteristic is first labeled and set apart as different and inferior and then applied to specific individuals or groups (Link and Phelan 2001: 363). Members of a society come to develop a shared stereotypical understanding of a certain trait, and those with that trait soon come to understand their devalued status based on prior experiences and exposure to dominant culture (Major and O'Brien 2005). Individuals who are perceived to have a stigmatized trait experience a variety of consequences, including status loss, discrimination, and stress (Link and Phelan 2001; Major and O'Brien 2005; Miller and Kaiser 2001). As a result, stigma has been linked to "poor mental health, physical illness, academic underachievement, infant mortality, low social status, poverty, and reduced access to housing, education, and jobs" (Major and O'Brien 2005: 394).

Importantly, the stigmatizing process is largely dependent on power differentials among different social groups in a society. Link and Phelan (2001) argue, "Stigmatization is entirely contingent on access to social, economic, and political power that allows the identification of differentness, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labeled persons into distinct categories, and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion, and discrimination" (367). This means that not only do groups with more power and status have more of a say in how a stigmatizing label gets applied, but also that those with power have more resources for coping with stigma when it is applied to them (Link and Phelan 2001; Major and O'Brien 2005). Women and minorities, for example, are less likely to have the power and resources to avoid or combat stigma (Link and Phelan 2001). Thus, stigma is not experienced by all individuals of a stigmatized group in the same way.

Stigmatized individuals employ various strategies to cope with, lessen, and avoid stigma and its consequences. Some may confront the stigma head on by affirming more strongly their association with the stigmatized trait or group and wearing that trait proudly (Branscombe et al. 1999; Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 2002). Alternatively, fear of stigma may cause individuals to "pass" by hiding their stigmatized trait or to disengage with that identity or trait altogether when it is an option (Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 2002; Goffman 1963). Whether an individual confronts or avoids stigma is largely dependent on their social status as well as their commitment to that group or trait. High-status or high commitment individuals may more strongly affirm a stigmatized identity, while low-status and low-commitment individuals rework their identity or conceal it (Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 2002).

These various responses to stigma have also been found among the non-religious. Some non-religious individuals, particularly atheists, redefine and reassert their non-religious identities by claiming their beliefs are "more moral" than those of the religious; they use humor and derision of the religious to affirm their non-religious identities as superior (Baker and Smith 2015; Guenther 2014). More often, however, the non-religious "pass" and hide their non-religious beliefs and identities in the presence of others (Cragun et al. 2012; Manning 2015; Schutz and Roth 2015; Zuckerman 2011).

The Gendered Nature of Non-religious Social Risk

Feminist scholars have begun to outline the ways in which women are more likely than men to bear the social costs of stigmatized non-religious choices (Hutchinson 2011; Miller 2013). By rejecting religion, women are seen as rejecting their femininity and their rightful place in society, including their moral obligations to be the "keepers of morality," supervising the moral upbringing of children and fulfilling the emotional needs of the family (cf. Sherkat 2000). Atheism, then, is socially risky for women because it violates gendered expectations, while for men, such choices are less risky because dominant understandings of masculinity are not intertwined with nurturing and religiosity. As Miller (2013) explains about atheism, "[M]en

do not face the risk of seeming less masculine by embracing what is portrayed as an emotionless, scientific, masculine belief" (217). To be a non-religious woman in America is to "unsex" oneself (Hutchinson 2011); a risk that is particularly acute for African-American women, given the historic centrality of religion in the African-American community (c.f. Baker and Smith 2015; Ellison and Sherkat 1995; Hutchinson 2011; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Baker and Smith (2015) argue that this explains why atheists are more likely to be privileged (white, male, and with a college degree); privileged individuals have the resources to avoid or combat the stigma associated with non-religion (Link and Phelan 2001).

Non-religious women violate gendered expectations, and women are more likely to be publicly criticized and sanctioned for non-conforming behaviors of all kinds. For example, a recent study finds that students evaluate female professors more harshly and critically than male professors; the looks and emotional expressions of female professors receive negative comments while students focus on and evaluate more positively the intellectual traits of male professors (MacNell, Driscoll, and Hunt 2014). Women are sanctioned more heavily than are men for eschewing altruistic behaviors (Heilman and Chen 2005), for choosing childlessness over parenthood (Gillespie 2000; Letherby 2002), and for taking a dominant leadership role in the workplace (Brescoll and Uhlmann 2008; Rudman et al. 2012).

Thus, women may be judged more harshly than men for rejecting religion, and may be more likely to face sanctions that flow from these negative judgments, just as they are in general more likely to be stigmatized and have fewer resources to combat stigmatization (Link and Phelan 2001). Social psychologists have found that women who expect that they will be stereotyped and stigmatized are more likely than men to avoid stigma-tainted situations altogether or to seek out "prejudice-free alternatives" when they are available (see Miller and Kaiser 2001 for a review). In an exploratory qualitative analysis detailing how this process works for non-religious women, Schutz and Roth (2015) find that non-religious women experience higher rates of discrimination than do non-religious men, and that the sanctions they face are more serious. For example, they find that more women than men report public harassment, discrimination in the work-

place, and ostracism from previously close friends and family members as a result of revealing their non-religion. Non-religious women are also more likely to engage in various stigma management practices by "pretending" to be religious, hiding their non-religion by "passing," or taking on "softer" and more ambiguous non-religious labels.

Taken together, this research points to the utility of investigating not only gender differences in religion, but also gender differences in embracing an array of non-religious identities and practices as a way to negotiate the social risks that non-religious women face. It is of course the case that not believing in a god may entail existential risks, especially in certain social contexts. But, along with others (Baker and Smith 2015; Hutchinson 2011; Schutz and Roth 2015), we argue that in the contemporary United States, non-religion is socially risky because the rejection of religion is socially stigmatized. This stigma may be especially strong for atheism, the non-religious identity that most overtly and explicitly rejects religion. An intersectional approach helps us to understand why this risk may be more acute for women, for whom religion is congruent with gendered expectations of investment in mothering, nurturing, and moral socialization. As a result, women may be judged more harshly than men when they reject religion, and in the American context, those doing the judging may be more willing to directly sanction or discriminate against non-religious women than they would non-religious men.

Building on prior work, we propose that the concept of *social risk* offers a constructive re-framing of the gender and risk literature. If existential risk involves the anticipated loss of a valued existential good (salvation), social risk involves the anticipated loss of valued social goods; that is, social risk is driven by the knowledge of social costs associated with stigmatized choices. Based on prior research, non-religious individuals may reasonably anticipate the loss of three specific social goods due to the stigmatization of non-religion in the US context: reputation or social status, valued relationships with others, and access to information or opportunities (discrimination). In all cases, the mechanism leading to loss is also social;

reputational loss, relationship damage, and discrimination occur as individuals apply sanctions for non-conforming behavior during social interaction.

We argue that non-religious women face greater social risk than non-religious men in the contemporary United States. The social risk of taking on a non-religious identity may affect non-religious choices via two pathways. First, the anticipation of social risk may shape an individual's initial choice in how to identify as non-religious, with less powerful individuals choosing less risky non-religious identities and more powerful ones embracing more risky identities (in this case, atheism). Second, the result of non-religious choices may trigger social sanctions which either cause a person to switch to a less risky religious identity or which may lead to a more committed affirmation of a particular non-religious identity; again, power and resources will shape this choice. Either pathway would lead to women claiming less-risky non-religious identities than men.

In our analysis, below, we show that women and men sort into less and more risky non-religious choices, respectively, and that women report more discrimination for non-religious choices than do men. Our findings highlight the importance of considering the multi-faceted nature of non-religion and the ways it is shaped by social location and cultural context.

DATA AND METHODS

Data

All data are drawn from the Boundaries in the American Mosaic survey, a nationally representative online survey contracted through GfK with funding from the National Science Foundation. The survey was drafted during the summer of 2013 and fielded during a two-week period in early 2014. Participants were selected from GfK's nationally-representative panel sampling frame, which uses probability-based random address sampling from U.S. Postal Service records to recruit respondents in English and Spanish-speaking households through direct mail, telephone follow-up, and online registration. GfK provides laptop comput-

ers for respondent households lacking internet access. Using probability proportional to size weighted sampling, GfK drew a sample consisting of 2,400 adults, including two over-samples of 400 African American and 400 Hispanic respondents, from their panel. Sample weights were applied to the data to adjust for these ethnic and language-based over-samples, in addition to post-stratification sample weights for non-coverage and non-response biases similar to those used in comparable national surveys such as the GSS and the CPS (see Chang and Krosnick 2002 and Huggins and Eyerman 2001 for more information on internet survey reliability).

While respondents were paid for their participation, GfK caps participation in multiple surveys at two to four per month, does not allow for self-selection into either the frame or survey sample, and corrects for frequent sampling of respondents on particular demographic characteristics in their sampling procedure. Before fielding, the BAM survey underwent two rounds of pretesting and revisions with a convenience sample of undergraduates at an East-coast university and a random sample of 50 respondents from GfK's panel.

Methods

While risk preference theory examines gender differences in *religiosity*, we conceive of non-religion as socially risky and assess the effects of gender on the propensity to practice *non-religion* in a variety of ways (c.f. Keysar 2014). Specifically, we use a series of binomial logistic regression models focusing on non-religious belief (rejecting theism), non-religious behavior (not attending worship services), and non-religious identification (for example, identifying as "agnostic" or "atheist"). To test non-belief, we used a forced choice dichotomous question asking whether respondents "believe in a god or a higher power" with participants who responded "no" coded as 1.[1] To test non-attendance, we re-coded a categorical measure assessing the frequency of church attendance into a dichotomous variable with respondents answering "never" coded as 1. Finally, to test non-religious identification, we re-coded a categorical measure of

religious identification from the BAM survey based on a modified version of the Steensland et al. (2000) approach which asked respondents, "What is your current religious preference, if any?" Respondents could choose only one label from a list of religious and non-religious identifications, and our coding reflects their choice of one of four possible non-religious identifications from the list: "atheist," "agnostic," "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR), and "nothing in particular" (NIP). In our sample, 33% of men and 28% of women claim one of these four forms of non-religious identification.

Our main independent variables of interest are gender and religious/non-religious discrimination. To measure the social risk of expressing non-religious identities, we utilize a variable indicating whether respondents have ever experienced discrimination due to their non-religious beliefs and identification.[2] Of course, discrimination is just one of the many social costs one can incur for taking on a stigmatized identity. However, in this case, using a measure of discrimination is a good test of our theoretical approach because it is in many ways the most serious risk associated with taking on a stigmatized identity and this measure captures an experience or perception that is notable and memorable. This is useful because the perception of discrimination motivates action to avoid future discrimination. To test whether women experience the social risk of discrimination differently than men, we also include an interaction term in our models for gender and experiences with non-religious discrimination. Our control variables include dichotomous measures of non-white racial identification (black or Hispanic), political conservatism, whether the respondent is a parent, and whether she or he completed college. We also include a continuous measure of age and a categorical measure of income. A full list of variables is presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 here

Agnostics make up our smallest sub-sample, with only 75 individuals reporting identification with the agnostic label. Following Hosmer and Lemeshow (2013), who recommend including only one independent variable for every 8-10 cases of a dependent variable in logistic regression, we limit our suite of independent variables to eight measures in order to maintain statistical power, and we hold this block

constant across all the models for ease of interpretation.

We report nine binomial logistic regressions. Seven of our nine reported models utilize the full sample of the BAM survey to test the probability of non-belief, non-attendance, and non-religious identification against believing, attending, and identifying baselines. In our final two models, we compare self-identified atheists to a sub-sample baseline of non-believers (N=275) to assess who, among those who have already taken on Pascal's Wager and denied belief in a god, is more or less likely to identify as atheist. These sub-sample models bring additional nuance to our analysis because they allow us to test whether gender associates not only with whether respondents express non-belief, but also how respondents represent that non-belief.

RESULTS

A social risk perspective of non-religious identification suggests that (1) non-religious respondents experience different kinds of social sanctions for non-affiliation, and (2) that they respond to those risks with different strategies. To demonstrate these claims, we first ran a series of bivariate tests for gender differences in non-religious identification and experiences of discrimination based on those identifications. Table 2 presents a descriptive picture of the gender breakdown across different kinds of religious and non-religious identification, as well as the percentages of each group who report ever experiencing discrimination by gender. While a higher percentage of male respondents identify as nothing in particular, atheist, or generally non-religious, a higher percentage of women identify as spiritual but not religious. A chi-square test indicates that this difference is statistically significant (p<.001). Among women who claim no religious identity, 19% reported having experienced discrimination; 15% of non-religious men experienced discrimination, though these differences were not statistically significant. However, among SBNR respondents, women report significantly higher rates of discrimination than men (p<.05). While agnostic and NIP females are more likely to report discrimination than their male counterparts, these

differences were not statistically significant. Atheist men also reported experiencing discrimination at higher rates than atheist women (35% vs 22%), but the limited number of atheists in the sample does not render this difference statistically significant; neither chi-square nor Fisher's exact tests were significant for this group.

Insert Table 2 here

Building on this bivariate analysis, we report logistic regression models assessing how these experiences with discrimination relate to various kinds of non-religious expression when controlling for key demographic and ideological factors. Table 3 presents results for the odds of respondents reporting that they do not believe in a god or universal spirit and the odds of respondents reporting that they never attend religious services. As indicated by the odds ratios, women are about half as likely to say they do not believe in a god as men, and they are about .76 times as likely (that is, 24% less likely) to report never attending religious services. Non-white respondents (those who self-identify as black or Hispanic) are about half as likely as white respondents to report each of these outcomes as well. Parents and politically conservative respondents are also less likely to report these outcomes, while respondents who completed college are 1.64 times more likely to claim non-belief in this model.

Insert Table 3 here

Table 4 tests the odds of respondents reporting a range of non-religious identities, with respondents who *do* report a religious identity serving as the reference category. The first column treats all non-religious respondents as the outcome variable, while each subsequent column treats only a specific non-religious identification as the outcome. The two most important findings in this table stem from the varied effect of gender in each of these models. First, there is no statistically significant difference in the odds of female respondents identifying as non-religious in general. Instead, female respondents are 31% less likely to identify as "nothing in particular" than male respondents, and they are 70% less likely to identify as atheists. However, female respondents are also twice as likely to identify as SBNR as are men.

The second important gender finding relates to experiences with discrimination. A one standard deviation increase in reported frequency of experience with non-religious discrimination significantly associates with about 2.5 times higher odds of identifying as an atheist, while the same increase in our interaction term for gender and experiences of discrimination associates with 1.5 times higher odds of identifying as SBNR. These are the only two times in the full sample models where experiences with discrimination are statistically significant. Together with the findings above, we can conclude not only that women are more likely than men to identify as SBNR, but also that women who report experiencing more frequent religious discrimination are more likely to do so. At the same time, men are more likely to identify as atheists, and men who report more experiences with religious discrimination are more likely to do so. This supports the idea that for women and men, the choice to embrace a specific religious identity (SBNR for women, atheist for men) may be part of a gendered strategy for dealing with experiences of discrimination.

Political conservatism has the most consistent relationship across all of the models in Table 4, associating with lower odds of any kind of non-religious identification. This finding is in line with existing literature that suggests a primary motive for leaving religious groups is dissatisfaction with the link between religion and conservative political views (Hout and Fischer 2002, 2014). Parents are less likely to identify as non-religious in general, but show no specific patterns in identification preferences. Non-white respondents are less likely to identify as non-religious overall, and much less likely to identify as atheist or agnostic. While college completion does not significantly relate to the odds of identifying as non-religious overall, those who complete college are almost twice as likely to identify as atheist or agnostic. Income and age are significant in some of the models presented, but their effects are not substantively large.[3]

Table 5 presents the results from logistic regressions for a sub-sample of only respondents who say they do not believe in a god or a universal spirit (N=275). With this small sub-sample of respondents, we do

not mean to draw highly generalizable conclusions; rather, we add context to extend our understanding of gendered expressions of non-religiosity. We ran this model twice, once with the full model and again without the gender and religious discrimination interaction term for a slight improvement in model fit with the low number of respondents. In the full model, only race remained significant and substantive, suggesting that non-white respondents who do not believe in a god are about 66% less likely to identify as an atheist than white respondents who said they do not believe in a god.

Insert Table 5 here

In the reduced model, gender becomes significant at a similar magnitude, suggesting that women who do not believe in a god or universal spirit are still less likely to identify as atheists. Since our data are ordinal, we executed a KHB mediation test in STATA to assess whether gendered experiences with discrimination mediate the effect of gender on atheist identification (Breen, Karlson, and Holm 2013). The test identified a significant direct path from gender to atheist identity in the reduced model (p=.020), and a significant, but small, mediation effect in a full model including gendered discrimination (p=.034), but the difference between the two models was not significant. This means that experiences with discrimination might mediate the relationship between a non-believer's gender and their odds of identifying as an atheist, but our small sub-sample of respondents does not show definitively that such mediation effects are statistically significant.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Our results point toward an understanding of gender differences in non-religion grounded in social risk. One of our contributions is to build on previous explanations for this gender difference by highlighting the ways that men and women have different experiences with the way society polices religiosity. We find that women more frequently report experiences with non-religious discrimination than do men, and that

men and women who experience religious discrimination choose different non-religious identities: men are more likely to identify as atheists, and women are more likely to identify as SBNRs. Notably, these significant gender differences show up when we look at *specific* non-religious identities, not the odds of a respondent claiming a non-religious identity in general. This supports our conception of both religion and non-religion as a varied set of everyday practices that intersect with other aspects of identity and experience. These gendered effects show up even among women who express *non-theistic* beliefs. Women who do not believe in a god are still less likely to identify as atheist than are men, and their experiences with discrimination might mediate the relationship between gender and identification. This suggests that a perception of social risk persists for women regardless of their level of existential risk aversion.

Our survey data are cross sectional, and thus we cannot definitively settle the question of time ordering from experiences with discrimination to non-religious affiliation and speak to the question of pathways of influence raised in the introduction. Prior research suggests that atheists are an "embattled minority," and that experiences of discrimination push people into embracing and sharpening their atheist identity (Doane and Elliott 2015, c.f. Smith 1998). On the other hand, it is possible that people first declare an atheist identity, and then experience discrimination, leading them to either "double down" and embrace that identity more strongly or to switch to a less risky non-religious identity. Our findings do show, however, that men's and women's experiences with the social risk of non-religion associate with different cultural strategies for non-religious identification. Research has found that women often have a more pragmatic, practice-oriented approach to religion that privileges spirituality over formal identification, allowing them to choose strategies of religious expression that avoid aspects of religious institutions they perceive as problematic for women while avoiding the stigma of avowing an explicit non-religious identity (c.f. Aune 2015; Shutz and Roth 2015; Wilcox 2009). This makes sense when we consider our bivariate analyses in which we find that, despite tending to avoid the most stigmatized non-religious identity (atheist), women in our sample still report experiencing more discrimination for their non-religious identification than do men. At the same time,

we find that women prefer alternative labels for their non-religiosity, such as "spiritual but not religious" rather than "nothing in particular."

In the United States, we know that non-religion is stigmatized, and qualitative research (Shutz and Roth 2015, Manning 2015) shows that experiences of discrimination can result from this stigmatization. But discrimination is not the only social cost associated with stigmatization (and some instances of discrimination may not be due to stigma). Further research that combines qualitative and quantitative methods and includes better measures of stigma and a wider range of social costs will be needed to fully understand experiences with non-religious stigmatization and the strategies individuals use to combat it.

We also show that social context plays a role in how individuals express non-religious beliefs. Though less likely to identify as non-religious overall, non-white respondents who are non-religious are more likely to identify as SBNR and less likely to identify as atheist or agnostic. Political conservatism significantly associates with lower odds of non-belief, non-attendance, and non-religious identification of all kinds. However, non-religious respondents who are politically conservative are *more* likely to call themselves "nothing in particular." These findings support a theoretical perspective understanding non-religion as embedded in other social contexts and aspects of identity which shape non-religious identification, in addition to non-belief (cf. Baker and Smith 2015).

We show that non-religion is socially risky, that atheism is more socially risky than other forms of non-religion, and that it is the most privileged who embrace the most socially risky forms of non-religion. Atheists are distinguished from the much broader population of "nones" by distinct markers of privilege – they are young, white, male, and college-educated (c.f. Baker and Smith 2015); even among the smaller group of non-believers in our sample, those who also claim an atheist identity are the most privileged – young, white males. However, we find that women are *not* any less likely to identify as non-religious than men, but that they do choose less stigmatized identities and practices -- identifying as "spiritual but not reli-

gious," continuing to attend church, and maintaining some form of theistic belief. The concept of social risk helps us to understand these patterns.

The concept of social risk will also be useful in explorations of racial differences in non-religiosity. If a focus on differences between men and women has, in the past, led to viewing risk preferences as innate and biological, a broader focus on marginality and power shifts the analysis to the social, including dynamics of discrimination and stigma management, which is particularly useful for understanding the non-religious choices of members of historically marginalized racial groups. Future research should examine in more detail how non-whites experience and practice non-religion, which identities and practices they embrace, how gender and race intersect to shape non-religious practice, and the specific social costs incurred by non-whites who embrace non-religious identities (c.f. Brown et al. 2015).

It will also be useful in future research to explore the differences in *religious* choices and the ways in which they intersect with social location and religious discrimination. Prior research, including a large body of work on religious switching, largely focuses on the positive and expressive factors that shape religious choices in adulthood (e.g. social mobility, a desire for religious homogamy with one's spouse, or finding a community more compatible with one's lifestyle or other beliefs) (Sherkat 2014). When "push" factors are identified, they often have to do with differences in the strength or duration of religious socialization among different religious traditions. The implication is that people choose freely in switching religious identities, and in a largely voluntaristic religious landscape that is not an unreasonable interpretation. But it is the fact that religion is understood as "chosen" in the American context that makes individuals interpret religious choices as a reflection of character, morality, and trustworthiness and therefore a useful marker of important symbolic boundaries (Kalkan *et al.* 2009; cf. Lamont 1992). It would be fruitful to analyze when and how social risk may shape religious choices and how this may work differently for men and women, whites and non-whites, and the more and less educated.

We have sought to build on and extend recent critiques of risk-preference explanations for gender differences in religiosity, which have argued that these differences are not universal and that experiences of existential risk may vary. We agree. We also argue that it makes sense to develop a more complex and socially-embedded understanding of the risks of non-religion, one that focuses on the differential social costs of embracing stigmatized non-religious identities, beliefs, and behaviors for different individuals (e.g. Baker and Smith 2015; Shutz and Roth 2015). In a society in which religiosity is more normative for women than it is for men, in which women are more likely to be sanctioned for behavior that violates gender norms, and in which atheism is the most stigmatized non-religious choice, it makes sense for women to manage the social stigma of non-religion to reduce social risk. It is important to understand that the risk being managed is derived from social power and stigma, rather than philosophical or existential concerns alone. Our sub-sample analysis of non-believers shows that even women who have already taken Pascal's Wager and chosen not to believe are still reluctant to openly identify as atheist. The fact that findings for non-white Americans mirror those for women supports the idea that sociologists should consider the different social costs of non-religion that make non-religious choices risky, depending on how religiosity intersects with other aspects of one's social identity.

Our findings point to the need for further investigation of the socially risky nature of non-religion, including more qualitative research on the nature of sanctions faced by non-religious men and women in different social and professional contexts and the various "risk management" strategies they employ as a result. Further, more and better surveys are needed that allow for an assessment of whether experiences of discrimination either serve as a turning point prompting people to embrace non-religious identities or else result from the choice to "come out" as non-religious. Such research must be mindful of the changing context of non-religious practice and explore more systematically how experiences of discrimination vary with age, gender, race, and other aspects of social location. This is necessary because religion is more than a matter of believing in a god or an afterlife; it is a social practice that involves an array of contextually em-

bedded choices that intersect in different ways with other aspects of social identity. Particularly in contexts in which religiosity is a choice, and one perceived by many as socially relevant and an index of moral character, further investigation of the social risks of non-religion seem warranted, even essential.

ENDNOTES

[1] We acknowledge that a force-choice question for religious belief is not ideal and loses the nuance gained in questions offered by surveys like the General Social Survey that allow for more ambiguous responses (Bishop 1999; Hout and Fischer 2002: 173). Though the BAM survey used a dichotomous question assessing belief in god(s) in the style of Gallup poll data, the nuance that these authors argue we lose is actually beneficial for our analysis because we are not interested in differentiating the certainty of belief. Instead, our measure captures only those who are willing to explicitly declare their non-belief in a survey; for our purposes, this is a conservative and valid measure of non-belief.

[2] Respondents received a question conditionally worded on their response to their current religious preference. If respondents identified with a religious denomination, they received the question "Have you ever experienced any discrimination because of your religion?" If the respondent identified as an atheist, an agnostic, nothing in particular, or spiritual but not religious, they received the question "Have you ever experienced any discrimination because you are not religious?" To build our measure of discrimination, we interacted this dichotomous measure with an ordinal followup question: "Would you say this has happened to you frequently, occasionally, or rarely?" Our final measure of religious discrimination is ordinal and coded such that 0 = never experiencing discrimination, 1 = rarely experiencing discrimination, 2 = occasionally experiencing, and 3 = often experiencing.

[3] We ran an analysis that replicates the analysis in Table 4 using a baseline of non-religious respondents alone as the reference category. All respondents in these models identified as one of the four specific non-religious groups, and each regression compares those who chose a specific designator to a baseline of all the others. Results did not vary from those in Table 4. We also treated the identity categories as multinomial indicators against a religiously-identified baseline. For these models, respondents who claimed a religious identity were coded into a baseline 0 category, respondents who chose "nothing in particular," "spiritual but

not religious," or "agnostic" were coded into a second category which we label "non-religious," and self-identified atheists were coded into a third category, "atheist". We repeated this coding process to generate a separate dependent variable for each specific non-religious identity label (atheist, agnostic, spiritual but not religious, and nothing in particular), swapping the other non-religious identities into the second category. Patterns of significant covariates remained consistent across all three sets of models.

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TABLES

Table 1. Variable Descriptions	Obs	Mean, Proportion	Std. Dev., Std. Err.	Min	Max
Dependent Variables					
Non-believing	2465	0.13	0.34	0	1
Non-attending	2479	0.28	0.45	0	1
Non-religious identification	2471	–	–	–	–
Atheist	(80)	0.03	0.01		
Spiritual, but not Religious (SBNR)	(191)	0.08	0.01		
Agnostic	(75)	0.03	0.01		
Nothing in Particular (NIP)	(406)	0.16	0.01		
Independent Variables					
Female	2521	0.52	0.50	0	1
Age	2521	46.97	17.02	18	94
Non-White Racial Identity	2521	0.33	0.47	0	1
Completed College	2521	0.29	0.45	0	1
Income	2521	11.87	4.50	1	19
Respondent is a Parent	2485	0.64	0.48	0	1
Political Conservatism	2466	4.14	1.52	1	7
Experienced Religious Discrimination	2454	0.18	0.38	0	1

Source: Boundaries in the American Mosaic Survey 2014
Notes: Descriptive statistics do not include post-stratification weights

Table 2. Bivariate Analyses of Non-religious Identification and Experiences of Discrimination by Gender

	Identification			Experienced Discrimination				
				Men		Women		
	Men	Women	Sig.	No	Yes	No	Yes	Sig.
Any Religious Affiliation	66.91%	72.19%	**	698	120	736	156	
				85.33%	*14.67%*	*82.51%*	*17.49%*	
SBNR	5.54%	9.89%	***	60	7	93	29	*
				89.55%	*10.45%*	*76.23%*	*23.77%*	
Atheist	3.42%	2.65%	***	37	20	18	5	
				64.91%	*35.09%*	*78.26%*	*21.74%*	
Agnostic	4.65%	1.85%		33	9	24	9	
				78.57%	*21.43%*	*72.73%*	*27.27%*	
NIP	19.48%	13.42%	***	209	26	142	23	
				88.94%	*11.06%*	*86.06%*	*13.94%*	

Source: Boundaries in the American Mosaic Survey 2014

Notes: Chi-Square tests of significant differences across gender (*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001). Descriptive statistics do not include post-stratification weights.

Table 3. Odds of Non-religious Beliefs and Non-religious Behavior: Logistic Regressions: Full Sample				
	Does not believe in a god		Does not attend religious services	
	OR	SE	OR	SE
Female	0.52***	0.10	0.76*	0.09
Age	0.97***	0.01	1.00	0.00
Non-White	0.55**	0.12	0.49***	0.07
College	1.64**	0.29	0.83	0.11
Income	1.04	0.02	1.00	0.01
Parent	0.56**	0.10	0.67**	0.09
Conservative	0.66***	0.04	0.73***	0.03
Religious Discrimination	1.44	0.35	0.84	0.14
Female*Religious Discrimination	0.99	.20	1.10	0.18
Constant	2.46*	1.07	3.07***	0.98
N	2381		2399	
McFadden R2	0.149		0.058	
Wald Chi2 (13)	113.05***		87.22***	
BIC	1654.24		2740.10	

Source: Boundaries in the American Mosaic Survey 2014
Notes: Models include post-stratification weights
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001
One-tailed tests

Table 4. Odds of Non-religious Identification: Logistic Regressions: Full Sample

	All Non-religious		SBNR		NIP		Agnostic		Atheist	
	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE
Female	0.81	0.10	2.06***	0.44	0.69**	0.10	1.05	0.33	0.30**	0.12
Age	0.98***	0.00	1.01*	0.01	0.98***	0.00	1.00	0.01	0.96***	0.01
Non-White	0.76*	0.10	1.27	0.27	1.01	0.16	0.36**	0.14	0.25**	0.12
College	1.09	0.15	1.26	0.26	0.69*	0.13	1.90*	0.60	1.97*	0.62
Income	0.96**	0.01	0.97	0.02	0.95**	0.02	1.02	0.04	1.03	0.04
Parent	0.71**	0.09	0.78	0.17	0.80	0.13	0.71	0.22	0.79	0.29
Conservative	0.72***	0.03	0.75***	0.05	0.90*	0.04	0.63***	0.06	0.60**	0.09
Religious Discrimination	0.92	0.18	0.77	0.26	0.66	0.17	0.90	0.38	2.48*	0.90
Female*Religious Discrimination	1.13	0.17	1.51*	0.31	1.04	0.22	1.37	0.42	0.75	0.35
Constant	9.13***	2.84	0.11***	0.06	2.44*	0.85	0.22*	0.16	1.63	1.48
N	2405		2405		2405		2405		2405	
McFadden R2	0.08		0.06		0.05		0.10		0.21	
Wald Chi2 (13)	123.97***		65.01***		81.12***		68.39***		60.7***	
BIC	2871.69		1237.6		2224.1		737.5		694.6	

Source: Boundaries in the American Mosaic Survey 2014
Notes: Models include post-stratification weights
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001
One-tailed tests

Table 5. Odds of Atheist Identification: Logistic Regression: Non-believing Sub-sample				
	OR	SE	OR	SE
Female	0.34*	0.15	0.40	0.20
Age	0.97*	0.01	0.97*	0.01
Non-White	0.34*	0.17	0.34*	0.17
College	1.65	0.66	1.65	0.67
Income	0.98	0.04	0.98	0.04
Parent	1.16	0.51	1.11	0.49
Conservative	0.86	0.15	0.86	0.15
Religious Discrimination	1.64	0.59	1.94	0.88
Female*Religious Discrimination	-	-	0.74	0.37
Constant	3.12	3.34	2.91	3.15
N	275		275	
McFadden R2	0.11		0.11	
Wald Chi2	17.72*		18.25*	
BIC	394.2		399.4	

Source: Boundaries in the American Mosaic Surv ey 2014

Notes: Models include post-stratif icaiton weights

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

One-tailed tests