

An Investigation of the Sociological Patterns of Prayer Frequency and Content*

Joseph O. Baker

Baylor University

The majority of previous social scientific research on prayer has focused on the relationship between prayer and various types of health outcomes. Only limited attention has been given to prayer itself. This study examines the frequency and content of prayer using empirical data from the Baylor Religion Survey (2005), a national random sample of U.S. adults (N=1,721). Results indicate that women, African-Americans, and those with lower incomes pray more often than males, whites, and those with higher incomes. Concerning content of prayer, African-Americans and those at lower levels of income and education are more likely to pray about petitionary concerns such as asking God to influence personal health or one's financial situation. In addition people at lower income levels are more likely to offer prayer in an effort to gain supernatural favor and good standing with the divine. Theoretically this is understood by conceptualizing prayer as a coping mechanism.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of prayer to religion, for it is "belief and ritual at the same time" (Mauss 2003:22) and "to religion what thinking is to philosophy" (the poet Novalis as quoted in Heiler 1932:viii). Although prayer represents a fundamental aspect of religious life, the influence of social factors on prayer patterns has yet to be extensively explored. This study uses the 2005 Baylor Religion Survey to provide information about sociological patterns of prayer frequency and content. Demonstrating how sociodemographic variables influence prayer provides evidence for the connection between sociological factors and even the most private of religious practices. Prayer represents an individual's attempt to communicate with the supernatural (Stark and Finke 2000), as well as oneself and others (Ladd and Spilka 2002, 2006). It is expected that social factors will play a fundamental role in determining how communication with the supernatural manifests itself by influencing the reasons people pray and the needs prayer addresses.

**Direct all correspondence to Joseph O. Baker, Department of Sociology, One Bear Place #97326, Baylor University, Waco, TX 76798-7326 (Joseph_Baker@baylor.edu). Thanks to Dr. Chris Bader for his input and feedback on this project. Thanks also to Dr. David Yamane and the anonymous reviewers for their feedback on previous drafts of the paper.*

An estimated nine out of ten people in the United States report praying at least occasionally, and this figure has remained steady for the past 50 years (Gallup and Lindsay 1999; Poloma and Gallup 1991). The 2004 GSS supports this estimate, with 89.8 percent of people claiming to pray at least sometime. In addition to the high percentage that pray at least sometime, an estimated three out of four people report praying daily (Gallup and Lindsay 1999). Among U.S. adults that pray, 97 percent believe their prayers are heard and 95 percent believe they are answered (Gallup and Lindsay 1999). These findings reveal that prayer is not simply a ritual, but an action that participants believe has an impact on their lives and world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the growing scholarly interest in prayer has been directed toward understanding its influence on other areas of life, such as health and well-being outcomes. The use of prayer has been found to be negatively correlated with anxiety about death (Koenig 1988) and a consistent predictor of psychological well-being (Poloma and Pendleton 1989, 1991). Similarly, evidence suggests religious experiences during prayer (Richards 1991) and frequency of prayer (Carroll 1993; Richards 1990) are related to possessing a sense of purpose in life; however, the relationship between prayer and self-esteem is contingent upon the expectations of the person praying (see Krause 2004). Similarly, McCullough (1995) shows that prayer is often used as a stress deterrent, although its effects depend upon the type of prayer in question (Poloma and Pendleton 1991).

Prayer as a Coping Mechanism

The idea that social position and social structural conditions influence prayer patterns is essential to a sociological view of prayer. Research shows that members of traditionally underprivileged or marginalized groups—women, African-Americans, and older Americans—are more likely to pray (Ellison and Taylor 1996; Gallup and Lindsay 1999; Hill, et al. 1995; Levin and Taylor 1997; Poloma and Gallup 1991).¹ This suggests that individuals from social groups that experience more suffering and deprivation may turn to prayer as a coping mechanism (Krause and Chatters 2005), a perspective that provides an important foundation for this study.

¹These results may be due in part to these groups being more religious overall (Levin, et al. 1994); however, this is currently unclear as only Levin and Taylor (1997) have examined frequency of prayer in a multivariate context. Also, while previous studies have outlined patterns for race, gender, and age, a distinctive pattern for income level has not yet been identified (cf. Levin and Taylor 1997).

The work of Pargament is particularly important for understanding the use of religion as a coping mechanism. Coping is an effort to “manage (that is master, tolerate, reduce, minimize) environmental and internal demands” (Lazarus and Launier 1978:288). Pargament (1997) finds that individuals look to God to help maintain a feeling of control and justice in difficult situations (also Pargament and Hahn 1986), and that African-Americans, those with low income levels, and women are all more likely to use religion as a coping mechanism (Pargament 1997). Social position can change individuals’ perceptions of what they are able to do within the world, and correspondingly what God can or needs to do—if anything—to help them. Thus, among its many purposes, prayer can be seen as an attempt to communicate with the divine in the hope of receiving assistance in coping with one’s circumstances.

Prayer as a Means to Secure Supernatural Favor

Some types of prayer are aimed at securing good standing with the divine, which is an extension of the concept that prayer is used as a coping mechanism. Examples are praying about the nature of one’s relationship to the divine and confession of sins. These types of prayer are efforts to secure supernatural favor. In such instances, prayer is a mechanism for “seeking divine aid and guidance, for confession of guilt, [and] for gaining comfort” (Stark and Bainbridge 1987:46). The lack of resources available for the attainment of material comforts in this world can lead to attempts to secure otherworldly benefits, as people at lower levels of socioeconomic status are more likely to pursue religious compensation (Stark and Bainbridge 1985, 1987; also Davidson 1977, Stark 1972). Securing favor with the supernatural is a concern that people from all social locations may have; however, those of lower social standing may be more likely to *regularly* address these concerns through prayer.

HYPOTHESIS

Beyond looking at the *frequency* of prayer, it is important to examine the *content* of prayer, which provides important information about why people pray. It is also important to understand how the frequency and content of prayer is affected by individuals’ social location. The primary hypothesis of this investigation is that individuals belonging to traditionally underprivileged social groups pray more often and are more likely to pray about petitionary concerns than those belonging to more privileged groups. Specifically, African-Americans, those at lower levels of income, and women are expected to pray more often and be more likely to pray about petitionary concerns than whites, those at high income levels, and men.

DATA AND MEASURES

Data on the content and frequency of prayer were taken from wave 1 of the Baylor Religion Survey, which was fielded in 2005. The data were collected by The Gallup Organization using a nationally representative sample of Americans living in households with telephones via random digit dialing. The survey utilized a mixed-mode technique, such that the telephone survey phase was used to gain respondents' agreement to complete a mailed questionnaire.

7,041 potential respondents were initially called by Gallup. 3,002 people contacted by phone agreed to participate in the survey. 2,000 of these potential respondents were simply mailed questionnaires, while 1,002 were given a brief phone interview. Of the 1,002 given the phone interview, 603 were mailed questionnaires for a total of 2,603 questionnaires mailed out, of which 1,721 completed surveys were returned. This results in an overall response rate for the entire sample frame of 24.4 percent (1721/7041) and a response rate of 66.1 percent (1721/2603) for the mailed surveys. The survey was weighted by Gallup for gender, race, region, age, and education using a statistical algorithm based on data from the Census Bureau. All of these analyses employ this weight. Results from the Baylor Religion Survey compare favorably to demographic results from the General Social Survey (Bader, et al. 2007). For in-depth and detailed information regarding the data collection process and the comparison to other national surveys, see Bader, et al. (2007).

Explanatory and Control Variables

In order to better isolate the effects of sociodemographic variables in multivariate analyses, a number of religious controls were used. To control for the influence of Biblical literalism, a variable was included that mirrors the General Social Survey (GSS) question where respondents are provided four answer choices ranging from 1 ("The Bible is an ancient book of history and legends") to 4 ("The Bible means exactly what it says. It should be taken literally, word-for-word on all subjects"). In addition to Biblical literalism, church attendance was included as a control variable with values from 1 (never) to 9 (several times a week). To control for the influence of a respondent's religious tradition, dummy variables were created using the RELTRAD classification system developed by Steensland, et al. (2000).² This system divides the primary religious traditions in the United States into seven categories: Catholic, Mainline Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, Black Protestant, Jewish, religious other, and no religion. Religious

²The high number of religious control variables could cause problems with multicollinearity; however, in the OLS model none of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) scores were higher than 1.85, with the exception of classifications based on the RELTRAD system. The results of models created without the religious control variables reveal no indications of sign switching or any other unusual changes.

other is essentially a catch-all category, absorbing people as diverse as Unitarians, Mormons, Muslims, and Buddhists.

Dummy variables were used for sex (female=1), region (South=1), and marital status (married=1). The South was used as the comparison category due to the unique religious aspects of this region of the U.S. A dummy variable was created for being a parent (at least one child=1) to assess the influence of having children. Race is coded into three categories of white, black, and racial other. These categories were used to create dummy variables, with whites being the excluded category in multivariate analyses. Education is measured in attainment categories from 1 (less than high school) to 7 (post-graduate degree). Household income has the following values from 1 to 7: 1 (\$10,000 or less), 2 (\$10,001-20k), 3 (\$20,001-35k), 4 (\$35,001-50k), 5 (\$50,001-100k), 6 (\$100,001-150k), and 7 (\$150,001 or more). Age is measured as a continuous variable from 18 to 93.

Dependent Variables

The question assessing frequency of prayer mirrors the GSS question on the same topic by asking “about how often do you pray or meditate outside of religious services?” Answer choices are 1 (never), 2 (only on certain occasions), 3 (once a week or less), 4 (a few times a week), 5 (once a day), and 6 (several times a day). Clearly there are many types of prayer that do not fit this profile, such as group or liturgical prayer, but by focusing on prayer outside religious services, a better understanding of personal prayer is attained. However, similar to the GSS question on the same topic, a distinct limitation exists in including meditation and prayer in the same question. Meditation can take many forms. Some forms resemble extemporaneous personal prayer and some, such as “mindfulness meditation” (Kabat-Zinn 1990), do not. It is reasonable to assume that prayer comprises a large proportion of those that answered affirmatively to the question, but it is impossible to distinguish meditation from prayer in the variable, and this limitation must be acknowledged.

A battery of questions was used to address content of prayer. The general question was phrased “the last time you prayed, did you pray about the following?”³ Multiple topics of prayer content were covered with answer choices being “no” (0) and “yes” (1). The content items to be analyzed here are “your personal financial security,” “your personal health,” “confessing sins/asking for forgiveness,” and “your spiritual life/relationship with God.”

³By posing the question to address the last time a respondent prayed, more variation in content was attained. If the question had been phrased such that the respondent had *ever* prayed about the topics listed, then many respondents would have undoubtedly prayed for all of the items listed at some point. The questions provide a cross-sectional view of prayer content—and by examining a person’s *current* social circumstances and *current* prayer content, a more comprehensive view of this relationship can be attained.

TABLE 1
 Bivariate Statistics for Sociodemographics on Frequency of Prayer Measure
 (Range = 1-6)

| Variable | % Never Praying | % Praying Several Times Daily | Mean Prayer Score |
|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Sex | | | |
| Male | 18.8 | 20.3 | 3.53 |
| Female | 8.8 | 36.2 | 4.44 |
| Marital Status | | | |
| Married | 12.5 | 28.5 | 4.04 |
| Not married | 15.2 | 29.1 | 3.97 |
| Race | | | |
| White | 14.5 | 27.2 | 3.94 |
| Black | 3.8 | 43.6 | 4.80 |
| Other | 12.9 | 31.2 | 3.88 |
| Children | | | |
| Parent | 11.3 | 31.1 | 4.14 |
| Non-Parent | 21.1 | 21.3 | 3.54 |
| Region | | | |
| South | 9.4 | 37.3 | 4.37 |
| Midwest | 9.2 | 25.7 | 4.16 |
| East | 19.1 | 21.7 | 3.62 |
| West | 17.7 | 27.8 | 3.80 |
| Age | | | |
| 18-29 | 14.8 | 24.6 | 3.78 |
| 30-39 | 20.4 | 24.5 | 3.67 |
| 40-49 | 14.3 | 28.1 | 4.09 |
| 50-59 | 12.7 | 26.6 | 3.92 |
| 60-69 | 10.1 | 28.3 | 4.06 |
| 70 and over | 8.1 | 40.3 | 4.54 |
| Income | | | |
| Less than 10k | 14.3 | 32.8 | 4.33 |
| 10,001 to 20k | 6.0 | 40.0 | 4.51 |
| 20,001 to 35k | 11.6 | 38.2 | 4.41 |
| 35,001 to 50k | 15.8 | 26.3 | 3.85 |
| 50,001 to 100k | 13.4 | 23.3 | 3.83 |
| 100,001 to 150k | 18.1 | 23.2 | 3.72 |
| More than 150k | 16.3 | 16.3 | 3.42 |
| Education | | | |
| 8th grade or less | 3.1 | 50.0 | 4.51 |
| 9-12th (no diploma) | 5.6 | 38.3 | 4.53 |
| High school grad | 8.0 | 34.1 | 4.33 |
| Some college | 14.6 | 28.5 | 3.97 |
| Vocational training | 21.5 | 23.2 | 3.69 |
| College grad | 15.8 | 26.5 | 3.90 |
| Post grad work | 15.1 | 23.5 | 3.78 |

Source: 2005 Baylor Religion Survey

RESULTS

Frequency of Prayer

Table 1 provides information about the bivariate relationship between socio-demographic variables and frequency of prayer. The patterns reveal that those who are more marginalized in American society pray more often. For example, women pray more often than men and African-Americans pray more than whites or other non-whites. People under 40 pray the least and people over 70 pray the most. There is also a downward trend in mean for the frequency of prayer as income and education levels increase. A more definitive pattern between income level and frequency of prayer is seen among those who have an active prayer life. In an analysis replicating the findings of Norris and Inglehart (2004:109), Figure 1 shows the number of people at varying income levels that claim to pray at least daily. An inverse relationship between income level and an active prayer life is apparent; although people at all income levels pray regularly, those with less income tend to pray more frequently.

OLS regression models were used to assess which sociodemographic factors influence frequency of prayer. In model 1 only sociodemographic variables are

FIGURE 1
Percent Praying at Least Daily by Income

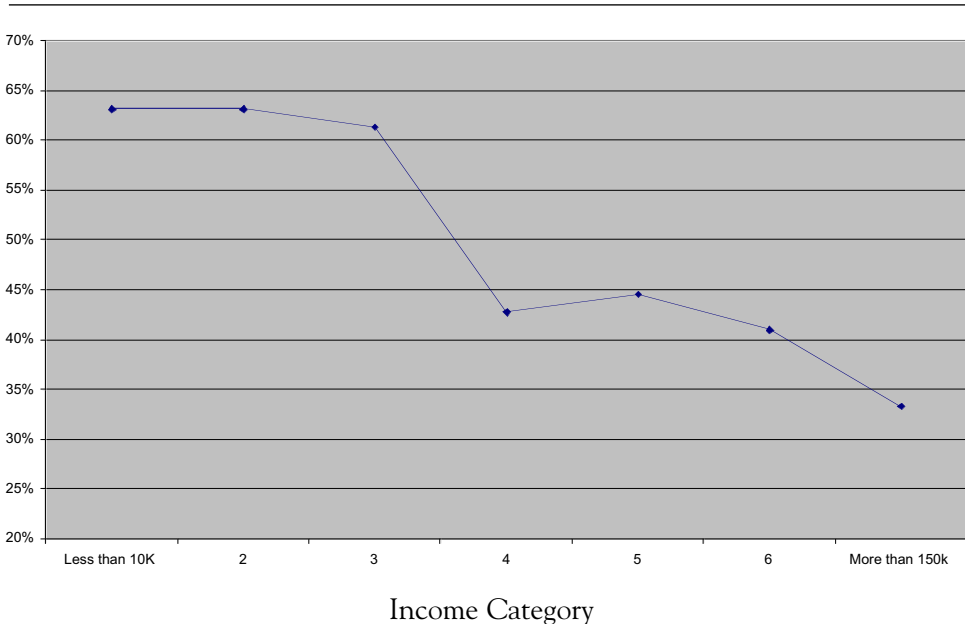


TABLE 2
 Unstandardized Coefficients for OLS Regression
 of Sociodemographic on Frequency of Prayer (N=1,377)

| Independent Variables | Model 1 | Model 2 |
|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Intercept | 3.371*** (.232) | 1.679*** (.240) |
| Sociodemographics | | |
| Income | -.156*** (.034) | -.083** (.029) |
| Female | .866*** (.087) | .639*** (.072) |
| Black ^a | .577*** (.163) | .589** (.197) |
| Other ^a | .006 (.184) | .066 (.150) |
| Age | .005 (.003) | .005* (.002) |
| Education | -.029 (.030) | .025 (.025) |
| South | .470*** (.094) | .069 (.079) |
| Married | .377 (.104) | -.023 (.086) |
| Parent | .361** (.115) | -.071 (.096) |
| Religious Controls | | |
| Attendance | | .228*** (.016) |
| Literalism | | .405*** (.044) |
| RELTRAD ^b | | |
| Catholic | | -.187 (.104) |
| Blk. Protestant | | -.717** (.249) |
| Mainline | | -.222* (.102) |
| Jewish | | -.465 (.248) |
| Religious other | | .369* (.176) |
| No religion | | -.706*** (.145) |
| Adjusted R ² | .133 | .460 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Source: 2005 Baylor Religion Survey.

^aWhites are excluded category

^bEvangelicals are excluded category

*p ≤ .05 **p ≤ .01 ***p ≤ .001 (two-tailed tests)

included. In this model, income has a significant negative influence on frequency of prayer ($b = -.156, p \leq .001$), while being female ($b = .866, p \leq .001$), African-American ($b = .577, p \leq .001$), a parent ($b = .361, p \leq .01$), and living in the south ($b = .470, p \leq .001$) all have a significant positive influence on frequency of prayer. Model 2 presents the same variables as model 1 with the addition of controls for religious belief, attendance, and affiliation.

While not significant in model 1, age does have an impact in model 2, such that each additional year of age results in a .005 increase on the frequency of prayer measure ($p \leq .05$). The results from model 2 indicate that the influence of race, class, and gender persist net of religious controls. Each unit increase in income category results in a .083 decrease on the frequency of prayer measure ($p \leq .01$) in the second model. In comparison to males, females scored an average of .639 units higher on the prayer measure ($p \leq .001$), while African-Americans averaged .589 units higher than whites ($p \leq .01$), net of other factors. In this multivariate model, it is members of traditionally disadvantaged races, classes, and genders that pray more often.

Not surprisingly, religious factors also exerted a strong influence on frequency of prayer, especially church attendance ($b = .228, p \leq .001$) and Biblical literalism ($b = .405, p \leq .001$). Four of the six RELTRAD controls were significantly different than the comparison group of Evangelicals. On average Black Protestants ($b = -.717, p \leq .01$), Mainline Protestants ($b = -.222, p \leq .05$), and those claiming no religion ($b = -.706, p \leq .001$) pray less than Evangelicals. Those in the religious other category pray more than Evangelicals ($b = .369, p \leq .05$), net of other factors.⁴

Content of Prayer

Table 3 provides descriptive information regarding how many people prayed about each content item the last time they prayed. Frequencies are provided for both the overall sample and for only those claiming to pray. The percentage among all respondents provides an estimate of the proportion of Americans that prayed for a specific content item. 13.3 percent of the sample claim to “never” pray and these respondents are not included in the second column of frequencies, which provides information on the proportion praying for an item among those that pray at least sometime. The figures are listed in descending order so that the most frequently cited content item is listed first. Table 3 shows praying for one’s family is the most common topic of prayer among the items addressed.

⁴This is most likely due to the fact that over one-quarter of this category is composed of Mormons. In addition 17 percent are Buddhist, suggesting that some in this category are answering affirmatively to the meditation aspect of the question. The mixture of groups in this category renders substantive interpretation nearly meaningless.

TABLE 3
Percent Praying About Specific Content Items during Last Prayer

| Content Item | All Respondents | Among Those That Pray |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Your Family | 76.9 | 89.4 |
| Someone You Know | 64.5 | 75.3 |
| Relationship with God | 56.6 | 66.2 |
| General World Concerns | 53.2 | 62.2 |
| Confessing Sins | 52.2 | 61.2 |
| Personal Health | 49.0 | 57.1 |
| Praise or Adoration | 42.3 | 49.4 |
| Someone You Don't Know | 40.1 | 46.8 |
| Financial Security | 28.2 | 33.0 |
| N | 1721 | 1465 |

Source: 2005 Baylor Religion Survey

Of these content items, four are further analyzed using binary logistic regression: financial security, personal health, confessing sins, and personal relationship with God.⁵

Material Needs (Petitionary) Prayer Content. Financial security and health concerns are examined first (see Table 4). These two prayer content items relate to material needs. It is hypothesized that members of less privileged groups will be more likely to engage in this type of petitionary prayer.

Table 4 shows that those at higher levels of income and education are less likely to pray about their financial situation and personal health. Each additional increase in income category results in a 20.2 percent decrease in the odds of praying for financial security ($p \leq .001$) and a 14 percent decrease in the odds of praying about personal health concerns ($p \leq .01$). Each unit increase on the education measure results in a 9.4 percent decrease in the odds of praying about financial security ($p \leq .05$) and a 10.5 percent decrease in the odds of praying about personal health concerns ($p \leq .05$). African-Americans are 9.5 times more likely to pray about financial security ($p \leq .001$) and 3.6 times more likely to pray about personal health than whites ($p \leq .001$). Age has a negative impact on the odds of praying for financial security such that an additional year of age makes a person 2 percent less likely to pray about finances ($p \leq .001$). Contrary to expect-

⁵For these logistic regression models, an estimated measure of variance explained, the Nagelkerke R^2 , is reported (Nagelkerke 1991). Concerning model fit, the chi-square values for all the models (not reported) were significant at the .0001 level, indicating that all models had an acceptable level of fit.

TABLE 4
 Odds Ratios for Binary Logistic Regression on
 Material Needs (Petitionary) Prayer Content (N=1,232)

| Independent Variables | Financial Security | Personal Health |
|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Sociodemographics | | |
| Income | .798*** (.054) | .860** (.050) |
| Female | 1.281 (.137) | 1.090 (.126) |
| Black ^a | 9.489*** (.395) | 3.649*** (.393) |
| Other ^a | .878 (.284) | 1.058 (.261) |
| Age | .980*** (.005) | 1.000 (.004) |
| Education | .906* (.047) | .895* (.044) |
| South | 1.379* (.145) | 1.054 (.137) |
| Married | 1.302 (.166) | 1.233 (.153) |
| Parent | 1.168 (.188) | .779 (.173) |
| Religious Controls | | |
| Attendance | 1.040 (.028) | 1.094*** (.026) |
| Literalism | 1.383*** (.087) | 1.206* (.077) |
| RELTRAD ^b | | |
| Catholic | 1.192 (.190) | 1.271 (.173) |
| Blk. Protestant | .341* (.477) | 1.077 (.493) |
| Mainline | 1.071 (.188) | 1.140 (.171) |
| Jewish | 3.092* (.499) | 3.407* (.491) |
| Religious other | 1.481 (.326) | 1.890* (.301) |
| No religion | .807 (.381) | .441* (.335) |
| -2 log likelihood | 1366.9 | 1524.3 |
| Nagelkerke R ² | .190 | .134 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Source: 2005 Baylor Religion Survey.

^aWhites are excluded category

^bEvangelicals are excluded category

*p ≤ .05 **p ≤ .01 ***p ≤ .001(two-tailed tests)

tations, gender has no influence on the likelihood of praying for either of these content items.

Personal Spiritual Concerns Prayer Content. Confessions of sin and one's relationship with God are personal spiritual concerns. As with petitionary prayer, it is hypothesized that members of less privileged groups will be more likely to engage in these prayers, which are aimed at securing supernatural comfort.

However, unlike petitionary prayer, praying for these personal spiritual concerns is not significantly related to most sociodemographic variables. As Table 5 shows, income is the only sociodemographic variable that exerts a significant influence on this prayer content. Each increase in income category makes a respondent 12.5 percent less likely to pray about the confession of sins ($p \leq .05$). Similarly an increase in income category results in a 13.1 percent decrease in the odds of praying about one's relationship with God ($p \leq .01$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The intent of this investigation has been to explore the relationship between prayer and sociodemographic factors in a multivariate context using data from a recent national survey sample. Conceptualizing prayer as a mechanism for coping provides a theoretical foundation for the findings presented. Qualified support is found for the general hypothesis that members of traditionally underprivileged social groups pray more often and are more likely to pray about petitionary concerns. The influence of sociodemographic variables remains significant even when controlling for religious variables.

Of the sociodemographic variables, income is the most consistent predictor of prayer content. Those at lower levels of income are more likely to attempt to secure good standing with the divine through prayer. It is likely that if the content questions were phrased such that a respondent had *ever* prayed about each item, then the influence of income would be minimized. But in terms of the last prayer offered, those at lower income levels are more likely to have prayed about personal spiritual concerns, indicating a more habitual appeal for supernatural favor. This accords with Gallup and Lindsay's earlier finding that "wealthier Americans do not spend nearly the amount of time thinking about these types of things as do Americans with average or below average incomes" (1999:78). Results presented in this study support this conclusion by identifying two ways income level influences prayer: through needs addressed that are influenced by social status and by making individuals more likely to make efforts to secure otherworldly favor.

Although African-Americans are no more likely than whites to address personal spiritual concerns through prayer, they do pray more often and are more likely than whites to address petitionary concerns through prayer. African-Americans face different needs brought about by social position as well. The cul-

TABLE 5
 Odds Ratios for Binary Logistic Regression on
 Personal Spiritual Concerns Prayer Content (N=1,232)

| Independent Variables | Confession of Sins | Personal Relationship with God |
|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Sociodemographics | | |
| Income | .875* (.055) | .869** (.055) |
| Female | 1.207 (.135) | 1.085 (.136) |
| Black ^a | 1.146 (.364) | 1.375 (.365) |
| Other ^a | .735 (.282) | .875 (.277) |
| Age | .992 (.005) | 1.009 (.005) |
| Education | .957 (.048) | 1.014 (.048) |
| South | 1.226 (.149) | 1.204 (.152) |
| Married | 1.015 (.165) | .912 (.166) |
| Parent | .805 (.187) | .824 (.185) |
| Religious Controls | | |
| Attendance | 1.162*** (.028) | 1.223*** (.029) |
| Literalism | 1.796*** (.082) | 1.580*** (.081) |
| RELTRAD ^b | | |
| Catholic | 1.114 (.187) | .911 (.188) |
| Blk. Protestant | .870 (.460) | 1.414 (.502) |
| Mainline | 1.023 (.184) | .942 (.187) |
| Jewish | 2.408 (.484) | 1.042 (.465) |
| Religious other | .766 (.304) | 1.746 (.568) |
| No religion | .271*** (.384) | 1.047 (.330) |
| -2 log likelihood | 1360.0 | 1340.9 |
| Nagelkerke R ² | .249 | .222 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Source: 2005 Baylor Religion Survey.

^aWhites are excluded category

^bEvangelicals are excluded category

*p ≤ .05 **p ≤ .01 ***p ≤ .001 (two-tailed tests)

tural history of disadvantage and discrimination faced by African-Americans in the United States has influenced the way religion is expressed in the black community. Thus, not only are there likely to be current needs as a result of race, but the culture of how religion is expressed is often different. Religious movements such as the “health and wealth” gospel, where asking for God’s blessings is appropriate and expected (Hunt 1998), have found a footing in this community. African-Americans are likely to pray about petitionary concerns as a means of gaining agency in response to social conditions and also because this prayer style has been integrated into religious traditions in the black community.⁶ However, the analyses conducted here do not directly test this assertion concerning *why* prayer patterns differ, so further inquiry is necessary.

While women pray more often than men, they are not more likely to pray about petitionary concerns or their standing with the supernatural. This suggests that, as compared to race and class, there are different mechanisms underlying higher levels of female religiosity in the form of prayer. Additional analyses (not shown) revealed that women are more likely to pray about their families and other people, indicating an element of nurturing in the prayer habits of women.⁷

This study offers insight into how religiosity is expressed through prayer for members of different societal groups; however, there are some limitations that deserve mention. First and foremost, many types of prayer are not assessed, especially since personal extemporaneous prayer is the focal point of these analyses. Ritual prayer, group prayer, and prayer at religious services are all areas not covered by the data analyzed. In addition, the list of content items falls well short of being comprehensive, especially considering the highly varied nature of personal prayer. Consequently there are multiple avenues of exploration available in the vastly unexplored realm of prayer content.

In this same vein, the current study focuses primarily on prayer within Christianity. Although there are members of other religious groups in the sample, the thrust of the questions aim at a better understanding of Christian prayer and, as the sample is drawn from the United States, the majority of respondents are Christian. This raises the question: are there differences in the influence of social and religious variables on prayer between Christianity and other religions? As more becomes known about Christian prayer in the U.S., relevant comparisons to other religious traditions and countries can be made.

The focus here has been on the influence of race, class, and gender on prayer, but age was also an important variable in many of the models. This relationship

⁶When the binary logistic models are run without race variables included Black Protestants are 2.7 and 3.3 times more likely than Evangelicals to pray about personal finances and health respectively.

⁷The results of these models are available upon request.

has already received some attention (see Baesler 2002; Levin and Taylor 1997) and further investigation is warranted. As Krause and Chatters (2005) demonstrate, there are unique aspects of prayer for individuals over 65.⁸ The effects of age require in-depth analyses to parse out exactly how its influence is exerted.

Qualitative data on prayer content would also be an important advancement to the current understanding of prayer. Content analysis of individual prayer, assessing why people choose to pray about specific topics, and gathering extensive information about prayer habits are but a small glimpse into the issues that could be covered by qualitative research. When dealing with a topic as intensely personal and varied as prayer, certainly this approach deserves exploration. It is hoped that new topics of discussion and inquiry will open regarding the subject of prayer, as it represents a fundamental aspect of religion and religiosity that social science has yet to extensively explore, leaving multiple avenues available for meaningful study.

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⁸For this reason, I also ran models with a dummy variable for individuals over this age in place of the continuous age variable used in the models presented; however the differences between the models with the over 65 dummy and the ones shown were negligible.

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