

ABSTRACT

Filled with Purpose: The Effects of Deviant Religious Experiences on Sense of Purpose

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The discourse on religious compensators argues that people will pursue different religious experiences and activities based on the social class in which they belong because the rewards of religion are contingent upon one's social and economic class (Stark & Bainbridge, 1987). To further examine religion and one's feelings of purpose, I develop and test the hypothesis that the impact of a supernatural encounter with God will be much stronger for those who belong to the marginalized class of individuals who did not complete a high school education. Based on previous literature, the expectation of this study is that individuals without a high school degree will be more likely to seek out deviant religious experiences and will be significantly impacted by deviant experiences because the marginalized struggle to find a sense of purpose in other areas of their lives.

Filled with Purpose: The Effects of Deviant Religious Experiences on Sense of Purpose

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This study will examine if people who have had extraordinary religious experiences are more likely to have a strong sense of purpose compared to religious people who have not had these experiences. Living a purposeful life has historically been an important theme in sociological literature, including the works of Durkheim, Marx, and Weber. While the discourse on a purposeful life has never been exclusive to such theorists, the discussion gained notoriety in popular conversation after Pastor Rick Warren wrote *A Purpose Driven Life* in 2002. The religious self-help book has been on the *New York Times* Best Seller list for advice books for one of the longest periods in history, with over 30 million copies sold in its first five years. *A Purpose Driven Life* offers readers a 40-day personal spiritual journey, discussing what Warren describes as God's five purposes for life on earth. Not surprisingly, the majority of Americans feel their lives have real purpose. However, less than a third of Americans have *strong* feelings of purpose (2007 Baylor Religion Survey). A number of factors could be assumed to contribute to someone's sense of strong purpose including financial and career success, social status, and education (Easterlin, 1974; Ball & Chernova, 2007).

Many religious people might say that their purposes come from God and religious participation. For those who believe in God, many feel that their lives are purposeful, divine assignments from God (Affolter, 2007). This may lead to the conclusion that those who believe in God are more likely to have a strong sense of

purpose. But the relationship appears to be more complicated. Data from the 2007 Baylor Religion survey show that the ratio of individuals who agree they have purpose versus those who strongly agree they have purpose is the same in both the general population and the population of those who believe in God. In addition to believing in God with no doubts, there are other facets of religiosity that drives an individual's sense of purpose. Previous research has found that more congregational friends, more frequent worship attendance, consistent prayer, and viewing God as a loving God are all associated with a strong sense of purpose (Stroope, Draper, & Whitehead, 2011). In addition to religiosity measures, social class is an important factor to consider when examining the relationship between religion and feelings of purpose. The discourse on religious compensators argues that people will pursue different religious experiences and activities based on the social class in which they belong because the rewards of religion are contingent upon one's social and economic class (Stark & Bainbridge, 1987). To further examine religion and one's feelings of purpose, I develop and test the hypothesis that the impact of a supernatural encounter with God will be much stronger for those who belong to the marginalized class of individuals who did not complete a high school education.

Religious Experiences

Religious individuals often claim to have experienced direct, personal contact with the supernatural. This contact is what Stark and Glock (1968) call the experience dimension of religion. Religious experiences typically include intense feelings of special awareness of divine existence- the "born again" experience, for

example. Other times, religious experiences go beyond just “feeling” the supernatural. People have also claimed to experience what they describe as direct communication with the supernatural. Through this contact, they may claim to gain new revelations of divine purpose or higher calling (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985).

Religious experiences were first discussed by William James (1902), but were not given serious attention until several decades later when Rodney Stark (1965) outlined a conceptual scheme for classifying the many types of religious experiences. Religious experiences were not a rarity exclusive to high tension sects and cults, but were actually common among mainstream groups. Stark and Bainbridge (1985) claimed that the majority of members of even the most liberal and staid denominations reported having such experiences.

A 1962-1990 review of survey research findings on religious experiences shows an increase in individuals reporting having had religious experiences (Yamane & Polzer, 1994). For example, in 1962 only 20.5% of respondents answered yes to the question, “Would you say that you have ever had a religious or mystical experience- that is a moment of sudden religious awakening or insight?” (Back & Borque, 1962). In 1990, the percentage of respondents answering yes to the exact same question on a different survey rose to 53% (Gallup & Castelli, 1990). Among the 2005 Baylor Religion Survey respondents, 65.9% of the sample claimed at least having one religious experience¹ (Baker, 2009). An increase in reported religious experiences may be due to improved operationalization on recent surveys.

¹ Religious experiences included felt filled with the spirit, felt called by God to do something, had a religious conversion experience, had a dream of religious significance, witnessed or experienced a miraculous, physical healing, heard the voice of God, felt a state of religious ecstasy, spoke in tongues, and had a vision of a religious figure while awake.

Regardless of the reasoning for an increase in reported religious experiences, it is evident that religious experiences are prevalent among Americans and therefore worth much further pursuit in research.

Not only do religious experiences inform the field of religion, but they also greatly impact other areas of an individual's life, including their overall wellbeing. Religious experiences may bring about new meanings that produce higher feelings of control over one's life and more positive self-views (Spilka, Bernard, & Cassidy, 1992). A religious experience can be empowering and provide feelings of exclusivity because the person feels as if she was chosen by a higher power for special consideration. Feeling in touch with a higher power is likely to make a person feel like he or she has some control in life, whereas before the religious experience the individual may have felt like life circumstances are beyond his or her control. These benefits are only a couple of examples of what Stark and Bainbridge (1985) call religious compensators. They define a compensator as the belief that a reward will be earned in the distant future or in some other context that is not immediate or tangible.

Religious compensators, or any benefit from religion at all, were formerly thought of as exclusive to the poor and working class. Marx argued that our capitalist system allows the rich and powerful to receive rewards from this world by conventional means, but the less powerful working class must rely on the belief that they will be compensated for their trials and adversities with great reward in the afterlife (see Bader, Mencken, & Baker, 2010).

Religion has also been theorized as a reaction to uncertainty. Privileged individuals are more likely to feel in control of their lives, whereas underprivileged individuals are less likely to feel certainty or any control over their circumstances (Legerski, Cornwall, & O'Neil, 2006; Phares, 2001). Privileged people supposedly do not need the certainty and locus of control religion offers because they already are successful and secure in other areas of their life. They tend to have a good education, a high-paying successful career, and a stable family. Being successful in these areas- education, career, class, family- allows privileged people to feel a sense of control in these areas without having to look to religion for security or control (Pargament, 1986; Schieman & Bierman, 2007; Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliot, 2003; Schieman & Plickert, 2008; Bader et al., 2010).

Marx's work and the concept of locus of control formally led sociologists to believe that all forms of religious and supernatural beliefs would be primarily maintained by the poor and oppressed. However, religion and the supernatural beliefs provide answers to the questions both the poor and rich are concerned with and they usually offer a way of achieving life after death, which is something that cannot be bought with financial resources or higher status (Stark & Bainbridge, 1987; Bader et al., 2010). Religion offers activities that are personal investments benefiting individuals regardless of class. Religious services not only inspire and entertain, but they also instruct. Religious acts of charity and love are to the recipients' benefit, but they also improve the giver. Religion offers opportunity for improved circumstances in this life and/or in the afterlife (Iannaccone, 1990). All of

these personal investments are religious goods that are attractive to both the poor and rich, refuting the former argument that religion is only for the less fortunate.

Just like anything else in life, the goods that religion has to offer are not without costs. Each religious good requires some kind of input from the religious consumer. These inputs include purchased goods (such as Sunday attire and transportation), sacrificial offerings, and money contributions to finance the church's operations and facilities. Inputs also include time and labor, such as time attending church services, time spent in prayer and reading scriptures, and time and effort required for religious charity or service (Iannacone, 1990). The costs of religious goods also often include giving up certain behaviors or changing lifestyles in order to comply with the guidelines set forth by the religion.

Since religion functions like an economic market in which goods are exchanged for inputs, the main insights from economics can be applied to explain religious phenomena (Iannacone, 1991, Stolz, 2006). Just like any other market of supply and demand, the religious market consists of religious organizations that produce and sell "religious goods" in order to satisfy the "religious needs" of the "consumers" (Iannacone, 1991; Stolz, 2006). Religious goods may be "transcendent or immanent, future or present, individual or collective" (Stolz, 2006, p. 21). Different religious goods have different characteristics, the most important ones being divisibility, exclusiveness, rivalry, and alienability. Consumers choose the religious goods according to their preferences and budget constraints (Stolz, 2006). Positional goods, for example, can only be afforded by those of higher status because they are scarce and cannot be multiplied. On an individual level, positional

goods include holding a position in the church or having decision power. On the societal level, those who monopolize the positional goods determine which religious beliefs and practices are legitimate and which ones are deemed deviant.

Personal goods are especially attractive to the lower class because they are not scarce, causing them to be much more affordable to the less privileged. They are not exchanged on a market, meaning consumers are not required to offer anything in exchange for personal goods. The four types of personal goods are 1) religious human capital (religious knowledge and techniques, charismatic gifts such as speaking in tongues and gifts of prophecy), 2) physical, psychic, and social well-being, 3) ethic faculties and states of being without sin or negative feeling, in a state of complete accord with religious laws, and 4) religious experiences or union with the divine. Personal goods can be produced from socialization, produced by the individual alone, given by religious specialists, or experienced through transcendental forces (religious visions, hearing the voice of God, etc.) (Stolz, 2006). Individuals can independently achieve personal goods, without status and without others, causing the marginalized and less privileged to be more attracted to personal goods compared to the upper class who can afford higher sought out scarce goods. Personal goods also offer feelings of exclusivity to the less privileged, which is a feeling that they often cannot find in other areas of their lives. Based on previous literature, the expectation of this study is that individuals without a high school degree will be more likely to seek out deviant religious experiences and will be significantly impacted by deviant experiences because the marginalized struggle to find a sense of purpose in other areas of their lives. The encounter of a deviant

religious experience serves as a personal good that the less educated can afford and receive great feelings of purpose and empowerment from.

Stark and Bainbridge (1985, 1987) classified religious goods into only two categories: rewards and the previously mentioned compensators. Rewards include church membership, child socialization, human companionship, status as an upright person of good character, leisure and recreational activity, opportunities for marriage, courtship, and business contacts, and many other avenues of earning social capital. Examples of religious compensators are comfort, guidance, happiness, self-satisfaction, feelings of purpose and being “chosen”, and the achievement of eternal life.

Direct rewards are preferred over religious compensators, most likely because rewards are tangible and immediate, requiring little faith or patience. Like the capitalist system, it is the more powerful and financially stable individuals who earn the most direct rewards out of religion. Privileged people have the means to achieve the scarce rewards religion offers, having little need or desire for religious compensators. The powerful and upper class will tend to monopolize the direct rewards available from religion, just as they do in other areas of society. In other words, the upper class can “afford” the more preferred direct rewards, while the lower class or marginalized individuals are forced to rely upon the less sought out religious compensators (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985).

For the socially marginalized, failure to find direct, concrete rewards from religion may lead to disappointment, alienation, and estrangement from conventional society. These feelings may lead them to reject mainstream beliefs, but

still pursue a different kind of relationship with the supernatural realm. They may become more open to intense and alternative religious experiences such as speaking in tongues or claiming a miraculous healing. (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985; Wuthnow, 1978; Rice, 2003; Mencken, Bader, & Kim, 2009; Bader et al., 2010).

Having an extraordinary religious experience may also be a reaction to a life of instability and uncertainty. Those who are successful in their careers and finances are more likely to feel stable and confident in their futures. Those who have less financial resources, or who are marginalized from society, are more likely to feel like they have lost control of their future, producing greater feelings of uncertainty compared to those who are more financially stable. In some cases, unconventional beliefs and experiences give the marginalized a stronger sense of control of their lives and feelings of empowerment, which are both hard to find in the natural realm (Wuthnow, 1987; Bader et al., 2010).

Furthermore, the socially marginalized may be more likely to engage in unconventional religious behavior because they have less to lose than those of higher status. Individuals of higher status run the risk of being labeled strange or deviant for maintaining unconventional beliefs, but the already socially marginalized do not have need to be concerned with these labels (Mencken, Bader, & Stark, 2008; Mencken et al., 2009; Bader et al., 2010). With little at stake in terms of social standing, individuals with lower SES can obtain religious benefits in supernatural experiences that money and power cannot achieve. Those in prestigious positions have a great investment in conformity and therefore would be

sacrificing much more in terms of social status when claiming a deviant spiritual experience (Baker, 2009).

Empirical evidence supports the notion that the socially marginalized are more likely to have extraordinary religious experiences. People who earn higher wages are more likely to attend church services which is associated with providing the highly sought out direct rewards (Stark, 2008; Baylor Religions Survey 2007). Even though higher earners are more likely to attend church, people who earn lower wages are more likely to have an extraordinary spiritual experience (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985; Baker, 2009). Data from the 1998 Southern Focus Poll reported that older people, women, African Americans, and less educated individuals were more likely to report having an illness that was cured by prayer (Rice, 2003).

Individuals of lower SES are more likely to be members of congregations engaging in unrestrained and openly emotional worship, where people speak in tongues and testify about religious experiences (Chaves, 2004). This suggests that lower class individuals may be more likely to seek religious compensators that are emotionally driven, including intense religious encounters, compared to those of higher SES who tend to engage in more traditional and reverent form of worship (Baker, 2009). Yamane and Polzer (1994) also found a significant relationship between class and what they call an “ecstatic” experience. Those with less prestigious occupations were more likely to report having an ecstatic experience before including religious controls. However, when controlling for religion, career prestige was no longer significant.

Individuals who claim having a religious experience are likely to claim that their pre-experience lives were plagued by distress and unhappiness, implying negative meanings, powerlessness and low self-esteem. Individuals who report having a supernatural religious encounter widely report feelings of inadequacy, dissatisfaction, depression and a sense of sin in their pre-experience lives. Spilka, et al. (1992) found that unhappiness and dissatisfaction with pre-experience lives and work is widely reported by those who have had a religious experience. Among those who have had a religious experience, individuals are likely to report having low self-satisfaction prior to their religious experience. The same study reported that individuals had increased self-satisfaction and overall life satisfaction after their religious encounter. Furthermore, people who report having “peak experiences” are more likely to report living a meaningful, purposeful life (Wuthnow, 1978b).

Some religious experiences are considered more deviant than others, including speaking in tongues, religious visions, hearing the voice of God, and witnessing or experiencing a miraculous healing. These experiences are considered more deviant because they defy “the ‘laws’ of the material world, placing them at a greater distance from the mainstream culture and its faith in science as the most powerful explanatory tool” (Baker, 2009, p. 43). People who make lower incomes are more likely to claim deviant religious behavior. More specifically, low income was associated with experiencing a miraculous healing, hearing the voice of God, speaking in tongues, and having a religious vision. However, education does not reduce the likelihood of claiming deviant religious behavior. In fact, having a

religious vision was positively correlated with education. Nevertheless, low income is still a significant indicator in predicting religious experiences (Baker, 2009).

Religious experiences provide rewards that cannot be earned through material means, including psychological well-being, a sense of peace, feelings of a purposeful life, or increased certainty in religious faith. Depending on the nature of the experience, different magnitudes of rewards will be achieved (Baker, 2009).

What determines the magnitude of the reward is the degree of deviance associated with the experience. Stark and Bainbridge (1987) theorize that members belonging to religious groups that have high tension within their socio-cultural environment will experience higher rewards from their religion compared to those who belong to mainstream religious groups, or those who have low tension within their culture. In the same vein, deviant religious experiences come at a higher social cost and are associated with higher tension with society at large. Therefore, deviant religious experiences should offer stronger religious compensators than normative religious experiences (Baker, 2009).

Previous literature agrees that marginalized individuals are more likely than the privileged class to engage in extraordinary religious experiences. This is because the less privileged must go beyond conventional means to find feelings of purpose, empowerment, and control over their lives. When individuals are not one of the chosen few to be part of a higher class, they can find feelings of being “chosen” by a higher power when they are open to and/or pursue religious experiences. Previous research implies that it is ideal to find success and feelings of purpose in education, social status and income and when these feelings cannot be found there,

religion offers an alternative to finding feelings of efficacy and empowerment. This leads to the argument that not only are supernatural experiences more common among the less privileged class, but deviant religious experiences are much more meaningful to those who are marginalized. This study examines whether or not religious experiences provide a stronger sense of purpose to a greatly marginalized class- individuals who do not have a high school education. This study will also analyze if deviant experiences have a stronger effect than normative experiences on marginalized individuals as previous literature suggests (Stark & Bainbridge, 1987; Baker, 2009).

CHAPTER TWO

Data and Methods

The data analyzed for this study are from Wave II of the Baylor Religion Survey (BRS), which was fielded in 2007 by the Gallup Organization. The Baylor Religion Survey was designed using the General Social Survey (GSS) as a model. While the BRS covers a variety of topics, the majority of the fixed content of the Baylor Religion Survey is devoted to religion items. In addition to religion items, Wave 2 included modules addressing life and personality, race and ethnicity, tension with the sociocultural environment, and parenting practices. A detailed overview of the methodology behind the Baylor Religion Survey is provided by Bader, Mencken, and Froese (2007). Wave 2 of the BRS consisted of a random, national sample of 1,648 U.S. citizens (See Baker, 2009). Because this is an analysis of highly religious people only, it only includes individuals who claimed to have no doubts in the existence of God (see Mencken, Bader, & Embry, 2009) The sample used of highly religious people account for about 63.4% of the general sample.

Dependent Variable- Sense of Purpose

The dependent variable studied in this analysis is the individual's sense of purpose. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement, "My life has a real purpose." While the majority (56.97%) agreed to this statement, only one third of the sample included in this analysis strongly agreed with the statement. The dependent variable in this study measures whether or not

someone strongly agrees that his/her life has a real purpose (strongly agree=1, else=0).

Key Independent Variable- Religious Experiences

The key independent variables in this study indicate whether or not the respondent has had a religious experience. These religious experiences include “witnessed” or “received a miraculous, physical healing”, “felt called by God to do something”, “heard the voice of God”, “had a dream of religious significance”, “was protected from harm by a guardian angel”, or “had a religious conversion experience” (alpha=.73). Figure 1 and Table 1 represent the frequencies of religious experiences.

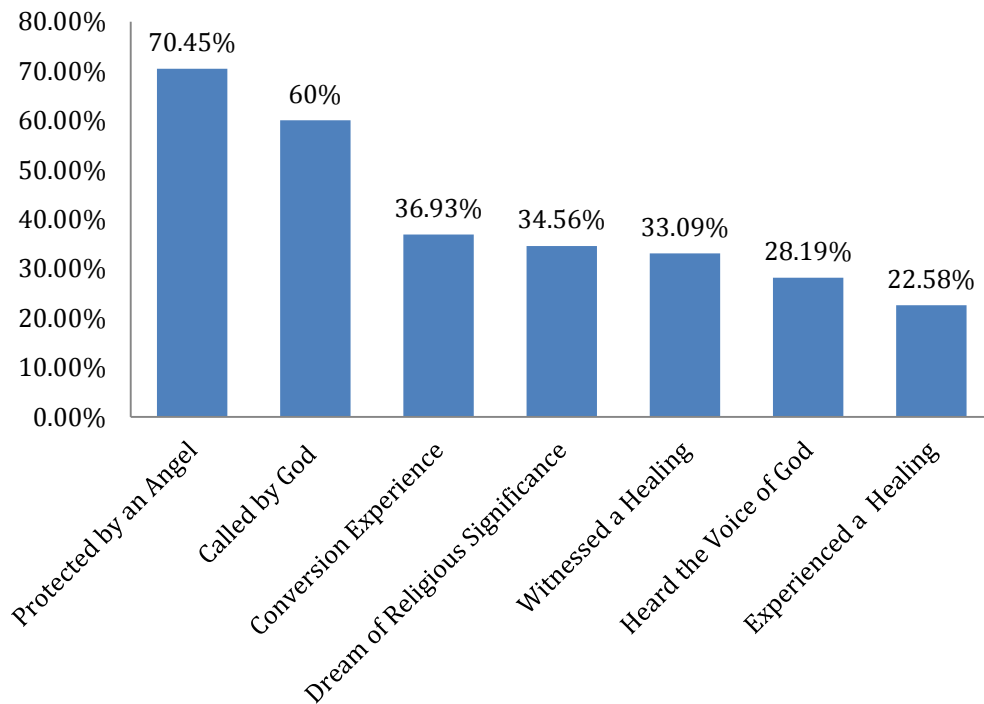


Figure 1. Frequency of religious experiences.
Source: Baylor Religion Survey 2007.

Table 1

Respondents Reporting a Religious Experience

Response	Frequency	Percent
Was Protected from Harm by an Angel	689	70.45
Felt Called by God to do Something	591	60.00
Had a Religious Conversion Experience	359	36.93
Had a Dream of Religious Significance	338	34.56
Witnessed a Miraculous Healing	324	33.09
Heard the Voice of God	276	28.19
Experienced a Miraculous Healing	222	22.58

Source: 2007 Baylor Religion Survey

For this study, the religious experiences are divided into two categories- deviant religious experiences and normative religious experiences. Normative experiences include felt called by God to do something, had a dream of religious significance, was protected from harm by an angel and had a religious conversion experience ($\alpha=.61$). A respondent was considered to have had a deviant religious experience if they claimed to witness a miraculous, physical healing, experiencing a healing, or hear the voice of God ($\alpha=.61$). Of the sample, 49.33% claimed to have had at least one of these deviant religious experiences. This study uses a similar definition of deviant religious experiences used by Baker (2009). For the purposes of this study, a deviant religious experience is one that goes beyond the sense of feeling and is encountered by one third or less than one third of the sample. The variables of normative experiences and deviant experiences are both coded as count models, determining how many of the experiences a respondent has claimed. The key variable examined is deviant experiences, whereas normative experiences are included as a control variable.

Demographic Controls

Several demographic controls are included in the analyses including income, age (in years), gender (male=1), marital status (married=1), race (white=1), and whether or not someone lives in the south (south=1). Education is the primary demographic being examined in this study. Not a high school graduate, high school graduate, some college/vocational degree, college graduate, and postgraduate are the categories for education. The class with less than a high school education serves as the reference category.

Religiosity Controls

Church attendance, Biblical literalism, and religious denomination are included in the models used for this study due to their potential effects on religious experiences and feelings of purpose. Church attendance includes the categories never, less than once a year, once or twice a year, several times a year, once a month, 2-3 times a month, about weekly, weekly and several times a week. The analysis measures Biblical literalism using the following question on the BRS: Which one statement comes closest to your personal beliefs about the Bible? A) The Bible means exactly what it says. It should be taken literally, word-for-word on all subjects; B) The Bible is perfectly true, but it should not be taken literally, word-for-word. We must interpret its meaning; C) The Bible contains some human error; D) The Bible is an ancient book of history and legends. Biblical literalism is treated as a dummy variable whereas respondents were considered Biblical literalists only if they claimed to believe the Bible means exactly what it says and it should be taken literally.

To control for denomination, a modified version of the RELTRAD typology developed by Steensland et al. (2000) is included in the model. This typology categorized respondents according to their stated denominations including Black Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Other Religion and None. Additionally, the modified version of the RELTRAD typology included in this analysis uses the name and location of church provided by respondents to employ aggressive recovery of missing cases. A detailed description of this modified RELTRAD typology is discussed in Dougherty, Johnson and Polson (2007). For the current analysis Evangelical Protestants are used as the reference category. Table 2 represents the demographic and religiosity measures of the respondents.

Method

This study first uses a contingency analysis (crosstab) to examine if less educated people are more likely to have a deviant religious experience. A binary logistic regression model is then used to examine the effects normative and deviant religious experiences have on one's strong sense of purpose. The analyses are divided into two separate models, both including normative experiences, deviant experiences, demographic controls, and religiosity controls. Model 1 includes only one education category- not a high school graduate. It also includes interaction terms to examine how normative and deviant experiences affect those without a high school education and their sense of purpose. Model 2 includes all other education categories and leaves the marginalized class without high school degrees

Table 2

Demographics of Highly Religious Respondents

Variables	Percent
Sociodemographics	
Education	
No High School Diploma	7.62
High School Grad Only	25.78
Some College/Vocational Training	34.41
College Graduate	18.96
Postgraduate	13.24
Income	
\$10,000 or less	6.78
\$10,001 - \$20,000	8.16
\$20,001 - \$35,000	14.62
\$35,001 - \$50,000	17.48
\$50,001 - \$100,000	34.22
\$100,001 - \$150,000	13.03
\$150,001 or more	5.72
Male	39.21
Age	52 (mean)
White	96.62
South	36.35
Married	66.31
Religiosity Measures	
Highly Religious- belief in God without a doubt	100.00
Church Attendance	
Never/Less than once a year	14.36
Yearly	19.35
Monthly	13.16
Weekly/About Weekly	39.19
Several times a week	13.96
Biblical Literalism	31.92
RELTRAD	
Evangelical	40.76
Black Protestant	5.52
Mainline Protestant	20.48
Catholic	26
Jewish	0.4
Religious Other	5.32
No Religion	1.51
N	1015

Source: 2007 Baylor Religion Survey

as the reference category. Interaction terms for each education category are included for both normative and deviant experiences.

CHAPTER THREE

Results

Figures 2 and 3 represent the frequency of deviant religious experiences by level of education. As expected, the majority of individuals without a high school education have had at least one deviant religious experience. However, an even higher percentage of postgraduates have had at least one religious experience. The majority of high school graduates and college graduates have not had a deviant religious experience. Overall, there is no significant correlation between education level and engaging in religious experiences.

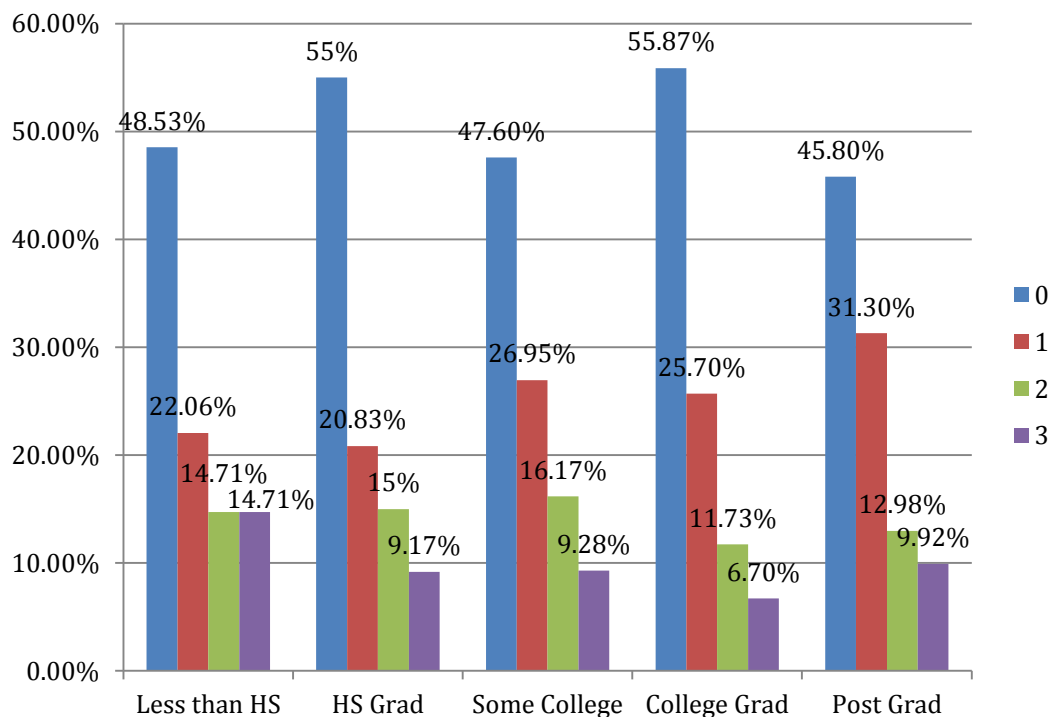


Figure 2. Frequency of deviant religious experiences.

Source: Baylor Religion Survey 2007.

Chi-Square=12.85; P=0.38.

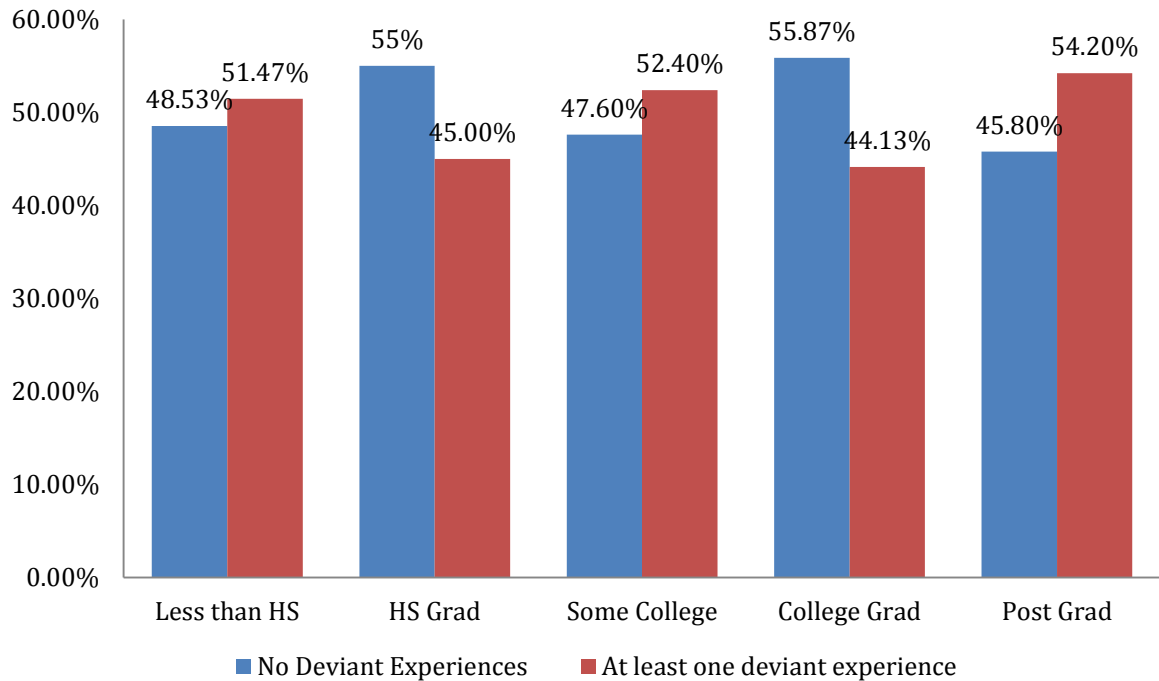


Figure 3. Deviant religious experiences by education.
 Source: Baylor Religion Survey 2007.
 Chi-Square=6.35; P=0.147.

Table 3 presents the results of the first logistic regression model that only includes the education category of less than high school. Table 3 shows that women are significantly more likely to strongly feel a sense of purpose. In fact, women have 39% greater odds of strongly agreeing their lives have purpose. Other sociodemographics including education alone, income, age, race, and marital status did not have an effect on one’s sense of purpose.

Religiosity measures such as church attendance and Biblical literalism increases the likelihood of one feeling a strong sense of purpose. With every increase in church attendance, one is 14% more likely to strongly feel a sense of purpose. A Biblical literalist is 1.24 times more likely to report a strong sense of purpose. The control variable of normative religious experiences is also a predictor

of purpose. For each normative experience reported, one is 32% more likely to feel a strong sense of purpose. Deviant experiences, however, had no significant effect. The interaction between normative experiences and education (less than high school=1) had no effect, but the interaction between deviant experiences and education is significant. For every deviant experience reported by an individual with no high school education, the likelihood of that individual feeling a strong sense of purpose increases 1.58 times.

Table 3

Logistic Regression of Feelings of Purpose on Religious Experiences

Variables	B	SE	OR
Intercept	-2.13	0.76	
Religious Experiences			
Deviant Religious Experiences	0.15	0.10	
Normative Religious Experiences	0.28	0.08	1.32***
Deviant*No High School Diploma	0.95	0.47	2.58*
Normative*No High School Diploma	-0.41	0.38	
Sociodemographics			
No High School Diploma	-0.32	0.87	
Income	0.05	0.06	
Male	-0.49	0.18	0.61**
Age	-0.01	0.01	
White	0.14	0.62	
South	-0.21	0.18	
Married	-0.13	0.20	
Religiosity Controls			
Church Attendance	0.13	0.04	1.14***
Biblical Literalism	0.81	0.21	2.24***
Black Protestant	0.93	0.81	
Mainline Protestant	0.12	0.25	
Catholic	0.32	0.24	
Jewish	0.84	1.44	
Religious Other	0.65	0.36	
No Religion	1.21	0.69	

***P \leq .001 **P \leq .01 *P \leq .05; Odds ratio reported only if significant

Source: 2007 Baylor Religion Survey; N=768, R²=0.20

Table 4 shows the results of the logistic regression that includes all education categories and leaves less than high school as the reference category. The results of the second model are consistent with the first. Men are 38% less likely to strongly agree with their lives having a real purpose. All other sociodemographic controls are not significant. Biblical literalists are 1.26 times more likely to strongly feel purpose and with every increase in church attendance, one is 14% more likely to feel purpose. A normative religious experience is not significant. However, the second model shows for every deviant religious experience reported, an individual is twice as likely to feel a strong sense of purpose. The interaction terms included in this model also present interesting results. There is no significant effect of deviant experiences on a high school graduate or a postgraduate compared to someone who does not have a high school education. However, compared to someone with a high school education, each deviant experience reported decreases the likelihood of having a strong sense of purpose by 62% for those with some college education and by 67% for college graduates. In other words, for every deviant experience reported, one without a high school education is about two-thirds more likely to have strong feelings of purpose compared to those with the same amount of deviant experiences but are college educated (some college=1 or college graduate=1).

Table 4

Logistic Regression of Feelings of Purpose on Religious Experiences Considering Levels of Education

Variables	B	SE	OR
Intercept	-2.40	1.15	
Religious Experiences			
Deviant Religious Experiences	1.10	0.46	3.02*
Normative Religious Experiences	-0.14	0.37	
Deviant*High School Graduate	-0.78	0.50	
Deviant*Some College	-0.96	0.49	.38*
Deviant*College Grad- Bachelor's Degree Only	-1.11	0.51	.33*
Deviant*Postgraduate	-1.00	0.52	
Normative *High School Graduate	0.19	0.40	
Normative *Some College	0.64	0.40	
Normative *College Grad- Bachelor's Degree Only	0.40	0.41	
Normative *Postgraduate	0.35	0.42	
Sociodemographics			
Education			
High School Graduate	0.61	0.90	
Some College	-0.26	0.93	
College Graduate- Bachelor's Degree Only	0.44	0.95	
Postgraduate	0.28	0.62	
Income	0.04	0.07	
Male	-0.48	0.19	0.62**
Age	-0.01	0.01	
White	0.18	0.62	
South	-0.25	0.19	
Married	-0.13	0.21	
Religiosity			
Church Attendance	0.13	0.04	1.14***
Biblical Literalism	0.81	0.21	2.26***
RELTRAD			
Black Protestant	0.97	0.82	
Mainline Protestant	0.10	0.26	
Catholic	0.28	0.25	
Jewish	0.69	1.44	
Religious Other	0.66	0.36	
No Religion	1.21	0.69	

***P<.001 **P<.01 *P<.05; Odds ratio reported only if significant

Source: 2007 Baylor Religion Survey; N=768, R2=.21

CHAPTER FOUR

Discussion and Conclusion

This study draws upon previous research that posits marginalized individuals are more likely to have deviant religious experiences for a number of reasons. The same research also suggests that marginalized individuals are likely to receive more from deviant religious experiences such as feeling of purpose, empowerment and a stronger sense of control over their lives. This study specifically examines a greatly marginalized class consisting of individuals without a high school education. Consistent with the assumptions on religious compensators, the majority of this category does in fact report having a deviant religious experience. Also consistent with previous theories, the majority of high school graduates and college graduates are not reporting deviant religious experiences. However, contrary to previous assumptions of religious compensators, the majority of postgraduates are having deviant religious experiences. The majority of the class that consists of individuals with some college education or a vocational degree also have had encountered a deviant religious experience. There is a bimodal relationship of reported deviant religious experiences according to one's education. While this is contrary to the assumption that extraordinary experiences are religious compensators primarily experienced by the less privileged, it is similar to the nonlinear relationship that is found in people who believe in other supernatural phenomena like ghosts, UFOs, and Sasquatch (Bader, et al., 2010). The discussion on religious compensators explains that deviant religious experiences are mostly

reported by the marginalized because they have to go beyond conventional means to attain rewards from any system, whether it is the capitalist system or the system of religion. This explains why the majority of those without a high school education have experienced at least one or more deviant religious experiences. However, this does not explain why the majority of postgraduates have also reported a religious experience. What could explain the popularity of deviant experiences among postgraduates may be the same argument that has been made for why the high-earning and well educated are also likely to encounter paranormal experiences. Well educated individuals are part of the elite class that is known as a group of “early adopters”. This class is more likely to embrace new opportunities, even when they involve risk. The educated elite have been continuously exposed to new ideas throughout their lives through higher education and a network of other educated individuals. Those with a higher education are more aware of a wider variety of ideas and religious beliefs they may have not experienced otherwise (Bader, et al., 2010). A highly educated person’s awareness of religious experiences and openness to new experiences are likely to drive the individual to pursue deviant religious experiences.

Even though the uneducated are not the only ones having deviant experiences, it is evident that deviant experiences have a greater impact on the marginalized class without a high school degree compared to their more educated counterparts. Church attendance, Biblical literalism, and number of normative religious experiences reported are all included as controls, but their significant effects also show that an increase in religiosity in a person greatly increases their

likelihood of having strong feelings of purpose, regardless of the class in which the person belongs to. However the effects of the religiosity measures do not compare to the impact a deviant experience has on an individual without a high school education. Both models show that deviant religious experiences have a phenomenal impact on one's strong sense of purpose, but only for those without a high school education. The results of this study support the argument behind religious compensators that the less privileged class will benefit the most from religious experiences, especially those of deviant nature, because they are deprived of other rewards that the more privileged class monopolize. The results from this study also emphasize the importance of dividing religious experiences into two categories because they do in fact differ in their impact on one's feeling of purpose. Normative experiences increased the likelihood of strong feelings of purpose only for the educated, whereas deviant experiences increases strong feelings of purpose only for the uneducated.

Conclusion

While numerous studies have examined demographic predictors of who is more likely to engage in religious experiences (Baker, 2009; Rice, 2003; Chaves, 2004), this study aims to examine the impact religious experiences have on an individual. It is evident that deviant religious experiences do differ from normative experiences pertaining to their impact on people's feelings of purpose. It is also evident that education is an important factor when determining the level of reward one receives from engaging in deviant religious experiences. People from all education backgrounds have deviant religious experiences, but the rewards from

the experiences are much greater for those who belong to the marginalized group who lack a high school education. Deviant experiences provide rewards like empowerment and feelings of worth to individuals who cannot find these rewards in other areas of their life due to their position in society. The results of this study not only inform us on the empowerment religious experiences provide, but they also inform us on the minority group of individuals lacking a high school education. When individuals cannot find purpose through the same conventional means as the more privileged class, they do have an alternative available to pursue that also provides great reward. Because deviant experiences have such a significant effect on the sense of purpose of a marginalized, uneducated individual, future research would be extremely beneficial to further explore other benefits the under privileged reap from engaging in deviant religious experiences.

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