

Article

The Role of Region and Religious Tradition in Predicting Individuals' Expressions of Faith in the Workplace

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Abstract: While many variables might influence an individual's willingness to express their faith in the workplace, the role of regional context has not been fully considered. The different geographical regions in the U.S. consist of unique demographics and cultures that could shape an individual's expression of faith at work. Moreover, these regional effects might be moderated by an individual's specific religious tradition. Using data from a survey of U.S. adults featuring oversamples of Jewish and Muslim individuals, we utilize two unique measures of religious expression—displaying/wearing religious items at work and talking about religion at work—to assess the roles of region and religious tradition in expression of faith at work. We find that regional cultures can sometimes override religious subcultures to determine if and how people express their religion in the workplace. We find that evangelical-conservative Christians are more likely than those following most other religious traditions to say that they talk about their faith at work, regardless of the region in which they reside. However, we also find that individuals in the South tend to be more likely to express their faith in the workplace independent of their religious tradition while evangelicals in the Northwest are less so. The findings have broader implications for subcultures related to religious pluralism in an increasingly diverse U.S. society.

Keywords: religious expression; religion in the workplace; regional analysis; survey research



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1. Introduction

The United States has seen a significant increase in religious diversity over the past few decades. While a majority of Americans still identify as Christian, the number of non-Christian (e.g., Muslim, Buddhist) and nonreligious (e.g., atheists, agnostics) Americans has been rising steadily (Pew Research Center 2015; Public Religion Research Institute 2021). As a result, there is a growing line of research that investigates how individuals negotiate this religious diversity and how this context shapes the ways people express their religion in public spaces (see Lichterman 2012). The workplace is a surprisingly understudied public space where religious diversity is negotiated. Over 60% of Americans over the age of 16 are part of the U.S. labor force (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019), meaning that workplaces are potentially *the* public space where individuals spend most of their time. There has also been an increase in requests for religious accommodations at work (Cash and Gray 2000; Kelly 2008; Lawrence and King 2008), supported by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's interpretation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Under current EEOC guidelines, refusing to provide reasonable religious accommodation at work is considered a type of employment discrimination and is illegal (EEOC 2014). Consequently, many organizations have become increasingly aware of the religious practices and needs of their employees. At the same time, American organizations are becoming more likely to promote religiously

diverse workplaces. As a result, the number of organizations allowing workplace religious expression has expanded (Ghumman et al. 2013; Grossman 2008).

In this context where religious expression in the workplace is on the rise, we need more research into what workplace religious expression looks like and which employees feel most comfortable expressing their religion at work. Who is more likely to express their religion at work? What kinds of religious expression are most common? Finally, what factors shape these decisions? This is an important area of study because when employees feel supported in their expression of religion at work, they report higher levels of job satisfaction, productivity, commitment, and emotional attachment to the organization (King and Williamson 2005; Messarra 2014). Past research in this area has typically focused either on how different workplace contexts shape religious expression or on how people from certain religious traditions are more or less likely to express their religion at work (e.g., Charoensap-Kelly et al. 2020; Lawrence and King 2008). However, sociologists of religion have shown that religious expression tends to vary by context, and religion scholars are increasingly interested in the complexity of “lived” experiences of religion rather than positing a singular religious identity that people express universally regardless of context (Ammerman 2007; Bender 2003; Lichterman 2012; Orsi 1997).

Not only do people within the same religious tradition express their religion differently depending on the institutional context and their social location, but geographic location also matters. Sociologists of religion have been called on to take “place” more seriously in their analyses and to investigate how local cultures, over and above national cultures, might shape religious affiliation and expression (Wellman and Corcoran 2013; Williams 2005). In the United States, there are significant regional differences in types and rates of religious affiliation, which can also translate into different styles of religious expression. We build from these insights in this study, investigating how the intersection of religious tradition and regional context shape religious expression in the workplace. We utilize two unique measures of religious expression—displaying/wearing religious items at work and talking about religion at work. We find that there are important differences in whether and how people express their religion at work and that workplace religious expression is shaped by how workers’ religious tradition intersects with their regional context. Our findings suggest that regional cultures can sometimes override religious subcultures to determine if and how people express their religion in the workplace.

2. Religious Traditions and Religious Expression

Religious expression is a distinct aspect of an individual’s religiosity. Whereas religious identity refers to the religious organization or tradition to which an individual belongs, and religious beliefs are the internally held attitudes that an individual has regarding religious tenets, religious expression pertains to the ways that individuals practice their religion and make their religious identity and beliefs known to others (Gebert et al. 2014; Lawrence and King 2008; Scheitle and Ecklund 2017). Individuals can express their religion verbally to others in conversations, through engaging in religious rituals such as praying or fasting, or through displaying or wearing religious items. Religious expression can also involve *abstaining* from certain practices or places, such as avoiding a type of food or activity prohibited by a religion.

Religious expression is shaped in part by an individual’s characteristics, such as personality and sociability. It is also the case that religious traditions often have different levels of visibility, and wearing religious symbols and dress is not always simply a matter of personal preference. Thus, the visibility of one’s religious identity might depend on one’s religious tradition above and beyond one’s level of religious commitment. Similarly, religious traditions vary in terms of how vocal their adherents are expected to be about their religious beliefs. Evangelical Christians, for instance, are typically more vocal about their religion in public spaces when compared to Catholics or Mainline Protestants (Bobkowski and Pearce 2011; Pew Research Center 2011).

While an individual's religious tradition is an important variable to consider when thinking about the form and frequency of religious expression, it is also important to consider contextual factors that could interact with one's religious tradition. That is, the same religious tradition might lead to different forms and frequency of religious expression in different contexts.

3. Regions and Religious Expression

An important context to consider in analyses of religious expression is geographical context. Sociologists of religion have been called on to take "place" more seriously in their analyses and to investigate how local cultures, over and above national cultures, might shape the relationship between religious affiliation and expression (Wellman and Corcoran 2013; Williams 2005). In the United States, there are significant regional differences in types and rates of religious affiliation, which can also translate into different styles of religious expression. Norman (2018), for example, notes that nearly 50% of residents of the Southwestern U.S. identify as "very religious", while in the Northeast only 25% describe themselves in the same way. In particular, past research has highlighted the religious culture of the so-called "Bible Belt", which spans across the Southern U.S. Indeed, nine of the eleven most religious states in the country are located in the Southeast or Southwest (Norman 2018). Conversely, states in the Pacific Northwest and New England regions of the U.S. have the lowest levels of religious adherence. Furthermore, while conservative Protestants make up the majority of religious adherents in the Southern U.S., nearly 70 percent of all religious adherents in New England are Catholic and nearly one-fifth of Jewish Americans live in this region (Tighe et al. 2019). Mainline Protestants, however, constitute a higher proportion of the population in the Midwest than any other region (Silk 2005).

Sociologists have also found that the urban/rural divide shapes religious expression in addition to regional differences. Urban areas are typically more religiously diverse than rural areas, and cities typically have more nonreligious people than rural areas (Warf and Winsberg 2008). Some research has also found that rural residents tend to be more religiously conservative than urban residents (Chalfant and Heller 1991). While there is little research in this area, and Chalfant and Heller (1991) find that region is a more significant factor in patterns of religiosity than urban/rural differences, the intersection of region and population density is an important factor to consider when accounting for "place" in examinations of religious expression.

Taken together, these regional differences in types and rates of religion are what some have called "religious ecology" (Bartkowski et al. 2011; Blanchard et al. 2008). Studies of religious ecology go beyond individual-level measures of religiosity to capture the group properties and community-level measures of religiosity in a given area, which can include the number of congregations in an area, the variety of congregations present, the relative dominance of one religious tradition over another, and the prevalence of civic outreach among each congregation in an area. Furthermore, work on religious ecologies shows that the ecological context can shape both private religiosity and public religious expression.

These regional differences in types and rates of religion in the U.S. often translate into distinct "cultures" of religious expression. For example, the Pacific Northwest is characterized as being a culture where "religiosity is neither assumed nor forced on anyone" (Wellman and Corcoran 2013, p. 497). Similarly, Silk (2005) explains that New England is often described as "a place where religion is not much spoken of in civic affairs" due to the history of religious conflict in the region (p. 266). In the Middle Atlantic and Southern regions of the U.S., however, religion "carries a strong dimension of ascribed identity" and it is a common topic of discussion in public spaces (Silk 2005, p. 268). These regional religious cultures also translate into differential treatment of religious groups. While Evangelical Protestants are less likely to perceive discrimination in the South when compared to the West (Scheitle and Corcoran 2018), Muslims and nonreligious people report comparatively high levels of discrimination in Southern states (Cragun et al. 2012; Wallace et al. 2014).

Thus, people's decisions about whether and how to express their religion in public are likely shaped by the regional context in which they are living.

4. Religious Expression at Work

The ways that religious tradition and regional context come together to shape religious expression at work is an important, yet understudied, topic among sociologists of religion. Expressing religion at work can take various forms, including discussing religion with one's co-workers, taking time during work to pray or read a religious text, asking for accommodations for religious practice such as a prayer room, or requesting time off for a religious holiday (Scheitle and Ecklund 2017). Past research in this area suggests that both workplace and individual factors shape religious expression in the workplace.

For example, Lawrence and King (2008) find that perceived organizational culture and congruence between the values of the company and those of the worker shape the likelihood of religious expression. They suggest that organizational cultures that are perceived to be more accepting of religion will result in more religious expression, and employees who perceive their values as being congruent with the values of their organization are also more likely to express their religion at work. Furthermore, Charoensap-Kelly et al. (2020) find that the likelihood of disclosure of one's religious identity at work depends on both the size and the dominant religious tradition of the workplace. Employees in smaller organizations are more likely to express their religion at work, and employees who are members of the dominant religious tradition in their workplace are also more likely to express their religion. Religious expression at work, or lack thereof, is also shaped by perceptions of the risk of experiencing religious discrimination in the workplace (Charoensap-Kelly et al. 2020). Indeed, scholars have increasingly documented the extent to which workers from minority religious traditions face discrimination based on their faith. A recent study of workplace discrimination in the U.S. found that more than half of Muslim (62%) and Jewish (54%) workers reported experiencing religious discrimination at work (Ecklund et al. 2020).

Scholars have also identified several individual-level factors shaping religious expression at work, including the worker's race/ethnicity, position within the organization, and their religiosity (Charoensap-Kelly et al. 2020). Religiosity, in particular, has been consistently linked with workplace religious expression, with those from particular religious traditions being more likely to express their faith (Lawrence and King 2008).

While the above research is useful in helping us understand certain aspects of religious expression in the workplace, there is very little research that investigates how religious tradition and geographic location intersect to shape religious expression at work. Given the increased importance of accounting for place and context when analyzing religious expression, we need research that provides more nuanced analyses of if and how people choose to express their religion in public spaces that take local religious cultures into account. In what follows, we utilize multiple measures of religious expression—accounting for both talk about religion and the display of religious items in the workplace—to analyze how religious tradition and geographic location shape the presence and type of religious expression employees are comfortable with in the workplace.

5. Data

Data for this paper come from the Faith at Work survey, a nationally representative survey of U.S. adults conducted in 2018. The survey was conducted between October 2018 and December 2018 by the survey firm Gallup, using a nationally representative, probability-based panel of U.S. adults aged 18 years or older with oversamples of both Jewish and Muslim individuals. Panel data have increasingly been utilized by social scientists given evidence that samples drawn from online probability panels provide more accurate estimates than more traditional recruitment methods such as random-digit dialing (Chang and Krosnick 2009). Based on estimates from the 2017 Current Population Survey, a sample of 29,345 adults was invited to participate in the survey, and 13,270 completed the

survey (45.2 percent completion rate). The surveys were conducted online or via mail, and participants had the option of taking the survey in English or Spanish.

6. Measurement

6.1. Outcome: Religious Expression at Work

We use two items from the survey to measure individuals' expression of religion or spirituality in the workplace. The first asked the individual's level of agreement with the statement, "At work, I display or wear items that represent my faith/spirituality". The second asked for individuals' level of agreement with the statement, "I feel motivated to talk about my faith/spirituality with people at work". Possible responses to both items were (1) strongly disagree, (2) somewhat disagree, (3) neither disagree nor agree, (4) somewhat agree, (5) strongly agree, and (6) not applicable. We discuss our analysis strategy due to this "not applicable" response below.

These items were only asked of individuals who indicated that they were employed part-time, full-time, or retired ($N = 11,398$), thereby excluding those who indicated that they were a student, volunteer, unable to work, or a homemaker. Retired individuals were instructed to "think about how you would have responded in your most recent job".

6.2. Focal Predictor: Religious Tradition

We use a series of items from the survey to assess individuals' religious tradition. We start with a question asking, "Currently, what is your religious tradition?" Possible responses were (1) Protestant, (2) Catholic, (3) another Christian, (4) Jewish, (5) Muslim, (6) Buddhist, (7) Hindu, (8) other, (9) no religion. We then used a separate question assessing respondents' view of the Bible to distinguish between conservative Protestants and liberal-moderate Protestants. Specifically, individuals who said that they view the Bible as "the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word" and identified as Protestant or another Christian were coded as evangelical-conservative Protestant. Individuals in these groups who said that they view the Bible as the "inspired" but not the literal word of God or who said the Bible is "an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts" were coded as liberal-moderate Protestant. As documented by [Hackett and Lindsay's \(2008\)](#) review of the literature, there are numerous strategies for categorizing conservative or evangelical Protestants, including those based on Bible view, denomination, belief in Hell, "born-again" experience or identification, religious attendance, and a variety of other methods. These strategies do tend to produce slightly different group characteristics. For instance, the Bible view method tends to be more restrictive and result in a smaller defined group—although it is not the most restrictive method. It also tends to result in a group that is somewhat more conservative in their religious views (e.g., more likely to be someone who applies religion to their life, attends more frequently, believes in Hell at a higher rate, etc.). We further distinguished between Black Protestants and the other Protestant categories given this tradition's unique social and political characteristics. If an individual identified as Protestant in any form and identified their race as Black or African American then they were coded into a Black Protestant category. Finally, due to a relatively few numbers of cases, we combine the Buddhist and Hindu categories with the other religion category. In sum, our final religious tradition measure is coded as (1) evangelical-conservative Protestant, (2) liberal-moderate Protestant, (3) Black Protestant, (4) Catholic, (5) Jewish, (6) Muslim, (7) other religion, and (8) no religion.

6.3. Focal Predictor: Region

We include indicators for the respondent's region of residence. This is defined with four categories representing Census Bureau's regional definitions: Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. These indicators are provided by Gallup based on the panelist's address. That is, the survey itself did not ask about region of residence.

6.4. Controls

Our analyses include a number of controls meant to isolate any independent effects of religious tradition, region, and the interaction between the two. First, we include a measure representing the individual's self-reported religiosity. This comes from a question asking, "Independently of whether you attend religious services or not, would you say you are . . . (1) not at all religious, (2) slightly religious, (3) moderately religious, (4) very religious". We also include controls for individuals' education and income levels. Education is measured on eight levels ranging from (1) less than a high school diploma to (8) postgraduate or professional degree. Income, which represents an individuals' total annual household income before taxes, is measured on eleven points from (1) less than \$12,000 to (11) more than \$1,000,000.

We also control for individuals' race, ethnicity, gender, and age. Individuals were asked to indicate with which race(s) they identify out of the options of White, Black or African-American, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or Other. Responses were then recoded into the following categories: (1) White, (2) Black, (3) Asian, (4) Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, Alaska Native, (5) other race, (6) multiple races. A separate question asked whether the individual is "of Hispanic origin or descent" with responses of yes or no. We include this to control for Hispanic ethnicity. Age is measured continuously.

We also include a series of indicators representing the individual's place of residence along the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural-Urban Continuum Codes, as some regional differences in workplace religious expression could be a function of rural-urban differences. These codes consist of nine categories: (1) metropolitan area over one million in population, (2) metropolitan area 250,000 to one million in population, (3) metropolitan area less than 250,000 in population, (4) non-metropolitan area greater than 20,000 in population that is adjacent to a metro area, (5), non-metropolitan area greater than 20,000 in population that is not adjacent to a metro area, (6) non-metropolitan area between 2000 and 20,000 in population that is adjacent to a metro area (7) non-metropolitan area between 2000 and 20,000 in population that is not adjacent to a metro area, (8) non-metropolitan rural area less than 2000 in population that is adjacent to a metro area, and (9) non-metropolitan rural area less than 2000 in population that is not adjacent to a metro area. These are included as categorical indicators in the analysis with the first category as the reference group.

Finally, we include a series of controls representing individuals' workplace industry, workplace size, their tenure at their workplace, whether their workplace has a religious mission, and their occupational position in the workplace. Industry was measured from a question asking individuals which category/ies from a list of 20 industries "best describes" the industry they work for. Individuals were told to mark all that apply. We include dichotomous measures for each of these industries indicating whether the individual selected it. A control for workplace size comes from a question asking, "About how many people work at the location where you work?" Responses ranges from (1) 1 to 9 to (7) 2000 or more. Workplace tenure was assessed through a question asking, "About how long have you worked for your current organization?" Responses ranged from (1) less than a year to (6) More than 30 years. Another question asked individuals, "Does your organization have a religious mission?" Responses to this question were either yes or no. Finally, we include a control from a question asking, "Think about the organization of job roles in your industry, where leaders are at the top of the organization and employees are at the bottom of the organization. Would you say you are toward the top of the organization, middle, or at the bottom?"

7. Analysis Strategy

As noted above, the two workplace religious expression items used as outcomes in this study included a response option for "not applicable". A sizable proportion of respondents chose this response: 19% for the item about talking about faith in the workplace and 30% for the item about wearing religious items in the workplace. Although a disproportionate

number of individuals who selected this response came from those who said that they do not have a religion, there were also a sizable proportion of individuals in this unaffiliated group who chose one of the other responses (e.g., strongly disagree). Moreover, some of those with a religious tradition also chose the not applicable response. In short, simply excluding the not applicable cases would not only reduce the statistical power of the analysis but also likely introduce biases. Including this response, however, means that we cannot treat the outcome items as ordinal or continuous in nature. Our primary analyses utilize multinomial logistic regression models with the “strongly disagree” response as the base outcome. Unfortunately, the raw results from such models are cumbersome to present and discuss. Instead of presenting regression coefficients or relative risk ratios, we instead present predicted probabilities based on those regression results. However, we offer the full results as a supplemental table for interested readers (Supplementary Materials). All analyses are conducted in Stata/SE 15.1 and utilize the software’s complex survey commands (*svy*) to account for the data’s weighting and structure. After excluding cases with missing values on the measures used in the analysis, the analytical sample consists of 10,027 individuals.

8. Results

Before turning to findings from our multinomial regression models, we first describe differences in the religious composition of the four regions and also present unconditional rates of religious expression by religious tradition and region. That is, before we control for other measures, to what extent does workplace religious expression differ by an individual’s religious tradition and region of residence?

8.1. Regional Differences in Religious Tradition

Table 1 presents the distribution of religious traditions by region. The findings in this table reinforce the unique religious context of particular regions. Individuals in the West, for instance, are more likely to say they have no religion (35.79%) compared to those in the Midwest (25.09%) and South (25.11%). Individuals in these latter two regions, though, are more likely to identify as an evangelical-conservative Protestant compared to those in the Northeast and West. Moreover, individuals in the Northeast are more likely to identify as Jewish when compared to the other three regions, while the Northeast and Midwest have higher proportions of Muslim individuals compared to the South and West.

8.2. Religious Tradition Differences in Workplace Religious Expression

Table 2 presents the percentage of individuals strongly agreeing with the two workplace religious expression items by religious tradition and region before accounting for any of our control measures. Because we are comparing all categories to each other instead of a single reference category, it is somewhat more complex to present and interpret differences and statistical significance. In the top half of the table, any religious traditions that are marked with the same superscript letter are not statistically different from each other. For instance, the Catholic (10.06%) and Jewish (8.89%) percentages for displaying or wearing items are both marked with a “b”. This means that these percentages are statistically equal. However, the Muslim (24.95%) percentage is marked with a “d”, which means that it is statistically different than the Catholic and Jewish percentages. Indeed, we see that Muslims (24.95%) are significantly more likely to strongly agree that they display or wear faith items in the workplace when compared to almost all other religious groups other than evangelical-conservative Protestants, who do not significantly differ from the Muslim percentage. Liberal-moderate Protestants (5.60%), though, are less likely than most of the other religious groups to strongly agree that they wear or display religious items in the workplace.

Turning to the items concerning talking about one’s faith/spirituality in the workplace, we again find that evangelical-conservative Protestants (19.28%) are particularly likely to strongly agree with this statement when compared to the other religious traditions, with

the exception of Muslims (17.95%). On the other hand, Jewish individuals (3.20%) are less likely to strongly agree that they talk about faith/spirituality in the workplace when compared to other religious groups.

Table 1. Distribution of religious traditions by region.

| Religious Tradition | Region | | | | Total |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| | Northeast | Midwest | South | West | |
| Evangelical-Conservative Protestant | 6.28% (98) | 12.85% (296) | 13.78% (423) | 8.33% (189) | 10.86% (1006) |
| Liberal-Moderate Protestant | 20.11% (357) | 28.17% (735) | 24.86% (788) | 24.19% (628) | 24.53% (2508) |
| Black Protestant | 5.00% (102) | 4.73% (122) | 9.59% (341) | 2.97% (84) | 6.08% (649) |
| Catholic | 23.98% (430) | 17.02% (449) | 13.13% (407) | 13.92% (341) | 16.17% (1627) |
| Jewish | 5.49% (181) | 1.30% (50) | 1.66% (95) | 2.25% (102) | 2.44% (428) |
| Muslim | 1.17% (42) | 1.07% (26) | 0.62% (58) | 0.77% (29) | 0.86% (155) |
| Other religion | 8.57% (139) | 9.76% (224) | 11.24% (328) | 11.79% (301) | 10.56% (992) |
| No religion | 29.4% (493) | 25.09% (588) | 25.11% (726) | 35.79% (855) | 28.50% (2662) |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| N | 1842 | 2490 | 3166 | 2529 | 10,027 |

Note: Numbers in parentheses represent cell N; Percentages are weighted.

Table 2. Unconditional percentage strongly agreeing with workplace faith expression items by religious tradition and region.

| Religious Tradition | Percentage Strongly Agreeing That . . . | |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| | <i>“At work, I display or wear items that represent my faith/spirituality”.</i> | <i>“I feel motivated to talk about my faith/spirituality with people at work”.</i> |
| Evangelical-Conservative Protestant | 14.44% ^{cd} | 19.28% ^d |
| Liberal-Moderate Protestant | 5.60% ^a | 6.48% ^b |
| Black Protestant | 10.57% ^{bc} | 10.47% ^c |
| Catholic | 10.06% ^b | 6.33% ^b |
| Jewish | 8.89% ^b | 3.20% ^a |
| Muslim | 24.95% ^d | 17.95% ^{bcd} |
| Other religion | 7.52% ^{ab} | 7.12% ^{bc} |
| No religion | 0.40% | 1.30% ^a |
| Region | | |
| Northeast | 5.96% ^x | 4.27% ^x |
| Midwest | 5.38% ^x | 5.94% ^y |
| South | 8.40% | 9.11% |
| West | 5.32% ^x | 5.70% ^{xy} |

abcd: Probabilities within a column sharing a letter are not significantly different at the 5% level. xy: Probabilities within a column sharing a letter are not significantly different at the 5% level.

8.3. Regional Differences in Workplace Religious Expression

The bottom half of Table 2 presents differences in workplace religious expression before accounting for any other variables. We see, for instance, that individuals in the South (8.40%) are significantly more likely than those in other regions to strongly agree that they display or wear religious items in the workplace. We find a similar result when looking at

the items asking about talking about one’s faith or spirituality in the workplace. That is, individuals in the South (9.11%) are significantly more likely to strongly agree with this item compared to those in other regions.

Multinomial Regression Model Results

While descriptively valuable, the religious tradition and regional patterns seen in Table 2 do not account for the association between the two. Is the greater religious expression in the South, for instance, a function of it having a greater presence of evangelical-conservative Protestants? Or is it a function of a distinctive regional culture that influences other religious traditions as well? Moreover, the differences seen in Table 2 do not account for other demographic and social factors that could influence workplace religious expression. Individuals may differ in their average level of religiosity across traditions, for instance. So, the religious tradition differences seen in Table 2 may be more a function of individual religiosity than unique characteristics of traditions.

Given these issues, we now turn to the results from our multinomial regression models that estimate differences in faith or spiritual expression in the workplace across religious traditions independent of region and our other control measures. That is, all else being equal, to what extent does an individual’s religious tradition or region of residence influence their likelihood of religious expression at work? The results from our multinomial regression models considering this question are shown in Table 3. These results are presented as the predicted probability of strongly agreeing with the two workplace religious expression items. We focus on the strongly agree response probabilities since these responses should reflect the strongest interest in or frequency of expressing one’s religion in the workplace. Interested readers, though, can find the full results from our multinomial models as a supplemental table (Supplementary Materials).

Table 3. Predicted probability of faith expression in the workplace by religious tradition and region independent of other measures.

| Religious Tradition | Predicted Probability of Strongly Agreeing That . . . | |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| | “At work, I display or wear items that represent my faith/spirituality”. | “I feel motivated to talk about my faith/spirituality with people at work”. |
| Evangelical-Conservative Protestant | 5.38% ^{ab} | 10.64% ^b |
| Liberal-Moderate Protestant | 2.61% | 3.70% ^a |
| Black Protestant | 5.72% ^{ab} | 4.27% ^a |
| Catholic | 5.56% ^{ab} | 3.63% ^a |
| Jewish | 7.77% ^b | 2.32% ^a |
| Muslim | 17.98% ^{ab} | 9.02% ^{ab} |
| Other religion | 3.97% ^a | 4.01% ^a |
| No religion | 0.93% | 3.00% ^a |
| Region | | |
| Northeast | 2.80% ^{xy} | 3.18% ^x |
| Midwest | 2.20% ^x | 3.28% ^x |
| South | 3.60% ^y | 5.46% ^y |
| West | 2.92% ^{xy} | 4.48% ^{xy} |

ab: Probabilities within a column sharing a letter are not significantly different at the 5% level. xy: Probabilities within a column sharing a letter are not significantly different at the 5% level. N = 10,027; probabilities computed from multinomial logistic regression models; model includes measures of region, religious tradition, rural-urban continuum, self-reported religiosity, income, education, race and ethnicity, gender, age, workplace industry, workplace size, tenure at workplace, workplace religious mission, and occupational position in workplace. Predictors held at their respective means in computing predicted probabilities.

8.4. Religious Tradition Differences in Religious Expression at Work

We begin by examining the religious traditional differences in religious workplace expression net of other measures. This is shown in the top half of Table 3. Looking at

the predicted probabilities for the item asking about wearing or displaying faith items in the workplace we see that, *independent of all other measures*, liberal-moderate Protestants (2.61%) are significantly less likely than all the other religious traditions—not counting those who do not identify with a religion—to strongly agree that they display or wear items that represent their faith or spirituality. Remember that our control measures include individuals' self-reported religiosity, so this is not simply a matter of liberal-moderate Protestants being less religious. Rather, this may reflect a different orientation towards visual expression of religious faith among this group.

We also see that the Jewish (7.77%) and Muslim (17.98%) individuals have higher predicted probabilities of strongly agreeing that they display or wear religious or spiritual items in the workplace even after controlling for other measures. This would be in line with our expectations given that these traditions sometimes have prescriptions concerning visible faith expressions (e.g., wearing of head coverings). However, tests of statistical significance do not find that we can be confident that these percentages are different from those for, say, the evangelical-conservative Protestant group (5.38%) or the Catholic group (5.56%).

The second column in Table 3 shows the predicted probabilities of strongly agreeing that "I feel motivated to talk about my faith/spirituality with people at work" by religious tradition, net of our other control measures. Here we see that evangelical-conservative Protestants (10.64%) are significantly more likely than individuals in most other religious traditions to express their faith verbally in the workplace. The only group who shows similar rates of agreement with this statement is Muslims (9.02%).

8.5. Regional Differences in Religious Expression at Work

We now turn to examining regional differences in religious expression in the workplace. The bottom half of Table 3 presents these findings for both of our outcomes. Looking first at the findings for the wearing of faith or spirituality items in the workplace, we see that—*independent of other measures including religious tradition*—individuals in the South are significantly more likely to strongly agree that they express their faith in this way when compared to individuals in the Midwest. Individuals in the Northeast and West, though, do not significantly differ from those either in the South or the Midwest in their likelihood of strongly agreeing with this item.

We find somewhat similar results when looking at the item asking about talking about one's faith/spirituality in the workplace. Individuals in the South are significantly more likely than those in the Northeast and Midwest to agree with this statement even after we account for religious tradition, religiosity, and all of our other control measures. However, individuals in the West are not significantly more likely to strongly agree with this workplace religious expression item relative to the other regions.

8.6. Interactions between Religious Tradition and Region

Finally, we consider the interaction between region and religious tradition. Are evangelical-conservative Protestants, for example, more likely to express faith or spirituality in the workplace in one region as compared to another? Table 4 presents the predicted probabilities for these interactions for the outcome asking about displaying or wearing faith items in the workplace.

The analysis finds that evangelical-conservative Protestants and Catholics in the South are more likely to say that they wear faith items in the workplace when compared to those in the West. For instance, net of all other factors, 8.47% of Catholics in the South are expected to strongly agree that they wear faith items in the workplace compared to 3.69% of Catholics in the West. Similarly, 6.91% of evangelical-conservative Protestants are expected to strongly agree that they wear faith items in the workplace in the South compared to 2.56% of similar individuals in the West.

Table 4. Predicted probability of displaying or wearing faith items in the workplace by interaction between region and religious tradition independent of other controls.

| Predicted Probability of Strongly Agreeing That . . . “At work, I display or wear items that represent my faith/spirituality”. | | | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| | Evangelical-Conservative Protestant | Liberal-Moderate Protestant | Black Protestant | Catholic | Jewish | Muslim | Other Religion | No Religion |
| Region | | | | | | | | |
| Northeast | 6.40% ^{ab} | 1.85% ^{ab} | 6.16% ^a | 4.84% ^{ab} | 13.64% ^b | 19.06% ^a | 3.70% ^a | 0.48% ^a |
| Midwest | 4.73% ^{ab} | 1.98% ^a | 4.62% ^a | 4.43% ^a | 3.34% ^a | 4.00% ^a | 2.37% ^a | 0.18% ^a |
| South | 6.91% ^b | 2.79% ^{ab} | 5.99% ^a | 8.47% ^b | 6.30% ^{ab} | 14.15% ^a | 4.47% ^a | 1.48% ^a |
| West | 2.56% ^a | 3.56% ^b | 8.33% ^a | 3.69% ^a | 1.63% ^a | 42.79% ^a | 4.87% ^a | 1.15% ^a |

ab: Percentages sharing a letter within a column in a model are not significantly different at the 5% level. Percentages without a letter are significantly different from all other percentages at the 5% level. N = 10,027; probabilities computed from multinomial logistic regression models; model includes measures of region, religious tradition, rural-urban continuum, self-reported religiosity, income, education, race and ethnicity, gender, age, workplace industry, workplace size, tenure at workplace, workplace religious mission, and occupational position in workplace; predictors held at their respective means in computing predicted probabilities.

We find a somewhat different pattern for Jewish and Muslim individuals. After accounting for other factors, we find that Jewish individuals in the Northeast (13.64%) are more likely to wear faith items in the workplace relative to Jewish individuals in the Midwest (3.34%) or West (1.63%). Examining the Muslim probabilities, our analysis finds that the predicted probability of Muslims wearing faith items in the workplace is greatest in the West (42.79%), but we cannot be statistically confident that this percentage differs from those in the other regions even though the predicted probabilities for those other regions are at least superficially much lower.

Table 5 shows the predicted probabilities for the second workplace religious expression outcome concerning talking about faith or spirituality. We find no significant net regional differences within the evangelical-conservative Protestant tradition, the Black Protestant tradition, the Jewish tradition, the Muslim tradition, or among those with no religion. However, even after accounting for those other characteristics, we find that liberal-moderate Protestants in the South (4.81%) are significantly more likely than their peers in the Northeast (2.38%) or Midwest (2.88%) to strongly agree that they feel motivated to talk about faith in the workplace. We also find that Catholic individuals in the South (5.62%) are more likely than their peers in the Midwest (1.78%) to strongly agree that they talk about faith in the workplace.

Table 5. Predicted probability of being motivated to talk about faith in the workplace by interaction between region and religious tradition independent of other controls.

| | Evangelical-Conservative Protestant | Liberal-Moderate Protestant | Black Protestant | Catholic | Jewish | Muslim | Other Religion | No Religion |
|-----------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Region | | | | | | | | |
| Northeast | 8.98% ^a | 2.38% ^a | 2.84% ^a | 3.36% ^{ab} | 2.57% ^a | 2.05% ^a | 1.74% ^a | 2.88% ^a |
| Midwest | 9.32% ^a | 2.88% ^a | 4.88% ^a | 1.78% ^a | 0.02% ^a | 1.92% ^a | 3.31% ^{ab} | 2.90% ^a |
| South | 13.20% ^a | 4.81% ^b | 4.89% ^a | 5.62% ^b | 1.60% ^a | 5.95% ^a | 4.99% ^b | 3.47% ^a |
| West | 9.01% ^a | 4.12% ^{ab} | 4.58% ^a | 3.21% ^{ab} | 2.58% ^a | 32.61% ^a | 5.01% ^{ab} | 2.85% ^a |

ab: Percentages sharing a letter within a column in a model are not significantly different at the 5% level. Percentages without a letter are significantly different from all other percentages at the 5% level. N = 10,027; probabilities computed from multinomial logistic regression models; model includes measures of region, religious tradition, rural-urban continuum, self-reported religiosity, income, education, race and ethnicity, gender, age, workplace industry, workplace size, tenure at workplace, workplace religious mission, and occupational position in workplace; predictors held at their respective means in computing predicted probabilities.

9. Discussion and Conclusions

The U.S. workplace is an important site for investigating the contexts of religious expression. The U.S. is seeing a rise in the number of non-Christian and nonreligious Americans, and while American workers are becoming more likely to request religious accommodations at work (Cash and Gray 2000; Kelly 2008; Lawrence and King 2008), they are also reporting an increase in religiously based discrimination at work (EEOC 2018). In this paper, we investigate how employees are managing these tensions and how the shifting religious landscape in the U.S. shapes whether and how people express their religion in the workplace. We also answer the call to take “place” more seriously in analyses of religious expression (Wellman and Corcoran 2013; Williams 2005). While religious affiliations and beliefs are often a stable part of an individual’s identity, the way that individuals express their religion often varies depending on where they are and who they are with (Lichterman 2012). Thus, we have considered the workplace to be a specific context that shapes religious expression, but we also investigate how religious affiliation and geographic region intersect to produce different kinds of religious expression at work. We find that the intersections of region and religious affiliation significantly shape if and how people chose to express their religion in the workplace, which adds important nuance to past studies that focus solely on one or the other.

In our analysis, we utilize two distinct measures of religious expression—the wearing of religious items at work and talking about religion at work. While someone may wear a religious item at work, for example, a necklace with a cross or a *hijab*, that does not necessarily mean they are comfortable talking about religion with their coworkers. Thus, by including both measures in our analysis, we provide a more expansive understanding of who is more likely to express their religion at work, what kinds of expression are more common, and where expression is more common across the United States.

First, we find that, net of a variety of individual and workplace characteristics, workers in the Midwest are less likely to say they display items related to their faith or talk about their faith in the workplace relative to those in the South. Individuals in the Northeast are also less likely to say they want to talk about faith in the workplace when compared to those in the South. This finding lines up with previous research on regional religious expression that finds religion to be a common topic of discussion in public places in the South but not in the Northeast (Silk 2005). American evangelicalism has a long history in the American South that is wrapped up in the region’s history of slavery and the coinciding Second Great Awakening that spread evangelical Protestantism to both Black and White southerners through emotional revivals and circuit-riding preachers who encouraged people to share their beliefs with others (Crowther 1992; Harvey 2015). As a result, a culture of “evangelizing”—or talking about one’s faith with others openly—persists in the American South even though the region is now increasingly more religiously diverse.

Comparing religious traditions, our analysis finds evangelical-conservative Protestants are more likely than those in other traditions—with the exception of Muslims—to say they feel motivated to talk to others about their faith in the workplace. Conversely, we found that liberal-moderate Protestants are less likely than those in other religious traditions to say that they display or wear religious items in the workplace, even after accounting for individual religiosity.

The findings concerning Muslims are interesting in light of previous research finding that Muslims experience some of the highest rates of religious discrimination in the U.S., both in the workplace and outside of it (Gerteis et al. 2019; Scheitle and Ecklund 2020). This means that even though Muslims are experiencing high levels of discrimination at work, they are still choosing to express their religion in the workplace. Furthermore, this expression goes beyond simply wearing religious clothing, which is more common among Muslims than other religious groups in the U.S. Our Muslim respondents were both more likely to wear religious items *and* openly talk about their faith at work than were most other religious groups. Research in social psychology may help explain this finding. Groups who are stigmatized typically have two options for managing their stigma: hiding the

stigmatized identity in order to reduce others' knowledge of it, or publicly affirming the stigmatized identity to gain the benefits of strong in-group identification (Branscombe et al. 2011; Ellemers et al. 2002). It may be that Muslims in our sample are choosing the latter option and asserting their religious identity as a means of combating stigma. Furthermore, there is evidence to support this in other research. For example, in a study of how Muslim women negotiate wearing the *hijab* in public spaces, Koura (2018) found that many Muslim women in the U.S. see wearing the *hijab* as a way to "exert their right to express their religious identities" in the face of rising Islamophobia (124).

Conversely, Jewish respondents in our sample were among the least likely to talk about their faith at work. While Jewish people are also among the most discriminated against religious minorities in the United States (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2015; Scheitle and Ecklund 2020), some studies find that they are less likely than Muslims to experience hiring discrimination based on their religion (Wallace et al. 2014; Wright et al. 2013). Jewish Americans are often less religious than Christian and Muslim Americans—they are less likely to attend religious services, less likely to believe in God, and over a quarter of American Jews identify as nonreligious (Pew Research Center 2021). Thus, it is likely a combination of a fear of discrimination and low levels of religiosity that explains the low rates of religious expression among Jewish people in our sample.

Considering the interactions between religion and region, we find that evangelical-conservative Protestants are less likely to display items representing their faith in the West relative to the South, while Jewish individuals are more likely to display such items in the workplace in the Northeast relative to the Midwest or West. These findings are consistent with previous research that finds evangelical-conservative Protestants to be more likely to perceive discrimination in the West than in other regions (Scheitle and Corcoran 2018), which is likely driven by the fact that the West is the least religious region in the country (Silk 2005; Wellman and Corcoran 2013). This finding also reveals the importance of considering "place" and context in studies of religious expression (Lichterman 2012; Williams 2005). While past research has found that evangelical Protestants tend to be more vocal about their religious beliefs in public than other religious groups in the U.S. (Bobkowski and Pearce 2011; Pew Research Center 2011), our findings suggest this is not necessarily a universal tendency and that local cultures shape how comfortable evangelical Protestants are expressing their faith in public. In short, norms for religious expression are not universal across even singular religious traditions (e.g., Lichterman 2012), and our intersectional analyses contribute to research on lived religion and the contextual nature of religious expression. We find that regional cultures can sometimes override religious subcultures to determine if and how people express their religion in the workplace. We also think of this in relation to the context of a changing U.S. society, particularly with respect to demographics. As populations shift due to geographic transitions, which we are seeing in particularly pronounced ways as many Millennials move to the South, there is the likelihood that there will be more conflict when existing social norms with respect to religious expression in the workplace come into conflict with those of newcomers.

Furthermore, while we found that Jewish people in our sample were among the least likely to express their faith at work, the fact that they are most likely to do so in the Northeast is likely because this region has a higher percentage of Jewish people than any other region (Tighe et al. 2019). It is also the case that Jewish people in the Northeast are more likely to be Orthodox than Jewish people in other parts of the country, which often comes with more visible expressions of the Jewish faith (Pew Research Center 2013). Thus, Jewish people may feel more comfortable expressing their religion at work in the Northeast because they are more likely to work in spaces where other Jewish people are present and Judaism is less stigmatized. Our data also suggest that Muslim respondents were most likely to wear faith items in the West. This may be due to high rates of discrimination that Muslims experience in regions such as the South and Northeast (Wright et al. 2013; Wallace et al. 2014). Conversely, we find that Catholics are generally more expressive in the South than in the Midwest and the West, which could be a product of the style of religious

expression in the South, as we have described previously. It is also the case that Catholics in the West are more likely to be Latinx than in other areas of the country (Orces 2020), and the intersection of racial and religious identity likely shapes religious expression in ways that future research should explore more.

9.1. Limitations

Of course, our study does have its limitations. Our measure of geographically distinctive religious cultures or demographics, for instance, is relatively crude. There are undoubtedly important variations within any of our four regions, and areas (i.e., states) of one region might better be placed in a bordering region. Indeed, any administrative measure of socially distinctive geographic areas is going to be a rough proxy at best. Future research could and should utilize more nuanced measures.

9.2. Implications and Future Research

A number of our control variables would be interesting place-oriented independent variables in their own right. For example, there is reason to believe that the rural–urban distinction would have implications for religious expression (Warf and Winsberg 2008), and similarly, the norms of some industries might be more receptive to religious expression than others. For example, Héliot et al. (2020) found that employees in service-oriented industries were more likely to draw on their religious identity to address the emotional labor inherent in their work. However, they also note that “relatively little research exists on religious identity expression in nonservice work” (p. 157). Future research could examine these additional variables as predictors of religious expression in the workplace.

In addition to examining other predictors of workplace religious expression, there is a need for future research to identify strategies that managers and organizations can or should use to support employee well-being and organizational health with respect to religious expression at work. Our research has been primarily descriptive in that we identified some of the place-based factors that contribute to religious expression at work. We did not, however, examine the impact of such expression on workers or their organizations. There is a mixed perspective in the literature about whether religious expression is more helpful or harmful in diverse workplaces. That is, does it have more potential as a divisive force, or does it result in more positive outcomes for individuals who can express their religious identity at work? A significant portion of the literature has found positive outcomes associated with religious and spiritual expression in the workplace (see Dik et al. 2023 for a review); however, there has not been a comprehensive effort at identifying the boundaries of such expression.

Finally, there are numerous other aspects of workplace religious expression that we were not able to explore here but that should motivate future research. For example, a previous study (Miller et al. 2019) identified four different ways that people integrate their faith into their work lives, including ethics, expression, experience, and enrichment. Our study focused on the different aspects of expression, but future research should investigate how religion shapes workplace ethics and informs people’s values and meanings around the workplace more generally.

9.3. Conclusions

We find that whether or not people express their religion at work is a nuanced matter, shaped by the general norms of expression of their geographic region, their particular religious tradition, and the interaction among them. Although for some groups—such as Jewish individuals and others whose communities have experienced and are experiencing stigma and discrimination—being in a regional location where one’s tradition is more dominant may outweigh other factors related to expression. Our analysis contributes to a growing line of research in the sociology of religion which takes “place” more seriously. Here we show that religious expression is contingent on social and geographic contexts. At a time when there is both increased religious diversity and increased reli-

religious discrimination in the United States, we need to continue to investigate how these tensions shape the experiences of both religious and nonreligious people and how different contexts—including the workplace—either promote or inhibit religious expression.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/rel14070920/s1>, Table S1: Multinomial Logistic Regression Results Predicting Responses to “At work, I display or wear items that represent my faith/spirituality”. Table S2: Multinomial Logistic Regression Results Predicting Responses to “I feel motivated to talk about my faith/spirituality with people at work”.

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