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Correlates of Spirituality among African Americans and Caribbean Blacks in the United States: Findings from the National Survey of American Life

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Abstract

The present study examined differences in reports of spirituality among African Americans, Caribbean Blacks (Black Caribbeans), and non-Hispanic whites using data from the National Survey of American Life (NSAL). Bivariate analyses indicated that African Americans were most likely to endorse statements regarding the importance of spirituality in their lives (“How important is spirituality in your life?”) and self-assessments of spirituality (“How spiritual would you say you are?”), followed by Caribbean Blacks and non-Hispanic whites. Regression analyses indicated that African Americans and Caribbean Blacks had significantly higher levels of spirituality than did non-Hispanic whites. However, there were no significant differences in spirituality between African Americans and Caribbean Blacks. Separate regression analyses for African Americans and Caribbean Blacks indicated distinctive patterns of sociodemographic and denominational correlates of spiritual sentiments. Findings are discussed in relation to available survey and ethnographic data on self-assessments of spirituality.

Keywords

Religiosity; Afro-Caribbean; West Indian

Interest in the topic of spirituality has grown considerably over the past several years (Koenig, 2008; Koenig, McCullough & Larson, 2001; Pargament, 1997). For example, a recent Gallup Poll (Gallup & Johnson, 2003) indicates that two-thirds of Americans indicated both a need for spiritual growth and affirmed that they were spiritually committed. Additionally, more than 80% of Americans indicated that faith gave meaning and purpose to their lives, while large numbers indicated that they felt a connection with God, a divine will or a higher power.

Current definitions of spirituality and religion often emphasize their differences from one another in terms of character, roles, and functions. Koenig and colleagues (Koenig et al., 2001) define spirituality as more individualistic, less visible, more subjective, and less formal and describe it as a personal quest for answers to ultimate questions about life, meaning, and relationships to the sacred. In contrast, religion is understood as being concerned with participation in a formal organization and embracing an organized system of beliefs, practices and rituals designed to facilitate closeness to God (Koenig et al., 2001; Pargament, 1997). Note, however, that researchers differ in their definition of spirituality and that there is no consistent or mutually agreed upon definition of the construct (Hill & Pargament, 2003). Further, definitions of spirituality have changed over time. Historically, spirituality was more closely linked with religiosity in that religion was viewed as a means by which people developed their spiritual character. In contrast, more contemporaneous definitions note that spirituality and religion are distinct concepts (Koenig, 2008).

The focus of the current study is to investigate the demographic and denominational correlates of spirituality among a national sample of African Americans and Black Caribbeans. The literature review begins with a discussion of research and scholarship on spirituality among African Americans and Caribbean Blacks. Given the paucity of systematic research on spirituality for these groups, a review of available research on the demographic and denominational correlates of religious involvement among African Americans is provided for background and comparison purposes.

Spirituality among African Americans and Caribbean Blacks

Although a sizable body of research examines the social and demographic correlates of religious involvement among African Americans (Taylor, Chatters & Levin, 2004), there have been only a few systematic empirical investigations of spirituality within this population group (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002). The majority of the research on spirituality among African Americans has come from the field of Black Psychology. For instance, many textbooks on Black Psychology include chapters on spirituality and religion (e.g., Belgrave & Allison, 2006). Afrocentric theorists in Black Psychology have discussed the philosophical foundations and psychotherapeutic treatment implications of Black spirituality and religiosity (Jules-Rosette, 1980; Myers, 1987; Nobles, 1991; Potts, 1991 Walker & Dixon, 2002). Mattis and colleagues (2000, 2001, 2002) have developed a program of research to systematically assess spirituality among African Americans and to explore its distinctiveness with respect to religiosity. They found (Mattis et al., 2001) moderate correlations between religiosity and spirituality, suggesting that the two constructs are not identical. Further, underscoring their distinctiveness, age was related to reports of religiosity, but not spirituality. Mattis (2000) found that Black women view spirituality and religiosity as interrelated constructs that are, nonetheless, conceptually distinct. Interestingly, religiosity (which involves adherence to predefined rituals and beliefs) was seen as a means for achieving spirituality. On the other hand, spirituality, while being devoid of specific rituals or beliefs, represented an internalized expression of positive values and virtues. Importantly, spirituality was seen as embodying a distinctly relational aspect that emphasized one's personal interactions with God, with self, and transcendent forces (e.g., nature).

Finally, ethnographic research (Maynard-Reid, 2000; Stewart, 1999) and Afrocentric scholarship in black psychology (Brome, et al., 2000; Jagers & Smith, 1996) identify core elements of African American worship modalities and spiritual orientations as being products of a distinctive African cultural perspective. Spirituality, in particular, is a central organizing framework and an essential characteristic of this African-centered worldview that shapes both individual and communal consciousness of persons of African descent (Brome et al., 2000; Jagers & Smith, 1996; Maynard-Reid, 2000). Owing to this orientation, God is regarded in very personal terms as an accessible spiritual being and personal friend (Black, 1999). Reminiscent of Mattis' (2000) observations regarding the relational aspects of spirituality, Black worship is characterized by frequent verbal communication in the form of conversational prayer (Baldwin & Hopkins, 1990) and direct manifestations of God (e.g., possession by the Holy Spirit/Ghost) (Maynard-Reid, 2000). This feature of worship practice, that is, God as an accessible and intimate friend with whom one can converse and commune, underpins a distinctive prayer and worship tradition among African Americans (Krause & Chatters, 2005; Maynard-Reid, 2000) that reinforces the significance of an explicitly spiritual dimension.

With respect to Caribbean Blacks, various ethnographic accounts of the diverse religious traditions of the Caribbean region (Gossai & Murrell, 2000; Zane, 1999) have focused on indigenous religious and spiritual systems such as voodoo (Vodun), obeah, Santeria, espiritismo, Shango/Orisha, and Rastafarianism. Other studies typically involve relatively small and geographically situated samples and religious groups (e.g., Vincentian Converted or

Spiritual Baptists), some of which have established traditions of spiritual beliefs and practices (e.g., Spirit work, spirit travel). Maynard-Reid's work (2000) provides perhaps the most comprehensive treatment of the role of African-centered spirituality in the worship practices of Black Caribbeans. His work documents the development and growth of a diverse group of explicitly African-based religious and spiritual traditions (e.g., Orisha, Vodun, Xango, Santeria), as well as the influence of African worldviews on the emergence and transformation of European-based Christian and quasi-Christian sects (e.g., Spiritual Baptists, Revival Zion) within the Caribbean region. Central to this work is the: 1) recognition of the remarkable range of religious and spiritual practice across the Caribbean, 2) dynamism and syncretism evident in these worship traditions, 3) fluidity of practice whereby individuals may be adherents of both traditional Christian denominations, as well as African-based religions and 4) centrality of spirituality and active spiritual communion. This work notwithstanding, there are no general surveys of spirituality among persons of Caribbean descent residing in the U.S.

Despite the lack of systematic work on spirituality, per se, Black Caribbean worship practices may bear some comparability to those found among African Americans. African Americans and Caribbean Blacks share a common racial heritage and racialized position within U.S. society. This shared racial context may have important consequences for shaping the nature of spiritual expression for both groups. Within the Caribbean context, Maynard-Reid (2000) argues that social class and skin color are principal stratification factors. Religion and spirituality have been important in shaping individual and group coping responses to class and color-based discrimination, as well as in influencing specific forms of religious and spiritual expression. Worship communities such as the Spiritual Baptists (Trinidad) and Revivalist (Jamaica) that embody a strong emphasis on spirituality have had particular appeal for oppressed and marginalized groups (i.e., the black poor). Consequently, the U.S. racial context in which being of African descent is a devalued status position, may have important consequences for the nature of spiritual expression for both African Americans and Caribbean Blacks.

In addition, some (Stewart, 1999) have argued that as people of the African Diaspora (in particular the broad cultural area of West Africa), Black religious worship and traditions in the U.S. and the Caribbean region might similarly embody a personal and intimate view of God that emphasizes direct communication in the form of conversational prayer. Further, because these elements of Black worship style embody a distinctly spiritual orientation and emphasis (Mattis, 2000), it is likely that they reflect a general investment in spiritual concerns and sentiments among both African Americans and Caribbean Blacks. However, African Americans and Caribbean Blacks also diverge significantly in relation to a number of demographic factors (e.g., ethnic origin, economic and social status) and denominational affiliation that may have a bearing on reports of spirituality.

Demographic and Denominational Correlates

Despite growing interest in spirituality, there is a lack of information about how demographic and denominational factors are associated with spirituality for African Americans and Caribbean Blacks. Limited data on the general population from the Gallup Polls (Winseman, 2003a, 2003b) indicates greater spiritual commitment among women, older persons, separated/divorced/widowed persons, and those with lower levels of education and income. However, as polls of the general population, the numbers of African Americans polled are too small to yield reliable numbers and meaningful comparisons. Consequently, as a point of departure and comparison to research on spirituality, this section examines research on the demographic and denominational correlates of religious involvement among African Americans (Taylor et al., 2004). We argue that religious involvement and spirituality are related, but distinct constructs.

As such, we expect some degree of correspondence in the demographic and denominational correlates of these two constructs.

Prior research on demographic and denominational correlates indicates that, in general, women, older persons, married individuals, Southerners and Baptists are more inclined than their counterparts to report higher levels of religious involvement. Theoretical explanations for these differences center on issues of social role (i.e., gender, marital status) expectations and obligations and community and social environments (e.g., the Bible Belt, congregational practices and climate) that are consistent with and reinforce normative expectations for particular religious orientations and behaviors. For example, prior research indicates that women demonstrate higher levels of religiosity both within the African American (Chatters, Levin, & Taylor, 1992; Levin, Chatters, & Taylor, 1994) and the general population. This is thought to reflect traditional gender roles emphasizing women's activities as primary socializing agents for children, including religious socialization (Cornwall, 1989). Consequently, women have higher levels of contact with religious groups, greater familiarity with religious content and sensibilities and more investment in religious social networks and interactions than men.

With respect to marital status, research on African Americans indicate that divorced persons (as compared to marrieds) are less invested in religious pursuits in terms of less frequent service attendance (Taylor, 1988), reduced likelihood of requesting prayers from others (Taylor & Chatters, 1991) and lower levels of support from church members (Taylor & Chatters, 1988). Findings for socioeconomic status effects are generally less consistent. Positive education effects have been report for selected indicators such as rates of church membership, attendance, and reading religious materials (Chatters, Taylor & Lincoln, 1999; Taylor 1988), while persons with lower educational levels have a greater likelihood of using broadcast religious media (i.e., radio, television) as opposed to print media (i.e., reading religious materials). Lower income is associated with stronger denominational identification and a greater likelihood of deriving spiritual comfort from religion (Chatters et al., 1999). Finally, findings for denominational affiliation indicate that Pentecostals (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999) and Baptists (Taylor et al., 2004) have consistently higher rates of religious involvement as compared to other affiliation groups.

Given the correspondence between the constructs of spirituality and religious involvement (Mattis, 2000, 2002; Mattis & Jagers, 2001), the demographic and denominational correlates of religious involvement may prove to be largely comparable. However, previous research (Logan & Deane, 2003) indicates that African Americans and Caribbean Blacks are dissimilar from each other in terms of social status characteristics (e.g., Caribbean Blacks have higher levels of income and education) and denominational profiles (e.g., African Americans are more likely to identify with Baptists, while Caribbean Blacks report more Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists and Episcopalians) (Lawson, 1998, 1999; Taylor, Chatters & Jackson, 2007). These differences may influence overall levels of spirituality, as well as the relationships between demographic and denominational factors and spirituality (Taylor et al., 2007). In addition, immigration history (length of U.S. residency) and country of origin are factors unique to Caribbean Blacks that may affect expressions of spirituality in, as yet, unidentified ways. Taken as a whole, differences and similarities between African Americans and Caribbean Blacks could influence overall levels of spirituality, as well as the demographic and denominational correlates operating within these groups.

Based upon this previous literature, we anticipate that African Americans and Caribbean Blacks will demonstrate overall higher levels of spirituality as compared to non-Hispanic Whites. However, African Americans and Caribbean Blacks will not significantly differ from one another in overall levels of spirituality. Based on previous findings for religious

involvement for African Americans, we anticipate that older persons, women, married persons, Southerners and Pentecostals will demonstrate higher levels of spirituality. Given inconsistent prior findings with respect to income and education, no specific predictions are posited. For Caribbean Blacks, we anticipate that advanced age, female gender, being married and length of US residency will be associated with higher levels of spirituality; no specific predictions are proposed for income, education, region and country of origin.

Focus of the Present Study

The present study first investigates the extent to which African Americans, Caribbean Blacks and non-Hispanic Whites are similar or different with respect to reports of spirituality. Next, using separate regression analyses for African Americans and Caribbean Blacks, we examine the demographic (e.g., age, gender, socioeconomic status) and denominational correlates of spirituality. For Caribbean Blacks only, we also examine immigration status and country of origin as predictors of spirituality.

The present study possesses a number of advantages over previous efforts. First, it utilizes data from a large national probability sample so that the results are generalizable to the African American and Black Caribbean populations. Second, although there is a body of research on the demographic correlates of religious participation, this is the first study of the correlates of spirituality among a national sample of African Americans. This study compares the demographic and denominational correlates of spirituality with prior research on religious involvement and, thus, suggests potential differences between these two constructs. Third, the study includes Black Caribbeans in the United States, a small but significant portion of the general U.S. Black population. Although there is a growing literature on religion and spirituality among African Americans, there is extremely little information on many of the basic issues regarding religious participation and spirituality among Black Caribbeans. The NSAL is the first national sample of Black Caribbeans ever conducted and as such this is the first analysis of the correlates of spirituality among this group. Lastly, this analysis incorporates the impact of complex survey design effects. Adjusting for the effects of complex sample design has been routine in areas such as epidemiology, but has been rarely utilized in the field of religion and many other areas that utilize national and community based probability samples. Briefly stated, most previous analyses of religious participation do not account for the fact that the survey sample was based on a complex, multi-stage design and not a simple random sample. In statistical analysis, the failure to properly account for a complex sample design results in incorrect and artificially low standard errors (Lehtonen & Pahkinen, 2004). This produces an increase in the likelihood of Type 1 errors (declaring significance when there is none). Although this issue is not new (Kish, 1968), it is only in recent years that social science statistical programs can incorporate the effects of complex sample design effects in analysis.

METHODS

Sample

The National Survey of American Life: Coping with Stress in the 21st Century (NSAL) was collected by the Program for Research on Black Americans at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. The NSAL was part of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) Collaborative Psychiatric Epidemiology Surveys (CPES) initiative that included three national representative surveys - the NSAL, the National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R), and the National Latino and Asian American Study (NLAAS). The field work for the study was completed by the Institute of Social Research's Survey Research Center, in cooperation with the Program for Research on Black Americans. The NSAL sample has a national multi-stage probability design. A total of 6,082 face-to-face interviews were conducted with persons aged 18 or older, including 3,570 African Americans, 891 non-Hispanic whites,

and 1,621 Blacks of Caribbean descent. The African American sample is a national representative sample of households located in the 48 coterminous states with at least one black adult 18 years or over who did not identify ancestral ties in the Caribbean. Fifty of the adults in the African American sample were born in an African country. The non-Hispanic white sample was a stratified, disproportionate sample of non-Hispanic white adults residing in households located in the census 2000 tracts and blocks that have 10% or greater African American population (Heeringa et al., 2004:230). The NSAL sample is not optimal for descriptive analysis of the U.S. White population. Rather, the sample design and analysis weights for this sample were designed for comparative analyses in which residential, environmental, and socioeconomic characteristics are controlled in Black-White statistical contrasts (Heeringa et al., 2004). In this way, the design of the non-Hispanic White sample was intended to maximize the geographic and socioeconomic overlap with the African American sample. This strategy builds upon the recommendations of an emerging body of work which notes the difficulty of fully controlling for socioeconomic status in Black-White comparisons because the geographical and residential context of the two groups vastly differ (LaVeist & McDonald, 2002; Sampson & Wilson, 1995; Yu & Williams, 1999).

The NSAL includes the first major probability sample of Caribbean Blacks ever conducted. For the purposes of this study, Caribbean Blacks are defined as persons who trace their ethnic heritage to a Caribbean country, but who now reside in the United States, are racially classified as Black, and who are English-speaking (but may also speak another language). The interviews were face-to-face and conducted within respondents' homes. Respondents were compensated for their time. The data collection was conducted from 2001 to 2003. All of the interviews were conducted in English, using a computer-assisted personal interview that lasted an average of two hours and twenty minutes. The overall response rate was 72.3%. Response rates for individual subgroups were 70.7% for African Americans, 77.7% for Caribbean Blacks, and 69.7% for non-Hispanic Whites. This response rate is excellent considering that African Americans (especially lower income African Americans) and Caribbean Blacks are more likely to reside in major urban areas which are more difficult and much more expensive to collect interviews. Final response rates for the NSAL two-phase sample designs were computed using the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) guidelines (for Response Rate 3) (AAPOR, 2006).

The African American sample is the core sample of the NSAL. The core sample consists of 64 primary sampling units (PSUs). Fifty-six of these primary areas overlap substantially with existing Survey Research Center's National Sample primary areas. The remaining eight primary areas were chosen from the South in order for the sample to represent African Americans in the proportion in which they are distributed nationally. Both the African American and White samples were selected exclusively from these targeted geographic segments in proportion to the African American population. The Caribbean Black sample was selected from two area probability sample frames: 265 were selected from the households in the core sample, while 1356 were selected from an area probability sample of housing units from geographic areas with a relatively high density of persons of Caribbean descent (more than 10% of the population). The NSAL analysis weights for the African American and Caribbean Black samples were designed to provide population representation for these groups in the 48 coterminous states. In both the African American and Black Caribbean samples, it was necessary for respondents to self-identify their race as black. Those self-identifying as black were included in the Caribbean Black sample if they answered affirmatively when asked if they were of West Indian or Caribbean descent, said they were from a country included on a list of Caribbean area countries presented by the interviewers, or indicated that their parents or grandparents were born in a Caribbean area country (see Jackson et al., 2004 for a more detailed discussion of the NSAL sample).

Measures

Dependent Variables—Two indicators of spirituality are used. One item assesses the overall importance of spirituality in the respondent's life and asks: "How important is spirituality in your life?" very important, fairly important, not too important or not important at all. The second indicator is an overall self-rating of spirituality "How spiritual would you say you are --very spiritual, fairly spiritual, not too spiritual, or not spiritual at all?" Both items have four categories and ranged from 4 (very important or very spiritual) to 1 (not important at all or not spiritual at all).

Independent Variables—Sociodemographic factors (i.e., age, gender, family income, education, marital status, and region) and denominational affiliation are utilized as independent variables. Income is coded in dollars; in the multivariate analysis, income is divided by 5000 in order to increase effect sizes and provide a better understanding of the net impact of income. Missing data for family income are imputed for 773 cases (12.7% of the total NSAL sample) and missing data for education are imputed for 74 cases (1.2% of the total NSAL sample). Imputations are made using Answer Tree in SPSS. Denomination is measured by the question: "What is your current religion?" More than 35 different denominations were mentioned. This variable is recoded into nine categories: Baptists, Methodists, Catholic, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Seventh Day Adventist, Other Protestant (e.g., Lutheran, Presbyterian), Other Religions (e.g., Buddhist), and None.

Additionally, two demographic variables that are particularly relevant to the Black Caribbean population in the United States are included in this analysis (immigration status and country of origin). Immigration status has five categories (i.e., respondent was born in the United States, respondent immigrated to the United States 0 to 5 years ago, respondent immigrated to the United States 6–10 years ago, respondent immigrated to the United States 11–20 years ago, respondent immigrated to the United States more than 20 years ago). Finally, respondents report over 25 different countries of origin. Consistent with research on the Caribbean, the variable country of origin has been categorized based upon historical and anthropological categorizations of the Caribbean as Anglophone (English speaking), Hispanophone (Spanish speaking), and Francophone (French Speaking) (see Gossai & Murrell, 2000; Zane, 1999). Jamaica, Trinidad-Tobago, and Other English-speaking countries (e.g., Barbados) represent the Anglophone countries, Spanish-speaking or Hispanophone countries include Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic and Cuba, and Haiti is the Francophone country. The resulting variable, Country of Origin, is recoded into five categories: Jamaica, Trinidad-Tobago, Other English-speaking country (e.g., Barbados), Spanish-speaking country (e.g., Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic) and Haiti. The distribution for all of the independent variables utilized in this analysis is presented in Table 1.

Analysis Strategy

First, frequency distributions of the two dependent variables are presented. The percentages are weighted based on the sample's race-adjusted weight measure. Second, multivariate analyses of the two indicators of spirituality by race/ethnicity are presented in which demographic factors and denominational affiliation are used as controls. Two sets of regressions are conducted in which race/ethnicity is represented by a set of dummy variables. In the first set, African American is the excluded or comparison category; while in the second set, Black Caribbean is the excluded or comparison category. Third, subgroup analyses are presented — one set of analysis is conducted exclusively with African Americans and a second set of analysis is conducted exclusively among Black Caribbeans. One of the goals of the sub-analyses are to maximize the demographic variation among these two populations. Consequently, the categories of the independent variables are tailored to the demographic distribution of the African American and Black Caribbean populations. There are four

categories of region for African Americans (Northeast, North Central, South, West) and two categories for Black Caribbeans (Northeast, Other). These categories reflect the geographic distribution of these two populations, with Black Caribbeans being highly concentrated in the Northeast (e.g., New York, Connecticut, Washington, D.C.). Among African Americans, the denomination variable does not include Episcopalians and Seventh Day Adventists as separate categories due to the small number of African Americans in these religious affiliations. Finally, as mentioned previously, the analyses for Black Caribbeans include two Caribbean-specific variables--immigration status and country of origin.

The bivariate analysis uses the Rao-Scott chi-square which is a complex design-corrected measure of association. All of the multivariate analysis utilize Ordered Logit regression (Borooah, 2002). Ordered Logit Regression or Ordered Probit Regression are appropriate for regression analysis in which the dependent variable is ordinal scaled. These analyses were conducted using STATA 9.2 using `svy:ologit`. To obtain results that are generalizable to the African American and Black Caribbean populations, all of the analyses utilize analytic weights. Additionally, standard error estimates corrected for the sample's complex design (i.e., clustering and stratification) are utilized.

RESULTS

Descriptive data in Table 1 indicate that African Americans, Caribbean Blacks and non-Hispanic whites in the sample are distinctive in several respects. On average, of the three groups, non-Hispanic Whites tend to be slightly older, possess more years of education and higher incomes and are more likely to be married. However, Caribbean Blacks are somewhat younger than African Americans, have incomes that are largely comparable to non-Hispanic whites and, of all three groups, have roughly equal percentages of men and women. African Americans and Caribbean Blacks are also distinctive from one another (Logan & Deane, 2003) with respect to demographic and economic profiles, with Caribbean Blacks possessing higher levels of educational attainment and income. Consistent with their overall geographic distribution, most Caribbean Blacks in the sample reside in the Northeast region. With respect to Caribbean Blacks, fully 31% of the sample identifies Jamaica as their country of origin, 36% indicate that they were born in the U.S., roughly 16% have resided in the U.S. for up to 10 years and 46% have been in residence for 11 years or more. Finally, the denominational profile indicates that Caribbean Blacks are less likely than African Americans to indicate that they are Baptist (21% vs. 49%, respectively), are similar to non-Hispanic Whites in their reports of being Catholic, Episcopalian, and a member of some other Protestant group, but are more likely than either African Americans or non-Hispanic Whites to report their affiliation as Seventh Day Adventist.

Table 2 presents the percentage distribution for the importance of spirituality by race and ethnicity. The results indicate that both African Americans and Black Caribbeans are more likely than non-Hispanic whites to indicate that spirituality is important in their lives. For instance, 81.7% of African Americans, 78.7% of Black Caribbeans and 65.9% of non-Hispanic Whites report that spirituality is "very important" in their lives. Conversely, 4.24% of non-Hispanic Whites, compared to only 0.8%, of Black Caribbeans and 0.76% of African Americans indicate that spirituality is "not important at all" (Table 2). Table 3 provides the regression coefficients for the effects of race/ethnicity on the indicators of spirituality, with controls for the effects of sociodemographic (i.e., age, gender, marital status, education, family income, and region) and denominational factors. Race/ethnicity is represented by a dummy variable with African Americans as the excluded category in regression results reported in Row 1; Black Caribbeans are designated as the excluded category in regression results reported in Row 2.

Importance of Spirituality in One's Life

Both African Americans and Black Caribbeans report significantly higher levels of the importance of spirituality than non-Hispanic Whites (Table 3). Similarly, there is no significant difference between African Americans and Black Caribbeans in reports of the importance of spirituality. Table 4 presents the coefficients for the regression of demographic and denominational factors on the importance of spirituality for African Americans (Equation 1) and Black Caribbeans (Equation 2). Results for Equation 1 indicate that among African Americans, age, gender, education, marital status, region and denomination are all significantly related to the dependent variable. Older respondents, women and those with more years of formal education report higher levels of the importance of spirituality than their counterparts. Married respondents indicate higher levels of the importance of spirituality than co-habiting and never married respondents. Regional differences indicate that Southern respondents report higher levels of the importance of spirituality than those who reside in the Northeast. Finally, respondents who do not have a current religious denomination report lower levels than Baptists, whereas Pentecostals and those in other Protestant denominations attach greater importance to spirituality than do Baptists.

Examination of the regression coefficients for the importance of spirituality among Black Caribbeans reveals overall fewer demographic differences than the analysis among African Americans (Table 4; Equation 2). In fact, only marital status and denomination are significantly associated with the importance of spirituality among Black Caribbeans. In comparison to married persons, widowed respondents indicate greater importance of spirituality in their lives, whereas co-habiting respondents attach less importance to spirituality. Pentecostals report greater importance of spirituality than Baptists, whereas, Baptists report greater importance of spirituality than do Episcopalians and those who indicate no current religious affiliation.

Self-Rated Spirituality

Table 2 presents the percentage distributions of self-rated spirituality by race and ethnicity. Higher percentages of both African Americans and Black Caribbeans indicate that they are spiritual than non-Hispanic whites (Table 2). Four out of 10 African Americans (43.6%) and Black Caribbeans (41.4%) report that they are "very" spiritual, compared to 33.5% of non-Hispanic Whites. Regression analyses indicate that both African Americans and Black Caribbeans report significantly higher levels of spirituality than non-Hispanic Whites (Table 3). There is no significant difference, however, between African Americans and Black Caribbeans in level of self-rated spirituality.

Coefficients for the regression analysis of self-rated spirituality among African Americans are presented in Table 4 (Equation 3). This equation indicates that age, gender, education, marital status, and denomination are significantly associated with self-rated spirituality (Table 4; Equation 3). Older respondents and women indicate significantly higher levels of self-rated spirituality than their younger and male counterparts. African Americans with more years of formal education have higher levels of self-rated spirituality than their counterparts with fewer years of formal education. Married respondents report higher levels of self-rated spirituality than those who cohabit with their partner. Baptists report lower levels of spirituality than do Pentecostals, respondents in other protestant denominations, and persons of other religions. However, Baptists report higher levels of spirituality than respondents with no current denominational affiliation. The regression coefficients for the correlates of self-rated spirituality among Black Caribbeans are presented in Table 4 (Equation 4). Only denominational affiliation and country of origin are significantly associated with self-rated spirituality among Black Caribbeans. Pentecostals and those identifying other Protestant denominations indicate higher levels of self-rated spirituality than Baptists. Lastly, respondents

whose country of origin is Jamaica report higher levels of spirituality than Black Caribbeans from Trinidad-Tobago.

DISCUSSION

This analysis empirically verified that spirituality is an important aspect of the lives of African Americans and Black Caribbeans. Eight out of 10 African Americans and Black Caribbeans indicated that spirituality was very important in their lives and four out of ten of both groups characterized themselves as being very spiritual. High levels of spirituality are certainly consistent with both historical (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990) and contemporary research (Gallup & Johnson, 2003; Taylor et al., 2004) underscoring the special significance of religion and church life, especially among African Americans. Additionally, among Black Caribbeans the high rates of reported spirituality are consistent with prior ethnographic work on the importance of spirituality within this group (Gossai & Murrell, 2000; Zane, 1999). The analyses also revealed that, for both groups, sentiments regarding the importance of spirituality in one's life were more strongly endorsed than self-ratings of spirituality. Roughly twice as many respondents stated that spirituality was "very important" in their lives as reported that they considered themselves as being "very spiritual." Respondents make apparent distinctions between their beliefs regarding the importance of spirituality in their lives as opposed to their own personal self-assessments as having a spiritual nature. Although respondents endorse the importance of spirituality in their lives at especially high levels, they may be reluctant to characterize themselves as being very spiritual for fear of appearing to be self-righteous or being immodest. Alternatively, to the extent that spirituality is viewed as an inner-directed and ongoing process, respondents' self-assessments of spirituality may reflect their own evaluations of their current status and continual movement toward an idealized state of being or spiritual actualization that they have yet to achieve.

Overall, these analyses indicated that African Americans and Black Caribbeans had significantly higher levels of spirituality than non-Hispanic Whites for both importance and self-assessed spirituality. These differences persisted even after the application of controls for demographic and denominational factors that are differentially distributed within black and white populations and are known to be of consequence for religious involvement. The significant differences in spirituality between African Americans and non-Hispanic Whites are consistent with a number of prior studies indicating that African Americans are more religiously inclined (Levin et al., 1994; Taylor et al., 1996) in terms of both public (e.g., church attendance) and private religious behaviors (e.g., prayer), and subjective religiosity (e.g., religious minded, importance of religion, religious comfort). However, in this first survey-based investigation of spirituality among Black Caribbeans, Black Caribbeans and African Americans were similar to one another in regards to spirituality (both had significantly higher levels as compared to non-Hispanic Whites). The similar high assessments of spirituality for African Americans and Black Caribbeans may reflect a shared cultural background as persons of African descent in which the construct of spirituality is a pervasive and unifying element of life (Brome et al., 2000; Jagers & Smith, 1996; Maynard-Reid, 2000). This explanation is consistent with a growing body of literature which identifies several similarities in religious involvement among African Americans and Black Caribbeans as a reflection of their common African heritage (e.g., Maynard-Reid, 2000).

Separate regression analyses for African Americans and Black Caribbeans, however, indicated different profiles of significant predictors of spirituality. For African Americans, the several significant demographic differences in both the importance of spirituality and self-rated spirituality were consistent with prior findings on the correlates of religious participation. The finding that African American women were more spiritual than African American men is consistent with previous research indicating the centrality and importance of religion in the

lives of African American women (Taylor et al., 2004). Overall, women, in general, and African American women, in particular, have higher levels of religious participation than men. In fact, gender and race (black-white) are two of the strongest and most consistent demographic predictors of religious participation; a finding that holds for spirituality as well. Age was positively associated with both indicators of spirituality, consistent with other work which indicates higher levels of religious participation among older as compared to younger African Americans (Chatters & Taylor, 1989; Chatters et al., 1999). Findings of lower levels of spirituality for individuals who cohabit with their partners and persons who had never married (as compared to married persons) is also consistent with other research indicating higher levels of religious participation among married African Americans (Taylor et al., 2004).

Education was positively associated with both indicators of spirituality, such that persons with more years of formal education reported higher levels of spirituality. This is somewhat surprising given that the majority of prior research shows few education and other socioeconomic status differences in religious participation (Taylor et al., 2004). Further, in a recent analysis of this data, education was negatively associated with religious coping among both African Americans and Black Caribbeans, indicating that persons with higher levels of education were less likely to use religious coping strategies to deal with problems (Chatters et al., 2008). This clear departure from previous education effects suggests that spirituality may be distinct from other related, but more explicitly religious constructs. Within the general white population, younger age and more education are associated with movement away from traditional religious organizations and expressions and endorsements of a more explicitly spiritual orientation. In the current sample, reported higher levels of self-assessed spirituality among African Americans of higher education could reflect differences in opportunities and exposures to a broader spectrum of religious and spiritual thought and practice. The present finding of an education effect suggests the need to further examine this difference to determine the specific meanings of spirituality across levels of education and whether this signals a true point of divergence within the African American population. Finally, Southerners indicated higher levels of the importance of spirituality than respondents who lived in the Northeast which is consistent with research noting the higher levels of religious participation among Southerners and which characterizes the South as the “Bible Belt” (Taylor et al., 2004).

Turning to denominational differences, Pentecostals reported higher levels of spirituality than Baptists. This finding is consistent with Gallup Poll (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999) data among the general population which indicates higher levels of religiosity among Pentecostals in comparison to other religious groups. Respondents who claim no current religious denomination reported lower levels of spirituality than Baptists, consistent with previous work using various indicators of religiosity (Taylor et al., 2004). Collectively, these findings indicate that African Americans with no current religious denomination have lower levels of both spirituality and religiosity. This study indicates that, for African Americans, the demographic correlates of spirituality are virtually identical to findings from prior research on religious behaviors and sentiments. This indicates that religiosity and spirituality, while not identical constructs, are associated with demographic and denominational affiliation in a similar fashion.

The picture is somewhat different for Black Caribbeans. We had anticipated that African Americans and Black Caribbeans would be similar with respect to the predictors of spirituality. However, among Black Caribbeans, only a few demographic factors were significant predictors of spirituality. Further, several of the typically robust correlates of religious participation such as gender and age were not associated with spirituality among Black Caribbeans. Denominational and marital status differences in spirituality among Black Caribbeans were, however, largely consistent with previously mentioned findings (i.e., lower levels of spirituality among cohabiting respondents and higher levels of spirituality among Pentecostals). Among Black Caribbeans, one significant country of origin difference in self-rated spirituality was

found such that persons from Trinidad-Tobago reported lower levels of self-rated spirituality than persons from Jamaica. By way of explanation, the two countries differ in regards to predominant Christian denominations (Anglican in Jamaica and Roman Catholic in Trinidad-Tobago). The history of religious and spiritual traditions in Trinidad-Tobago is particularly complex, the result of the intermingling of African, East Indian and European influences. However, one notable feature in Trinidad-Tobago is the history of stigma and legalized discrimination against semi-Christian groups such as the Spiritual Baptists and African-based religions such as Orisha and the public perception and characterization of these traditions and practices as pagan/demonic (Maynard-Reid, 2000). It is possible that persons from Trinidad-Tobago in the present study are less likely to describe themselves as 'spiritual' because of the term's enduring stigma and association with the Spiritual Baptists, Orisha and other African-based religions. While this is an interesting possibility, because this is the first survey analysis of spirituality among Black Caribbeans, the precise meaning of this finding remains uncertain and deserves further study.

Taken as a whole, the findings indicate that for African Americans, demographic and denominational factors are important correlates of spirituality. On the other hand, among Caribbean Blacks, only limited marital status, denomination and country of origin effects were found. Despite comparable levels of spirituality for African Americans and Caribbean Blacks (recall the absence of significant ethnicity effects), the significant predictors of spirituality varied for the two groups. Accordingly, these data indicate that assessments of spirituality among Caribbean Blacks are largely independent of demographic and denominational factors, whereas for African American, social status position and denomination significantly differentiate levels of spirituality. Differences in life circumstances and social context for African Americans and Caribbean Blacks may provide an explanation for these findings.

Outwardly, African Americans and Caribbean Blacks report comparable levels of spirituality. However, findings for the importance of divergent sets of demographic and denominational correlates indicate that the substance of spirituality for these groups may be very different. As many scholars have noted (Stewart 1999; Maynard-Reid 2000), the diverse spiritual traditions of the Caribbean region are particularly robust, well-established and enduring features of the social context and life experiences in this region. Further, some have argued that the existence of marginally Christian sects and African-derived spiritual traditions (e.g., Orisha) are pervasive throughout the Caribbean and often practiced in tandem with other mainstream and traditional religious orientations (Maynard-Reid, 2001). The intermingling of European-based religions and African-inspired spiritual traditions has resulted in a creolization of Christianity in which African elements, and particularly spiritual elements of worship, became prominent.

Viewed within this perspective, the levels of spirituality reported by Caribbean Blacks and the overall lack of demographic differences may reflect the general milieu and socialization experiences surrounding the nature of spiritual matters. It may be the case that spiritual traditions and sentiments are not readily differentiated by social status location because they are equally salient across all segments of the Black Caribbean population. For example, Vickerman (1999) asserts that Caribbean societies and institutions are less secularized than in the U.S. As a reflection of these socialization and life experiences, Caribbean immigrants rely more heavily on an explicitly religious/spiritual worldview and are more conservative in relation to religious concerns, lifestyle behaviors and general outlook. In essence, the distinctive patterns of significant correlates of spirituality found in this study reflect differences in levels of secularization in US and Caribbean societies. A comparable phenomenon can be observed in relation to the characteristic levels of religious involvement found in black populations in the Southern US or "Bible Belt". While significant regional differences in levels of religiosity have been observed among African Americans, within-region variations in the south are much more attenuated, owing to overall heightened levels of religious involvement.

Clearly, more conceptual and methodological work is needed to better understand these and other differences in spirituality for Black Caribbeans and African Americans.

Limitations and Conclusions

This study provided a preliminary assessment of differences in spirituality across three race/ethnic groups. The availability of a nationally representative sample of African Americans, non-Hispanic Whites and particularly, Caribbean Blacks, was a definite advantage of the study. Importantly, their inclusion represents a first-of-its kind investigation of these issues among a Black Caribbean sample. Despite these advantages, the findings are limited by restrictions in the study sample. The Black Caribbean sample excludes individuals who do not speak English (i.e., persons who only speak Spanish, Haitian-French, or Creole dialects) and, as a consequence, the study findings are not generalizable to these groups of Caribbean Blacks. Another limitation involves the use of single items as dependent variables. Although the indicators are robust in terms of face validity, it is preferable to have more indicators represent a construct as broad as spirituality. It is important to note, however, that many of the established scales of spirituality are problematic because they include items that are not measures of spirituality or religiosity, but are more appropriately classified as indicators of psychological well-being (e.g., “my life is full of joy and satisfaction”, “my life is often empty and filled with despair”) (see Koenig, 2008 for a detailed discussion of this issue).

Nonetheless, the significant advantages of the sample, methods, and analysis provided a unique opportunity to examine the correlates spirituality across these three groups of adults. The findings suggest a number of important areas of inquiry related to issues of spirituality and its distribution within and across population groups that can be summarized as follows. First, both African Americans and Black Caribbeans have high levels of spirituality as reflected in both indicators. Second, the level of spirituality among these two groups is significantly higher than the level of spirituality among non-Hispanic Whites, indicating important differences in these sentiments across these groups. Third, among African Americans, demographic differences in spirituality were consistent with research on various measures of religious participation. However, unlike previous research on religious participation, African Americans with more years of formal education indicated higher levels of spirituality. Lastly, among Black Caribbeans, demographic factors were relatively ineffective predictors of reports of spirituality. Future research should explore cultural, life history, and ethnic group differences that may explain divergences in the correlates of spirituality among African Americans and Black Caribbeans.

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Table 1

Demographic and denomination distribution of sample^a.

Demographic Variables	African Americans		Black Caribbeans		Non-Hispanic Whites	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Age						
18–24	16.14	482	19.18	251	13.09	86
25–34	19.59	750	22.69	373	16.65	137
35–54	42.65	1501	38.75	693	41.97	370
55 and older	21.62	837	19.38	304	28.29	298
Mean	42.32		40.27		44.98	
S.D.	14.49		5.77		31.11	
Education						
0–11 years	24.19	920	21.23	306	15.15	149
12 years	37.86	1362	29.65	481	31.16	293
13–15 years	23.83	809	26.06	443	24.82	216
16 or more years	14.12	479	23.07	391	28.87	233
Mean	12.42		12.93		13.32	
S.D.	2.22		0.99		4.98	
Income						
Less than \$18,000	30.79	1315	21.05	368	19.52	212
\$18,000–\$31,999	25.17	930	24.94	436	21.10	207
\$32,000–\$54,999	23.72	781	22.45	391	26.42	228
\$55,000 or more	20.32	544	31.56	426	32.96	244
Mean	36,845		47,017		47,397	
S.D.	33,236		15,241		75,265	
Gender						
Male	44.02	1271	50.87	643	47.25	372
Female	55.97	2299	49.13	978	52.74	519
Marital Status						
Married	32.91	960	37.56	559	47.35	383

Demographic Variables	African Americans		Black Caribbeans		Non-Hispanic Whites	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Partner	8.74	260	12.57	131	6.59	44
Separated	7.16	286	5.36	128	3.10	37
Divorced	11.74	524	9.29	178	13.05	147
Widowed	7.89	353	4.28	78	7.83	103
Never married	31.54	1170	30.91	542	22.05	173
Region						
Northeast	15.69	411	55.69	1135	22.67	107
North Central	18.81	595	4.05	12	7.96	83
South	56.24	2330	29.11	456	54.60	609
West	9.25	234	11.14	18	14.76	92
Country of Origin						
Spanish	--		14.07	180	--	
Haiti	--		12.64	298	--	
Jamaica	--		31.72	510	--	
Trinidad-Tobago	--		9.98	170	--	
Other English	--		31.57	440	--	
Years in the US						
US born	--		36.58	440	--	
Less than 5 years	--		8.07	119	--	
6-10 years	--		8.44	164	--	
11-20 years	--		20.20	357	--	
21 years or more	--		26.70	490	--	
Denomination						
Baptist	49.08	1865	20.52	278	21.18	240
Methodist	5.87	216	3.17	66	6.90	71
Pentecostal	8.61	304	8.70	152	3.88	32
Catholic	5.95	202	18.66	367	20.21	157
Episcopal	0.45	17	3.31	80	2.05	20
Seventh Day Adventist	0.71	21	4.22	87	0.26	2

Demographic Variables	African Americans		Black Caribbeans		Non-Hispanic Whites	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Other Protestant	16.53	528	25.10	333	23.45	201
Other Religion	2.25	71	3.56	56	6.53	43
No Religion	10.50	344	12.72	194	15.50	122

^a Percents are weighted; frequencies are unweighted.

Table 2Distribution of spirituality variables. ^a

	African Americans	Black Caribbeans	Non-Hispanic Whites
Importance of Spirituality			
Very Important	81.67%	78.73%	65.99%
Fairly Important	13.78%	16.92%	22.80%
Not Too Important	3.78%	3.51%	6.95%
Not Important at All	0.76%	0.82%	4.24%
N	3553	1614	884
Rao-Scott $\chi^2 = 207.222$ $p < .0001$			
Self-Rated Spirituality			
Very Spiritual	43.68%	41.43%	33.55%
Fairly Spiritual	45.35%	46.66%	48.43%
Not Too Spiritual	9.09%	8.43%	11.44%
Not Spiritual at All	1.87%	3.46%	6.56%
N	3553	1611	889
Rao-Scott $\chi^2 = 101.50$ $p < .0001$			

^aPercents are weighted; frequencies are unweighted.

Table 3Race and ethnic differences in spirituality.^a

	Importance of Spirituality		Self-Rated Spirituality	
	B	S. E.	B	S.E.
Row I: African Americans Excluded Category				
Caribbean Blacks	.109	.171	.088	.135
Non-Hispanic Whites	-.786	.101 ***	-.494	.083 ***
Row II: Caribbean Blacks Excluded Category				
African Americans	-.109	.171	-.088	.135
Non-Hispanic Whites	-.895	.163 ***	-.583	.134 ***

^a All regressions control for age, gender, income, education, marital status, region, and denomination.

* p < .05;

** p < .01;

*** p < .001

Table 4

Regression models for importance of spirituality and self-rated spirituality^a

	Importance of Spirituality				Self-Rated Spirituality			
	African Americans		Caribbean Blacks		African Americans		Caribbean Blacks	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Age	.014	.005*	-.008	.010	.024	.003***	.006	.010
Gender	.663	.091***	.370	.251	.437	.079***	.043	.150
Income	.002	.010	-.009	.011	.011	.006	-.012	.018
Education	.078	.024**	-.004	.042	.045	.016**	-.001	.044
Marital Status								
Partner	-.747	.193***	-.968	.377*	-.474	.142**	-.506	.373
Separated	-.420	.249	-.282	.655	.358	.185	-.200	.378
Divorced	-.208	.205	.028	.369	.137	.137	-.307	.354
Widowed	.306	.396	1.95	.667**	.030	.173	.008	.244
Never Married	-.650	.152***	-.396	.271	-.188	.113	-.332	.193
Region								
Northeast	-.419	.189*	-.291	.188	-.219	.118	-.179	-.217
North Central	-.258	.130	--	--	-.039	.068	--	--
West	-.263	.172	--	--	-.080	.110	--	--
Denomination								
Methodist	.009	.208	-.090	.322	.061	.135	.552	.309
Pentecostal	.816	.254**	1.61	.607*	.570	.121***	1.015	.411*
Catholic	-.024	.248	-.422	.321	.270	.208	.017	.404
Episcopalian	--	--	-.946	.420*	--	--	-.144	.223
Seventh Day Adventist	--	--	-.000	.551	--	--	.764	.455
Other Protestant	.572	.154***	-.332	.322	.566	.118***	.543	.250*
Other Religion	.986	.496	.552	.549	.756	.214***	.803	.879
No Affiliation	-1.11	.146***	-1.96	.347***	-.528	.166**	-1.10	.590

	Importance of Spirituality				Self-Rated Spirituality			
	African Americans		Caribbean Blacks		African Americans		Caribbean Blacks	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Country of Origin								
Spanish	--	--	.375	.364	--	--	.575	.383
Haiti	--	--	-.503	.567	--	--	-.430	.445
Trinidad-Tobago	--	--	.467	.359	--	--	-.548	.211*
Other English	--	--	.009	.317	--	--	-.355	.265
Immigration Status								
0 to 5 years	--	--	-.627	.710	--	--	.459	.362
6 to 10 years	--	--	.498	.345	--	--	.156	.298
11 to 20 years	--	--	.393	.316	--	--	-.144	.321
Over 21 years	--	--	.279	.291	--	--	.016	.341
N		3705		1574		3706		1572

^aRegressions control for age, gender (0=male), income, education, marital status (0=married), region (0=South for African Americans and 0=all other regions for Black Caribbeans), and denomination (0=Baptist). Income is coded in dollars and has been divided by 5000. Regressions for Black Caribbeans additionally control for Country of Origin (0=Jamaica) and Immigration Status (0=U.S. born).

* p < .05;

** p < .01;

*** p < .001