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African American Religious Participation

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Introduction

Religion and religious institutions remain an important component of the lives of many African Americans (Taylor, Chatters & Levin, 2004). In recent years, studies of religion and religious participation among African Americans have grown significantly. However, as compared to non-Hispanic whites, there still remains a paucity of research in this area. This study provides a comprehensive examination of the social and demographic correlates of religious participation among African Americans. In particular, we investigate the socio-demographic correlates of twelve different indicators of religious participation including measures of organizational (e.g., service attendance), nonorganizational (e.g., prayer, reading religious materials) and subjective religiosity (e.g. importance of taking children to religious services). Independent variables include customary demographic factors (i.e., age, gender, education), as well as several novel social correlates (e.g., incarceration history, cohabitation, welfare history, military service). We begin the literature review with a discussion of black-white differences in religious participation, followed by research on African American religious participation, measurement of religious involvement and conclude with the focus of this study.

Religious Participation among African American and Non-Hispanic White Adults

The last 20 years has seen significant declines in congregational membership in the United States. Despite these overall declines, Black religious congregations are less likely than White congregations to report attendance declines and are more likely to report growing by at least 10% between 2000 and 2010 (Roozen, 2011). Further, because Black church

members are also younger, Black congregations will likely to continue to grow faster than their white counterparts (Hadaway, 2010; Roozen, 2011). African Americans also express greater confidence in religious institutions than do Whites (Hoffman, 1998), which likely accounts for the relative strength of Black congregations despite overall declines in church membership in the U.S. Traditionally, Black churches have been a central institution in the civic and spiritual life of African American communities, which may account for Blacks' greater support (relative to the general population) for political and social activism of religious leaders on social issues (Pew, 2012). In addition, Black churches are over-represented in faith-based community organizing efforts to pressure legislators to support policies to improve the quality of life within poor and black communities (Brown, 2009; Warren & Wood, 2002).

Evidence from race comparative analyses documents higher levels of religious participation among African Americans than whites (Chatters et al., 2009; Krause, 2006; Krause & Chatters, 2005; Levin, Taylor, & Chatters, 1994, Taylor, Chatters, Jayakody, & Levin, 1996; Taylor & Chatters, 2011). These findings have been duplicated in numerous nationally representative surveys using a variety of indicators of organizational, nonorganizational and subjective religiosity. For instance, in previous analyses of the NSAL Chatters et al., (2009) found that in comparison to non-Hispanic whites, African Americans had significantly higher levels of religiosity across all 12 dependent variables examined. Brown et al.'s (2013) study of religious non-involvement, found that African Americans were significantly less likely to report never attending religious services and to not have a current denomination. Further, congregation members play a more prominent role in the support networks of African Americans than among non-Hispanic whites (Krause & Batisda, 2011; Taylor et al., 2013). Among African Americans, support from church members is positively associated with a variety of health and mental health issues including promoting healthy lifestyles (Krause et al., 2011), increased life satisfaction (Krause, 2004) and protecting against suicidal behavior (Chatters et al., 2011). Collectively, this body of research underscores the importance of investigating religious involvement among African Americans.

African American Religious Participation

Throughout American history, the Black church has occupied a distinctive position in the lives of African Americans as the traditional institutional core of African American communities (Barnes, 2009; Billingsley, 1999; Brown, 2009; Dillard, 2007; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Despite differences in their origins and individual histories, the historic black denominations and churches share several central elements and themes. The historic black denominations and churches typically emerged as a result of conflict within the larger white religious institutions in which they were embedded (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). This conflict resulted in a complete physical and institutional separation from the larger group and the development of independent churches, particularly in free states. The situation was very different in slave-holding states, where so-called "parallel institutions" or "invisible churches" that existed outside of the sanctions and scrutiny of white religious and civil authority were organized by slaves on plantations. Whether as recognized independent congregations or secret organizations, these emerging religious institutions and social welfare societies (i.e., mutual aid and benevolent societies) allowed blacks to develop

distinctive styles of worship and to cultivate a tradition of Black Christian belief that was particularly suited and responsive to their life circumstances—both spiritually and materially (Frazier, 1974; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Further, these elements coalesced into a Black religious ethos which emphasized notions of communal responsibility and was manifested in church-sponsored civic, educational, economic and political activity (Barnes, 2009; Brown, 2009; Dillard, 2007; Taylor, Thornton & Chatters, 1987).

Given this background and ethos, Black religious institutions have been amazingly adaptive to their surrounding circumstances and continue their traditions as major supportive systems for individuals, families and communities (Taylor, Chatters & Levin, 2004). Religion, then, has a special prominence in the lives of African Americans, with churches assuming a particularly influential role. However, despite the central role that religion and churches play in the lives of African Americans, systematic research in this area is scarce.

Prior to the emergence of the National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA) dataset, only a handful of survey-based studies examined religiosity among black Americans and black-white differences in religious participation. The lack of empirical studies was due to the fact that most major surveys had too few black respondents (generally around 100–150) to conduct meaningful sub-group analysis and typically examined only 2 or 3 measures of religious participation. The advent of the National Survey of Black Americans (1979–1980) signaled a major development in research on religiosity among African Americans. As the first nationally representative, probability-based survey of the Black population, the NSBA had a total of 2,107 respondents which allowed for meaningful demographic subgroup analysis. Additionally, the NSBA included approximately 15 measures of religious participation representing diverse aspects of religiosity.

Analyses revealed important subgroup differences in religious involvement indicating that women, older persons, married persons, and Southern residents are particularly religiously involved and identified, as compared to their respective counterparts (Chatters & Taylor, 1994; Chatters, Taylor, & Lincoln, 1999; Levin & Taylor, 1993; Levin, Taylor, & Chatters, 1995; Taylor, 1988; Taylor et al., 2004; Taylor et al., 2007). Education and income differences in religious involvement are less consistently demonstrated but suggest that persons with higher levels of education are less likely to use religion to cope with problems (Chatters et al., 2008). Further, higher levels of education are associated with reading religious materials, while lower levels of education are associated with broadcast (television, radio) religious programs (Taylor & Chatters, 2011).

Collectively, this work indicates that: 1) owing to their unique historical position, religious institutions actively promote concern for both the spiritual and corporate well-being of Black Americans; 2) religious involvement in various forms continues to occupy a distinctive position within the lives of Black Americans and is associated with beneficial outcomes; 3) African Americans report significantly higher levels of religious participation than non-Hispanic whites; and 4) subgroup variation in religious involvement indicates that these concerns are differentially important for segments of the Black population (e.g., older persons, women).

Conceptualization and Measurement of Religious Involvement

Conceptualization and measurement of religion and religious involvement remains a fundamental issue in this research area (Chatters, Taylor & Lincoln, 2001; Hill & Pargament, 2003; Idler et al., 2003; Mindel & Vaughan, 1978). Given the variety of religious and spiritual phenomena and the recognized complexity of religious participation, no single index or scale adequately represents the construct of religiosity (Fetzer Institute/National Institute on Aging, 1999). Instead, interest in religion's associations with health and other outcomes has spurred systematic programs of research focusing on the development of conceptually-based and empirically-validated measures of religious involvement for use in research (Chatters, 2000; Chatters, Taylor & Lincoln, 2001; Fetzer Institute/National Institute on Aging, 1999; Ellison & Levin, 1998; Idler & George, 1998; Idler et al., 2003).

One of the goals of research is to develop multi-dimensional, yet parsimonious measures of religious involvement (Chatters, Levin, & Taylor, 1992; Chatter, Taylor & Lincoln, 2001; Ellison, 1994; Hill & Pargament, 2003; Idler & George, 1998; Idler et al., 2003; Krause, 1993; Levin & Chatters, 1998; Levin, Chatters, & Taylor, 1995; Pargament, 1997; Schiller & Levin, 1988) that reflect the construct's multidimensionality and incorporate behavioral (i.e., public and private) and subjective (i.e., attitude, belief and experience) components. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of religious participation that encompasses indicators of organizational, non-organizational, and subjective religiosity. Organizational religious participation refers to behaviors that occur within the context of a church, mosque, or other religious setting (e.g., church attendance, membership, participation in auxiliary groups). Nonorganizational religious participation refers to behaviors and practices that may occur outside of a religious setting (e.g., private prayer, reading religious materials, watching or listening to religious television and radio programs). Subjective religiosity refers to perceptions and attitudes regarding religion, such as perceived importance of religion, the role of religious beliefs in daily life, and individual perceptions of being religious (Chatters et al., 1992).

Focus of the Present Analysis

Our study explores the demographic correlates of organizational, non-organizational, and subjective religious participation as well as religious identity among African Americans. The first major studies of the demographic correlates of religious participation among African Americans were initiated over 25 years ago using the National Survey of Black Americans. Our present investigation builds on earlier work and uses a much expanded dataset (the National Survey of American Life) and a more comprehensive set of both dependent and independent variables. We examine twelve indicators of religious participation, including non-involvement (e.g., no current denomination), novel measures of religious participation (i.e., religious paintings and imagery) and a measure of religious identity. This study explores traditional demographic correlates (i.e., age, gender), as well as expanded information on marital and partner status (i.e., remarriage, cohabitation) and life circumstances (i.e., military service, incarceration, welfare history).

Consistent with prior work indicating that religion is particularly salient for specific subgroups, we anticipate overall higher rates of involvement for older adults, women, married persons and Southern residents as compared to their counterparts (Chatters & Taylor, 1994; Chatters, Taylor, & Lincoln, 1999; Levin & Taylor, 1993; Levin, Taylor, & Chatters, 1995; Taylor, 1988; Taylor et al., 2004; Taylor et al., 2007). Although findings for education are mixed, we anticipate that education will be inversely associated with religious coping, religious identities, and use of religious broadcast media (TV and radio), but positively related to service attendance and reading religious materials. Income has been largely unrelated to religious involvement for African Americans; we expect that income and welfare history will be unrelated to religious involvement. We anticipate that because religious norms and church culture endorse pro-family attitudes and initiatives, parenthood will be associated with higher levels of religious involvement. In contrast, given religious injunctions against socially stigmatized statuses, we anticipate that respondents who are remarried, currently cohabitating with an unmarried partner, or previously incarcerated will be less likely than their counterparts to report involvement in organizational religious activities (service attendance, church membership and other church activities) or to identify with religious or church-going people. However, we expect that these groups will be similar to their counterparts in relation to non-organizational and subjective religiosity. Finally, we anticipate that a history of military service will be associated with high levels of religious involvement.

The current study has several sampling and methodological advantages over previous investigations that use small convenience samples that are geographically restricted, examine a limited number of religious involvement measures (e.g., attendance), focus on select denominational groups, and/or classify denominational affiliation as the single category of “Black Protestants.” This study’s inclusion of a significant number of independent variables including a full range of marital status categories (i.e., remarriage and cohabitation) and novel assessments of life circumstances (e.g., military service, incarceration history, and welfare history) offers a unique opportunity to investigate social and demographic heterogeneity across diverse dimensions of African American religious involvement.

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 field work for the study was completed by the Institute for 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 which 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.

The data collection was conducted from February 2001 to June 2003. The interviews were administered face-to-face and conducted within respondents' homes; respondents were compensated for their time. A total of 6,082 face-to-face interviews were conducted with persons aged 18 or older, including 3,570 African Americans. The overall response rate was 72.3% and 70.7% for African Americans. The response rate is excellent given that African Americans (especially lower income African Americans) are more likely to reside in major urban areas which are more difficult and expensive with respect to survey fieldwork and data collection. 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 samples) (AAPOR 2006) (see Jackson et al. 2004 for a more detailed discussion of the NSAL sample). The NSAL data collection was approved by the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board.

Measures

Dependent Variables—We examine 11 indicators of organizational, nonorganizational, and subjective religious participation and one indicator of religious identity. For the sake of brevity, we present question wording for all dependent variables in Table 1.

Independent Variables—Sociodemographic variables (i.e., age, gender, family income, education, marital status, region, parental status) and denomination affiliation are independent variables. Missing data for household income was imputed for 773 cases (12.7% of the total NSAL sample). Missing data for education was imputed for 74 cases. Imputations were completed using an iterative regression-based multiple imputation approach incorporating information about age, sex, region, race, employment status, marital status, home ownership, and nativity of household residents. Income is coded in dollars and for the multivariate analysis only is divided by 5000 in order to increase effect sizes and provide a better understanding of the net impact of income on the dependent variables. Region is coded Northeast, North Central, West, Urban South and Rural South.

We examined several independent variables not typically used in studies of religious participation—military service, incarceration, welfare history and parental status. Military service measures whether the respondent has had any military service in their lifetime. Incarceration measures whether a person has had any type of crime related incarceration (i.e., prison, jail, juvenile detention, reform school). Welfare history is measured by the question: “Have you ever received public assistance or welfare since turning age 18? By public assistance we mean Aid to Families with Dependent Children or General Assistance or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.” This variable has three categories: currently on welfare, previously on welfare and never on welfare.

Analysis Strategy

We used regression analyses to examine demographic differences in religious participation. Logistic regression was used for the four dichotomous dependent variables (no current denomination, never attend religious services, church membership, religious painting in home); linear regression was used with the remaining dependent variables. The analyses were conducted using SAS 9.13. We used analytic weights for all analyses so that results are

generalizable to the African American population. All statistical analyses accounted for the complex multistage clustered design of the NSAL sample, unequal probabilities of selection, nonresponse, and poststratification to calculate weighted, nationally representative population estimates and standard errors.

RESULTS

Table 2 shows descriptive data for all study variables. Percentage distributions (not shown) for the religious participation variables provides additional information (in the interest of brevity, only select variables are discussed). First, relatively few respondents report that they are not involved in some level of organizational religious participation. Only 10.5% indicate that they do not have a current denomination and only 8.57% report that they have never attended religious services since the age of 18. Further, only 2.6% indicate that they both do not have a current denomination and have never attended religious services since the age of 18. One out of three (37.9%) attend services at least once a week or more, and 8 out of 10 (81.2%) report attending religious services at least a few times a year. For respondents who attend religious services at least a few times a year, 71.8% are official members of their church (58.8% of the total sample are church members). In terms of non-organizational religious participation, one out of four respondents (27.1%) read religious materials nearly everyday and another 23.6% read religious materials at least once a week. Eight out of ten pray nearly everyday (82.8%) and report that it is very important that parents take their children to religious services (83.7%).

We present the regression analysis for organizational, non-organizational and subjective religious involvement in Tables 3–5. Age has a significant association with religious involvement in 11 of the 12 regression models (note that because of significant interactions, two models are presented for requests of prayer, but is counted only once). Older age is positively associated with service attendance, frequency of congregational activities, reading religious materials, private prayer, having religious paintings and items in the home, importance of religion in childhood, importance of taking children to religious services and perceived closeness to religious and church-going Black people. Age is negatively associated with the two religious non-involvement variables—older adults are less likely to report not having a current religious denomination and never attending religious services. In all significant models, older respondents report higher levels of religious participation than their younger counterparts. Separate analyses (not shown) conducted within 6 separate age cohorts (i.e., 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–69, 70 and older) also indicated linear age relationships.

Gender is significantly associated with religious involvement in 8 of the 12 regression models. Male gender is significantly related to not having a current religious denomination, and lower rates of service attendance, church membership, frequency of congregational activities, reading religious materials, private prayer, requests for prayer, and not having religious paintings and items in the home. A significant gender by age interaction is significant for requests for prayer. The interaction reveals that among women age is significantly and positively associated with requests for prayer, but among men age and prayer requests are unrelated.

Significant regional differences in all 12 of the regression models indicate that respondents who reside in the urban South report higher levels of religious participation than their non-southern counterparts. Also in analysis not shown, Southerners in general (combining urban and rural South) have higher levels of religious participation in all 12 of the regression models. Respondents in the Northeast report lower levels of religious participation than urban Southerners in 11 of the 12 models; requests for prayer is the only variable without a significant difference. Respondents in the North Central region report lower levels of religious participation in 9 of the 12 models. Persons in the North Central region and urban Southern residents are similar in terms of frequency of congregational activities, private prayer and requests for prayer. As compared to urban Southerners, respondents in the West report lower levels of service attendance, reading religious materials, perceived importance of taking children to religious services, and feelings of closeness to religious church-going people. Although the initial model for requesting prayers from others indicates a significant difference between West and urban South, this relationship does not remain significant in the larger interactive model. A significant region and gender interaction for requests for prayer indicates that for women, there is no significant difference between residing in the urban or rural South. Among men, however, those in the rural South request prayer from others less frequently than men in the urban South. Lastly, only 3 significant differences between urban South and rural South are noted—rural Southerners are more likely than their urban Southern counterparts to be official members of their church, read religious materials more frequently, and feel that religion was important in their home during childhood.

Income is significantly and negatively associated with requests for prayer only. Education, in contrast, is positively associated with frequency of service attendance, congregational activities, and reading religious materials, while it is negatively associated with the two religious non-involvement variables. In terms of religious participation, persons with more years of education have higher levels of religious participation, are more likely to read religious materials and are less likely to be non-involved. Education, however, is negatively associated with perceived closeness to religious and church-going Black people.

Ten of the 12 models reveal at least one significant marital status difference. In each instance, persons currently in a first marriage have higher levels of religious participation. Compared to respondents currently in a first marriage, those in a cohabiting relationship attend religious services and participate in congregational activities less frequently, are less likely to be church members, read religious materials less frequently, are less likely to have religious artifacts in their home, ascribe less importance to taking children to religious services, and report feeling less close to religious people. Both divorced and widowed respondents attend religious services less frequently than their currently married counterparts. Widowed respondents participate in congregational activities less frequently than currently married respondents. Remarried respondents are more likely than those currently in their first marriage to request prayer from others and to have religious artifacts in their homes. Never married respondents are more likely to not have a current denomination and are less likely to be church members. Further, they attend religious services, participate in congregational activities, read religious materials, and pray less frequently than persons currently in a first marriage. There are no significant differences between separated and currently married respondents.

We found three significant relationships between military service and religious participation. Respondents with military service report that they read religious materials, pray, and request prayer from others less frequently than their counterparts. Three significant relationships for history of incarceration and religious participation indicate that persons who were previously incarcerated attend religious services and participate in congregational activities less frequently and state that they do not feel as close to religious church-going people in comparison to their counterparts. Welfare history is significantly associated with one indicator of religious participation. Respondents who have never been on welfare are more likely to have religious paintings or other religious artifacts in their homes than respondents currently on welfare. Only one significant relationship between parental status and religious participation emerged—parents request prayer from others more frequently than their counterparts.

We found several significant denominational differences. As expected, respondents with no current denomination have higher levels of religious non-involvement and lower levels of religious participation. As compared to Baptists, Pentecostals attend religious services and participate in congregational activities more frequently, are more likely to be church members, read religious materials more frequently, request prayer from others more frequently, are more likely to have religious paintings or artifacts in their homes and attach greater importance to parents taking children to religious services.

Discussion

Our study provided a comprehensive examination of religious participation among African Americans. We examined a diverse set of organizational, non-organizational and subjective religious involvement measures. We further had the benefit of a large national sample which allowed the investigation of a full range of marital status categories as well as several novel independent variables. Our findings indicate a considerable degree of demographic variation in African American religious involvement.

Age was significant in 10 of the 12 regression models indicating that older respondents expressed higher levels of religious participation and lower levels of religious non-involvement than their younger counterparts. These findings are consistent with previous work from the National Survey of Black Americans (Taylor et al., 2004) as well as other surveys (Chatters et al., 1999) indicating a consistent pattern of positive age relationships for religious participation. Gender was similarly a strong and consistent correlate of religious participation; similar to previous findings for both African Americans and whites (Krause, 2006; Taylor et al., 2004, women reported significantly higher levels of religious involvement than men.

Two different significant interactions involving requests for prayer were noted. First, age was positively associated with requests for prayer among women, but not men. Second, rural Southern men requested prayers from others more frequently than urban southern men. This urban-rural difference does not occur among women. Collectively, these two findings indicate that the relationship between gender and requests for prayer is much more nuanced than the relationship between gender and other indicators of religious participation. These

questions can best be answered using qualitative research in both the rural and urban South, as well as with different age groups of men and women.

Marital status differences indicated that respondents who are currently in their first marriage reported higher levels of religious participation than their unmarried counterparts. This is consistent with previous research indicating that among both African Americans and non-Hispanic whites, married adults have significantly higher levels of religious participation than their non-married counterparts (Taylor, Chatters & Levin, 2004). Further, two significant differences between respondents who were remarried as compared to those in their first marriage, indicated that remarried respondents were more likely to request prayers from others and to have religious artifacts in the home. Consistent with previous research on African Americans (Chatters et al., 1999; Taylor, 1988), divorced respondents attended religious services less frequently than their currently married counterparts. Their lower levels of attendance may be due to stigma associated with divorce, especially given the value that churches place on marriage. Alternatively, married people may be more religiously involved because they share an investment in religious concerns and pursuits with their spouse. Further, social networks within the church may be organized around individuals who share common characteristics, such as being married. Rates of attendance may decrease following divorce due to the absence of spouse, the presence of broader church network influences that reinforce religious participation among married couples (e.g., church programs focusing on marital and family relationships) and/or the active withdrawal of church member support from individuals who are divorced. Questions of this sort, while interesting, can only be properly addressed with prospective data on religious involvement and marriage quality, duration and transitions.

Surprisingly little research has examined religious participation and cohabitation, despite the fact that cohabitating couples are a rapidly growing segment of the population. Levels of cohabitation have risen drastically in the last 25 years and the majority of current marriages are preceded by a period of cohabitation (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). Further, increasing numbers of middle aged and older adults are now in cohabitating relationships (King & Scott, 2005). We found that individuals in cohabiting relationships had significantly lower levels of religious participation than married respondents, especially for organizational participation (i.e., service attendance, church membership, other congregational activities). Noted marital trends (Bumpass & Lu, 2000) and marital status differences in religious participation, suggest that this is an area that deserves considerably more attention.

Southerners in general were significantly more likely than respondents from the Northeast, North Central and West regions to be religiously involved. These findings are consistent with prior work indicating higher levels of religiosity among Southerners among both African Americans (Taylor et al, 2004) and whites (Fichter & Maddox, 1965; Roof & McKinney, 1987; Stark & Bainbridge, 1985; Stump, 1986). There were only 3 significant differences between urban Southerners and rural Southerners. Rural Southerners were more likely to be official members of their church, read religious materials more frequently, and felt that religion was more important in their childhood home than their urban Southern counterparts. These findings are consistent with research using the National Survey of Black Americans which found that rural Black Americans were more likely to be church members,

(Taylor, 1988) and had higher levels of church participation (a combination of service attendance and congregational activities) (Ellison & Sherkat, 1995). An advantage of our analysis is that we examined twelve different indicators of religious participation. Comparatively speaking, although there were 3 significant Southern urban-rural differences, overall, age, gender and region were more consistent correlates of religious participation.

Our analysis examined welfare history, incarceration and military service—factors that are not typically explored in relation to African American religious participation. Only one significant difference emerged for welfare use; respondents who have never been on welfare were more likely than those currently on welfare to have religious paintings or other religious artifacts in their homes. In explanation for this finding, persons currently on welfare may have less discretionary funds to purchase religious items. Alternatively, other work (Bartlett, 1997) indicates that individuals who are not in poverty are more likely to own their own home, are less likely to frequently move households and consequently may in general have more household furnishings. Interestingly, there were no other differences in religious participation based on welfare status.

Previously incarcerated respondents attended religious services less frequently, participated in congregational activities less frequently and indicated that they did not feel as close to religious church-going people in comparison to their counterparts. No significant differences were found for other indicators of religious involvement. As a whole, the findings suggest that previously incarcerated respondents are disengaged from the organizational life of the church and do not endorse a religious self-identity (i.e., felt closeness to religious people). However, they are comparable to others with respect to private prayer, reading religious materials, requesting prayer from others, and perceived importance of religion in their childhood. In essence, they are no different from others in terms of religious sentiment and private devotional practice. In fact, this pattern of disengagement from organized religious participation is similar to that found for cohabiting respondents. Clearly, for both previously incarcerated as well as cohabiting adults, social stigma may inhibit level of organizational religious participation. Findings from qualitative research indicate that many church goers feel that churches are unwelcoming to many individuals (Taylor et al., 2004). Given current rates of cohabitation (Bumpass & Lu, 2000) and incarceration (NAACP, 2013) within African American communities, Black churches' responses to these groups are important areas for future research.

Finally, respondents who had served in the military indicated that they read religious materials less frequently, prayed less frequently, and requested prayer from others less frequently than their counterparts. In many ways this pattern of relationships is the reverse of that for previously incarcerated and cohabiting respondents. That is, military service is not associated with differences in organizational religiosity, but instead is related to lower levels of private religious participation. In interpreting these findings, it is important to acknowledge that the measure of military service used is rudimentary (i.e., any military service). More detailed measures that assess length of service, service branch, specific deployments and redeployments, and whether the individual served in combat may be helpful in understanding these relationships.

In conclusion, the findings from the present investigation provide the most systematic and comprehensive assessment of religious involvement among African Americans. As noted previously, the combination of a large, representative sample along with a broad array of sociodemographic factors and measures of religious involvement are particular strengths of this analysis. The findings in large part confirmed prior research regarding demographic correlates of religious involvement (i.e., age, gender, region, marital status). Importantly, the inclusion of diverse measures of organizational, non-organizational and subjective religious involvement provided the opportunity to explore the different relationships between sociodemographic correlates and religious measures reflecting public behaviors, private devotional practices and religious attitudes and identification.

Further, the inclusion of more comprehensive measures of life circumstances (i.e., cohabitation, military service, and incarceration) provided the opportunity to examine how these situations are related to religious involvement. Our findings suggest that, in some instances (i.e., incarceration and cohabitation), social processes within religious institutions associated with stigmatized statuses may inhibit organizational religious involvement. Just the opposite seems to be occurring for individuals who have a history of military service. Additional research on these and related issues (e.g., HIV/AIDS) is important for understanding how individual life circumstances are associated with participation in religious institutions, adoption of religious identities, and access to the varied material, spiritual and psychosocial resources that characterize African American churches.

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Table 1

Question Wording for the Indicators of Religious Participation

Variable	
Denomination	What is your current religion? Recoded into these categories: Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Pentecostal, Other Protestant (e.g., Lutheran, Presbyterian), Other Religion (e.g., Buddhist, Muslim), and None.
No Current Denomination	Contrasts respondents who do not have a current denomination with those that do.
Never Attend Religious Services	Other than for weddings or funerals, have you attended services at a church or other place of worship since you were 18 years old? (Yes, No)
Frequency of Church Attendance	How often do you usually attend religious services? Nearly everyday, at least once a week, a few times a month, a few times a year, less than once a year, never attended except for weddings or funerals since the age of 18.
Church Membership	Are you an official member of a church or other place of worship? (Yes, No)
Congregation Activities	Besides regular service, how often do you take part in other activities at your church? Would you say nearly everyday, at least once a week, a few times a month, a few times a year, or never?"
Reading Religious Materials	How often do you read religious books or other religious materials? Would you say nearly everyday, at least once a week, a few times a month, at least once a month, a few times a year or never?
Private Prayer	How often do you pray? Would you say nearly everyday, at least once a week, a few times a month, at least once a month, a few times a year or never?
Requests for Prayer	How often do you ask someone to pray for you? Would you say nearly everyday, at least once a week, a few times a month, at least once a month, a few times a year or never?
Religious Paintings in Home	Interviewer Observation (Yes, No)
Religion in Childhood	How important was religion in your home while you were growing up? Was it very important, fairly important, not too important, or not important at all?
Take Children to Services	How important is it for parents to send or take their children to religious services? Is it very important, fairly important, not too important, or not important at all?
Closeness to Religious People	How close do you feel in your ideas and feelings about things to religious church-going Black people? Do you feel very close, fairly close, not too close, or not close at all?

Table 2
 Demographic Characteristics of the Sample and Distribution of Study Variables

	%	N	Mean	S.D.	Range
Gender: Female	55.97	2299			
Age		3570	42.33	14.50	18–93
Family Income		3570	36832.66	33068.07	0–520000
Education		3570	12.43	2.23	0–17
Marital Status					
Married	24.00	707			
2 nd or more Marriages	8.91	253			
Partner (Cohabitation)	8.74	260			
Divorced	7.16	286			
Widowed	11.75	524			
Separated	7.90	353			
Never Married	31.55	1170			
Region					
Northeast	15.69	411			
Midwest	18.81	595			
Urban South	50.13	2080			
Rural South	6.11	250			
West	9.25	234			
Military Service: Served in Military	13.28	417			
Incarceration: Previously Incarcerated	16.70	531			
Welfare History					
Currently on welfare	6.81	271			
Past Recipient	18.87	715			
Never on Welfare	74.32	2517			
Parental Status: Parent	82.17	2992			
Denomination					
Baptist	49.08	1865			
Methodist	5.88	216			

	%	N	Mean	S.D.	Range
Pentecostal	8.62	304			
Catholic	5.96	202			
Other Protestant	17.70	566			
Other Religion	2.25	71			
No Religion	10.51	344			
No Current Denomination	10.51	344			
Never Attend Religious Services	8.57	267			
Service Attendance		3570	3.79	1.21	1-6
Church Membership		2990	2.12	1.59	1-5
Congregation Activities		2991	2.41	1.05	1-5
Reading Religious Materials		3569	4.18	1.44	1-6
Private Prayer		3567	5.60	0.95	1-6
Requests for Prayer		3564	3.71	1.65	1-6
Religious Paintings in Home	22.70	824			
Religion in Childhood		3565	3.60	0.64	1-4
Take Children to Services		3558	3.81	0.43	1-4
Closeness to Religious People		3508	3.40	0.64	1-4

Percents and N are presented for categorical variables and Means and Standard Deviations are presented for continuous variables. Percents are weighted and frequencies are un-weighted.

Table 3

Correlates of Organizational Religiosity

Predictors ^{1,2}	No Current Denomination		Never Attending Religious Services		Service Attendance		Church Membership		Congregation Activities	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Age	-0.03	0.01***	-0.04	0.01***	0.01	0.00***	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00**
Gender										
Female	-0.57	0.13***	-0.16	0.18	0.31	0.06***	0.61	0.12***	0.22	0.07**
Imputed Family Income	-0.01	0.01	-0.02	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.00
Years of Education	-0.09	0.04*	-0.15	0.04***	0.05	0.01***	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.01*
Region										
Northeast	0.73	0.20***	0.74	0.21***	-0.51	0.08***	-0.46	0.18*	-0.14	0.07*
North Central	0.69	0.18***	0.63	0.24**	-0.38	0.06***	-0.49	0.17***	-0.05	0.08
Rural South	0.12	0.35	0.12	0.42	-0.02	0.12	0.50	0.24*	0.05	0.07
West	0.33	0.27	0.21	0.16	-0.38	0.10***	-0.66	0.36	-0.11	0.10
Marital Status										
2nd or more Marriages	-0.06	0.34	0.53	0.31	0.08	0.10	-0.35	0.22	-0.04	0.11
Partner	0.18	0.24	0.42	0.36	-0.46	0.09***	-1.07	0.23***	-0.46	0.10***
Divorced	0.61	0.32	0.16	0.35	-0.35	0.07***	-0.26	0.23	-0.20	0.11
Widowed	0.31	0.35	0.38	0.31	-0.21	0.08*	-0.45	0.23	-0.24	0.10*
Separated	-0.64	0.59	-0.20	0.61	-0.01	0.08	0.49	0.35	-0.10	0.13
Never Married	0.62	0.29*	0.56	0.29	-0.29	0.07***	-0.58	0.20***	-0.31	0.09**
Military Service	0.25	0.27	0.47	0.31	-0.15	0.10	0.08	0.20	-0.02	0.10
Incarceration	-0.04	0.18	0.18	0.21	-0.23	0.07**	-0.04	0.17	-0.20	0.07**
Welfare History										
Past Recipient	-0.15	0.35	-0.26	0.33	0.15	0.11	-0.03	0.19	-0.12	0.10
Never on Welfare	0.05	0.29	0.01	0.30	0.11	0.09	0.15	0.19	0.01	0.09
Parental Status										
Parent	-0.41	0.21	-0.33	0.20	0.06	0.07	0.16	0.16	-0.03	0.08
Denomination										

Predictors ^{1,2}	No Current Denomination		Never Attending Religious Services		Service Attendance		Church Membership		Congregation Activities	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Methodist	-	-	-0.23	0.44	0.12	0.10	-0.08	0.21	-0.05	0.09
Pentecostal	-	-	-0.54	0.40	0.61	0.08***	0.94	0.23***	0.61	0.07***
Catholic	-	-	0.09	0.36	0.06	0.16	0.08	0.19	-0.14	0.10
Other Protestant	-	-	-0.32	0.24	0.37	0.07***	0.08	0.13	0.27	0.08**
Other Religion	-	-	-0.11	0.44	0.13	0.17	-0.08	0.28	0.25	0.17
No Religion	-	-	0.83	0.18***	-0.87	0.09***	-1.54	0.54***	-0.19	0.11
Constant	0.06	0.68	0.51	0.79	2.80	0.22***	-0.08	0.59	1.80	0.28***
F	-	-	-	-	88.24***	-	-	-	38.65***	-
Chi-Square	196.93***	-	226.05***	-	-	-	303.40***	-	-	-
R²	0.05	-	0.06	-	0.21	-	0.10	-	0.09	-
N	3486	-	3485	-	3486	-	2918	-	2919	-

¹ Several independent variables are represented by dummy variables: Gender, 0 = female, 1 = male; Marital Status, married is the excluded category; Region, Urban South is the excluded category; Welfare History, Currently on Welfare is the excluded category; Parental Status, 0 = Non-Parent, 1 = Parent; Denomination, Baptist is the excluded category.

² The analysis for No Current Denomination, Never Attending Religious Services and Church Membership are logistic regressions

* p < .05;

** p < .01;

*** p < .001

Table 4

Correlates of Non-Organizational Religious Participation

Predictors ^{1,2}	Read Religious Materials		Private Prayer		Requests for Prayer		Requests for Prayer (With Interactions)		Religious Paintings in Home	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Age	0.01	0.00 ^{***}	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.01	0.00 [*]	0.01	0.00 [*]
Gender										
Female	0.45	0.07 ^{***}	0.23	0.06 ^{***}	0.24	0.08 ^{**}	-0.26	0.25	0.28	0.14 [*]
Imputed Family Income	-0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.01	0.00 [*]	-0.01	0.00 [*]	-0.02	0.01
Years of Education	0.09	0.01 ^{***}	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.02
Region										
Northeast	-0.28	0.09 ^{**}	-0.24	0.09 [*]	-0.20	0.17	-0.10	0.23	-0.81	0.19 ^{***}
North Central	-0.26	0.07 ^{***}	-0.08	0.06	-0.14	0.09	-0.05	0.13	-1.26	0.21 ^{***}
Rural South	0.18	0.07 [*]	0.08	0.06	0.00	0.16	-0.30	0.10 ^{**}	0.43	0.29
West	-0.29	0.09 ^{**}	0.03	0.10	-0.41	0.15 [*]	-0.36	0.33	-0.35	0.22
Marital Status										
2nd or more Marriages	0.14	0.15	-0.01	0.08	0.47	0.16 ^{***}	0.48	0.15 ^{**}	0.38	0.17 [*]
Partner	-0.48	0.11 ^{***}	-0.14	0.09	0.08	0.14	0.08	0.14	-0.49	0.21 [*]
Divorced	-0.10	0.12	0.05	0.09	0.24	0.16	0.23	0.16	0.00	0.18
Widowed	-0.11	0.08	-0.02	0.08	-0.09	0.11	-0.10	0.11	0.00	0.21
Separated	0.06	0.12	0.07	0.07	0.05	0.16	-0.06	0.15	0.09	0.18
Never Married	-0.37	0.10 ^{***}	-0.15	0.05 ^{**}	0.01	0.12	0.02	0.11	0.06	0.16
Military Service	-0.18	0.09 [*]	-0.24	0.10 [*]	-0.51	0.12 ^{***}	-0.43	0.14 ^{**}	-0.06	0.18
Incarceration	-0.08	0.08	-0.16	0.08	-0.11	0.11	-0.11	0.11	-0.04	0.17
Welfare History										
Past Recipient	-0.04	0.14	-0.11	0.09	-0.12	0.15	-0.13	0.15	0.21	0.18
Never on Welfare	0.01	0.13	-0.06	0.08	-0.15	0.14	-0.18	0.15	0.45	0.19 [*]
Parental Status										
Parent	0.14	0.09	0.12	0.07	0.27	0.09 ^{**}	0.30	0.09 ^{**}	-0.01	0.19
Denomination										

Predictors ^{1,2}	Read Religious Materials		Private Prayer		Requests for Prayer		Requests for Prayer (With Interactions)		Religious Paintings in Home	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Methodist	-0.11	0.14	-0.06	0.09	-0.07	0.15	-0.07	0.15	0.24	0.23
Pentecostal	0.57	0.11***	0.10	0.06	0.48	0.12***	0.49	0.12***	0.55	0.15***
Catholic	0.03	0.11	-0.00	0.10	0.12	0.15	0.11	0.16	0.37	0.22
Other Protestant	0.45	0.10***	0.15	0.05**	-0.11	0.09	-0.12	0.09	0.22	0.15
Other Religion	0.70	0.18***	0.18	0.11	-0.21	0.26	-0.22	0.25	0.37	0.36
No Religion	-0.72	0.13***	-0.80	0.11***	-0.68	0.12***	-0.70	0.13***	-0.06	0.18
Gender X Age										
Female x Age	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.01	0.01*	-	-
Gender X Region										
Female x Northeast	-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.17	0.21	-	-
Female x North Central	-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.15	0.15	-	-
Female x Rural South	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.49	0.20*	-	-
Female x West	-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.10	0.49	-	-
Constant	2.39	0.25***	5.50	0.15***	3.68	0.32***	4.00	0.34***	-2.11	0.50***
F	101.8***		45.64***		14.06***		100.62***		-	
Chi-Square	-		-		-		-		185.11***	
R²	0.17		0.14		0.06		0.07		0.05	
N	3486		3484		3482		3482		3302	

¹ Several independent variables are represented by dummy variables. Gender, 0 = female, 1 = male; Marital Status, married is the excluded category; Region, Urban South is the excluded category; Welfare History, Currently on Welfare is the excluded category; Parental Status, 0 = Non-Parent, 1 = Parent; Denomination, Baptist is the excluded category; Gender x Age, Female x Age is the excluded category; Gender X Region, female x urban south and male x all regions are excluded categories.

² The analysis for Religious Paintings in the Home is logistic regression.

* p < .05;

** p < .01;

*** p < .001

Table 5

Correlates of Subjective Religiosity and Religiosity Identity

Predictors/ Age Gender Female Imputed Family Income Years of Education Region Northeast North Central Rural South West Marital Status 2nd or more Marriages Partner Divorced Widowed Separated Never Married Military Service Incarceration Welfare History Past Recipient Never on Welfare Parental Status Parent Denomination Methodist	Religion in Childhood		Take Children to Services		Closeness to Religious People	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
	0.00	0.00****	0.00	0.00****	0.00	0.00****
	-0.02	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.03
	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00	-0.02	0.00*
	-0.06	0.03	-0.11	0.03****	-0.21	0.03****
	-0.09	0.04*	-0.08	0.02**	-0.11	0.04*
	0.10	0.04*	0.01	0.05	0.05	0.06
	-0.07	0.04	-0.08	0.02****	-0.14	0.05**
	-0.03	0.04	-0.02	0.03	-0.01	0.06
	-0.05	0.05	-0.10	0.04*	-0.12	0.06*
	0.07	0.05	-0.03	0.03	0.02	0.06
	0.05	0.04	-0.03	0.03	-0.08	0.04
	-0.03	0.05	-0.05	0.04	-0.07	0.07
	-0.06	0.04	-0.06	0.03	-0.04	0.04
	-0.02	0.04	-0.03	0.03	-0.03	0.05
	0.02	0.05	-0.04	0.03	-0.11	0.04**
	-0.09	0.07	-0.03	0.04	-0.02	0.04
	0.01	0.05	-0.05	0.04	-0.03	0.05
	-0.02	0.05	0.03	0.03	0.01	0.05
	-0.01	0.06	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.04

Predictors [/]	Religion in Childhood		Take Children to Services		Closeness to Religious People	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Pentecostal	-0.01	0.05	0.08	0.03*	0.07	0.05
Catholic	-0.03	0.07	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.06
Other Protestant	-0.19	0.04***	0.03	0.03	-0.08	0.03*
Other Religion	0.03	0.07	0.09	0.04*	-0.19	0.09*
No Religion	-0.43	0.06***	-0.35	0.05***	-0.37	0.05***
Constant	3.40	0.14***	3.81	0.09***	3.45	0.12***
F	36.88***		51.52***		64.22***	
R²	0.08		0.11		0.08	
N	3484		3478		3462	

[/] Several independent variables are represented by dummy variables. Gender, 0 = female, 1 = male; Marital Status, married is the excluded category; Region, Urban South is the excluded category; Welfare History, Currently on Welfare is the excluded category; Parental Status, 0 = Non-Parent, 1 = Parent; Denomination, Baptist is the excluded category.

* p < .05;

** p < .01;

*** p < .001