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Religious Media Use Among African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and Non-Hispanic Whites:

Findings from the National Survey of American Life

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the correlates of watching religious television programs and listening to religious radio programs. Data are taken from the National Survey of American Life, a nationally representative study of African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and non-Hispanic Whites. Several significant findings were noted. Both African Americans and Black Caribbeans watched religious television programs and listened to religious radio programs significantly more frequently than non-Hispanic whites. These differences in electronic religious media consumption were particularly large, especially listening to religious radio programming. Among African Americans and Black Caribbeans, several significant demographic differences in frequency of consuming religious programming (e.g., age, gender, region, marital status, immigration status) emerged. Lastly, our analysis found that consuming electronic religious programming did not substitute for attending church service but, instead, complemented weekly service attendance.

Keywords

West Indian; Black church; Religious involvement; Religious radio; Religious television

For many adults, watching or listening to religious broadcasts are integral components of their weekly religious observance. There are more than 200 television stations and 1,300 radio stations that exclusively have religious content. An estimated 10 to 20 million people regularly watch/listen to religious programs, while some sources have estimated this audience to be as large as 40 million (Barna 1991; Hays et al. 1998; Hoover 1988). The focus and content of religious programming on issues such as financial difficulties,

unemployment, health problems, and death and dying are particularly salient for African American adults, elderly adults, and those who are experiencing serious personal problems (death of a loved one, unemployment, physical illness). In addition, even though many individuals watch and listen to these programs alone in their homes, they perceive themselves as part of a community of like-minded believers (Alexander 1994; Hays et al. 1998).

Broadcast religious media has had a long and noteworthy history in African American communities. Beginning in the late 1920s, several notable individuals have played a prominent role in African American religious life through their radio or television ministries. These figures include Elder Solomon Lightfoot Michaux, Father Divine, Rev. Ike, and Rev. C. L. Franklin. Currently, televangelists such as Bishop T. D. Jakes, Bishop Eddie Long, and Pastor Creflo Dollar have well-known and influential ministries among the general African American population (Walton 2009). Despite the prominent place of broadcast ministries among African Americans, little research specifically focuses on religious media use within this group. Although Walton's (2009) work provides important sociohistorical and theological perspectives on Black televangelism, to date, there have been no largescale survey based investigations of religious media use within the broader African American population.

The goal of this study is to examine the frequency and sociodemographic correlates of watching religious television programming and listening to religious radio programming using data from the National Survey of American Life (NSAL) which is a national sample of African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and non-Hispanic Whites. Although there is a limited amount of research on religious media use among African Americans, we should note that this is the first in-depth analysis of this issue among Black Caribbeans. This paper begins with a review of the literature on African American religious participation, followed by research on religious participation among Black Caribbeans. Next, is a discussion of the correlates of religious media use with a specific focus on African Americans and Black Caribbeans. The section concludes with a short discussion of broadcast religious media as a potential substitute for or complement to religious service attendance.

African American Religious Participation

A rich tradition of historical and contemporary research documents the important and multifaceted roles that religion and religious institutions have played in the lives of African Americans (Billingsley 1999; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Taylor et al. 2004). The Black Church is recognized as one of the two most significant institutions (along with the extended family) that have been instrumental in supporting the development and maintenance of Black communities (Hill 1972). Billingsley's (1999) in-depth ethnographic case study of Black churches examines their historic and contemporary roles in addressing the economic, social, political, and civic challenges facing their respective communities. Contemporary Black churches provide a range of community outreach programs that focus on discrete populations (e.g., elderly, children, and youth, families) and address various social welfare and health concerns (e.g., housing, employment, child care, medical screening). Billingsley's work, along with others (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Taylor et al. 2004)

demonstrates how the Black Church has functioned to ensure the well-being of individuals and families through the provision of tangible assistance, the development and implementation of specialized outreach programs, and the enhancement of the personal and social resources (i.e., social networks and contacts, coping strategies) needed to deal with life problems.

Research has also shown that African Americans have high levels of religious participation, including high levels of organizational (e.g., religious service attendance, membership), nonorganizational (e.g., frequency of prayer, reading religious materials, watching religious television broadcasts), and subjective religious involvement (e.g., attitudes about the importance of religion, self-rated religiosity) (Krause 2006; Taylor et al. 2004). Religion is particularly salient for specific segments within the African American population, such as older persons, women, and residents of the South. Religious involvement has been shown to be particularly beneficial for African Americans because it is associated with positive psychological outcomes, such as higher levels of well-being and lower rates of depression and depressive symptoms (Chatters et al. 2008a; Taylor et al. 2004).

Black Caribbean Religious Participation

Despite their long-standing presence in the U.S., there is relatively little systematic information concerning the life circumstances of Caribbean Blacks, including information pertinent to religious concerns. This is the case for several reasons. First, because race is of paramount significance in determining social location and status in American society, Caribbean Blacks are routinely subsumed under the category of black race (Foner 2005; Vickerman 2001a, b; Waters 1999). Ethnic differences within the black racial category are ignored, thus essentially rendering Caribbean Blacks “invisible.” Second, available information regarding Black Caribbeans is largely derived from ethnographic studies of specific Caribbean populations located in cities in the Northeast and Southeast U.S. that have high proportions of Black Caribbeans (e.g., New York, Miami) (Stepick et al. 2009). Although these studies provide rich and detailed information, they have limited representation with respect to overall population diversity and geographic locale. Finally, investigations of religious involvement among Black Caribbeans often focus on relatively small religious groups (e.g., Spiritual Baptists, Vincentian Converted), while ignoring the larger mainstream religious denominations to which the majority of Black Caribbeans belong (e.g., Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal) (Zane 1999).

With the advent of the NSAL, several recent studies have begun to examine sociodemographic and denominational correlates of religious involvement within this group. Similar to African Americans, Black Caribbeans are strongly invested in religious behaviors and concerns. Both groups indicate high levels of religiosity and spirituality (Chatters et al. 2008c; Taylor et al. 2009) and heavily rely upon religion to cope with personal problems (Chatters et al. 2008b). Both African Americans and Black Caribbeans have higher levels of religious involvement than non-Hispanic Whites, indicating that race differences (i.e., Black–White) are more important for understanding religious involvement than are ethnic differences (i.e., African American–Black Caribbean) (Chatters et al. 2009). Further, the two groups demonstrate both similarities and differences in the pattern of findings (Chatters et

al. 2008c; Taylor et al. 2009). For example, similar to African Americans, age, gender, and marital status are important correlates of religious involvement for Black Caribbeans. However, due to differences in denominational profiles, Black Caribbeans have larger numbers of Catholics, Episcopalians, and Pentecostals. Further, factors such as immigration status and country of origin which are unique to the Black Caribbean population emerge as significant predictors of religious involvement for this group.

Religious Media Use

Information on Black Americans' (both African Americans and Black Caribbeans) consumption of religious television programs is extremely limited. However, general information about television usage informs this analysis. First, almost all Americans have at least one television and the average American household has almost three televisions. With regard to viewership, Americans averaged more than 31 h of television viewing per week in 2009 (Nielsen 2009a, b).

Black Americans as a group watch 30–40% more television than the rest of the population (Steadman 2005). Among Black Americans, older adults and women have higher levels of viewing television shows. The overall viewing patterns of Black Americans and Whites are extremely different. The top ten prime time shows for Black Americans and the top ten prime time shows for Whites do not have much overlap except for a sports show like Monday Night Football. The tops rated shows for Black Americans tend to be black-oriented situation comedies such as “Girlfriends” and the “Steve Harvey” show. However, these shows have a relatively small white audience (see Steadman 2005).

Somewhat more information is available about listening patterns for religious radio programs. According to data by Arbitron, in 2007 there were 304 black gospel radio stations with an audience of nearly 2.9 million African Americans per week (Arbitron 2008a). Among Black Americans, the market share for gospel radio stations was 5.9% which is the fourth most popular radio format for this population (Arbitron 2008a). Black Americans in the South were more likely to listen to gospel stations than those in any other region. Listening to gospel stations was higher during the weekends than on weekdays. Nearly 1.2% of Black Americans per week also listened to Religious stations that had a mostly white Religious format (Contemporary Christian, Southern Baptist). Stations with a white Religious format had a 2.1% market share of Black American listeners. It is important to note that with 993 stations there are three times as many stations with a Religious format than those with a gospel format. Consequently, there are many Blacks who live in areas where there are not any gospel stations available (e.g., New England, Northwest) and only have access to Religious format stations.

Similar to television viewing, patterns of radio listening differ by race. Siegelman and Waldfogel's (2001) analysis of 1997 Arbitron radio audience data found sharply different programming preferences for Blacks and Whites. In particular, they found that black-targeted radio formats attract 61% of all Black listeners, but only about 3% of White listeners.

Local radio programming is also particularly important to Black Caribbeans. There are numerous stations that cater to the needs of local populations including those serving a general Caribbean audience, as well as Jamaican and French Haitian stations. Many of these are low-power FM (LPFM) local community stations that cater to ethnic enclaves, and are required to broadcast a minimum of 8 hours of local programming each day. The number and diversity of Caribbean radio stations is readily apparent when doing an Internet search on this issue.

Religious Television and Radio: Complement or Substitute for Service Attendance

The growth of electronic religious broadcasts raises questions about the degree to which electronic religious media complements or competes with weekly religious service attendance and participation in local churches. Many religious leaders fear that the rise of television ministries in particular will lead to less frequent church attendance (Gaddy and Pritchard 1985). Their interest stems from a concern for both church membership rates, as well as potential revenue losses from smaller churches. Research in this area is inconclusive with some work indicating that religious television does not compete with church attendance (Armstrong 1979), whereas other research indicates that, particularly among Protestants, watching television programs may substitute for going to church (Gaddy and Pritchard 1985).

Focus of the Present Study

The present study examines race and ethnic differences in frequency of watching religious television programs and listening to religious radio programs among African Americans, non-Hispanic Whites, and Caribbean Blacks. First, the analysis examines the degree to which the three race/ethnic groups are similar or different with respect to reports of electronic religious media consumption (controlling for other relevant sociodemographic and denominational factors). Next, using separate regression analyses for African Americans and Caribbean Blacks, we examine the demographic (i.e., age, gender, socioeconomic status) and denominational correlates of watching and listening to religious programming. For Caribbean Blacks only, we also examine immigration status and country of origin as predictors. Lastly, we investigate whether consuming electronic religious television and radio programs substitutes or complements weekly religious service attendance.

The present investigation has several advantages over previous research. First, the majority of research on the correlates of religious participation among African Americans utilized the first wave of the National Survey of Black Americans which is now more than 25 years old. This analysis provides the opportunity to explore these issues using a much expanded dataset and to explore ethnic group, as well as demographic differences. Second, 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 limited information on many of the basic issues regarding religious participation 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 religious electronic media use 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 disciplines like epidemiology, but has been rarely utilized in the area of religion and many other fields which utilize national and community based probability samples.

Methods

Sample

The NSAL: Coping with Stress in the 21st Century was collected by the Program for Research on Black Americans at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. The fieldwork 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 multistage 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 NSAL includes the first major probability sample of Black Caribbeans. For the purposes of this study, Black Caribbeans 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). 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 Black Caribbean sample if they: (1) answered affirmatively when asked if they were of West Indian or Caribbean descent, (2) said they were from a country included on a list of Caribbean area countries presented by the interviewers, or (3) indicated that their parents or grandparents were born in a Caribbean area country.

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, 891 non-Hispanic Whites, and 1,621 Blacks of Caribbean descent. The overall response rate was 72.3%. Response rates for individual subgroups were 70.7% for African Americans, 77.7% for Black Caribbeans, and 69.7% for non-Hispanic Whites. 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—Two indicators of use of broadcast media are used. One item assesses frequency of watching religious television programs and asks: “How often do you watch religious programs on TV?” The second variable assesses frequency of listening to religious programs on the radio and asks: “How often do you listen to religious programs on the radio?” Respondents were asked whether they engaged in these activities nearly everyday, at least once a week, a few times a month, at least once a month, a few times a year, or never. Scores for these variables ranged from 6 for nearly everyday to 1 for never.

Independent Variables—Sociodemographic variables (i.e., race/ethnicity, age, gender, family income, education, marital status, region, and functional status) and denomination affiliation are utilized as independent variables. Missing data for household income were imputed for 773 cases (12.7% of the NSAL sample). Missing data for education were imputed for 74 cases. Imputations were done 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 has been divided by 5,000 in order to increase effect sizes and provide a better understanding of the net impact of income on the dependent variables.

Functional status was measured using a modified version of the World Health Organization Disability Assessment Schedule (WHO-DASII) in which participants were asked about their functional ability in the past 30 days with respect to six domains: cognitive (e.g., concentration and memory), being out of role, self-care (e.g., washing, dressing), mobility, social life (e.g., conversing and maintaining friendships), and family burden. Items assessed the number of days of impairment in each domain weighted by self-assessed difficulty in performing activities. Scores in each of the six domains were transformed to range from zero (no impairment) to one (complete impairment). In this study, we summed scores in each of the domains ($\alpha = 0.70$). This scale provides a profile of functioning (i.e., activity limitations and participation restrictions) experienced by individuals due to a physical or mental illness.

Denomination is measured by the question: “What is your current religion?” More than 35 different denominations were reported. For analysis purposes this variable was recoded into nine categories: Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostal, Catholic, Episcopalian, Seventh Day Adventist, Other Protestant (e.g., Lutheran, Presbyterian), Other Religions (e.g., Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim), 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 corresponding to respondents who were: (1) born in the United States, (2) immigrated to the United States 0–5 years ago, (3) immigrated to the United States 6–10 years ago, (4) immigrated to the United States 11–20 years ago, and (5) immigrated to the United States more than 20 years ago. Finally, respondents identified more than 25 different countries of origin. Consistent with research on the Caribbean region, country of origin was categorized based upon historical and anthropological designations of the Caribbean as Anglophone (English speaking),

Hispanophone (Spanish speaking), and Francophone (French Speaking) (see Gossai and Murrell 2000; Zane 1999). Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Other English-speaking countries (e.g., Barbados) represent the Anglophile 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 and 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, bivariate analysis of race/ethnic differences in the use of religious media are presented. The percentages are weighted based on the sample's race-adjusted weight measure. Second, multivariate analyses of the two indicators of media use 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 subanalyses is to maximize the demographic variation among these two populations. Consequently, the categories of several independent variables are tailored to the demographic distribution of the African American and Black Caribbean populations. For example, there are four categories of region for African Americans (Northeast, North Central, South, West) and two categories for Black Caribbeans (Northeast, Other). These region 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 for these religious affiliations. As mentioned previously, the analyses for Black Caribbeans include two Caribbean-specific variables—immigration status and country of origin. Lastly, we conducted bivariate and multivariate analysis of watching religious programming and listening to religious radio programming on frequency of service attendance.

This analysis tests whether the consumption of religious media complements or substitutes for weekly service attendance. The bivariate analysis uses the Rao–Scott chi-square (χ^2), which is a complex design-corrected measure of association. Analytic tests (skewness and kurtosis) indicated that linear regression could be appropriately used with these two independent variables. The analyses were conducted using SAS 9.13. 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

Table 1 presents the distribution of the sociodemographic and religious denomination variables for the three groups. Table 2 presents the bivariate analysis of race and ethnic differences in the frequency of use of religious media. The results indicate that both African Americans and Black Caribbeans are more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to indicate that they consume religious media. For instance, 15.2% of African Americans, 12.8% of Black Caribbeans, and 4.2% of non-Hispanic Whites report watching religious television nearly everyday. Conversely, 44.6% of non-Hispanic Whites, compared to only 19.1% of Black Caribbeans and 16.3% of African Americans indicate that they never watch religious programming on television (Table 2). Similarly, even larger racial and ethnic differences are seen in listening to religious radio programs. Roughly one out of five African Americans (22.4%) and Black Caribbeans (18.1%) indicate that they listen to religious radio programming nearly everyday, compared to only one out of ten non-Hispanic Whites (9.3%).

Table 3 provides the regression coefficients for the effects of race/ethnicity on the frequency of watching religious television programs and frequency of listening to religious radio programs, 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.

Frequency of Watching Religious Television Programming

Both African Americans and Black Caribbeans report a significantly greater frequency of watching religious television programs than non-Hispanic Whites (Table 3). Similarly, there is no significant difference between African Americans and Black Caribbeans in reports of the frequency of watching religious television programs. Table 4 presents the coefficients for the regression of demographic and denominational factors on the frequency of watching religious television programs for African Americans and Black Caribbeans. Results for African Americans indicate that age, gender, marital status, region, and denomination are all significantly related to frequency of watching religious television programs. Older African Americans and women watched religious television more often than their counterparts. Never married respondents watched religious television less frequently than their married counterparts. Regional differences were evident with Southerners watching religious television more frequently than those who resided in the Northeast, North Central, and West. Lastly, denominational differences were evident with Pentecostals watching religious television more frequently than Baptists, and respondents who were other Protestant, other religions and not affiliated watching religious television less frequently.

Among Black Caribbeans, age, education, marital status, denomination, and country of origin were significantly associated with frequency of watching religious television programming (Table 4). Age was positively associated and education was negatively associated with frequency of watching religious television. Divorced Black Caribbeans watched religious television more frequently than their married counterparts. Black

Caribbeans who are Baptists watched religious television more frequently than Catholics, Episcopalians, Seventh Day Adventists, those with other religions, and those with no religious affiliation. Black Caribbeans from Haiti and Spanish speaking countries watched religious television more frequently than their Jamaican counterparts.

Frequency of Listening to Religious Radio Programming

The regression analysis in Table 3 indicates that both African Americans and Black Caribbeans listened to religious radio programs more frequently than non-Hispanic Whites. However, there was no significant difference between African Americans and Black Caribbeans in listening to religious radio programs. Table 4 presents the analysis of listening to religious radio programming among African Americans. Gender, marital status, region, and denomination were all significantly associated with the dependent variable. African American women listened to religious radio programs more frequently than African American men. Among the marital status categories, African Americans who are married listen to religious radio programs more frequently than cohabiting, widowed, and never married respondents. Southerners listened to religious radio broadcasts more frequently than residents of the Northeast, North Central, and West regions. Lastly, Baptists listened to religious radio programs more frequently than Catholics, other Protestants, other religions, and those with no religious affiliation.

Table 4 also presents the regression equation of frequency of listening to religious programming on radio for Black Caribbeans. Age, denomination, and immigration status were significantly associated with this dependent variable. Age was positively associated with listening to religious radio programs. Pentecostals listened to religious radio more frequently than Baptists, but Baptists listened more frequently than Catholics, Episcopalians, and those with no religious affiliation. Immigration status was also significant with Black Caribbean who immigrated to the United States 0–5 years ago, 6–10 years ago, and more than 21 years ago all listening to religious radio programs more frequently than native-born Black Caribbeans.

Religious Media and Church Attendance

Table 5 presents data which tests whether watching or listening to religious media is a substitute or complement to religious service attendance. As evident in this table, the percentage of respondents who indicate that they attend religious services less than once per year, but watch or listen to religious programming at least once per week is very small. In particular, only 4.32% of African Americans, 3.91% of Black Caribbeans, and 2.30% of non-Hispanic Whites indicate that they attend religious services less than once per year, but they watch religious television programs at least once per week. Similar small percentages are noted for those who attend religious services less than once per year, but listen to religious radio programs at least once per week (4.74% of African Americans, 4.18% of Black Caribbeans, and 0.88% of non-Hispanic Whites).

Table 6 presents the multivariate analysis of watching or listening to religious media on the frequency of service attendance. This analysis shows that for African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and the total sample both watching religious television programs and listening

to religious radio programs were significantly and positively associated with the frequency of service attendance.

Discussion

This analysis found that overall the use of religious media is very high among African Americans and to a lesser degree Black Caribbeans. Both groups watched religious television programs and listened to religious radio programs on a frequent basis. The differences between Blacks (both African Americans and Caribbean Blacks) and non-Hispanic Whites in electronic religious media consumption are particularly noteworthy and are some of the largest differences found in the literature on religious involvement. These differences were particularly evident when examining the percentage distributions in which more than 49.46% of African Americans and 36.68% of Caribbean Blacks listened to religious programs on the radio nearly everyday and at least once a week, as compared to only 15.82% of non-Hispanic White Americans—a more than twofold difference. Conversely, six out of ten non-Hispanic Whites (62.07%) reported that they never listened to religious programs on the radio, compared to 29.66% of Caribbean Blacks and 25.44% of African Americans. Percentage differences for watching religious television programs showed a similar pattern, but were not as striking. The race/ethnic differences observed in Table 5 are equally dramatic. For instance, one quarter of African Americans (25.25%) both attend religious services and listen to religious radio at least once per week, compared to only 11.08% of non-Hispanic Whites. Conversely, one out of five non-Hispanic Whites attend religious services less than once per year and never listen to religious television (20.18%) or radio programs (23.53%).

The finding that African Americans listen to/watch religious programming more frequently than non-Hispanic Whites is consistent with other research (Hays et al. 1998; Taylor et al. 1996). However, because these studies combined religious television and radio programs into a single item, separate information for the two formats was indistinguishable. By disaggregating religious television and radio, the present findings specifically revealed important differences in rates of listening to religious radio programs.

One potential explanation for this difference is that, overall, African Americans and Black Caribbeans watch television and listen to the radio more frequently than non-Hispanic Whites. This is consistent with research which indicates that overall Black adults spend more hours a day viewing television and listening to the radio than non-Hispanic Whites (Arbitron 2003, 2008b; Steadman 2005). The significant race differences in levels of watching/listening to religious programs are in effect artifacts associated with generally higher use of television and radio among Black Americans. However, this is not an entirely adequate explanation given that the race differences in the use of religious media were so pronounced.

The present findings are more consistent with research that shows high levels of religiosity among African Americans and Black Caribbeans. Research consistently indicates that African Americans have significantly higher rates of religiosity than non-Hispanic Whites. This significant difference has been found across numerous national surveys and is

consistent across various measures of religiosity including service attendance, membership, reading religious materials, frequency of prayer, self-rated religiosity, and the belief that religion is very important in their own life (Chatters et al. 2009; Krause and Chatters 2005; Levin et al. 1994; Taylor et al. 1996). Further, race differentials are consistent across various age groups such that Black adolescents (Smith et al. 2002), adults (Taylor et al. 1996), and elderly persons (Levin et al. 1994; Krause 2006, 2010; Krause and Chatters 2005; Taylor et al. 2007), all demonstrate higher levels of religious involvement than do their respective white age counterparts. Like the current study, these differences persist even when controlling for known correlates of religious involvement such as gender, socioeconomic status, region, and denominational affiliation.

Recent research on the NSAL data also indicates that Black Caribbeans have higher levels of religiosity than non-Hispanic Whites. Consistent with the findings of the present study, Black Caribbeans in the United States have higher levels of religiosity (Chatters et al. 2009), spirituality (Chatters et al. 2008c), and are more likely to use religion as a means of coping than non-Hispanic Whites (Chatters et al. 2008b). Despite the vast differences in cultural backgrounds, Black Caribbeans and African Americans have comparable levels of religiosity. Collectively, these findings strongly suggest that the higher levels of consuming electronic religious media among Black Caribbeans and African Americans as compared to non-Hispanic Whites are due to their overall higher levels of religiosity and spirituality.

The high levels of religious media use among African Americans and Black Caribbeans is reflective of the fact that religion is a major and fundamental feature of the respective cultures of these two groups. For instance, many African American radio stations that have a Rhythm and Blues or Urban Contemporary format may play several black gospel songs during the course of a day. These stations typically have a religious format from roughly 5:00 A.M. to 12:00 noon on Sunday mornings. Further, R&B stations may devote 1–3 hours per day to religious music and content. Similarly, it is not unusual to hear religious music in African American barbershops and beauty parlors. Even high schools and colleges that have only a small percentage of African American students will have a black gospel choir. Additionally, it is not unusual for black theater productions to feature gospel music.

Ethnographic work on both African American and Black Caribbean indicates how religion is an integral part of their culture. Pattillo-McCoy (1998) demonstrates how interaction styles within Black churches of call-and-response, prayer, and Christian imagery provided the cultural “tool-kit” that was used in facilitating local activism among residents of an African American community in Chicago. Additionally, for many Black Caribbean immigrants religion is central to their life history and immigration experience (Bashi 2007; Stepick 1998; Stepick et al. 2009).

This analysis revealed several notable demographic differences in the use of electronic media for African Americans and Black Caribbeans. Many of these differences are consistent with previous research on religious involvement (e.g., age, gender, region) and have been discussed in great detail elsewhere (see Chatters et al. 2008b, c; Taylor et al. 2009). Accordingly, due to space constraints, the demographic differences will be discussed briefly.

Consistent with previous research on age differences in religious participation, age was positively associated with watching/listening to religious programs in both groups. Although African American women watched/listened to religious programming more frequently than African American men, this gender difference was not as evident among Black Caribbeans. Previous research has shown that although gender is consistently associated with religious participation among African Americans, these differences are still evident but not as consistent among Black Caribbeans (see Taylor et al., in press). One of the more consistent findings in the literature is that married adults have higher levels of religious participation than unmarried adults. In our analysis, this was the case among African Americans, especially with regard to listening to religious radio programs. This was not the case among Black Caribbeans where the only significant marital status difference indicated that divorced respondents watched religious television programming more frequently. This could be an example of how religious television may substitute for attending religious services. Divorced Black Caribbeans may choose not attend religious services because of the stigma attached to being divorced. However, they may choose to watch religious television broadcasts instead.

Among African Americans, region was significantly associated with forms of religious media consumption. Southerners watched/listened to religious programming more frequently than residents of other regions. These findings are consistent with previous research on African American religious participation and the notion of the South being the “Bible Belt” (see Taylor et al. 2004). Denominational differences were evident among African Americans with Pentecostals and Baptists reporting higher rates of consumption of religious media than Catholics and respondents with no current affiliation. Among Black Caribbeans, Baptists had higher rates of watching/listening to electronic media than Catholics, Episcopalians, and Seventh Day Adventists. Overall, these findings are consistent with previous research on this data and other data sources which indicates among both African Americans and Black Caribbeans, Pentecostals, and Baptists report higher levels of religious participation than comparison groups (Chatters et al. 2008b; Taylor et al., in press).

Among Black Caribbeans, respondents from Spanish speaking countries and those from Haiti watched religious television programs more often than respondents from Jamaica. Interpretation of these findings is difficult given that there is so little research on Black Caribbeans more generally. Although we do not have direct information on this issue, it may be the case that respondents from Spanish-speaking countries and Haiti are watching religious television programs that are broadcast in their native language. Religious television programming may be included in locally produced and locally broadcasted programs offered through community cable access, as well as programs that are available through international Spanish language networks. In addition to religious television programs, these stations and programming formats provide news and information about their countries of origin that is of interest to immigrant communities. Local television stations (cable access) provide information relevant to immigrants residing within the immediate and surrounding communities. In essence, higher viewership of religious television among Haitian and Spanish-speaking immigrants may be the result of these programs being available on stations that are geared to non-English speaking immigrant audiences.

With respect to immigration status, Black Caribbeans who immigrated to the U.S. 0–5 years ago, 6–10 years ago, and more than 21 years ago listened to religious radio programs more frequently than native-born Black Caribbeans. These differences reflect more of an immigration effect with immigrants more likely to listen to religious radio programs than are native born Black Caribbeans. Similar to the previous country of origin findings, listening to local radio stations including religious programming may be a way of helping immigrants stay connected with their home country and other immigrants in their local community. Additionally, these findings are consistent with research which indicates that religious involvement is of greater importance for first generation immigrants as opposed to second- or third-generation, native-born Caribbean Blacks (Foley and Hoge 2007; Kurien 2006).

It is important to note that functional status was not significantly associated with watching or listening to religious programs. It was expected that individuals with higher levels of functional impairment due to health and mental health problems would watch/listen to religious programs more frequently. Future research should do a more in-depth examination of the impact of functional status on the consumption of religious media as well as other indicators of religious involvement.

The analysis presented in Table 5 tests whether watching/listening to religious media substitutes for or complements service attendance. If religious television and radio was a *substitute* for service attendance then one would expect a relatively high percentage of respondents indicating that they attend religious services less than once per year, but they watch/listen to religious services at least once per week (i.e., low service attendance coupled with high religious media use). If religious television and radio was a *complement* then one would expect low percentage of respondents in this group, as well as relatively high percentages of respondents who indicate that they either: (1) never attend and never watch/listen or (2) attend services at least once per week and watch/listen to religious programming at least once per week.

This analysis clearly shows that for respondents in this sample, watching/listening to religious programs complements rather than substitutes for church attendance. Less than one out of twenty respondents indicated that they attend religious services less than once per year but that they watch religious television at least once per week (3.30%) or that they listen to religious radio programs at least once per week (2.80%). Additionally, one out of four (24.80%) African Americans attend religious services and watch religious television programming at least once a week. One out of four African Americans (25.25%) also attends religious services and listen to religious radio at least once per week.

The multivariate analysis presented in Table 6 indicated that both watching religious television and listening to religious radio were significant and positively associated with church attendance. This also indicates a complementary function of religious media and service attendance. A significant negative association would be indicative of a substitution effect.

Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

The present study provided important information about the correlates of religious media use within and across African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and non-Hispanic Whites and suggests several directions for future research. First, with respect to methodology, the current study inquired about the general frequency with which respondents viewed or listened to broadcast religious media (e.g., nearly everyday, at least once a week). Future studies of broadcast religious media could ask more specifically about the amount of time devoted to media which would help us to better understand different profiles of media use and time investment. For example, within the category of individuals who listen to religious radio “at least once a week” there may be those who listen twice a week for a total 20 min, as well those who listen everyday for 2 h or more. Detailed information about time use for religious broadcast media would provide greater specificity with respect to measurement, as well as the relationships to sociodemographic factors. For example, it may be the case that the gender differences observed in this study (i.e., more frequent religious media use among African American women) are significant even within categories of reported use (e.g., among those reporting daily religious media use, women devote greater amounts of time than do men). A second area of future research concerns the proliferation of different religious broadcast media formats (e.g., podcasts, online radio) (Greer and Phipps 2003). During the 1980s and 1990s, there was a significant consumer market for cassette tapes of religious sermons. Since that time, there has been explosive growth in broadcast and communications technology and, currently, religious content is available in a variety of forms and formats including podcasts, web-streaming, online radio, and web-based video sermons (Swanson 2010). The proliferation of these various broadcast platforms and formats has meant that there are many more options available to religious media consumers representing a diversity of religious content, perspectives, and messages. Future studies of broadcast religious media that focus on the diversity of programming outlets and formats can provide a better understanding of religious media use and consumer preferences, and how they vary across and within important subgroups of the population.

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Table 1

Demographic and denomination distribution of sample

Demographic variables	African Americans		Black Caribbeans		Non-Hispanic Whites	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Age (years)						
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
Partner	8.74	260	12.57	131	6.59	44

Demographic variables	African Americans		Black Caribbeans		Non-Hispanic Whites	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
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
Functional status						
Mean	0.313	3570	0.254	1621	0.280	891
S.D.	0.054		0.022		1.04	
Country of origin						
Spanish	–		14.07	180	–	
Haiti	–		12.64	298	–	
Jamaica	–		31.72	510	–	
Trinidad and Tobago	–		9.98	170	–	
Other English	–		31.57	440	–	
Years in the U.S.						
U.S. 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

Demographic variables	African Americans		Black Caribbeans		Non-Hispanic Whites	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Seventh Day Adventist	0.71	21	4.22	87	0.26	2
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

Percents are weighted; frequencies are unweighted

Table 2

Bivariate analysis of race/ethnicity on the use of religious media

	African Americans	Black Caribbeans	Non-White Hispanics
Frequency of watching religious programs on television			
Nearly everyday	15.15%	12.82%	4.19%
At least once a week	32.26%	24.45%	13.85%
A few times a month	14.54%	17.60%	6.77%
At least once per month	7.19%	5.89%	5.04%
A few times a year	14.56%	20.07%	25.57%
Never	16.27%	19.14%	44.56%
<i>N</i>	3569	1616	891
Rao-Scott $\chi^2=402.24, p<0.0001$			
Frequency of listening to religious programs on the radio			
Nearly Everyday	22.39%	18.06%	9.32%
At least once a week	27.07%	18.62%	6.50%
A few times a month	9.46%	10.24%	4.79%
At least once per month	5.38%	7.33%	3.98%
A few times a year	10.23%	16.05%	13.31%
Never	25.44%	29.66%	62.07%
<i>N</i>	3569	1618	891
Rao-Scott $\chi^2 =717.08, p<0.0001$			

Percents are weighted; frequencies are unweighted

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Table 3

Race and ethnic differences in the use of religious media

	Frequency of watching religious programs on television		Frequency of listening to religious programs on the radio	
	<i>B</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>	S.E.
Row 1: African Americans excluded category				
Caribbean Blacks	0.08	0.12	-0.10	0.13
Non-Hispanic Whites	-1.19***	0.08	-1.34***	0.10
Row 2: Caribbean Blacks excluded category				
African Americans	-0.08	0.12	0.10	0.13
Non-Hispanic Whites	-1.28***	0.13	-1.23***	0.13

All regressions control for age, gender, income, education, marital status, region, denomination, and functional status
B standardized regression coefficient

*
 $p < 0.05$

**
 $p < 0.01$,

 $p < 0.001$

Table 4
Regression models for religious media use among African Americans and Black Caribbeans

	Watch religious television programs				Listen to religious radio programs			
	African Americans		Black Caribbeans		African Americans		Black Caribbeans	
	<i>B</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>	S.E.
Age	0.02***	0.00	0.02**	0.00	0.00#	0.00	0.01**	0.00
Gender	0.41***	0.07	0.33#	0.16	0.55***	0.08	0.22	0.15
Income	-0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.01	0.01
Education	-0.02	0.01	-0.09***	0.02	-0.01	0.01	-0.02	0.03
Marital status								
Partner	-0.08	0.12	0.31	0.38	-0.47**	0.13	-0.43	0.24
Separated	0.11	0.14	-0.03	0.37	-0.03	0.18	-0.01	0.38
Divorced	0.03	0.12	0.49*	0.20	0.02	0.09	0.07	0.57
Widowed	-0.18	0.14	0.02	0.37	-0.33*	0.15	-0.09	0.46
Never married	-0.18*	0.08	-0.07	0.19	-0.38***	0.09	-0.21	0.19
Region								
Northeast	-0.57***	0.11	-0.17	0.16	-0.77***	0.13	-0.24	0.21
North Central	-0.40***	0.10	-	-	-0.66***	0.12	-	-
West	-0.38***	0.11	-	-	-0.80***	0.16	-	-
Denomination								
Methodist	-0.06	0.14	0.06	0.20	-0.11	0.18	-0.04	0.33
Pentecostal	0.57***	0.12	0.24	0.31	0.22	0.14	0.59**	0.18
Catholic	-0.13	0.13	-0.72***	0.15	-0.53*	0.21	-0.84***	0.17
Episcopal	-	-	-0.72**	0.23	-	-	-0.57*	0.21
Seventh Day Adventist	-	-	-0.62*	0.23	-	-	0.36	0.28
Other Protestant	-0.21*	0.10	-0.07	0.14	-0.40***	0.11	-0.19	0.24
Other religion	-0.40***	0.22	-0.97*	0.45	-0.97**	0.32	-0.68	0.51

	Watch religious television programs				Listen to religious radio programs			
	African Americans		Black Caribbeans		African Americans		Black Caribbeans	
	<i>B</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>	S.E.
No affiliation	-0.79***	0.10	-1.05***	0.24	-1.07***	0.13	-1.21***	0.15
Functional status	0.09	0.05	0.13	0.20	-0.02	0.06	0.15	0.13
Country of origin								
Spanish	-	-	0.65***	0.12	-	-	-0.13	0.19
Haiti	-	-	0.82***	0.15	-	-	0.46	0.30
Trinidad and Tobago	-	-	0.00	0.18	-	-	-0.05	0.22
Other English	-	-	0.16	0.11	-	-	0.14	0.27
Immigration status								
0-5 years	-	-	-0.32	0.35	-	-	0.79*	0.31
6-10 years	-	-	0.59#	0.29	-	-	0.78**	0.23
11-20 years	-	-	0.23	0.21	-	-	0.40	0.33
More than 21 years	-	-	0.179	0.29	-	-	0.55**	0.17
<i>N</i>	3551		1575		3551		1575	
Model <i>F</i> value	49.94***		3157.54***		29.52***		525.41***	
<i>R</i> ²	0.17		0.22		0.13		0.21	

Regressions 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 5,000. Regressions for Black Caribbeans additionally control for Country of Origin (0 = Jamaica) and Immigration Status (0 = U.S. born)

p<0.06,

* *p*<0.05,

** *p*<0.01,

*** *p*<0.001

Table 5

Bivariate analysis of Church attendance and religious television and radio programs

Church attendance	Total	African Americans	Black Caribbeans	Non-Hispanic Whites
Watch religious television programs				
Less than once a year	13.31%	6.48%	7.22%	20.18%
Never				
Few times a year	6.58	7.40	9.88	5.58
At least once a week	3.30	4.32	3.91	2.30
At least a few times a year	11.54	6.21	8.66	16.76
Never				
Few times a year	18.05	19.34	21.93	16.57
At least once a week	11.96	18.28	15.18	5.78
At least once a week	5.55	3.57	3.25	7.57
Never				
Few times a year	12.46	9.55	11.75	15.25
At least once a week	17.20	24.80	18.17	9.96
Rao-Scott χ^2	402.56***	249.31***	30.05***	201.31***
N	6075	3569	1616	890
Listen to religious radio programs				
Less than once a year	15.99%	8.40%	10.47%	23.53%
Never				
Few times a year	4.41	5.06	6.25	3.67
At least once a week	2.80	4.74	4.18	0.88
At least a few times a year	18.29	11.07	13.46	25.43
Never				
Few times a year	11.76	13.29	18.73	9.82
At least once a week	11.50	19.47	13.40	3.86
At least once a week	9.49	5.96	5.72	13.09
Never				
Few times a year	7.73	6.72	8.65	8.61
At least once a week	18.00	25.25	19.09	11.08
Rao-Scott χ^2	279.45***	242.99***	41.93***	99.56***
N	6077	3569	1618	890

Regression models for religious media use on church attendance among African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and the total sample

Table 6

Church attendance						
	African Americans		Black Caribbeans		Total sample	
	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>
Watch religious television programs	0.154 ^{****}	0.020	0.176 ^{****}	0.029	0.159 ^{****}	0.014
Listen to religious radio programs	0.114 ^{****}	0.013	0.095 ^{**}	0.027	0.156 ^{****}	0.013

^a All regressions control for age, gender, income, education, marital status, region, denomination, and functional status. The Black Caribbean analysis also control for Country of Origin and Immigration Status

* $p < 0.05$,

** $p < 0.01$,

*** $p < 0.001$