

Religious Socialization in African American Families: The Relative Influence of Parents, Grandparents, and Siblings

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The family is the principal context for religious and spiritual socialization. Although religion remains a central force in the lives of most African Americans, research has failed to explore the role and impact of family on religious socialization within this population. This study addresses that gap in the literature by 1) exploring adults' perceptions of the influence of their parents, grandparents, and siblings on their religious and spiritual lives, and 2) examining the extent to which those perceptions are associated with subjective religiosity, subjective spirituality, religious importance, and commitment to religious socialization among a community sample of urban-residing African American adults in the Midwest and Northeast ($N = 319$). Findings revealed that, on average, parents, grandparents, and siblings positively influenced adults' religious commitment and values. However, mothers had the greatest positive influence on these outcomes. Religious commitment and values were differentially associated with family members as a function of the generation and gender of the family member. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: African Americans, religious socialization, parents, siblings, grandparents

Religion and spirituality are of central importance in the lives of the majority of African Americans¹ (Taylor, Chatters, & Levin, 2004; Taylor & Chatters, 2010). African Americans are more likely than any other ethnic group in the United States to report a formal religious affiliation (Pew Forum, 2007); 90% of African Americans report that they are "absolutely certain" of the existence of God (Pew Forum, 2007); and 90% rate religion as "very important" in their lives (Taylor & Chatters, 2010). These patterns of religious devotion apply across the life span, as is evident in findings that African American adolescents are more likely than youth of other ethnic groups to attend religious services and be involved in religious-based youth groups and organizations (Smith, Denton, Faris, & Regnerus, 2002). Further, empirical studies have demonstrated that religious beliefs and faith-based institutions play a significant role in virtually every domain of African American life (see Mattis & Mattis, 2011; Taylor et al., 2004).

Despite the centrality of religion and spirituality in the lives of African Americans and the principal role of families in socializing religious development (Flor & Knapp, 2001; Mattis, 2005; Park & Ecklund, 2007), few studies have examined the transmission of religiosity within African American families. This study examines the extent to which parents, grandparents, and siblings positively or negatively influence the religious experience of a sample of African American adults. We further explore how each of these family members influence the importance that African American adults assign to religion in their own lives, the importance that they assign to involving children in formal religion, and the extent to which they experience themselves as religious and/or spiritual people.

Families and Religious Socialization

Religious socialization is the process by which an individual learns, integrates, and maintains religious attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors (Bengtson, Copen, Putney, & Silverstein, 2008). This is a transactional process that requires the transmission of values, beliefs, attitudes, and practices from one person to another (Bengtson et al., 2008; Martin, White, & Perlman, 2003). Religious socialization not only facilitates the reification of values and beliefs, but serves as a primary mechanism by which families embed younger generations in relationships, moral communities,

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¹ African Americans are defined as people who self identify as African American, including people of Afro-Latino and Afro-Caribbean descent living in the United States.

and contexts where they can build critical forms of cultural, social, and spiritual capital, including religious knowledge and an array of concrete skills (Smith, 2005). This form of socialization is also a means by which communities catalyze and cultivate the prophylactic benefits of religious life (e.g., prosocial engagement, compassion, efficacious coping, and attenuation of risk-taking behaviors; see Mattis & Mattis, 2011; Regnerus, 2003; Smith, 2005). Importantly, the process of religious socialization typically begins in the private sphere of the family at an early developmental stage and continues across the life span (Bengtson et al., 2008; Flor & Knapp, 2001; Park & Ecklund, 2007).

Scholars disagree on which family members most strongly influence religious socialization (Martin et al., 2003). Many studies credit parents, as a unit, with being the most influential religious socialization agent (Flor & Knapp, 2001; Regnerus, Smith, & Smith, 2004). Others suggest that mothers alone have the greatest influence on offspring religiosity (Acock & Bengtson, 1978; Okagaki, Hammond, & Seamon, 1999; Park & Ecklund, 2007). Few empirical studies have examined the role of paternal influence in the faith development of children; those studies that have done so have focused on White, Christian, or Mormon males (see Dollahite, 1998; Snarey & Dollahite, 2001). Paternal influence is an important determinant of adolescent and emerging adult religiosity (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006; Leonard, Cook, Boyatzis, Kimball, & Flanagan, 2013). For some men, becoming a father inspired a deepening of personal faith and a search to find a house of worship to support their children's faith development (Palkovitz & Palm, 1998). Sons also may emulate their fathers' patterns of religious commitment: Men who do not attend religious services are more likely to report that their fathers were religiously uninvolved (Mattis et al., 2004). Past empirical research on religious socialization has focused on the nuclear family model (Snarey & Dollahite, 2001). Scholars note, however, that for African Americans, "family" refers to a more complex system of people than is represented by the nuclear model (Taylor, Chatters, Woodward, & Brown, 2013). Research on religious socialization beyond the nuclear model has been limited. One exception is work by Bengtson and colleagues (2008), which found that grandparents influence their grandchildren's subjective religiosity and religious attendance, but that this influence has declined over the past four decades. By the year 2000, the influence of grandfathers had waned so that only grandmothers had an impact on their grandchildren's service attendance. Further, they found a generation by gender interaction such that grandmothers most strongly influenced the faith lives of their granddaughters (Bengtson et al., 2008). Recently, research by Özdikmenli-Demir (2012) has suggested a role for siblings in the religious socialization process. Beyond these studies, the role of grandparents and siblings in religious socialization remains understudied. Importantly, no such literature exists for African Americans. The lack of attention to socializing agents beyond the nuclear model is especially problematic for understanding the religious socialization of African Americans, given the complex and intergenerational African American family structure (Taylor et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 1995).

Most research on the role of family in religious socialization has explored this process within White populations (e.g., Hardy, White, Zhang, & Ruchty, 2011; Park & Ecklund, 2007; Schwartz, 2006). As a consequence, little is known about the ways in which

African American family members affect each other's religious experience and religious development. The small body of work that does exist demonstrates that African American parents' religious practices affect their children's behavior and their psychosocial development: Regular religious attendance by African American parents is associated with fewer oppositional behaviors and mood symptoms among their children (Christian & Barbarin, 2001); and parental religious encouragement is associated with increased motivation in African American college students' pursuit of career goals (Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006) and greater self-esteem among older African Americans (Krause & Ellison, 2007). No research, however, has explored how grandparents and siblings influence African American religious socialization.

The Current Study

The continuity of faith within and across generations depends on the extent to which family members can represent religious and spiritual life as sacred, as personally meaningful, and as a viable strategy for understanding and resolving life challenges. There are two general approaches to assessing the (positive) influence of families in the religious socialization process. One the one hand, researchers can assess the extent to which members of a family shape each other's religious affiliations, beliefs, behaviors, coping, and meaning-making efforts. On the other hand, researchers can evaluate the extent to which family members positively affect the subjective dimensions of each other's faith lives, including 1) the level of importance that family members assign to faith life; 2) the extent to which family members come to identify as people of faith; and 3) the extent to which they endorse the value of continuing to socialize others in the family to internalize the value of faith. This study employs the latter approach to fill crucial gaps in the literature on the role of family in religious development by attending to the ways in which African American adults retrospectively characterize the influence that family members have had on their faith lives, and by examining the link between these characterizations and the subjective dimensions of African American adults' religious lives. In particular, we focus on the extent to which family members' influence (within and across generations) is associated with adults' experience of religion as personally important, the extent to which adults subjectively identify as religious and spiritual, and the extent to which individuals believe that it is important for African Americans to transmit religiosity to children. We inquire about subjective religiosity and spirituality separately because these interrelated constructs hold distinctive meanings (Mattis, 2000; Taylor, & Chatters, 2010), and their different patterns of predictive utility suggest the need to keep the two concepts disentangled.

We deliberately focus our attention on an urban-residing sample of African American adults. National probability studies have demonstrated that urban-residing African Americans in Northern U.S. states are less religiously committed than their Southern or rural counterparts (Hunt & Hunt, 2001). We reason that because of their lower level of religious commitment, it is especially important to study the factors that are associated with religious continuity and successful religious socialization among urban-residing adults in the North.

Method

Participants

We conducted a secondary data analysis from an African American family and community experiences study to address the central questions for this study. Demographic data are presented in Table 1. Data were collected from a community sample of 319 urban-residing African American adults (men $n = 219$; women $n = 100$). Participants ranged in age from 17 to 83 years old with a mean age of 29.25 ($SD = 15.29$). Approximately half (50.9%) of the sample had attended college but did not receive a degree, and 34.7% held a baccalaureate degree. Ten percent of participants had combined household incomes of less than \$20,000 per year; 16.3% lived in a household with an income between \$20,000 and \$40,000; 22.5% lived in a household with a combined income between \$40,000 and \$60,000; 12.5% lived in a household with a combined income between \$60,000 and \$80,000; and 30.3% lived in a household with a combined income of \$80,000 or greater. Approximately 93% ($n = 296$) of participants grew up in a household that included their mother, and 3% ($n = 10$) grew up with a stepmother. Sixty-eight percent ($n = 217$) grew up with their father in the household, and 6% ($n = 19$) grew up with a stepfather. Sixteen percent ($n = 52$) grew up with their grandparents living in their household; 59% ($n = 189$) grew up with at least one sister; and 67% ($n = 187$) grew up with at least one brother. Compared with African Americans nationwide, participants in our study had higher household incomes and levels of educational attainment.²

Participants were recruited from Detroit and Ypsilanti, Michigan ($n = 171$) and the five boroughs of New York City ($n = 149$). Recruitment took place in various community settings including barbershops, community centers, beauty salons, and businesses frequented by African Americans. Flyers were posted in these settings, and African American research assistants associated with the study frequented the recruitment sites and answered questions from prospective participants about the study. Surveys were distributed and completed at the recruitment sites. Participants deposited surveys in an envelope or box on site. Each participant received \$10 in cash after completing the survey.

Measures

Four stand-alone items were borrowed from the National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA; see Jackson, 1991) and the National Survey of American Life (NSAL; see Jackson et al., 2004), to serve as indicators of religiosity and spirituality: "How important is religion in your life today?"; "How important is it for African Americans to send or take their children to religious services?"; "How religious are you?"; and "How spiritual are you?" Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = *not at all* to 4 = *very*).

Influence on Experience of Religion/Spirituality was measured with single items measured on a 5-point Likert scale ($-2 = \textit{very negative influence}$ to $+2 = \textit{very positive influence}$). Questions inquired about the quality and level of influence that specific family members had on participants' feelings about religiosity/spirituality (e.g., "What kind of influence did *your mother* have over your feelings about religion/spirituality?") These influence

questions focused separately on males and females across three generations of family (i.e., influence of grandmother, grandfather, mother, father, sister(s), brother(s)).

Results

Family members had a positive or very positive impact on participants' religious lives (see Table 1). Means for each family member's influence on religious socialization were all positive: Mothers had the highest mean influence scores ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.08$), and brothers had the lowest ($M = .92$, $SD = 1.24$). In general, participants found religious life and religious socialization important, self-identified as religious and spiritual, and credited family members with positively impacting their feelings about religion and spirituality.

Of the 320 participants, only 1% ($n = 2$) indicated mother, 7% ($n = 19$) father, 2% ($n = 5$) grandmother, 2% ($n = 6$) grandfather, 2% ($n = 6$) brother(s), and 2% ($n = 5$) for sister(s) as having negatively affected one's religiosity or spirituality. These data suggest that, within and across generations, fathers are most likely to have a negative influence, but that family members, on the whole, rarely have an adverse effect on religious socialization.

To explore the relationship between demographic factors, the socializing influence of family members, and participants' self-reported religiosity and spirituality, we ran a series of bivariate correlations (see Table 2). Older participants saw religious life as more important than younger participants and more strongly identified as religious and spiritual (r 's $> .14$, p 's $< .05$). Higher levels of educational attainment were associated with less perceived influence of mother, grandmother, or grandfather on feelings toward religion and spirituality (r 's $< -.19$, p 's $< .01$). Educational attainment was not associated with feelings toward religion or spirituality.

Familial influences were all positively and significantly associated with the four religiosity and spirituality indices, with a few exceptions: Grandmothers' influence was not associated with spirituality, grandfathers' influence was not associated with religiosity or spirituality, and sisters' influence was not associated with religiosity. All familial influence items were positively and significantly correlated, as were all indices of religiosity and spirituality.

Inferential Data Analyses

Some participants did not indicate familial influence for sister(s) ($n = 53$), brother(s) ($n = 48$), grandfather ($n = 34$), and grandmother ($n = 18$). An additional 25 participants did not report combined household income. Missing data for all other study items were 10 or fewer. A total of 204 participants completed every survey item. Little's missing completely at random test revealed that all missing data points were missing completely at random, $\chi^2(404) = 402.02$, $p = n.s.$

An a priori power analysis demonstrated that, for each of our four regression models, a small to medium effect (Cohen's $f \geq .11$,

² According to United States Census Bureau, 2012 projections, the median African American household income was \$33,764 per year; 16.8% of respondents had not received a high school diploma; 31.3% had received a high school diploma; 33.1% had completed some college; 12.0% held a baccalaureate degree; and 6.8% held a graduate or professional degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for Study Measures (N = 319)

Variables	n (%)	Mean	SD	Range
Age		29.25	15.29	17 to 83
Gender				
Men	219 (68.4%)			
Women	100 (31.3%)			
Education				
Less than high school	1 (.3)			
High school degree or GED	42 (13.1)			
Some college	163 (50.9)			
Bachelor's degree	57 (17.8)			
Graduate or professional degree	54 (16.9)			
Combined household income				
Less than \$20,000	34 (10.6)			
\$20,000 to \$39,999	52 (16.3)			
\$40,000 to \$59,999	72 (22.5)			
\$60,000 to \$79,999	40 (12.5)			
\$80,000 or above	97 (30.3)			
Family member influence on religiosity/spirituality				
Mother		2.23	1.08	-3 to 3
Father		1.34	1.53	-3 to 3
Grandmother		1.81	1.31	-3 to 3
Grandfather		1.09	1.39	-3 to 3
Brother(s)		.92	1.24	-3 to 3
Sisters(s)		1.02	1.22	-3 to 3
Self-reported religiosity/spirituality				
How important is religion in your life today?		4.01	1.21	1 to 5
How important is it for African Americans to take/send their children to religious services?		4.27	1.02	1 to 5
How religious are you?		3.54	1.21	1 to 5
How spiritual are you?		4.22	.93	1 to 5

or $\Delta R^2 \geq .1$) could be detected at $\alpha = .05$ with a sample size of 195 participants at a power of .95. Given the amount of missing data, that this data was missing completely at random, and that the number of participants who had complete data exceeded the number of participants necessary to detect a small to medium effect, we opted to focus the analyses on participants who had completed all study items. The decision not to impute family influence data also owed to our recognition that participants elected to leave items blank for a number of reasons. For some participants, the decision to leave familial influence items blank may result from the absence of such relationships (e.g., participants without siblings cannot meaningfully report on a sibling's influence on devotional life).

Although the primary aim of our study is to explore the relative influence of family members on religious socialization in African American families, we recognize that this process takes place within the context of development (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006), which demands an exploration of the impact of age on familial religious influence. Univariate analysis of the sample's age distribution revealed a substantial positive skew (skewness = 1.67, $SE = .139$): Although participants ranged from 17 to 83 years of age, the median participant age was 22. Because this age distribution does not allow for a tenable assessment of the impact of age with moderated regression analysis, we performed a median age split and compared familial influence means between participants younger than 22 (i.e., young adults) with participants older than 22 (i.e., older adults). Young adults did not significantly differ from older adults in the influence that mother, father, grandmother, brother(s), and sister(s) had on feelings about religion and spiri-

tuality, t 's (202) < 1.82, p 's = *ns*. Grandfathers, however, had a more positive influence on young adults' feelings about religion and spirituality ($M = 1.16$, $SD = 1.39$) than on older adults' feelings about religion and spirituality ($M = .76$, $SD = 1.31$), $t(202) = 2.064$, $p < .05$.

We conducted four hierarchical multiple regression models to explore the impact of demographic factors and the influence of parents and grandparents on the four indices of religiosity and spirituality (see Table 3). Age, educational level, gender, and household income were entered into the first block of each model to control for demographic influences on subjective religiosity, and the influence of mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and grandfathers were entered into the second block of each model. We supplemented these multiple regression models with relative weights analysis to assess the relative importance of each family member's influence on these outcomes. Relative weights are regression coefficients that present the proportion of overall model variance accounted for (R^2) by each predictor, taking into account its unique relationship to the criterion and its shared variance with other predictors (Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2011). Relative weights analysis computes orthogonal regression coefficients that sum to the regression model R^2 , allowing researchers to determine the relative importance of variables while accounting for their intercorrelations (Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2011). Raw relative weights are presented in terms of the proportional percentage of R^2 they explain. This analysis provides richer diagnostic information about the contribution of each predictor to the explained variance than does an assessment of the significance of each regression coefficient.

Table 2
Intercorrelations Between Demographic Factors, Family Member Influence, and Religiosity/Spirituality

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Demographics														
1. Age	—													
2. Gender ^a	-.068	—												
3. Education	.407***	.078	—											
4. Combined household income	.066	.102	-.021	—										
Family influence on religiosity/spirituality														
5. Mother	.139	-.010	-.218**	.043	—									
6. Father	.133	.030	-.080	.096	.318***	—								
7. Grandmother	-.012	-.097	-.242**	-.086	.350***	.174*	—							
8. Grandfather	.012	-.082	-.194**	-.160*	.228**	.383***	.532***	—						
9. Brother(s)	.052	.013	.002	-.040	.298***	.344***	.231**	.316***	—					
10. Sister(s)	.136	.057	.073	.017	.328***	.328***	.166*	.211**	.567***	—				
Religiosity and spirituality														
11. Importance of religion	.242**	.006	-.013	.010	.359***	.278***	.268**	.193**	.156*	.163*	—			
12. Importance of sending African American children to religious services	.191***	-.010	.044	-.060	.304***	.272***	.248**	.244**	.193**	.166*	.719***	—		
13. How religious are you?	.254***	-.027	-.060	-.043	.318***	.212**	.189**	.056	.178*	.117	.733***	.636***	—	
14. How spiritual are you?	.141*	.113	.087	-.006	.300***	.201**	.055	.039	.176*	.183*	.466***	.314***	.413***	—

^a 0 = male, 1 = female.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

How Important Is Religion in Your Life Today?

Family members across all generations appeared to have a significant positive influence on participants' reports of the importance of religion in their present lives. More specifically, grandmothers' ($r = .268, p < .001$); grandfathers' ($r = .193, p < .01$); mothers' ($r = .359, p < .001$), fathers' ($r = .278, p < .001$); brothers' ($r = .156, p < .05$); and sisters' ($r = .163, p < .05$) positive influence on participants' feelings about religion or spirituality was associated with higher scores on the reported importance of religion in present life.

After controlling for age, education, gender, and household income ($R^2 = .072, F(4, 199) = 3.86, p < .001$), familial influence on current importance of religion was significant, and explained 15.4% of the variance in religious importance over and above demographic factors, $\Delta R^2 = .154, F(6, 193) = 6.38, p < .001$. The final model accounted for 22.6% of the variance in religious importance ($R^2 = .226$, adjusted $R^2 = .185, p$'s $< .001$). Age ($\beta = .221, p < .01$), mother's influence ($\beta = .258, p < .001$), and grandmother's influence ($\beta = .161, p < .05$) were each independently and positively predictive of the personal importance assigned to religion.

Raw relative weights reported in Table 3 sum to the unadjusted explained variance of the final regression model. Of the total variance explained by the model, 34.5% was attributable to mothers, 14.9% to fathers, and 16.3% to grandmothers. Grandfathers and siblings each accounted for less than 5% of explained variance. Additionally, 22.1% of the explained variance was attributable to age. These findings suggest that age and the influence of mothers account for the greatest proportion of explained variance in religious importance, but that fathers and grandmothers also have a substantial role to play.

How Important Is It for African Americans To Take or Send Their Children to Religious Services?

Age was positively and significantly associated with participants' ratings of the importance of taking or sending African American children to religious services ($r = .191, p < .01$). Gender, education, and annual household income were not related to this outcome. The greater the positive influence of family members on participants, the more likely that participants were to report that it is important for African Americans to take or send their children to religious service. This pattern was observed for family members across all generations. More specifically, grandmothers' ($r = .248, p < .001$); grandfathers' ($r = .244, p < .001$); mothers' ($r = .304, p < .001$), fathers' ($r = .272, p < .001$); brothers' ($r = .193, p < .01$); and sisters' ($r = .163, p < .05$) positive influence on participants' feelings about religion or spirituality was associated with higher scores on reported importance of taking children to religious services.

Demographic factors accounted for a marginally significant proportion of variance in perceived importance of sending African American children to religious services, $R^2 = .047, F(4, 194) = 2.38, p = .053$. Familial influence significantly predicted this index of religiosity. Indeed, familial influence explained 13.6% of the variance in religious importance over and above demographic factors, $\Delta R^2 = .136, F(6, 188) = 5.19, p < .001$. The final model accounted for 18.2% of the variance in religious importance, $R^2 =$

Table 3
Multiple Regression and Relative Weights Analyses Predicting Religiosity and Spirituality Outcomes from Demographic and Familial Influences

Variables	Personal Importance of Religion		Importance of Sending African American Children to Religious Services				How Religious Are You?				How Spiritual Are You?					
	β		Relative Weight		β		Relative Weight		β		Relative Weight		β		Relative Weight	
	Step 1	Step 2	Raw	% R ²	Step 1	Step 2	Raw	% R ²	Step 1	Step 2	Raw	% R ²	Step 1	Step 2	Raw	% R ²
Demographics																
Age	.284***	.221**	.050	22.1	.226**	.182*	.029	15.9	.316***	.255***	.061	27.6	.112	.047	.009	5.6
Education	-.089	-.042	.002	0.9	-.091	-.057	.002	1.1	-.142	-.107	.007	3.2	.087	.105	.013	8.3
Gender	-.020	.083	.002	0.9	.060	.157*	.011	5.9	-.048	.026	.001	0.7	.056	.117	.008	5.5
Household Income	.000	.016	<.001	0.2	-.053	-.035	.002	1.1	-.069	-.082	.005	2.5	-.029	-.051	.001	0.7
Family Influence																
Mother		.258***	.078	34.5		.200*	.047	25.9		.230**	.065	29.4		.306***	.080	51.7
Father		.136	.034	14.9		.125	.030	16.2		.162*	.032	14.7		.108	.020	12.7
Grandmother		.161*	.037	16.3		.110	.025	13.6		.145	.024	10.8		-.014	.003	1.9
Grandfather		.019	.011	4.9		.111	.024	13.1		-.148	.005	2.3		-.040	.001	0.9
Brother(s)		-.022	.005	2.3		.022	.008	4.4		.098	.015	7.0		.045	.010	6.4
Sister(s)		-.015	.007	3.0		-.032	.005	2.7		-.095	.004	1.9		.012	.010	6.3
R ²	.072***	.226***			.047	.182***			.098***	.220***			.031	.154***		
Adjusted R ²	.053***	.185***			.027	.139***			.080***	.179***			.010	.109***		
ΔR^2	.072***	.154***			.047	.136***			.098***	.122***			.031	.123***		

Note. Reported relative weights correspond only to the Step 2 model R². * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

.182, adjusted R² = .139, p 's < .001. Age ($\beta = .182, p < .05$), gender ($\beta = .157, p < .05$), and mothers' influence ($\beta = .200, p < .05$) independently and positively predicted the belief that it is important to take or send children to religious services.

Of the total variance explained by the model, 25.9% was attributable to mother, 16.2% to father, 13.6% to grandmother, and 13.1% to grandfather. Age accounted for 15.9% of explained variance and gender accounted for 5.9% of explained variance. Contrasting these results with the relative importance of each predictor for religious importance, these findings suggest that fathers and grandparents have a comparatively larger role to play in instilling belief in the importance of sending African American children to religious services. The influence of brothers and sisters accounted for less than 5% of explained variance.

How Religious Are You?

Individuals who reported that family members had a positive influence on their feelings about religion and spirituality also tended to report that they view themselves as religious today. Subjective religiosity was positively associated with the influence of grandmothers ($r = .189, p < .01$); mothers ($r = .318, p < .001$); fathers ($r = .212, p < .001$); and brothers ($r = .178, p < .01$). Importantly, the influence of grandfathers and sisters was not significantly related to participants' subjective sense of themselves as religious people.

After controlling for demographic factors ($R^2 = .098, F(4, 198) = 5.39, p < .001$), familial influence explained 12.2% of variance in self-reported religiosity, $\Delta R^2 = .122, F(6, 192) = 4.99, p < .001$. The final model accounted for 22.0% of the variance in religious importance, $R^2 = .220$, adjusted $R^2 = .179, p$'s < .001. Age ($\beta = .255, p < .001$), mothers' influence ($\beta = .230, p < .01$),

and fathers' influence ($\beta = .162, p < .05$) independently and positively predicted subjective religiosity.

Of the total variance explained by the model, 29.4% was attributable to mothers, 14.7% to fathers, 14.7% to grandmothers, 10.8% to grandfathers, 7.0% to brothers, and less than 2% to sisters. Age accounted for 15.9% of explained variance. As with religious importance, age, mothers' influence, fathers' influence, and grandmothers' influence accounted for the most substantial portions of the variance explained by the model.

How Spiritual Are You?

Individuals who reported that family members positively influenced their feelings about religion and spirituality also reported that they view themselves as spiritual. Subjective spirituality was positively associated with positive influence of mothers ($r = .300, p < .001$), fathers ($r = .201, p < .01$), brother(s) ($r = .176, p < .01$), and sisters ($r = .183, p < .01$). Grandparents' influence was not related to participants' sense of spirituality.

Regression analyses revealed that demographic factors did not account for a significant proportion of variance in self-reported spirituality, $R^2 = .031, F(4, 192) = 1.51, p = n.s$. However, familial influence significantly explained 12.3% of variance in self-reported spirituality, $\Delta R^2 = .123, F(6, 186) = 4.52, p < .001$. The final model accounted for 15.4% of the variance in spirituality, $R^2 = .154$, adjusted $R^2 = .109, p$'s < .001. Only mothers' influence was independently and positively predictive of subjective spirituality ($\beta = .306, p < .001$).

Relative weights analysis revealed that more than half (51.7%) of the variance explained by the model was attributable solely to mothers' influence, and 12.7% of explained variance was attributable to fathers' influence. Grandmothers and grandfathers to-

gether accounted for less than 2% of explained variance. Relative to grandparents, brothers (6.4%) and sisters (6.3%) appear to have a greater influence on subjective spirituality. Age accounted for a small proportion (5.6%) of explained variance. Education, however, accounted for 8.3% of explained variance. These results suggest that although, consistent with the findings of the regression analysis, subjective spirituality is overwhelmingly informed by mothers' influence, fathers and other immediate family members are also important to adults' experience of themselves as spiritual.

Comparing Family Member Influence Across Analyses

This study aims to explore the quality of the impact of different family members on various aspects of subjective religiosity and spirituality. Toward this end, the relative weights for each family member, reported in Table 3, are presented graphically in Figure 1. In interpreting this figure, we caution the reader that percentages of variance explained are proportional to the total explained variance for each given model—not the total possible amount of variance in the criterion.

Discussion

Family is the principal context for religious and spiritual socialization (Mahoney, 2010). We learn about God from our families; we learn to pray and meditate in our families; we read sacred texts with, and learn the tenets of faith from, our families; families engage their children in the rituals of faith; and our families model the complexity of lived faith. Although faith life is shaped princi-

pally in families, that shaping process is not necessarily a smooth one. Faith life often is a space of ideological contestation. Within any given family, individuals may hold different views on religious and spiritual beliefs and practices (e.g., on the existence or nonexistence of God; the meaning and applications of religious texts; the value of religious and spiritual rituals; and the historical relevance, integrity, and virtue of religious leaders and institutions). The beliefs that family members hold, and the ways that they enact or communicate those beliefs, can positively or negatively affect other family members' views and experiences of religion or spirituality. In light of this reality, this work focused on two central concerns: 1) the extent to which African American adults' feelings about religion and spirituality positively or negatively influenced their family members; and 2) the extent to which the positive or negative influence of various family members is associated with important indices of religiosity. In our effort to craft a nuanced picture, we paid attention to inter- as well as intragenerational relationships (i.e., to the influence of grandparents, parents, and siblings on feelings about religion and spirituality); to the gender of family members within each generation (i.e., to grandfathers separately from grandmothers); and to multiple indices of religiosity that have been identified as important in national studies of the religious development of African Americans. Several important findings emerged from this study and contribute to advancing our knowledge of religious socialization generally, and of African American religious socialization in particular.

First, our findings revealed that although some participants reported that family members negatively influenced their experi-

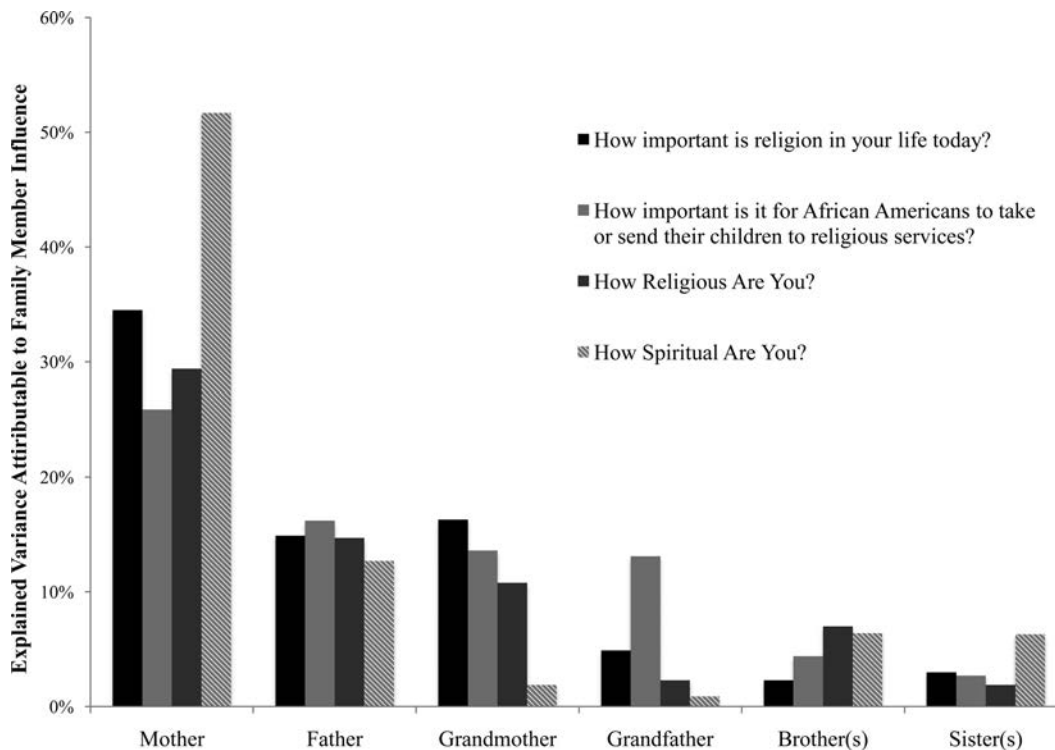


Figure 1. Proportion of variance explained in four indices of religiosity/spirituality attributable to family member influence.

ence of religion and spirituality, such reports were rare. Interestingly, participants who reported being negatively influenced by family tended to identify their fathers as the source of the negative influence. Again, it is noteworthy that these negative reports were rare. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of participants described the influence of their family members as positive. This pattern of disproportionately positive familial influence on religiosity and spirituality may help to explain why religion continues to be a mainstay in the lives of African American adults. If individuals provide positive experiences for others in their family networks despite the ideological and social complexities associated with religion and spirituality, then it stands to reason that participants would embrace faith life.

A second finding of this study is that male and female family members across all three generations appear to have at least some relationship to the religious development of the participants in our study. However, the influence of male and female relatives within the same generation of families was associated with different religious and spiritual outcomes. This latter point constitutes a third important outcome of this work. Findings suggest, for example, that grandmothers' and grandfathers' influence on African American adults' feelings about religion and spirituality was associated with these adults' subjective religious beliefs. At the bivariate level, grandmothers' influence was associated with the personal importance assigned to religion, the perceived importance of taking or sending children to religious services, and subjective religiosity. Grandmothers' influence was also positively predictive of the importance that individuals assigned to religion in their own lives. Grandmothers' influence was not associated with subjective spirituality. Grandfathers' influence was positively related to personal importance assigned to religion, and to the perceived importance of taking or sending children to religious services but not to participants' subjective identification as religious or spiritual. Grandfathers' influence was not predictive of any of the religiosity or spirituality outcomes. It is noteworthy that, as a unit, grandparents' influence was associated with religiosity but not with spirituality outcomes. This finding may owe to the fact that grandparents are more likely to hold traditional beliefs and values that reinforce the importance of internalizing the tenets of a formal faith system. Our findings appear to be consistent with Bengtson and colleagues' (2008) findings that grandparents do play significant roles in religious socialization, that grandfathers appear to have a more limited range of influence, and that grandmothers appear to be more influential. It will be useful in future work to explore the specific and most meaningful messages and practices that grandmothers as well as grandfathers may use in their efforts to support the religious development of their grandchildren.

Consistent with existing findings, we found that mothers' influence was positively associated with all four indicators of religiosity and spirituality. Gender socialization theories have proposed that this powerful and consistent role for mothers owes to women's unique position in households and as bearers of culture (deVaus & McAllister, 1987), and to women's degree of adherence to feminine role orientations (Thompson & Remmes, 2002). In sum, women have the most consistently positive influence on the religious lives of their children because they are socialized to transmit critical values, beliefs, and practices across generations, and because they embrace norms of femininity that reinforce such roles. Future research might further explore how mothers socialize their

children to embrace religion, how these practices might be similar or different for their daughters and sons, and their motivations for engaging in these practices.

An important contribution of this work is the finding that African American fathers have substantial positive influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their adult children. To our knowledge, this work on the role of African American fathers in the religious and spiritual development of their children is the first of its kind. Bivariate analyses revealed that fathers' influence was significantly related to the personal importance that African American adults assigned to religion, to subjective religiosity and spirituality, and to the belief that it is important to take or send African American children to religious services. In sum, adults who reported that their fathers had a positive influence on their faith lives were also likely to assign personal importance to religion, to hold subjective identities as religious and as spiritual, and to believe that involving children in formal religious life is important. We note that African American fathers' influence was significantly predictive of subjective religiosity but not of the other religiosity outcomes. More work needs to be done to discern the reasons for this finding. It may be the case that because African American men are less likely to attend religious services or be members of religious institutions, they come to use their personal (i.e., subjective) religious identification as the most meaningful index of the depth and authenticity of their faith. In much the same way that men transmit other values to their children, they may transmit to their children the message that this subjective aspect of faith life is especially meaningful or important.

Yet another important contribution of this work is its attention to the role of siblings. Although sibling influence was not predictive of any of the religiosity outcomes, the findings from our bivariate and relative weights analyses provide us with an important appreciation of the value of siblings to African American religious and spiritual development. These analyses demonstrate that siblings matter and that they may play different roles in each other's faith development. Bivariate correlations demonstrate that brothers' influence was significantly related to all four indicators of religiosity and spirituality. Interestingly, sisters' influence was significantly associated with all outcomes except for subjective religiosity. These findings suggest the importance of family models that critically examine the intragenerational relational processes associated with spiritual development. It will be important to attend more closely to the overlapping roles that brothers and sisters play in shaping each other's faith lives. Given that the sibling relationships are lifelong, it will be important to understand how siblings' roles in each other's faith development evolve over the life course, and particularly at critical developmental milestones. Finally, it will be important to explore the extent to which birth order and/or birth order by gender interactions in siblings' influence impact each other's religious and spiritual evolution. In sum, it will be useful to know how younger versus older siblings influence each other's religious and spiritual lives and whether and how older or younger brothers differ from older and younger sisters on their same-sex and opposite-sex siblings.

Limitations

As with all studies, this study has limitations. First, the study employs an urban-residing convenience sample from three cities in

the American Northeast and Midwest (New York City, Ypsilanti, and Detroit). In addition, the fairly high levels of educational attainment and household income of the participants suggest that these findings are not generalizable to the larger African American community. Further, we note that men and younger people also are disproportionately represented in this sample, and we are mindful that these findings may largely reflect their experiences and perspectives. As we reflect on the limitations of the study, we note that African American women score higher than their male counterparts, and that urban-residing African Americans score lower than their rural counterparts, on virtually all indices of religiosity and spirituality (see Hunt & Hunt, 2001; Taylor, Chatters, & Levin, 2004). Historical and cultural factors that differentiate the African American family experience in Northern, industrialized cities may make findings from this research less applicable to African American families located in rural areas or in other areas of the U.S. including the American South (see Tolnay, 2003, for discussion). Future research involving a more diverse participant pool will certainly add to our understanding of the ways that family influences African American faith life. Further, our sample contains participants with higher incomes and more education than the average African American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). As such, these findings may not generalize to lower-income or less-educated populations. Additionally, we did not assess participants' religious affiliation. Given that 78% of African Americans are Protestant Christians (Pew Forum, 2007), we believe that these findings are most reflective of African Americans in Christian households. Nevertheless, given the diversity of religious affiliations in African American communities, future research should explore how African Americans of varying religious backgrounds differ in the influence that family members have on their religious and spiritual lives.

Second, the outcomes on which we focus center on the subjective dimensions of religious and spiritual life. Our use of subjective measures enabled us to assess participants' personal evaluation of their family's influence on their religious and spiritual development. However, we are mindful that, owing to social desirability, participants may have overreported the positive influence of family members on their religious development. A natural next step in this line of research will be to focus on behavioral dimensions of faith life (e.g., the actual practice of taking or sending children to religious services), and on triangulating religious influence data from multiple family sources. Finally, we borrowed a set of stand-alone items of religiosity and spirituality from national studies of African American religious life. National studies of religious and spiritual life routinely use single item indices of various indicators of religious commitment and religious behavior (see Hunt & Hunt, 2001). Studies have demonstrated the efficacy of measuring such indices of religiosity as attendance by asking stand-alone questions such as "how often do you attend religious services?" However, future research should explore the ways in which various family members influence other aspects of religiosity that are more effectively measured using multidimensional and multiitem measures (e.g., religious coping).

Conclusion

Despite its limitations, this work significantly advances our understanding of religious socialization. Our findings move be-

yond the important albeit noncritically reified message that mothers are crucial to the religious development of their children. We contend that institutions interested in deepening the religious or spiritual commitment of African Americans should consider the broad and complex familial relational landscape within which religious commitment develops. It may be useful for parents and grandparents to consider that although religiosity is shaped in important ways by older generations, children within a family (i.e., siblings) also influence each other's faith. Families that help siblings to positively influence each other's religiosity and spirituality may be more likely to experience the salutary effects of faith life.

Our work selectively focused on the relative influence of family members in socializing religion specifically within an African American sample. Nevertheless, our findings contribute to a growing discourse on familial religious socialization within both the psychological and sociological literatures. The importance of family influence on the transmission of religiosity and spirituality is not relevant solely to African Americans. Although faith life is not a panacea for personal or societal ills, past research strongly suggests that parents who socialize their children to be religious convey many benefits of religious life to them (e.g., life satisfaction, social involvement, and improved coping; see Regnerus, 2003). Sociologists have used national surveys of Americans of diverse religious, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, and found that family systems are tenacious in their capacity to cultivate robust intergenerational religious traditions. For example, findings from the National Study of Youth and Religion (see Smith, 2005) revealed that 78% of teenagers in the United States consider their religious beliefs to at least somewhat, if not greatly, resemble those of their mother, while 72% identify a strong likeness between their faith and that of their father; similarly, 11% of teens have religious beliefs that are very different from their fathers, and only 6% of teens have very different religious beliefs from their mothers (Smith, 2005; see Mahoney & Pargament, 2011, for a review). Likewise, Copen and Silverstein's (2008) findings from the Longitudinal Study of Generations, which followed participants for over 30 years and included more than 3,000 members from three- and four-generation families, also speak to the staying power of familial religious socialization across religious, racial, and intergenerational lines: They found that grandmothers' religiosity in 1970 significantly predicted religiosity in their grandchildren in 2000 (see also Bengtson et al., 2008).

Put simply, children whose parents identify as religious and regularly attend religious services are more likely to value faith and faith service attendance. This "transmission effect" (Mahoney & Pargament, 2011) has powerful implications for the future of American society, and for African Americans in particular. Skirbekk, Kaufmann, and Goujon (2010) used data from the General Social Survey to project the religious composition of the United States to the year 2043 while accounting for fertility, migration, religious conversion, and, importantly, intergenerational religious transmission: According to their projections, Black Protestantism and Islam will remain stable landmarks on the religious landscape despite ongoing tectonic shifts in American religious life, such as the steep rise in Hispanic Catholics and increasing secularism among non-Black Protestants (Skirbekk, Kaufmann, & Goujon, 2010). We argue that the intergenerational transmission of religious values and practices plays a central role in maintaining the strength and integrity of religious life within the African American

community—and, if Skirbekk and colleagues' (2010) projections hold true, will continue to do so for many years to come. By exploring the relative influence of family members on religious socialization within the African American community, our work illuminates the intrafamilial processes that inform these sociological phenomena.

As noted earlier, continuity of faith systems depends simultaneously on personal valuation of faith in one's life, a belief that faith is important, on the internalization and identification with the traditions, and on an intergenerational commitment to socialize younger generations in the faith traditions that have been the cornerstones of community life. Taken together, these findings underscore the importance of family. Scholars may begin to build on these findings by examining the specific messages that have the greatest positive effect on others in the family. Practitioners conducting family-based interventions may also find it useful to assess the pathways by which family members transfer religious benefits to each other, and the potential salutary effects of mobilizing particular family members to provide religious support. In this regard, we suggest that it may be helpful to capitalize on data-gathering techniques being used to assess spirituality in other realms—for instance, spiritual genograms and spiritual life maps being used by clinical psychologists to more deeply understand the spiritual experiences and histories of their clients. These tools may provide unique opportunities to more fully understand the complex transactional processes involved in religious socialization.

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