

Race and Religious Participation: Introduction to Special Issue

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Research in the field of the scientific study of religion is rapidly growing due to the demonstrated centrality and importance of religion in the lives of Americans. The USA has one of the highest levels of religious involvement of industrialized countries, with rates much higher than found in European countries. Survey data indicate that 9 out of 10 Americans engage in prayer, and more than half of all Americans pray at least once a day (Brown et al. 2015; Taylor et al. 2004). Religious involvement is a major aspect of the daily lives of Americans and has significant impacts on a variety of behaviors and outcomes including mental and physical health, substance abuse, marital relationships, child rearing, political participation, delinquency and criminal behavior.

The goal of this special issue of *Race and Social Problems* is to feature new research focusing on race and religious involvement. Given the number of high-quality manuscripts that were submitted, the editor decided that it was appropriate to devote two issues to this topic. The articles in these two special issues focus on a variety of topics related to the influence of religious participation and include issues of migration, attitudes toward immigration, domestic violence, help-seeking for mental health problems, depressive symptoms, drinking behavior, psychiatric disorders, optimism and psychological well-being. Articles in the special issues also investigate several religious behaviors and outcomes such as the impact of early school behaviors on religiosity in adulthood and exchanges of

instrumental support (financial assistance, help with chores, transportation and help during an illness) among church members. The articles in these two issues also provide information about the diversity of religion and its impact across race/ethnicity and age groups. For example, several articles examine racial differences, as well as within group differences among African Americans and two of the articles are based on Muslim samples. The collection of articles also focuses on adolescents, young adults and adults, deepening an appreciation of religion's meaning and functions across the life span. Finally, the articles selected for the special issues utilize both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Scholars interested in race and religion will find these articles informative. Additional resources for scholars in this area include articles in religion journals (*Review of Religious Research*), psychiatry journals (*Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*), Gerontology journals (*Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*) and more recent journals published by the American Psychological Association (*Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*). Scholars should also examine research from both the PEW foundation and the Gallup Organization which have conducted important surveys on religious involvement among Americans. Turning now to this special issue on race and religion, the remainder of this introductory article summarizes several of the strengths of the work appearing in this volume. Brown and Brown (2017) examine the influence of religious participation on attitudes toward immigration policies among African Americans, Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites. In particular, using the pooled 2004 and 2008 National Politics Study, they investigate the impact of exposure to political sermons within religious settings on attitudes toward restrictive immigration policies. They found that non-

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Hispanic white attendees of politicized religious congregations tend to be critical of restrictive immigration policies. However, among blacks and Hispanics, attending politicized religious congregations had little impact on attitudes toward immigration.

One of the noted limitations of research on religious participation includes a reliance on cross-sectional data, as well as the limited amount of research on adolescents. The second of these two special *Race and Religion* issues includes two articles on religious participation among adolescents. The Bowie et al. (2017) article is quite innovative and investigates life course predictors of religious involvement using cohort data from 1242 first grade African American children followed over four time periods to the age of 42 (the Chicago Woodlawn Study). Bowie and associates investigate the degree to which early school behaviors, family characteristics and neighborhood and social resources influence religiosity in adulthood. They find that boys rated by teachers as shy in first grade were more likely to report religiosity as a resource at age 42. Findings for the sample as young adults indicate that those living in neighborhoods with a higher proportion of African Americans, those with more social ties in young adulthood and those living in neighborhoods with a higher proportion of African Americans reported higher adult religiosity. These and other findings are discussed and illustrate the importance of longitudinal investigations of religious involvement.

Pendergrass (2017) uses qualitative data to investigate role of religion in the migration process of African Americans who have moved from northern cities to Charlotte North Carolina. She found that African Americans migrants drew heavily on their faith and spirituality to cope with the uncertainties of relocation. Some respondents interpreted their move as part of a master plan that God had for their lives. Pendergrass's article illustrates the importance of qualitative research for investigating nuanced aspects of the impact of religion and spirituality on everyday life.

The article by Mattis et al. (2017) continues research (Mattis et al. 2003, 2004) on the impact of religion on optimism among African Americans. In this most recent article, Mattis et al. (2017) investigate the impact of social location, religious participation, belief about the quality of one's relationship with God, and beliefs about being the recipient of divine forgiveness on optimism among a community sample of African American adults. One of the strengths of this study is the use of a theologically informed model which uses a combination of traditional measures of religiosity and indicators of ideological aspects of faith. In multivariate analyses, they found belief in God's love predicted optimism. They argue that in predicting optimism, it is the internalization of faith as a core aspect of

one's identity that matters more than traditional indicators of religiosity.

Taylor et al. (2017) investigate the correlates of the types of instrumental support exchanges that occur between church members. Exchanges of four types of instrumental support were examined: transportation assistance, help with chores, financial assistance and help during illness. Data for this study were from African American respondents in the National Survey of American Life Re-Interview, the follow-up survey to the National Survey of American Life. For each of the four types of instrumental support, respondents indicate that they provide more assistance to others than they receive. For all eight dependent variables, those with lower levels of education were more actively engaged in receiving and providing support than their higher educated counterparts. This study confirms the importance of church-based informal social support between African Americans and documents within group diversity as both recipients and providers of assistance. Further, study findings complement previous work on racial differences in church support networks (Krause 2016; Krause and Bastida 2011; Taylor et al. 2013), as well as recent research on reciprocal church support among African Americans (Taylor et al. 2016).

In comparison to non-Hispanic whites, African Americans have higher rates of poverty, are more likely to live in neighborhoods with higher crime rates, have poorer health and have more exposure to racial discrimination. Further, because these factors are typically associated with psychiatric disorders and substance abuse, it is anticipated that African Americans should have higher rates of psychiatric disorders and substance abuse than non-Hispanic whites. That, however, is not the case. Generally, research indicates that African Americans have lower rates of depression (Williams et al. 2007) and anxiety (Himle et al. 2009; Levine et al. 2013) than non-Hispanic whites and have higher rates of alcohol abstinence (Henderson and Tuch 2017). Two articles in this issue examine whether higher levels of religious involvement among African Americans help to explain these differences.

Mouzon (2017) investigates the role of religious participation in explaining the black–white paradox in mental health. Using the National Survey of American Life, she investigates whether the significantly higher levels religious participation among African Americans may help explain this paradox. Examining several indicators of religious involvement, she finds that specific indicators of religious participation are protective against depressive symptoms. Overall levels of religious participation, however, did not explain the difference in depressive symptoms between African American and whites. She argues that future research in this area should examine the joint influence of multiple support networks such as church and family (Chatters et al. 2015), family and friends (Levine

et al. 2015; Nguyen et al. 2016; Taylor et al. 2015) or a combination of protective factors such as racial identity, religion and region.

Differences between whites and African Americans in drinking behavior are quite nuanced. African Americans are both more likely to abstain from drinking, as well as more likely to be problem drinkers than their white counterparts. Henderson and Tuch (2017) investigated the impact of religion and discrimination on these drinking patterns. Using the National Survey of Black Workers, they investigated the correlates of individuals who are non-drinkers, social drinkers and problem drinkers. They find that discrimination is positively associated with both being a social drinker (vs. non-drinker), as well as a problem drinker (vs. non-drinker). They also find that religious service attendance helps offset some of the effects of discrimination on drinking and argue that “Without religion, African Americans would be less likely to abstain, and they would have more drinking problems.”

This collection of articles should hopefully appeal to a broad array of researchers and clinical practitioners. They should also appeal to scholars in a variety of fields including adolescent development, gerontology, human development, sociology, psychology, political science, psychiatry, social work and public health. The papers in these two issues provide a broad and complementary examination of the impact of race (both within and between groups) and religious involvement on a variety of outcomes. Research in these areas is critical because of the importance of religion and spirituality in the lives of the majority of Americans.

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